THE ICONOGRAPHY OF
MEXICAN FOLK RETABLOS

by
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ABSTRACT

Limited in area and era, an art form peculiarly suited for and developed by the common people in Mexico appeared. Popularly called retablos and consisting of religious images painted in oil on small pieces of tin, their development can in many respects be logically traced to works of art, devotional habits, and an artistic tradition of the previous centuries. The unique aspects are its coincidence with the establishment of Mexico as an independent nation, the adoption by the common masses of an older religious and artistic vocabulary, and the subsequent manipulation of these elements in presentation. Anonymous, undated, and largely untraceable to area, this folk art manifestation has been considered by various authors as the only redeeming quality of Mexican art during the nineteenth century when Mexico was in the throes of an unfertile, eclectic Neo-Classic movement. At one time prolifically produced and dispersed by itinerant painters, now only remnants remain. However, these produce impressions of widely varying abilities in devout and spontaneous artists. The subjects portrayed are readily distinguishable and provide an insight into the myriad concerns confronting the Mexican during the last century.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The painting of religious images on sheets of tin was once a flourishing folk art tradition in Mexico. Popularly called retablos, these small paintings can be found today in scattered Mexican homes and shrines and in many antique and curio shops both in Mexico and the United States. Modern interest in folk art has created a market for retablos, which are being purchased by tourists and decorators, but very little serious study has been made of them to date.

These paintings, of unknown origins and dates, present a great variety of subjects and treatments. Comparing them with one another and with related religious art, one finds both similarities and differences. This paper proposes to investigate the original localities most concerned with the creation of retablos, the purpose for which they were made, and the religious personages that they portrayed.

This type of religious folk art flowered in a limited area of Mexico, the middle six-state section, during the nineteenth century. Although all Catholic countries have representations of religious matter peculiarly
their own, these small saints, Madonnas, and Christs painted on tin are uniquely Mexican. Produced in the provincial areas away from any doctrines of official taste, they escaped the domination of foreign styles and of the eclectic Academy of San Carlos. Thus they reflect certain inherent attitudes which existed in both the Spanish and Indian People of Mexico, and their subject matter modified and mirrored both Christian and pagan beliefs.

The retablo can be considered a genuine manifestation of Mexican folk art. Icons and small paintings have existed from the earliest years of Christianity, but this type, painted for and mostly by the common people in a limited time and area in Mexico has a quality all its own. These tin paintings reflect the intense, sincere beliefs of the people and radiate the naive charm of the primitive.

There are several words used in referring to these small paintings, often interchangeably. The technical term preferred and used by many modern Mexican historians and critics is imágenes pintadas. However, an individual possessing one in his home altar would refer to it simply as a retablo or santo.

The word retablo comes from low Latin, retaulus—meaning a rear table or an area behind the altar (Latin: retro-tabulum), and is used in Mexico in a number of senses. Before 1800 it applied to the great gilded, painted, and carved screens created in the apses of churches behind the
altars. After 1800 it may also apply to small, votive paintings by popular artists made for their clients as thank offerings for miraculous recoveries.¹ Similar materials, size, and in many cases, creators, caused the word to be applied also to the small paintings of the saints.

Because the term santo also applies to the carved figurines, and because the terms retablo, milagro, and ex-voto are used for votive paintings, in this thesis the votive paintings will be referred to as ex-votos. To use a term closer to what they are actually called rather than a technical description, the saint paintings will be referred to as retablos.

The results of research into the emergence of retablos, their area of distribution, and their general characteristics and the sources of inspiration for their style and subject matter will be presented in this thesis. The reasons for the gradual cessation of tin paintings and the changing popularity of the saints as reflected by the retablos were investigated, and the findings are included. The iconography, the attributes of the saints and their aspects of protection will be discussed in relation to the

time and area in Mexico in which the retablos were produced. Finally, a section is included containing photographs of certain retablos to demonstrate their variety and sources of inspiration and individual descriptions to explain why the images are so represented and for what reasons they are employed.

* * * *

This form of art has been largely neglected by modern Mexican authors who, while acknowledging its charm, its contributions to modern Mexican art, and its gradual disappearance, have failed to apply themselves to a specific study of origins, authorship, or even indentifications. Apart from A. Carrillo y Gariel2 little has been written except brief mentions or descriptions of this art form.

It is of interest to note that a tremendous amount of research has gone into the North American equivalent, the New Mexican retablos, whose genesis and disappearance roughly parallel the dates of their Mexican counterparts. Most of the noteworthy work in the New Mexican area of research was done before 1960 and early material published in the 1940's is outdated in comparison with recent

research. However, the written material concerning these paintings as well as the actual physical examination of New Mexican retablos was invaluable. Assuming that these New Mexican religious works had some sort of Mexican prototype, the analysis as to their subject matter, saint identification, and employment should be applicable. This is not to say that these two areas produced similar-appearing retablos. There are similarities between the Mexican and New Mexican social strata producing and buying this art, such as the negligible formal training of the artists, the devout feeling expressed, the ingenuity in overcoming technical difficulties of media, and the holy images portrayed, but these similarities are balanced by dissimilarities. In Mexico the greater population logically provided more retablo painters, so that there was a wide variety of readily distinguishable styles, and a wider geographic area of distribution. There was also a difference in media as tin was abundant in Mexico while New Mexico depended on an equally inexpensive and available material, wooden planks. The Mexican retablos are much more sophisticated because the artists who painted them were in closer contact with metropolitan areas and with imported and trained art, whereas the New Mexican artists worked in a cultural backwater. An untrained eye would have trouble distinguishing between the work of different New Mexican artists, but the Mexican work can be more
easily classified, due to the greater variety of influences and the greater number of individuals and areas involved.

While much of the New Mexican material is thus inapplicable to the study of Mexican retablos, it did provide a starting point in iconography and the identification of saints and other holy personages.

The total lack of any specific research in this field in Mexico and the special nature of the New Mexican research left a large area to be investigated. With the exception of the New Mexican material and the brief descriptions provided in a few authoritative texts published in Mexico during the last decade, there were no written sources of data available.

While there is very little written about the retablo, the related ex-voto enjoys more publicity. Because the ex-votos portray dramatic moments and include written texts, they are favorites among writers and collectors of Mexican art and folklore. The principal concern of this investigator centered around the retablo, but written material on ex-votos as well as the ex-votos themselves proved helpful, as will be explained later. However, with the exception of Roberto Montenegro's book Retablos de México (México, 1950), written material on the ex-voto is descriptive rather than analytic.
By using the lives of saints and the histories of certain famous images throughout Spain and Mexico and by examining approximately 3,500 retablos, this investigation often proceeded from the ends to the middle. That is, a retablo might be examined and later identified by means of books on iconography, or a particular iconographic type might be sought in an area. Most of the time the original source is unknown, and attempts were made to fix a time and place by comparing a given retablo with ex-votos, which usually include the date and location in a written text and which were often painted by the same artist who painted the retablo.

Because of the vast quantities of both ex-votos and retablos and human limitations in examining and comparing thousands of them, this method of date and area correlation was not totally satisfactory. However, it is felt the method is basically sound and that future research will demonstrate this. As it was, the comparison of these two types of religious art did show broad patterns of development and later deterioration which enabled the writer to make general conclusions concerning dates and location. Because of the inability to provide cross indexing between all the retablos with ex-votos and thus narrow dates and areas, the broadest dating and locations will be used here rather than specifics about a few and none about most retablos.
Research by means of hagiographies and the examination of old missals and books on iconography proved to be the most helpful procedure although less spontaneous than actually visiting with people who might be acquainted with retablos: priests, dealers in antiques, and the possessors or ex-possessors of the paintings.

The ages of the retablos indicate that they outlived their original devotees. With each succeeding generation forgetting more and caring less about the retablo, it was often futile to discuss the subject with individuals. The fact that the paintings had been discarded and replaced by inexpensive machine-produced lithographs or photographs indicates a loss of interest on the part of modern Mexicans in the continuation of this tradition. The inability of individuals in most cases to recall which saint a retablo portrays, excepting for a handful of favorite saints who are also popular today, is indicative of the modern emphasis on a few holy persons rather than the previous large numbers. With this lack of knowledge extending even to the clerics in Mexico, personal contacts and interviews were seldom helpful.

The resulting research, therefore, lacks the human contact hoped for between the people and their ancestors' religious aids, specifically the retablo. However, with the material collected, the areas visited, and the conversations recorded, a concise background and a basic
study was accomplished. There are many missing links, but it is hoped that with continued research keys may be found to the unanswered questions.
CHAPTER 2

THE EMERGENCE OF THE TIN RETABLO

The worship of a household god or image representing supernatural powers is as old as man himself. Logically, then, the replacement of the New World's native religions and gods with Christian beliefs and religious personages was an obvious step in the conversion of the Indians. Catholicism supplanted an already deeply-ingrained image-worshiping tradition with a new set of holy personages, often strikingly similar to the old gods. The desire to possess an image to insure health, fertility, and abundance of crops often led to a simple transfer of beliefs from a pagan image to one of the Catholic hierarchy of saints.

Immediately after the conquest, this new iconography created a demand for paintings, statues or prints, a demand often unsatisfied because of the expense of materials and the scarcity of the artists. While the well-to-do might have been able to afford paintings by professional artists on canvas, the poorer classes had to be content with small images painted on wooden panels by themselves or by artists of little or no training. Later, during the eighteenth century, paintings on copper sheets
became popular, but because of the cost of the medium, only those of more substantial means could afford them. The developing folk art tradition continued producing images for the poor on crude canvases then locally produced in Mexico\(^1\) or the wooden panels.

Late in the eighteenth century the metallurgical process of applying a thin coat of tin to a leaf of iron was developed to prevent the iron from rusting and corroding. The cost of the painting surface was now much less. Paint adhered well to the tin surface and under protective conditions was as durable as copper and much lighter.\(^2\) Around the beginning of the second third of the nineteenth century, sheets of tin began to replace both copper and canvas as the preferred medium of retablo painters.

Copper continued to be used in a limited way, and there is often a direct correlation as regards the quality of painting and craftsmanship between retablos of copper and those of tin from approximately the same date.

\(^1\)Ibid., p. 125. During the second half of the sixteenth and during all of the seventeenth century, the major part of the popular paintings was done on wooden panels exclusively. During the early eighteenth century it was done on canvas or cloth with copper used by better artists for wealthier clients.

Because of the expense involved, the workshops or artists doing the painting on copper wanted to appeal to a wealthier and supposedly more sophisticated clientele. The paintings on copper are finished, slick, and often uninspired, imitating the manner of imported European models or popular painters such as Juan Cabrera and Cristóbal de Villalpando. Most of the painting done on tin lacks the finesse found on copper retablos but, although cruder and less technically skillful, reflects a distinctly livelier spirit.

Work done on tin for the common trade or work produced in the provinces was usually done by an individual with only a smattering of training, or at best by one who had been an apprentice to an accomplished or trained painter. It is logical to assume that the local retablo painter for a small village probably had another trade, was self-taught, and painted in his spare time.

The period of production of the tin retablo dates approximately from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth, with the surge perhaps beginning after 1820 and coming to a climax before the 1880's. Literally thousands were painted during this time. The beginning of this art form can be partially related to the abundant and cheap medium provided by the tin-plated iron sheets. It is possible also that the impetus of the revolution provided artistic independence
among the provincial painters and encouraged this prolific output. The fact that tin was readily available made it the material; if it had not been abundant, something else would have been found to meet the need.

Like all folk art the retablo remains nearly static. It may have deviations in development within an area or era, but as an expression of simple individuals whose way of life changes very slowly, the retablo shows no radical changes over a period of a century. In a particular area or during a specific time, some development or further sophistication might be found, but this is a difference between individuals rather than a continuing and contributing influence. There is in retablo art little evidence of evolution or traditions maintained over the years in local schools or workshops.

The overwhelming majority of retablo production was done by primitive or naive painters rather than trained artists. They painted without the weight of art history or academic influences that their sophisticated metropolitan peers might have experienced. In this connection, Kelemen writes:

The work of a native artist or anonymous painter mirrors his naive soul. Although he is contending with technical and compositional handicaps, the spirit expressed in his work and its story-telling qualities are unique.  

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Most of the retablos have the delightful quality of freshness that often characterizes naive art. These primitive or folk artists concentrated on the shape of a thing, more concerned with the contour and decorative effect than with any serious illusionistic attempts at *chiaroscuro* or modeling.

* * * * *

Colonial Mexican art as a whole is more than a "mere transplant of Spanish forms in a new world. . . ." The union of the civilizations, often in direct opposition to each other, formed a unique style. The Indian concept of flattened form and of bold color schemes without *chiaroscuro* and the powerful overtones of the Indian heritage were incorporated by the imported styles. While the material concerned with here flourished after the colonial era ended, it was a continuation of the tradition of household images and it employed traditional methods of interpretation and stylistic portrayal. Moreover, in provincial areas, extremely conservative and usually uninfluenced by modes, styles change very slowly.

Major trends are noticeable in non-provincial works due to the painstaking copying of European models, a practice that generally produced iconographically correct

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but uninspired works. The Academy of San Carlos, the dictating authority of good taste and advocate of the Neo-Classic style in the capital during this time, did little to influence the folk painter, whose native talents had been shaped into a new language and vocabulary dating from the time of the conquest. The retablo painter was content with a manner adapted from the previous two centuries. Furthermore, the mere fact of geography had some influence. Areas outside the immediate vicinity of Mexico City, Puebla, or Guadalajara, were considered the provinces, and little academic influence was felt there. With the exception of several large monuments and rich churches in and near mining areas, there was neither the demand nor the funds to import academically produced art or trained artists from the cities into the country. The anonymous provincial artist and his client, moreover, were probably less interested in the Neo-Classic mode of painting than in representations of images in a familiar manner with decoration lovingly lavished on them.

To describe these paintings on tin as crude and anonymous is not to suggest that they are to be regarded as inferior works of art. They must be examined in their own light and not merely compared with those done for the wealthier minority or reflecting official taste. In quality they can range from paintings done by the Academy-trained painters of Mexico City to the work of rural,
self-trained artists. Between these extremes, to use Fisher's words, are a "number of primitives with native genius who developed an identifiable style of their own, and whose work had the enchantment that only the primitive can lend." In comparison with their trained peers, the works of these folk artists may seem crude, but their ingenuity in accomplishing desired effects, their freshness, and the spontaneity they achieved from overworked subject matter are admirable and worthy of consideration.

\footnote{Fisher, loc. cit.}
CHAPTER 3

AREA OF DISTRIBUTION

Retablos were popular, not throughout Mexico, but in a limited area. Because of the unavailability of statistical material, research about location consisted mainly of questioning dealers in retablos in Mexico about the general areas where they might be found and then investigating in those areas. Local clerics and townspeople were asked if they knew what a retablo was, if they had ever seen or possessed one, and if not, whether they knew of anyone who did. By these means it was determined that retablos were produced in a certain limited area of Mexico and were not as widespread as originally imagined.

Although retablos were produced in great quantities, they originated for the most part from the six central states: San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas, Guanajuato, Querétaro, Jalisco, and Michoacán. The northeastern limit of their distribution might be tentatively set at San Luis Potosí. To the south, the richest area of production was the Bajío, which includes the states of Guanajuato and Querétaro. Westward they reach through Michoacán into Jalisco, while to the northwest, the limit of the area extends into Zacatecas. Of course, some retablos are
found outside this section, but the greatest concentration occurs within these boundaries.¹

Very few retablos of certain origin are to be found in Mexico City, although many may have been done there originally. It is possible that interest in them on the part of collectors has resulted in their dispersal, but more likely that this folk art form was not indigenous to the great cities. Further southeast in the city of Puebla, a similar situation exists. Although Puebla was heavily populated in the nineteenth century and contained an abundance of artists, both it and the capital seem to be outside the area of this particular artistic expression. Not only are retablos scarce in these large cities, but they are not found in the surrounding villages either. Retablos that are available today in antique and tourist curiosity shops in these cities and throughout Mexico presumably have been brought from the central states area.

The fact that most retablos are undated, unsigned or even signed by an untraceable name or initials often makes the identification of locations impossible. While

¹Much of these six states was personally canvassed, but with further investigation of the area it is hoped it will widen and other areas of production may be revealed in addition to those mentioned.

²Fisher, loc. cit.
exceptions do exist, the percentage of retablos signed by anyone who could be traced or chronicled is infinitesimally small.

On the basis of research to date, three main centers of production can be pinpointed: around the city of Guadalajara, around Zacatecas, and in the surrounding areas of the Bajío, especially Guanajuato. Frustratingly, although an area might be known to contain retablos, their examination does not provide any clue to origin. There are retablos from these areas that show similarity of style, motif, and colors and suggest that a thriving business was being conducted by relatively few artists. These similarities of recognizable styles tend to confirm the late Reginald Fisher in his conclusion that a limited number of artists produced the bulk of these. Their scattered distribution with little or no pattern suggests that they were done in one area and then peddled in others.

One of the unanswerable questions at this time is: Why this area? The prosperity in these states might have

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3 Conversation with Mrs. Doris Fisher, December 11, 1966, in El Paso, Texas. Dr. Fisher had been interested in this area of Mexican art for a number of years and had done much research concerning retablos, but with the exception of the previously cited bulletin for the El Paso Museum of Art, he left no written works on them.

4 Carrillo y Gariel, op. cit., pp. 41-42.
encouraged the output of art and the importation of artists for work in churches as well as in private homes, and the stimulation was perhaps contagious, reaching even the poorer levels. However, other prosperous areas to the north and south produced none. The abundance of tin in this area was not exclusive, and one can assume that the devout feelings of the people and the availability of folk artists would not be radically less in other sections of Mexico. Until other conclusions can be reached, the over-simple explanation that "it was not the custom" will have to suffice.
CHAPTER 4

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

The distinct appearance of a typical Mexican retablo occasions no confusion in identifying it from other religious art. Careful observation and a fundamental knowledge of colors, painting techniques, and drawing were the simplest but most effective aids in this part of the investigation. Fortunately, there is a general consistency in abilities, clichés used to portray the images, colors, materials used, and size.

Generally speaking, the drawing is crude and rules of anatomy and perspective are unknown or misunderstood. All elements of the person or articles portrayed are reduced to the simplest shapes. The main personage is almost never portrayed in profile and seldom fullface or full on, but generally in a three-quarter view. The personages shown fullface are usually paintings of revered statues, but even in copying statues the painter usually contrives to achieve a three-quarter view. Sometimes a three-quarter facial view will be used with a figure shown full on, but ordinarily the retablo image presents the body and head in harmony with the view shown.
The figures tend to be presented singly and are isolated in feeling. Should a group be shown, the impression of space often is obtained by vertical projection of figures or entire scenes. If there are figures subordinate to the main image and included only to illustrate his attributes, patronage, or some incident in his life, they are shown in hieratic scale. Shadows appear only rarely and when they do, they lack subtlety and effect, recalling the work of the Italian masters of the Trecento.¹

The fashionable stylistic trend of Mexican art during the time of the greatest production of this particular type of folk art was the Neo-Classical, encouraged by the Academy of San Carlos. However, the small figures and saints perpetuate a Manneristic and Baroque tradition, often attempting a "Grand Manner" effect. In many instances the figure of the saint is found in a Grand Manner setting with a bit of drapery and a piece of furniture, upon which might rest his attributes, or he may be holding his attributes, much the way the Grand Manner portraitists showed the individual's rank or profession by including the tools of his trade.

Rarely in retablo art does architecture appear, apart from carefully drawn tile floors, usually in

¹Kelemen, loc. cit.
incorrect perspective, or an equally incorrect window. Landscapes are found in some retablos, but with no illusionistic attempts at depth they seem like backdrops, limited in space, and creating the same decorative effect as the previously mentioned floor patterns.

Identifiable by their costumes and attributes, the holy personages in the retablo often followed a much earlier tradition in the Christian church, that of pictography. Because most of the Mexicans could not read, introduction to religious characters was by pictorial means. The figures portrayed could be identified by what they wore and carried. Their stylization and frontal orientation could in part be explained as an aid to instant identification.²

The colors used are mostly clear reds, dark blues, and dark yellows. Flesh tones are frequently achieved by what appears to be some type of red oxide or burnt sienna mixed with white. Greens appear occasionally and seem to be the result of the yellow and blue combination creating a dark olive. White is used alone or to achieve toning effects in flesh or to lighten colors. Black is used for lettering, to indicate metal implements, and certain religious costumes and for darkening colors. The rest of the colors are earthen browns.

² Carrillo y Gariel, loc. cit.
The expense or even unavailability of a great variety of shades of colors, coupled with a primitive desire for brightness and sharp contrasts gives the immediate impression of unsubtlety or even of a garish quality in many cases. However, the gradual darkening and yellowing of paints and varnishes through exposure to dirt and smoke have made many paintings more mellow than originally intended.

Indicative of their mass production is the fact that they ranged through several standard sizes in tin. The largest measure 14" x 20" and are the fewest in number along with the very smallest in size, 2-1/2" x 3-1/2". The next largest sizes, 10" x 14" and 7" x 10", were the most popular. The other standard size, 5" x 7", was followed by 3-1/2" x 5" which was relatively rare, and the even rarer 2-1/2" x 3-1/2" size. Each successive size is simply achieved by cutting the piece of tin in half along its short axis. It is probable that the 14" x 20" was created by cutting a still larger piece of tin into four equal parts.

Their consistent size, heavier metal gauge and flatness refute the often heard explanation that retablos as well as ex-votos are "paintings on sides of tin cans." Also, actual evidence of the presence of a recognizable

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3Fisher, op. cit., [p. 6].
stamp or mark identifying the piece of tin as part of a tin can or container is negligible, in comparison with the thousands of retablos and ex-votos bearing no such identification.

The tinned plate provided a surface that could be painted onto directly without any previous preparation or underpainting. There are retablos, however, that have a type of red bole underpainting showing through the paint as a result of age. But because of the uniqueness of this practice and a similarity of types, styles, and clichés used on certain retablos, this seems to be the peculiarity of one man or workshop rather than any standard method of preparation of the tin surface (See Illustrations: La Vendimia Mística, Figure 11; San Roque, Figure 48; and San Ysidro, Figure 52).

Spots of solder can be seen on the sides and backs of many retablos testifying to frames which were probably installed in the studio or workshop of the artist. Occasionally they are found still attached to the retablo and are generally elaborately worked tin, either a frame only or a box with a hinged glass door. Sometimes the frame was made of rectangular pieces of glass backed by tin. The glass would be painted on the underside in floral decorations or bright stripes, or colored paper or cloth would be sandwiched between the glass and the tin backing. The scarcity of frames on tin
Retablos now available for sale is a result of removal (1) to facilitate transporting by dealers in antiques, (2) to improve the appearance of retablos with broken or rusty frames, or (3) to sell separately, for they are often ingeniously worked and attractive in their own right.

* * * * *

The artists producing the retablos tended to be nonrealistic, choosing to deal with what they felt and knew rather than with the life around them. The forms were copied from other paintings or prints and were not studies from models; therefore, they tended to be abstract and conventionalized. The element holding this type of painting together was not realism but an instinctive feeling for design. Moreover, even when the intention was to produce a realistic piece, through technical limitations the results were apt to be conventionalized or unconsciously expressionistic. 4

This level of painting reflects the trend of the Mexican primitives toward decorative objectivity. Their love and flair for the decorative is most evident in the handling of textiles or any object capable of embellishment which is then elaborately depicted. Sometimes real

4Kelemen, loc. cit.
textiles were attached, or sequins, or slits were even made in the retablo into which jewelry or artificial flowers were inserted, giving an impression of a Near Eastern icon.
CHAPTER 5

SOURCE MATERIAL FOR RETABLOS

The inspiration for the content and mood of the retablo came from mainly three sources: woodcuts, etchings, and engravings, either distributed separately or in profusely illustrated religious books; paintings done in a manner popular during the previous centuries; and religious statues, revered for their miraculousness and portrayed in two-dimensional likeness.

Although Colonial Mexico was enormously productive of art, there are very few confirmed cases of renowned artists immigrating there, either from Spain or other European countries. The total number of European-trained artists with large reputations working in the new colony, therefore, was too few to have positively influenced or directed artistic orientation in the New World.¹ Due to this lack of broad artistic direction by highly trained and qualified artists working in Mexico, and because the

iconography was predetermined by the Inquisition and rigid religious canons, imported illustrated religious books and prints provided the early painter important sources of themes.

It was a common practice in Europe for famous or popular paintings to be reproduced in engraved form either in the atelier of the original artist, or in the shop of a specialist. Engravers from the sixteenth century on were attached to printing houses which in turn had their agents in foreign lands. These prints and others created for religious instruction affected and influenced much of early Mexican art previous to the retablo and later, the retablo. The bulk of these prints had their source not from Spain directly but from Flanders. Through a monopoly granted to the Plantin Press in Antwerp at about 1570 by Philip II, the firm managed to supply voluminous quantities of illustrated religious books and prints to Spain for importation to her colonies. This trade continued for almost two hundred and fifty years to Mexico, bringing stylistic influences from Europe including those of Pieter van der Borcht, Martin de Vos, the Wierix brothers, and later, Rubens' studio.2

However, as early as 1530, monks and their Indian converts in the Mexican provinces were working in fresco,

2Kelemen, op. cit., pp. 200-201.
using as guides woodcuts from religious books, which probably accompanied the early missionaries. Later, the colonial painter, who had no opportunity to enrich himself creatively through travel and exposure to important works of European art, also had to depend upon this type of imported material for inspiration and the latest modes.

The tremendous role played by this type of source in the diffusion of iconography and in direct influences upon new compositions by Mexican artists concerned the retablo both directly and indirectly. This research encountered many marked similarities between the painted images on tin of the last century and the prints that appeared in missals and books of daily devotion dating from as early as the sixteenth century. With the arrival of the nineteenth century and the mass production of the tin paintings, the problem of source material had largely been solved. Many of the small popular paintings had their direct source from the imported books and prints.

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3 Manuel Toussaint, *Pintura colonial en México* (México: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1965), p. 26; and Pál Kelemen, *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas*, XXXIII (México, 1964), 33. An early example of the use of imported material has been disclosed in a recent investigation. Juan Gerson received the inspiration for his murals painted in 1562 in the Franciscan church in Tecamachalco from wood engravings from a Bible identified as having been printed in Lyon in 1558 ("Lugduni, apud Jacobum de Millis, M.D.LVIII.").
The prints and profusely illustrated books available in every church, no matter how small, were popular blueprints for the unschooled provincial painter. Many other retablos appear to be products of traditionally accepted motifs and formats copied from the popular paintings on canvas, copper, and wood of the previous centuries, which were, though, themselves inspired from the same fundamental sources as those mentioned above.

While prints provided an important segment of the influences reflected in these popular works, another important source was the large paintings in churches of a variety of saints, Christs, and Virgin Marys for veneration and the propagation of different cults, many considered endowed with healing powers. Although many of these paintings were directly imported from Europe imbued with Manneristic and Baroque doctrine, there were more created in Mexico through the inspiration of these imported paintings following the same artistic canons. Some retablos are copies of these works, represented in a non-deviating manner with the only variety provided by the abilities of the different artists (See Illustrations: N. S. de Refugio, Figure 21).

At this point a brief summary of Colonial Mexican art is helpful to understand some of the characteristics found in retablos. A logical development can be seen in official art from the late Manneristic paintings of Simon
Pereyns, the first important European painter to work in Mexico, arriving in 1566. In the following twenty-four years until his death (c. 1590, Mexico) he contributed dozens of altar paintings, most of which, unfortunately, have been lost. He also relied upon prints, copying those of Martin de Vos and others. Martin de Vos might also be considered here as a highly influential artist through his paintings which were imported to Mexico and through engravings after his work. Manneristic approaches continued in Mexican art into the early 1600's with a few early Baroque innovations introduced by Alonso Vásquez and with his contemporary, Baltasar de Echave Orio.

As the Mexican artist was not expected to demonstrate any originality, protest, or criticism, the criterion for excellence was his ability to produce an acceptable, predictable product. The result was a conscientious and careful copying of the current popular European trend, although greatly modified to fit into an unchanging mold insisted upon by the ruling, privileged classes. Raphael may be considered as another early model, if not directly then through the medium of the Spanish painter Juan de Juanes. Here the sweetness and


softness of Raphael was emphasized, and this quality, which many times in Mexican art borders on sticky sentimentality, is retained through the years that follow.

By the mid-1600's the full Baroque movement exemplified by Zurbarán and Rubens provided heavy influences—the Colonial painter using Zurbarán's large areas of light and shade, modeling effects, mood, and realism and the movement and sumptuousness of Rubens. Unfortunately the fluidity and understanding of artistic elements exploited by those two men were not imparted to the Colonial, who managed to turn everything into stereotypes of terse, tight realism dredged in sentimentality. The ultimate influence was, however, that of Murillo. This southern Spaniard's paintings of holy personages caught in the throes of religious ecstacies, or radiating sweetness, all done with the greatest degree of realism, seemed to fulfill what every Spanish and Mexican patron of the arts desired. The dry formula of heavy drama, contrasts in light and color, and twisting action, combined with overwhelming tenderness and delicate beauty and all tied together by stringent realism would last until the middle of the nineteenth century.  

6"Art of the Americas," Art News Annual, XVIII (New York, 1948), 64.
It is outside the scope of this paper to discuss the many influences and crosscurrents of three hundred and fifty years of Mexican art and the hundreds of painters whose tremendous output is generally distinguished for quantity rather than quality. As far as the retablo is concerned, the Baroque movement and the styles of Rubens, Zurbarán, and Murillo constitute the chief influences. Artists such as the Juarez, the Correa, and Miguel Cabrera, working in styles heavily influenced by Murillo and steeped in sentimentality, enjoyed great popularity. Products of their brushes and workshops and the work of their imitators dating from the mid-1600's until the early 1800's were highly sought after and can be found today adorning almost any church in Mexico. It was this type of painting that the provincial or folk painter could see and copy from. In many retablos the Baroque vocabulary and apparatus can be easily discerned, even though highly modified and conventionalized in most instances. Attempts at drama, chiaroscuro or tenebroso, realism, movement, and expression often fail. The paintings produce instead an overall effect of decorative realism and in many cases constitute a very enjoyable and palatable form of art, despite the repetitive and stagnant source from which they derived.

In addition to prints and paintings, another important source of inspiration for retablo painters was
religious statuary in shrines and churches. Popular or miraculous, they appear in the retablos in literal transplantation, in their niches, bordered by candles and/or flowers and often still on their bases⁷ (See Illustrations: NN. SS. de Atocha, Figure 13; and Salud de Pátzcuaro, Figure 22).

Gradually, engravings in the books printed during the nineteenth century, individual prints, and ecclesiastical art in general began to include the Neo-Classical vocabulary. But by this time the manner of illustrating retablos by repeating previous popular works, or using old or discarded missals, prints, or prayer books had been established. The village artist and his patrons were not concerned with the latest stylistic developments, but rather with faithful duplications of familiar themes. The Neo-Classical influence might have made itself felt in official circles, but it rarely penetrated the provinces or the people's natural feeling for drama and the exuberant Baroque.

Originality appeared in many of the retablos principally because of the personal manner in which they were conceived and created by devout, mostly untrained craftsmen who, although striving for faithful duplication

⁷Kelemen, Baroque and Rococo in Latin America, p. 55.
of a correct and acceptable image, could not help but interpret it through their own idiosyncracies or cultural beliefs.
CHAPTER 6

REASONS FOR THE DISAPPEARANCE OF RETABLOS

With the rise of mechanization, the tin retablos gradually ceased being made, and there is a distinct correlation between the diminishing numbers of these charming folk art products and their decline in quality.

The appearance in the last third of the nineteenth century of abundant, inexpensive color lithographs and copper engravings was a heavily contributing factor to the disappearance of retablos. The desire for more realism, bright colors, less expense, and perhaps simply for something new, gradually reduced the demand for the painted folk retablos until they ceased being made. It is difficult to say just when production ended, but by comparing the quality of paintings of this type with that of closely related ex-votos in the same areas, the dates provided by the ex-votos can be used to establish some general time periods.¹

¹Since the decline in quantity and quality of the ex-votos paralleled that of the retablos, the former were invaluable for establishing the dates of the terminal period. They also made it possible for conclusions to be drawn about changes in technique, abilities, costumes, and customs. In addition, ex-votos attested to the popularity of a particular saint, for specific or general benefits, in a given town or area, since holy personages that were
The quality of the ex-votos begins to deteriorate rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century; not only do the drawing, composition, and workmanship worsen, but the colors lose their subtlety and mood-creating ability. The remnant of painterly quality present in earlier works also disappears. The desire for more realism and a decorative effect is strongly evident in the later ex-votos, and it can be assumed that retablos demonstrating similar syndromes are of the same general time. The loss of the earlier qualities results in harsh, mechanical, and careless representations. Lack of interest is indicated by the endless repetition of the same theme or format by the same individual both in retablos and ex-votos. Even a concern over the quality of paint lessened and the use of cheap materials such as ordinary house paint caused the paint to crack, flake, peel or become transparent. The tin surface, of course, had no preparation.

It is, therefore, safe to assume that the largest bulk of retablos was done before the twentieth century, with quality deteriorating in the late nineteenth century and production ceasing in the early twentieth century. Apparently a "Golden Age" existed for a period of perhaps portrayed in abundance in one area might not even be known in another. Furthermore, the written text at the bottom of the ex-votos often includes popular or common names for Christ or Mary that may not appear in the usual sources of hagiographical research.
fifty to sixty years in the middle of the nineteenth century. This is, of course, a generality; an exceptional individual after these dates may continue the previous tradition. Further research also may provide more exact information on dating. But when the inexpensive, colored paper reproductions became available, the great demand no longer existed for the painted retablo. Occasionally a well-done ex-voto of a recent twentieth century date is found, suggesting a remnant of the tradition. But for the most part they have become quite crude and even these are being replaced by the more realistic and perhaps graphic method of illustrating favors and healings by photographs, braces, crutches, and even X-ray plates.
CHAPTER 7

POPULARITY OF SAINTS

The variety of the tin retablos and the many differences they present are dependent in some degree upon shifts in the emphasis and popularity of individual saints.

By observing modern images offered for sale currently, recording the percentages of various images represented on retablos studied in this research, and noting the percentages recorded by two previous independent pieces of research,¹ an approximate idea of the popularity of specific representations or images today and in the nineteenth century can be obtained. The pattern that emerges is a fluctuating one.

The popularity of Christs, Madonnas, and saints changes from area to area and from one period to another. This change is understandable if one recalls that each of the mendicant orders from its arrival in Mexico staked out individual territories and started spreading its own cult. The Franciscans, the first to arrive in Mexico in

¹Carrillo y Gariel, op. cit., p. 23; and Reginald Fisher, op. cit., [p. 6].
1524, occupied the central and western provinces. The Dominicans after 1526 had areas of control south of Mexico City including the entire province of Oaxaca. The last of the mendicants, the Augustinians, after 1533 evangelized the areas to the northeast of Mexico City and then spread westward to join the Franciscans in Michoacán. After the evangelizing period, other orders appeared, bringing their own hierarchies of saints, favorite Madonnas or Christs. Later, other groups occupied areas evangelized by the original three orders. With the increase and decrease of orders, it is possible to understand the dispersal of Franciscan, Dominican, Jesuit, Augustinian and other saints, as well as their popularity in certain areas.

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The popularity of many saints has fluctuated over the years. When the wooden prototype for the tin retablo was being made from the middle of the sixteenth century and through the seventeenth century, to be replaced by canvas and copper in the eighteenth century, the most popular motifs were: the Virgin Mary and Child (aspect not specified); God, the Father, with a sphere representing the creation of the earth; and Christ in the most painful passages of His life, such as "Christ at the Column," or the seated Ecce Homo figure, popularly called "Cristo de Cañada." After these in popularity were: the
apostles, the founders of monastic orders, martyred saints, the archangel San Miguel, and the two knights of Christianity, Santiago and San Martín de Tours riding on horses with almost human faces.²

With the rise of the tin retablo at the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, other changes occurred. Three separate investigations have been made concerning this change. Although these surveys span a twenty-year period and were independent of one another, the conclusions they draw about the popularity of saints is similar to those of this thesis, reached after examination of approximately 3,500 retablos during two years.

The first survey involves the collection in the Taylor Museum of Art, Colorado Springs, Colorado, acquired by W. S. Stallings in the 1940's mainly from towns in the state of Guanajuato. There were 64 retablos in his original purchase and, while the number is relatively small to support broad conclusions, it nevertheless supports the percentages arrived at by Reginald Fisher's research³ and those of a tally taken in Nogales, Sonora,

²Carrillo y Gariel, op. cit., p. 11. Note that there is no mention of our Lady of Guadalupe being represented. She is present at this time but does not figure largely in popular paintings.

³Fisher, loc. cit.
Mexico, in November, 1966. A breakdown of the Stallings purchase follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N.S. de Refugio</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divino Rostro</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mater Dolorosa</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San José</td>
<td>7.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Niño Misionerito</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.S. de Guadalupe</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Trinidad</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Sagrada Corazón</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mano Ponderoso</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Virgin Mary in her advocacy of N.S. de Carmel and Purísima Concepción, SS. Francisco de Asís, Francisco de Paula, Buenaventura, Cayetano, Clemente, and others were roughly one per cent each.\(^4\)

The second breakdown is from the previously cited catalog of the El Paso Museum of Art. In this, Reginald Fisher remarked that from his observation, the image N.S. de Refugio perhaps averages around twenty-five per cent of the entire production, and next in popularity with percentages of from five to ten per cent are: "La Guadalupana," "Mater Dolorosa," "La Sagrada Familia," San José, La

\(^4\)Carrillo y Gariel, *op. cit.*, p. 23. These percentages might be altered slightly when it is considered that the author grouped the theme of "Divino Rostro" with images of Christ showing only his head, neck, and shoulders with a rope around his neck. Strictly speaking, "Divino Rostro" refers to the image of the face only as it was supposed to have appeared on the napkin of Veronica. The "portrait" of Christ lassoed is called Ecce Homo.
Trinidad," San Jerónimo, El Niño de Atocha, and San Francisco de Paula.  

The third supportive investigation is a specific tally taken in Nogales, Sonora, November, 1966 (See Table 1 following this chapter). A tourist-oriented border town sixty-five miles south of Tucson, Arizona, Nogales began featuring the popular paintings on tin in some colonial furniture and curio shops around 1964. In November, 1966, retablos, recently arrived, were examined. Their origins ranged throughout the "retablo belt," their condition was anywhere from excellent to scruffy, and they had not been picked over by customers.

From these three surveys (the only three that research has managed to uncover or promote) a general pattern emerged. N.S. de Refugio was the most persistent and popular image portrayed. She was followed in popularity by "Mater Dolorosa," San José, "La Trinidad," El Niño de Atocha, and SS. Jerónimo and Francisco de Paula. However, the low percentage of the "Divino Rostro," which appeared in large percentage in Carrillo y Gariel's article concerning the Stallings' purchase, is explained by the grouping of two specific types of

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5Fisher, loc. cit. It appears that Fisher offers these percentages on the basis of personal observation over several years rather than any specific totaling, for he does not mention the exact time or size of sample.
Christ together. In all these instances it is interesting to note the role of lesser importance played by N.S. de Guadalupe.

* * * * *

There have been changes in emphasis again and new patterns are now evident. The overwhelming favorite today, as demonstrated by the retablo's current successor, the lithograph, is N.S. de Guadalupe, whose popularity was only five to ten percent in the tin retablo. She is followed by San José and El Niño de Atocha. The past favorites, N.S. de Refugio, San Jerónimo, San Francisco de Paula, "La Trinidad," "Mater Dolorosa," and "La Sagrada Familia," have lost their appeal and are rarely seen in modern reproductions. San Antonio de Padua manages to maintain, if not increase, his popularity, but today's trend is toward a few saints rather than the wide array previously seen.⁶

The opposite seems true of the advocations of the Virgin. Although scarce in retablo art in comparison with the great bulk of other images, NN. SS. de San Juan

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⁶Few authentic santeros exist today. The saints and images are now inexpensive, brightly colored lithographs or plaster statues mass produced. The information given here concerning present day sources and popularity is from observation at ecclesiastical supply houses, Catholic book stores, religious supply outlets and booths inside and out of churches in Mexico, generally in the same areas from which the retablos originated.
de los Lagos, Zapopan, Pueblito, Talpa, and Remedios are now commonly seen. Since there seems to be a movement away from a variety of images sought for individual causes, these Virgins are appealed to for everything rather than specifics (although the Virgin of Remedios may be especially invoked by women wishing children). A testimony to the popularity of these Virgins can be seen in the quantities of modern ex-votos found in their shrines, offered for every type of complaint and miracle; logically, these are also some of the most popular shrines for pilgrimages.

Outside of this overall pattern, photographs or reproductions are sold of a favorite local saint or of the miraculous image of an area or shrine. But this is as it always has been, a local selection and not indicative of any general trend.

* * * * *

At the present time, two recently popularized images are enjoying great acceptance. The most notable is the case of San Martín de Porres. There does not exist, to this researcher's knowledge, a tin retablo of San Martín. The fact that he is an immensely popular saint in Mexico today is attested by his image in almost every church and his availability in every religious supply store in print and statue form. He shares a place of honor with "La Guadalupana" in private shrines, in
homes, and on the dashboards of taxis, buses, and private cars from one end of Mexico to the other. San Martín died in 1639, and was not beatified until 1837. During the time of the retablos he was either not popular enough to require the painting of his image, or more likely he was not even known in Mexico until the twentieth century. The recent dates on ex-votos dedicated to him and the newness of his statues in churches attest to the fact that his great popularity has arisen in modern times. Born in Lima, Peru, San Martín is popularly called a saint, although thus far only beatified. His rise in popularity is simultaneous with the upsurge of nationalistic pride in the Western Hemisphere; in addition, his mulatto background makes him attractive to people of mixed blood. Recently he has been selected in America and elsewhere as a patron for inter-racial justice and harmony and his life has been the subject of a number of recent books, both devotional and popular.

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7 Examination of *Año cristiano* by P. Juan Croisset, S.J. (2nd ed.; Madrid [1878-1885]) a type of book used in Mexico for daily devotion discloses no mention of San Martín. Although not every saint is included in these volumes, the most popular ones are chronicled.

Another holy personage whose popularity is recent is N.S. de Perpetuo Socorro. Her tenth-century Byzantine painting was rediscovered only in the 1860's in Italy, and the Redemptorist Fathers, the order responsible for the dispersal of her cult, did not arrive in Mexico until the end of the nineteenth century. Since the cult's inauguration in Mexico occurred after the period of intensive retablo production, not a single tin painting bearing her image has been found.

Thus over the years the popularity of saints has increased and decreased in harmony with the religious temper of the times. During the high period of retablo paintings a galaxy of holy personages flourished, many of whom are virtually unknown today, even to the devout. Similarly some of today's most popular saints, such as San Martín de Porres or N.S. de Perpetuo Socorro were unknown at the time the retablo painters were at work. For this reason the identification of a saint on a retablo cannot be made by asking its owner, a clergyman, or the proprietor of the store that sells it, but must be established by research.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Retablos</th>
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<tr>
<td>N.S. de Refugio</td>
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<td>52</td>
</tr>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>7.03</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td>Santa Librada</td>
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<td>Mano Ponderosa</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Santa Isabel de Portugal (?)</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Ramón Nonato</td>
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<td>La Fiedad</td>
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<tr>
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<td>&quot;</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Huida de Egipto</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Juan Nepomuceno</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Juan Bautista</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Santa Gertrudis</td>
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<tr>
<td>N.S. de Atocha</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>San Leonardo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cristo de Columna</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jesú Nazareno, N.S. de Misericordia, or N.S. de Laborador</td>
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<tr>
<td>Santa Lucía</td>
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<tr>
<td>La Sagrada Familia con Santa Anna y San Joachín</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>San Miguel</td>
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TABLE 1--Continued

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Unidentifiable Virgin Statue Paintings</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unidentifiable Madonnas with Child</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unidentifiable Saints (badly mutilated)</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table represents a tally taken November 6, 1966, in Nogales, Sonora, Mexico, in which 341 retablos were examined and identified as shown above. It is reasonable to assume that their proportions are roughly representative of retablo subject matter.
CHAPTER 8

ICONOGRAPHY OF FOLK RETABLOS

Iconography, in a strict sense, is the study or description of images, specifically, in this thesis, religious images. Through iconographical research the work of identifying the subjects of Mexican folk retablos was accomplished. When hagiography and iconography are involved with a folk-based art, however, they can no longer be contained within the strict boundaries of definition but must be projected against the vast background of Mexican culture and folk beliefs.

Little, if any, work has been done specifically on the identification of saints found in this particular type of Mexican art. Even though essentially the saints remain the same as those imported from Europe by the conquerors and missionaries, their functions varied as contacts between the two continents lessened and as additional attributes and elements of protection were added to suit the common tastes. In most cases, however, the iconography remains identical, and it would seem that with knowledge of iconography and of the attributes displayed by the saints, identification would be fairly simple. This is not always the case.
In 1961 in the Western Hemisphere territories originally colonized by Spain there were between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn approximately 160,000,000 Catholics, 70,000 churches and "Christs and Madonnas beyond number."

Furthermore, as Attwater explains:

Saints have this in common with hymns, that they are exceedingly numerous, but only a few are well known to everyone. No one knows, or can know, how many holy men and women have received a cultus, veneration, official or "popular" in the church during the course of nineteen centuries.

There exists no single list or canon for them--their names have to be sought in a variety of martyrologies, calendars, relic-lists, and so on. The Roman Martyrology alone contains some 4,500 entries. To understand some of the confusion in identifying saints: in the Roman Martyrology there are 67 saints called Felix, to mention only one name. Thus, combined lists and martyrologies would amount to a staggering total. Attwater comments:

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3 In the 141º Calendario de Mariano Galván Rivera, an inexpensive popular booklet published yearly by Librería y Ediciones (México, D.F.), there are listed 53 Juans--a common name purposely selected to indicate the possibility of confusion existing even in this small and not totally inclusive pamphlet.
And among all the known names, nothing more whatever is known of many; of many more, only the place of veneration and the saint's description (Martyr, etc.) have survived, to which, perhaps, an approximate date can be added.4

Although in Mexico not every saint was venerated during the period that concerns this investigation, the number of venerated saints was huge and the reasons for veneration differed from standard European patronages.

When a saint, Madonna, or Christ brought from Spain reached the New World during the sixteenth century, it took the name of the place where it was fixed. The various orders had their own popular images, of course, but depending upon the new arrival's popularity or miraculous abilities, his cult would spread, taking with it its place name. Thus, there are many Christs with names such as "Lord of Chalma," "Lord of Amecameca," "Lord of Sacramonte," and "Lord of Izmiquilpan;" saints like "San Antonio Itzcuintla" and "San Francisco Ecatepec;" and Madonnas such as the "Lady of Zapopan," the "Lady of Atzcapotzalco" and the "Madonna of Juchitan." "Some are more powerful and miraculous than others," Anita Brenner explains, "depending on the prestige, wit and devotion of their respective zones."5 Unfortunately, however, they

4Attwater, loc. cit.
may not resemble their prototypes and may deviate enough to cause confusion and doubt as to their correct names.

The subject matter for retablos could be just about any saint, story from the Bible, station of the cross, sorrow of Mary, or legend that was considered "correct" by the Council of Trent in 1568 or the Inquisition in Mexico. But fortunately, certain themes were vastly more popular than others and can easily be identified. In some cases exact identification is impossible due to faults of omission or because attributes were added in order to individualize or describe additional powers that a particular religious personage might have in a certain area. This is especially true in the instance of the Virgin Mary who has extremely complicated and involved traditions and attributes.

Iconography and identification bog down occasionally when the image portrayed closely resembles some other saint. Even though there might not have been a shadow of a doubt in the mind of the painter or devotee as to what holy person this image represented, without a title on the painting it is virtually impossible to know now for certain if the name it is known by today is the original one or even if it is correct.

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6Kubler and Soria, op. cit., p. 303. Old Testament themes were traditionally avoided, as well as the nude figure.
The retablo painter was of course an individual, and the possibility of his including a personal concept cannot be ignored. This individualizing, however, would more than likely appear in border decorations, in the ornaments of clothing or jewelry, or in specific clichés or shortcuts—such as a special manner of painting eyes, for example. For the most part, iconography was strictly adhered to. This art was of religious significance, serving as an object of veneration on an altar in the home. The manner in which a saint might be displayed had been copied from pictures or statues in the churches or from books that contained engravings, such as missals, breviaries, or books of daily devotion, and these sources would be nondeviating in correctness. 7

Although a saint might have additional attributes or be represented in a totally different manner in Europe or Spain, the concern here is how he appeared in Mexico, and the Spanish or European method of representation will be mentioned only where it would show origin or add interest.

7Early copies of Año christiano containing lives of saints and profusely illustrated were an aid in identification for this investigator.
CHAPTER 9

SAINTS' ATTRIBUTES

Iconography of saints presents interesting problems in identification and requires an understanding of the use of particular attributes. The European artist was forced very early in the Gothic period to find a means of identifying and characterizing the saints. The impetuous development of iconography during this time resulted in many cases where a simple figure with perhaps the emblems of martyrdom could represent a dozen distinct personages. To depict what the saint was doing and to show his collective attributes sometimes were not enough to individualize him. The artist then would select some incident of the saint's life or some legend, one that would most personify him, and synthesize it, reducing it to a symbol. This then became the saint's personal attribute. Many times it was an implement of torture or martyrdom, but it could also be an element of his life or miracles performed. However, the circumstances surrounding the incidents were sometimes lost, for on many occasions they were selected by the artist himself. The
personal attribute thus remains, giving rise to other legends to try to explain it.¹

The diversity of attributes began in the thirteenth century and by the second half of the fourteenth century almost all had been fixed, excepting those that changed attributes in the following two hundred years. In 1563 the twenty-fifth session of the Council of Trent was dedicated solely to images; it eliminated dubious legends and superstitions and, occasionally, a saint. This greatly influenced the new iconography, for the Council also established rules as to how artists should represent the saints.² These rules were imparted to the retablo artist three hundred years later through the copying of previously-approved prints and paintings. The attributes in retablos are thus traditionally reduced in scale, and many include other people considered necessary to demonstrate the saint's life but subservient to him in importance (See Illustrations: Santa Rita, Figure 47).

Attributes may be divided and classified into six categories:³

¹Juan Ferrando Roig, Iconografía de los santos (Barcelona: Ediciones Omega, 1950), p. 17.
²Ibid., p. 11.
³Ibid., p. 24.
1. Related to instruments of martyrdom or tortures.

2. Related to a miracle or important event in the saint's life.

3. Related to the profession or social standing of the saint.

4. Related to the patronage they extend—such as St. Raymond Nonatus and pregnant women.

5. Related only to the name—i.e., the relationship between "Lucía" (light) and eyes or a lamp and the Lamb (Agnus in Latin meaning lamb), St. Rose and roses or the veil of Veronica (here the name comes from the attribute—Veronica from vera icon or "the true image"—rather than the attribute from the name).

6. Not really related, but only symbolic of some phase or act of the saint, such as symbols of evangelists, the lily of purity, or the trumpet of San Jerónimo.

The specific positions that attributes occupy are significant. For example, a royal crown is a symbol of the Virgin Mary. However, when a crown is at the feet or to the side of a saint, it signifies the renouncing of this world's honors for heavenly ones. When a crown is worn, it symbolizes noble birth. When it is held in the right hand, it is the symbol of the virtues.\(^4\)

In retablo art the content of the attribute remains but the appearance varies greatly. The skull of San Jerónimo, for instance, might appear as it would on an Aztec temple, and to a Mexican such a skull might be more

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than merely an accepted sign of contemplation. The cane that Christ was scourged with becomes a cornstalk and appears also with the Virgin in her aspect of "Mater Dolorosa." The Crown of Thorns bristling with spines is characteristically cactus. Cooking implements become ollas, and ceramics become Guanajuato Majolica. The depiction of a saint might be strictly adhered to, but the intrusion of the Mexican milieu often turned the attributes into familiar items.
CHAPTER 10

FUNCTIONS OF THE SAINTS

Every illness has its protection, each worry a helper, each social station, profession, celebrates a patron. In droughts, floods, meteorological dangers, on trips, saints are resorted to. With them are related plantings and harvests. New villages, mountains, and in general the topographical phenomena carry saints' names. They all forcefully influence religious art.1

These words of Roig illustrate the manifold functions of saints. Every saint in some way is a patron saint, but the aid of most of them is limited to some particular area. Although many are revered in one locality and only for one certain thing, there are a few who are worshiped universally through Christendom.2 The worship of many of the saints in Mexico followed European traditions brought to the New World by its conquerors. However, there are occasions where patronage is not based on European usage. Valid conclusions about the functions of holy personages in Mexico may be drawn by analogy with European usage, but the possibility of local Mexican

1 Roig, op. cit., p. 11.
variations and different saintly functions must always be kept in mind. The conversion of the Indians to Christianity brought additional powers to Christ, the Virgin Mary, and certain saints. Similarities between the attributes of the Indian gods and those of the Christian hierarchy helped ease the transition from the old faith to the new.

Often the image and name were changed, but the powers ascribed to the Indian god were transplanted to the Christian saint. For example, Tonantzin, worshiped in a pre-conquest temple on the hill of Tepayac, was replaced by the Virgin of Guadalupe who miraculously appeared on the same site and now is worshiped in the basilica at the foot of the same hill. Tonantzin, meaning "Our Mother" in Aztec dialect, was the goddess of fertility and rainbringing. Her feast day, like that of N.S. de Guadalupe, was celebrated before the rains; thus to "La Guadalupana" now are ascribed the same powers as the former goddess.\(^3\)

\(^3\)Edith Hoyt, *The Silver Madonna* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Letras, 1965), p. 41. The church on the site today is dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe, who is still referred to as Tonantzin by some Indian tribes.
name of the saint on whose day he was born and who thus became his patron, or his parents might name him for a favorite saint, whose day would then be celebrated as the child's birthday. Many retablos must have been purchased or commissioned by people named after saints. The occupation in which a person was engaged might also have its special patron. For example, a farmer might pray to San Ysidro el Labrador, patron of farmers, or a stockman to Santiago, for fertility of mares. Likewise, a person seeking relief from some affliction or distress might purchase the retablo of a saint considered especially effective in this area. For instance, San Ramón Nonato might be invoked to aid in childbirth, to assist those falsely accused or imprisoned, or even to silence gossip or still the tongue of an over-talkative member of the household.

Some saints, of course, enjoyed a great general popularity, not as intercessors for particular problems but rather as mediators for all things. This is the case today with the Virgin of Guadalupe, whose image may be found in almost every Mexican home. A hundred years ago, as the retablos testify, "La Guadalupana" was not the most popular holy personage but shared her place in Mexican homes with a great variety of other saints. Owing perhaps to honors bestowed upon her in the last century, and possibly also to a trend towards praying to one holy
personage for everything, she has become the overwhelming favorite. Feelings of nationalism should not be disregarded either. It seems logical that the Virgin whose image adorned Hidalgo's banner and whose name was a battle cry during the Revolution of 1810 would influence the Mexicans in the selection of an image that is truly their own.

Although the wish to pray to one image for all protection rather than to specific saints for particular problems is now a current trend, this was not the case during the nineteenth century, as is evidenced by the variety of holy personages found on tin retablos. The modern lack of interest in this great array of saints might be explained by the greater sophistication of the modern Mexican or by a more skeptical attitude. With the passing of this specialized devotion, however, a library of delightful folk beliefs is being lost, as each succeeding generation fails to observe or record them. The current lack of interest is made clear by the destruction or sale of retablos whose holy personages are now nameless to the average Mexican and whose special powers are forgotten.
The investigation of the Mexican retablo that has been presented in the foregoing chapters has been made in the hope that it may provide a basis for further research into this area of Mexican folk art. Although it has not been the subject of much serious study thus far, the retablo merits the attention both of art historians and teachers for its intrinsic values as primitive art and for the insights it may offer into Mexican society in the last century.

The artistic development of the retablo can be traced from previous centuries, and the modifications of material and context to which it was subject can be logically explained. Created to meet the needs of a specific time and place, this art flourished and produced a large number of primitive masterpieces. The use of consistent formats, colors, and subject matter and the adoption of certain clichés for portraying holy personages endowed this art with immediately recognizable qualities. In addition, the art is pervaded by a naive view of nature that reduces details to the barest essentials.

The primitive painter, limited in education and permissible subject matter and unable to travel far from
his native village, followed the time-honored tradition of Mexican artists and copied from other works. Because these folk artists made much use of earlier prints from European religious books and paintings of the previous centuries, they managed to continue up to the twentieth century the stylistic devices of Mannerist and Baroque art. Saved by their remoteness and perhaps by their instinctive love for drama and color, they escaped the cold sterility of the Neo-Classic tradition.

The Industrial Age destroyed retablo art by making cheap, colorful prints available to replace these products of the usually illiterate craftsman-artist. The popularity of colored lithographs so reduced the need for this art form that it gradually deteriorated and finally ceased about the beginning of the twentieth century.

Although the investigation of an abandoned art form of such great variety posed some problems, there were certain consistent features to guide research. Identification of the images painted was aided by the fact that the same saints and the same manners of representation appeared frequently. These patterns of similarity assumed significance for possible identifications of artist, area, patronage, and date. The kaleidoscope of venerated personages provided variety and stimulation for the village artists and reflected a fascinating milieu of beliefs and customs among the
people. As the twentieth century drew near, however, sophisticated religious beliefs and new methods for reproducing religious art resulted not only in deterioration of the quality of the painted images on tin but in a restriction of the previously enormous variety of subjects.

Another consistent feature that proved a guide to research was the faithfulness of the artists to prescribed iconography. If personal idiosyncrasies and purely regional notions had been followed in retablo art, the entire movement would have been reduced to total confusion. The pious artists, however, adhered strictly to the dictates of the Catholic Church and the Twenty-fifth Council of Trent and carefully presented the holy personages in the prescribed manner and with the traditional symbols. Their originality and personal touches appear in details that bring to life timeworn, cliché-ridden motifs. The conventional attributes of each holy personage, carefully depicted by the retablo painter, not only facilitate identification but provide the observer with the somewhat provincial pleasure of recognizing familiar faces.

In daily life the tasks and troubles of the Mexican folk were eased by their devotion to their beliefs, and the variety of the holy images was matched by an equal variety of problems for which their aid was
sought. These sacred figures depicted with oil paint on tin sheets were appealed to for everything and could be depended upon to remedy both specific and general situations—ailments of every conceivable sort, social problems and meteorological phenomena.

The Mexican folk retablo was an artistic flourish which lasted approximately a century and was limited to the geographical center of Mexico. It deserves a place as a minor artistic genre in its own right because it consisted of a recognizable variety of subject matter, was produced under certain circumstances, employed specific materials, and was destined for a certain clientele.

Some questions remain to be answered by further investigation, and the chief of these relates to the area of distribution of the retablo. The explanation that it was "the custom" for people in one area to adorn their home altars with retablos and "not the custom" in another area simply gives rise to new questions. What circumstances dictated this custom? There is no way to trace each retablo to its original artist and its first owner, nor to ascertain the exact dating of each of these works. The answer, however, may lie within the broad area of the religious, social and artistic stimuli that combined in some areas with the easy availability of a good painting surface, tin, to produce and foster this art.
It has often been said that to understand a society one must understand its art. The retablo is a virtually unknown and largely unappreciated art object that was utilized by a large area and population during the last century. Reflecting as it does unwritten concerns and native abilities, its importance as an aid to understanding the Mexican society of the nineteenth century is inestimable. The retablo speaks a language that is unique and understandable, reflecting the customs and beliefs of a Mexico that has now virtually disappeared.

While the purpose of this thesis has been to present these paintings in an analytical, iconographical manner, much remains to be done in determining their entire significance in relation to the art, culture, beliefs, and customs of nineteenth century Mexico.
APPENDIX A

ILLUSTRATIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS
INTRODUCTION TO ILLUSTRATIONS

The reproductions of Mexican folk retablos presented here show Christ, Mary, popular saints, and angels in various manifestations. Included are the saints which, to judge by their frequent appearance, were the most popular during the period of roughly a century when this art form was being produced. Others have been selected for their uniqueness, interesting aspects, or artistic merit.

The text accompanying the illustrations discusses each holy personage as he appears or might appear in this type of art. Significant elements of the lives of the saints are included as they may assist in demonstrating a point or explaining some attribute or element of patronage, but there is no intention to provide complete accounts of the saints' lives. To relate the saints to their historical periods, death dates are given, and each saint's day or feast day is indicated for the benefit of readers who may wish to consult hagiographies for further data on individual saints.

The patronage that a particular saint might have represented has been indicated because this often influences the manner in which the saint is represented. This
information has been drawn not only from books on iconography, but from popular beliefs as they were ascertained by interviews with people from the area of Mexico where this art flourished. The data on patronage is in many respects limited because no satisfactory book has been written dealing specifically with Mexican beliefs about the saints and because of the failure of individuals to remember patronages, beliefs, and customs affected by them. Images of Christ or Mary, moreover, could rarely be identified with any specific area of protection, but were usually acquired as greatly revered images for family shrines and invoked for many complaints.

Local variants, such beliefs as might be held in only one village, have been omitted in favor of more general beliefs about patronage, for only confusion can result from including all the variations. For example, San Cayetano is regarded as a founder of the Theatines and, on the basis of his life, may be sought for money. However, one individual queried about his patronage remembered that in her childhood he was appealed to by her family to bring rain. There is no element of his life or legend connected with rainmaking and such a belief, while it could be considered as part of his extended protection, must be set aside as a purely local or personal idea.
The material presented here pertaining to the lives of Christ, Mary, and the saints, as well as information concerning the archangels has been compiled from a variety of sources. They are:


In areas of conflict between references, Butler's *Lives of the Saints* was preferred because of its recentness, accuracy, and wide use by modern hagiographers and scholars.
The following illustrative materials are photographs of retablos in the author's collection, except where as indicated.
CHRIST
Figure 1. La Alegoría de la Redención
LA ALEGORIA DE LA REDENCIÓN
The Allegory of the Redemption

Christ appears in this elaborate allegory surrounded by the symbols of the Passion. God the Father appears in a separate block above Christ holding an orb and bestowing a benediction. The sun and moon are usually present in scenes like this, alluding to the astronomical phenomenon at the time of the crucifixion when the skies darkened and the stars and moon could be seen. The Tenebrae also symbolized the sorrow of all creation at His death.¹

Michael weighs souls to Christ's right while Mary in her advocatio of "Mater Dolorosa" is to his left. Below them in a darkened area are souls in flames praying, while Adam and Eve are accepting apples from the tree of wisdom. Allegorically the scene signifies that Christ, the second Adam, saves the world through the sacrifice of His body. The archangel and Mary are intercessors through whom people are redeemed. The souls in flames could either represent those in limbo who were saved by Christ's Harrowing of Hell, or mankind, the seed of Adam and Eve, who through their prayers and the intervention of Mary are saved. The inclusion of the tree of wisdom is

significant, for according to legend the wood of the cross came from a tree that grew from a seed of the tree of wisdom.

This theme is not common.
Figure 2. El Cristo Negro
EL CRISTO NEGRO

The Black Christ

This retablo portrays the interesting phenomenon of the Black Christ and could be any one of the many images in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America that were purposely made dark.

There are three very popular Black Christs in Mexico and one in Guatemala. In Mexico NN. SS. de Chalma, de Villa Seca, and de los Milagros command the largest followings, while in Guatemala the most famous is N.S. de Esquipulas. The latter is the earliest and was created in 1594 by a Portuguese sculptor, Quirio Cantaño, at the request of the Guatemalan bishop. Although it is difficult to determine, the three Mexican Black Christs quite possibly are variations of the Guatemalan image.

The dark color, chosen by the early clergy with no small psychological insight, enabled the Indians to identify with the suffering and sacrificed Christ as a release for their own emotional tensions. Degraded to the lowest caste in their own land, they embraced the realistic agonized Christ and interpreted him in their own terms. The accentuated blood, thorns, and wounds represented their own martyrdom; and in making this image a symbol of their suffering, they "made it their own so

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2Kelemen, op. cit., p. 50.
Although the brown was meant to represent the Indian skin color and provide a bond between the image and the worshiper, many Christs fashioned by the Indians were created black. Possibly the use of black may represent the survival of pre-Christian beliefs, for black has always been considered sacred and divine in middle America.⁴

Although this particular Black Christ is not identifiable as to title, it is clear from the placement of the curtains and the flower vases that the painter copied a statue or a print done from a statue. The bloody wounds, the hands fixed in benediction, and the tres potencias (the ornamental silver crown suggesting thorns and halo) are commonly seen in this theme.

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³Brenner, op. cit., p. 115.
⁴Ibid., p. 148.
Figure 3. La Cruz de Animas
LA CRUZ DE ANIMAS
The Cross of Souls

Similar in theme to the previously examined Allegorical Redemption, this retablo is a direct copy from the small painted wooden cross with figures popular in homes during the last century for family devotion. The symbols of the Passion, St. Michael, and Mary remain constant. The only addition here is the dove descending from God upon the Son. Although they are not present on this retablo, Adam and Eve are usually found on the base of the wooden crosses and the praying figures on the steps of the base are carved in the round. The nakedness seen here is also a faithful duplication of the original wooden images.

This is an unusual retablo.
Figure 4. La Mano Poderosa or Las Cinco Personas
LA MANO PODEROSA
or
LAS CINCO PERSONAS

The Powerful Hand or the Five Persons

This theme, not uncommon in retablo art, alludes to some allegory and may be related to the Mystic Vintage since occasionally lambs are placed at the bottom to catch the blood in their mouths. Some special significance within the Franciscan order is suggested by the blue Franciscan robe and stigmata of St. Francis.

Although the signification may be lost, this is the only time when the Holy Family is shown with Mary's parents, Anne and Joachim. Each of the figures maintains typical characteristics, and Christ bestows a blessing upon the rest.
Figure 5. El Niño de Atocha
or El Niño Misionerito
EL NIÑO DE ATOCHA
or
EL NIÑO MISIONERITO

The Child of Atocha or The Child Missionary

This image is an overwhelming favorite among the representations of Christ in this folk tradition. With the exception of "La Guadalupana," "El Niño de Atocha" is the only subject of extreme popularity in the last century that has continued to be produced today in abundance in the retablo's modern equivalent, the colored lithograph. He also maintains about the same degree of popularity as he did then, around five per cent.

The image has its origin from the time of the Moorish invasion of the town of Atocha, Spain. Legend tells of the Moors forbidding anyone to visit the prison full of Christians on errands of mercy except children. The prisoners' families prayed daily for their deliverance, knowing that those imprisoned lacked sufficient food. One day, a child dressed as a pilgrim came to the prison carrying a basket and a staff with a gourd of water. Even after he had served all the prisoners, the basket and gourd were still full.

His most famous shrine in Mexico is in Plateros, near Fresnillo, Zacatecas. His image there is the source of great veneration, as the tremendous number of ex-votos attest. Although the exact date of when this image from Spain arrived at Plateros is undeterminable, paintings and
engravings of the miraculous Infant were widely distributed during the nineteenth century after the first recorded miracle in 1829, chronicled by an ex-voto at Plateros. The image in use today dates from 1886 but does not radically differ from the previous one.

The Child wears a brimmed hat with a plume (a cockleshell sometimes appears on his hat or costume indicating a pilgrim from Compostela) and a robe and cape. He holds in his left hand a pilgrim's staff and gourd and a few spears of wheat and in his right, a basket which may contain flowers. He is shown, except in a rare ex-voto, as seated. Occasionally, a pair of shackles is included, perhaps referring to his original appearance at the prison in Atocha.

It is due to this aspect of his legend that he is patron for freeing prisoners. He also performs miraculous rescues for people in every kind of danger, especially violent acts and, in particular, for travelers.

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Figure 6. El Rostro Divino, La Santa Faz, or Verónica
The Divine Face, The Holy Face, Veronica, or the Veil of Veronica

A commonly seen topic, the legend of St. Veronica, is the subject of this retablo. Veronica was a woman who was moved by compassion at the sight of Christ on His way to Calvary. Pushing her way through the crowds, she wiped the blood and sweat from His face. The imprint of His divine countenance—no longer visible on a towel preserved in St. Peter's in Rome—was felt to be adequate testimony to the story. There is some evidence that this towel has been preserved in St. Peter's since the time of Pope John VII (705-707). However, there is no historical evidence of the origin of the towel or even of the existence of such a person as Veronica.

It seems probable that the name Veronica was applied to the legendary woman because of the image on the towel; for Veronica is derived from vera icon or "true image." Hence, it is more than likely that the towel was the primary instrument in the story, and the name Veronica was subsequently applied to the presumed owner of the towel. Although the story, appearing in the Apocryphal Gospels of Nicodemus, is an accepted legend of the Catholic Church, Veronica is not named in recent Roman
martyrologies. Her cult did not appear until the fifteenth century when the devotion to the Stations of the Cross was developing, and when the Mystery plays had brought her into prominence in scenes of the Passion. She was a popular patron saint among towel makers in France from the latter part of the fourteenth century.

There is a long history of Veronica's image and of the Holy Face alone from the fourteenth century in Europe. Examples include a statue of her commissioned in 1310 for the Collegiate Notre-Dame d'Ecouis, a fifteenth-century German panel, a section of an altar by the Master of Flemalle (whose idealized type would persist), an engraving by Dürer, a sixteenth-century painting by El Greco, and seventeenth-century Italian and Portuguese Baroque statues. Popular in German and Flemish art, the theme entered Spain in the early fifteenth century, as an altarpiece dated 1415 by Luis Borrassá attests.

Although in European art the saint is often pictured holding the veil or towel, Veronica herself never

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8 Ibid., p. 1314.
appears in Mexican retablo art, but the piece of cloth is always shown with Christ's image upon it. Occasionally, instruments of the Passion are included upon the veil, as here the three nails. The tendency toward a display of great quantities of blood when depicting Christ sometimes confuses identification between this topic, minus the crown of thorns, and rare, older images of St. John the Baptist. It is not uncommon in these tin paintings of this subject to terminate the head or upper neck with blood, suggesting decapitation and hence St. John.

(The present condition of this retablo helps prove the point of current disregard among the people for the older images. An examination indicates that it was cut up to make huarache patterns, an unlikely use of something truly valued or revered. These little paintings frequently are deliberately mutilated, scratched, scribbled or written upon.)

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9Although not appearing in Mexican retablos, she perhaps appears on at least one New Mexican retablo. See: Mitchell A. Wilder, Santos, the Religious Folk Art of New Mexico (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Taylor Museum of the Colorado Springs Fine Art Center, 1943), Plate 63.
Figure 7. La Sagrada Familia
LA SAGRADA FAMILIA

The Holy Family

This representation was extremely popular among the primitive painters. Murillo's painting of this subject, formerly at the Gallery Heinemann, Munich,\textsuperscript{10} may be considered a prototype for the hundreds of subsequent copies. However, rarely does God the Father appear above the Holy Family in these retablos, as he does in the originals. Instead, a dove, the Symbol of the Holy Ghost, is always present.

This concept of the saintly family is not based on any scriptural text, but is rather a result of Franciscan meditation inspired by the Counter Reformation. Although the theme might fit into a narrative of the return from Egypt, or be considered by the Church to be the Holy Triad, a Trinity on Earth,\textsuperscript{11} it was simply regarded by the Mexicans as an example of a perfect family and revered as such.

In this context, Christ is always shown as a young child walking between his parents, who gaze upon him adoringly. Here Mary appears traditionally in a red gown with a blue mantle, the Child appears usually in some

\textsuperscript{10}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{11}\textit{Ibid.}, Plate 39.
shade of red, while Joseph is dressed in his colors, green and yellow, and always carries the blossoming staff.
Figure 8. N.S. de los Trabajos
N.S. DE LOS TRABAJOS
Our Lord of Hardships

This theme is often represented. Were it not for the fact that here Christ has already been crucified, this depiction might more aptly describe the Ecce Homo scene, wherein He is dressed in a purple robe after having been scourged and crowned, as He is represented here.

This case illustrates some of the identification difficulties. The first retablo includes the title El Sr. de Los Trabajos de Pueblo. Our Lord of Hardships, however, is shown in many ex-votos as He appears in the second illustration, that is, not carrying the cross. The image in the second illustration appears similar to a statue revered in the church of Santa Prisca in Taxco that is entitled Jesús Nazareno. Furthermore, an image of Christ bearing the cross is commonly referred to in some ex-votos as "Padre Jesús de los Tres Caminos," which would more closely resemble the first illustration—Our Lord of Hardships. To add to the confusion, the popular image at Santa Prisca and similar statues are also called "Padre Jesús."

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14 Montenegro, op. cit., p. 55.
The titles are not of great importance, but this confusion does illustrate how problems can arise when local people attach a special name to an image and are ignorant of the generally accepted title.

The first representation is unusual, not only in content but in the manner in which it is represented. The icon effect is strengthened by the Byzantine appearance of the face and hands and by the addition of gold leaf on the garment, cross and halo. The second illustration is more common. The figure is devoid of any lifelike element, and the statue quality is increased by the arrangement of flowers, candles, and draperies. An attempt at depth with the placement of the flowers and candles is destroyed by the misunderstood perspective of the tile floor, a common feature in retablo art.
Figure 9. La Trinidad
The Trinity

The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost almost always appear in retablo art as three images of the same person in complete disregard of the ban imposed by Pope Benedict XIV in 1745 on depicting the Holy Trinity in three identical personages as was common in Byzantine art. Representing the Holy Ghost in human form had been previously condemned by Pope Urban VIII in 1623.15

This repetitious Trinity reflects the vast popularity of Juan Cabrera's paintings, for the retablos appear to be almost exact duplicates of his Trinity paintings. Although there is some discussion as to whether or not the widely imitated Trinity as it appears in Mexican art was Cabrera's invention,16 his popularity cannot be disputed nor can the spread of his Trinities as the basis for many copies, including the retablos.

The Three appear as identical young men but are identifiable by symbols on their breasts. God the Father generally appears in the center with the sun, holding a sceptre; the Son is on His right with a lamb, showing the


marks of crucifixion and sometimes holding a cross; and the Holy Ghost is on the Father's left with a dove. The positions of the Father and the Holy Ghost are sometimes reversed.

The colors of the robes may be all white, but usually God the Father is dressed in white—a symbol of purity, faith, light, and integrity. The Son is either clothed in a blue robe or in red with a blue mantle—symbolizing heaven and divine love. Red is traditionally the color of the Holy Ghost and also is a symbol for martyrs' blood and royalty.¹⁷

Extremely popular in retablo art, this theme is rarely reproduced today.

¹⁷ de Bles, op. cit., p. 30; and Ferguson, op. cit., p. 94.
Figure 10. El Varón de Dolores or Ecce Homo
EL VARÓN DE DOLORES
or
ECCE HOMO

The Man of Sorrows or Behold the Man

"Behold the Man," (John 19:5) introduced Christ to the mob after He had been scourged and crowned with thorns. This retablo represents one in a series of historical scenes in the Passion of Christ which begins with the scourging, includes Him at the column, and finally represents the crucifixion. 18

This image was a common and popular theme in European art. He has yet to be crucified. He is represented as bound and bleeding, with a knotted cord around His neck. He looks out to the viewer and presents a rare example in this genre of trying to provoke a psychological response. The staff in His hand refers to the legend that the soldiers who scourged and crowned Him with thorns mockingly gave Him a staff, reed, or scourge as a symbol of His sceptre as King of the Jews.

Occasionally Christ is shown seated with the reed, which has become a plant more familiar to the Mexican, a stalk of cane. He then is commonly titled "N.S. de Caña."

These images are related to another popular Mexican theme in tin paintings, N.S. de los Trabajos.

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Figure 11. La Vendimia Mística
LA VENDIMIA MÍSTICA

The Mystic Vintage

The Biblical inspiration for the allegory comes from Isaiah 63:3: "I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: . . . ."

Representations of this theme are found as early as the twelfth century in illuminated books and as late as Italian paintings in the Renaissance and Baroque periods.19

The theme was very popular in Colonial times and there are various versions of it in existing paintings and prints. The exact prototype of this retablo has not thus far been traced, but Hieronymus Wierix (1553-1619), an Antwerp Mannerist influenced by Peter Breughel the Elder, did prints similar in context and appearance for illustrations of religious books that were imported into Mexico from Europe.20

In this retablo the libation of Christ's blood to atone for the sins of the world is illustrated by blood pouring from his body into a chalice. That he is "the vine" (John 15:1-8) is demonstrated by a grapevine originating from his body and arching over his head. The

19Kelemen, op. cit., p. 56.
20Ibid.
seven sheep symbolize the souls of the faithful, and it is not unusual to see the blood flowing into each of their mouths while they stand on a closed book with seven seals (Revelation 5:1).

The manner in which it appears here, however, is extremely common.
THE VIRGIN MARY
THE VIRGIN MARY

Mexico has often been called by writers and theologians "The Land of Mary" because many popular sanctuaries are dedicated to the Virgin, and her popularity with the Mexican people is vast. The tradition was begun in the earliest days of the Conquest by Cortés, who by means of a carved and gilded wooden statue of the Virgin introduced Catholicism to the Indians.¹ The appearance in 1531 of the Virgin on the hill of Tepeyac reinforced Mary's right to add Mexico to the other establishments and dispersals of Marian cults.

Most images of the Virgin in retablo art show her associated with her son, either in actual representation with Him or in relation to the Passion. While the most popular subject of this art was N.S. de Refugio, accounting for up to twenty-five per cent of the entire production, other themes of the Virgin were also extremely popular. She appears in retablo art many times in obvious statue paintings, complete with pedestal, flowers and/or candles, framed by draperies. Unfortunately many retablos

of Mary have no special distinguishing features and cannot be given a more specific title than "La Virgen." Occasionally, however, a title is included, distinguishing a retablo that otherwise would have joined the ranks of the unidentifiable. Identification is very difficult because there are so many different images and representations of the Virgin each with a specific name which may refer to her acts, history, attributes, or patronage, or especially to her geographical location.

Although the correct name may thus be difficult to ascertain, there need be no confusion about identifying Mary, for she is distinguished from female saints by several motifs. When she is not arrayed in white in her aspect of the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption, or in purple, as in some Pieta, her traditional colors are blue, symbolizing fidelity, divine love, and truth, and red, standing for royalty and the Holy Spirit. Her head may be covered or uncovered. When shown as "Mater Dolorosa" or in scenes like the Pieta, her head is covered with a veil as a sign of mourning.

Many times there is a moon associated with her representation, in which case she is shown either standing on it or framed by it. Generally the moon signifies her

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2 Roig, op. cit., p. 17
virginity, but specifically it refers to the Woman of the Apocalypse: "And there appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (Revelation 12:1). This Apocalyptic Woman was interpreted as representing the Virgin as she existed before the beginning of time. The representation of Mary with the crescent moon under her feet was adopted by the Church and was extremely popular in all graphic forms of art and consequently in retablo paintings. Members of both the Mexican and American Catholic clergy, in discussion, interpret her standing on the moon as the triumph of Christianity over pagan beliefs. In pre-Christian Mexico, however, the moon was an Indian emblem of Metzli, goddess of agriculture; thus Mary's association with the moon can be seen as one of the many transfers from pagan to Catholic beliefs. However, as this aspect of the Virgin existed in Europe long before it arrived in Mexico, similar conclusions can be drawn there about her powers over paganism.

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3 Hall, op. cit., p. 7.

4 Wilder, op. cit., Plate 14. In the last half of the fifteenth century the idea of the Immaculate Conception gained great importance. As a result, artists tried to invent an appropriate symbol for it. After a variety of attempts they translated into painted form the Apocalyptic Woman.
In retablos, statue paintings are generally readily recognizable not only by their setting, but also by their type of clothing. Soon after the conquest, it became extremely popular in Spain to attempt the creation of greater realism in statues. This was effected by constructing an extremely realistic face and hands on a manikin figure. The figure was then clothed over a pyramid-shaped frame in stiffly starched, sumptuous clothing. Other statues that were entirely carved in the round were modernized by being covered with a frame and dressed in a similar manner. These ideas in due course were transferred from Spain to Mexico, and several historically important statues of the Virgin which were originally sculptured carvings were revamped to accommodate a tent-like canopy of clothing. Mary is commonly shown in retablo art attired thus.

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The material that follows will present a number of different images of the Virgin Mary as portrayed in this

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5See N.S. de Salud de Pátzcuaro. At least four extremely important images in Mexico were remodeled in this way. Some of the leading statues of the Virgin were either originally constructed to wear real clothing or altered for that purpose, and there is a custom of donations on the part of local individuals or organizations for the purpose of dressing the statues in various costumes. It is possible, therefore, that retablos of the same Virgin painted at different times might not resemble one another at all due to changes in costume.
popular art. They were selected for their typicality and their general interest, both from a historical point of view and because of the manner of portrayal. As mentioned previously in the chapter entitled "Functions of the Saints," Mary is sought to remedy almost all ills and is not limited to any one specific patronage. Occasionally, however, when she is sought for something specific, this will be included.
Figure 12. La Madre Santísima de la Luz
LA MADRE SANTÍSIMA DE LA LUZ
The Most Holy Mother of Light

This image is in the Cathedral of León, Guanajuato. One of the legends tells of its being painted by an artist under the direction of a very holy nun who lived in Palermo during the early 1700's. The nun had been asked by Giovanni Antonio Genovese, a Jesuit missionary, to help him in determining a suitable image of the Virgin—one which would move the hearts of men. Through her prayers and visions, the nun was able to direct an artist to create an image that Mary herself posed for. Father Genovese carried the painting for the rest of his missionary life, converting many. Its fame spread through Sicily as did the devotion.

Through the efforts of another Jesuit with the same last name, José María Genovese, also a native of Sicily, the devotion came to Mexico. He arrived in Mexico in 1707 with the painting and subsequently became master of the novitiate at Tepotzotlán. Various Jesuit establishments in Mexico vied with one another for the painting, but through a lottery León was selected. La Madre Santísima de la Luz has resided in León since 1732 as chief Patroness of the city and Patroness of the Diocese of León.
Attwater describes the painting thus:

It is a complicated design, of a sort not calculated to appeal to all beholders: it includes the Mother pulling a naked man out of a dragon's mouth, and the Child taking men's souls out of a basket proferred by an angel.\(^6\)

Retablos of this subject reflect faithfully the original. She is being crowned by two angels, signifying her role as Queen of Heaven.

Like N.S. de Guadalupe and N.S. de Refugio, she presents no problem of identification. She is always shown in this manner minus minor details. She is not only revered as the Patroness of León and remedy of all ills but is especially remembered for her role in the protection of the city against plagues, storms, and invasions during the various wars and revolutions.

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Figure 13. N.S. de Atocha
N.S. DE ATOCHA

Our Lady of Atocha

"Since time immemorial in the court of Madrid and in almost all of Spain there has been a predilection for devotion to the Most Holy Virgin of Atocha." A religious leader of Antioch, according to a respectable tradition, took the image of the Virgin made by St. Luke and placed her in a modest hermitage in some fields seeded with esparto grass or atochales. The cult spread and soon the hermitage was converted into a sanctuary. The site was leveled during the Saracen invasion in the tenth century. Afterwards a pious gentleman proposed to dedicate a new chapel in a different place since the image was being stored in another area anyway. "History tells us that already in 1162 she was added to the church of Santa Leocadia in Toledo." Here her cult continued to grow.  

Carlos V in 1523 built a great temple and an enormous convent for the Dominicans who were responsible for her cult. The cult reached its peak during the Spanish conquest of New Spain and it is not unlikely that N.S. de Atocha arrived in the New World in the form of statues or medallions with the conquerors.

The images of the Virgin and Child venerated at Plateros in the state of Zacatecas, Mexico, are considered a direct continuation of the Spanish devotion.

She is always seen on these tin paintings with the Child in her arms, for without Him in His distinctive costume, she would be unidentifiable.

She is particularly revered by miners in the cities of Plateros and Zacatecas.
Figure 14. N.S. de la Concepción or N.S. de la Encarnación
N.S. DE LA CONCEPCIÓN
or
N.S. DE LA ENCARNACIÓN

Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception or
Our Lady of the Incarnation

Both titles essentially relate to the descent of the Holy Ghost upon Mary although technically they are not the same. She is pictured as a young girl wearing a crown of roses, and her hands crossed over her heart seem to be pressing the dove toward her. She holds in one arm a staff of lilies and occasionally in the other, roses.

The Virgin has been called a "rose without thorns" or a "lily among thorns" to symbolize her purity and exemption from the sins of the world. The lily, therefore, is considered her flower and a symbol of her purity. The garland of roses on her head may be a carry-over from a device found in Renaissance art alluding to the rosary of the Blessed Virgin. The Dove, of course, represents the Holy Ghost.

Although not abundant, this subject is not uncommon in retablo art. The aspects of the Immaculate Conception were always presented in retablos in this manner, but the theme of the Annunciation with the Angel Gabriel was never done.

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8 Ferguson, op. cit., pp. 33, 37-38.
Figure 15. N.S. de la Cueva Santa
N.S. DE LA CUEVA SANTA
Our Lady of the Sacred Cave

The cult of N.S. de la Cueva Santa is of Spanish origin and had very little popularity in Mexican art. This retablo is included here because of its charming simplicity and feeling for the abstract. In an almost oriental fashion, the body is indicated by a few lines and shadows. Our Lady appears in a bell-shaped grotto, and the placement of the crown atop the cave heightens the bell illusion.

An examination and comparison of the crown, lips, eyes, and shadows indicate that she was painted by the same individual who painted the retablos of La Trinidad and N.S. de Merced (See Illustrations: Figures 9 and 19).
Figure 16. N.S. de los Dolores or Mater Dolorosa
N.S. DE LOS DOLORES
or
MATER DOLOROSA

Our Lady of Sorrows or Sorrowful Mother

This image is among the most important of the representations of Mary without Christ. Although she may be presented with minor variations, essentially she is shown as the mourning mother.

She may be seen crowned with thorns over her veil, but most generally she appears as illustrated here in a grieving attitude, head covered, usually with hands clasped, and tears streaming down her face. Always there is a dagger in her breast and occasionally seven. This attribute distinguishes her in this role. It alludes to Luke 2:35 when upon presenting Christ to the temple she was told a sword would pierce her soul. This text has been elaborated upon to include the seven sorrows of Mary, hence seven swords or daggers. But here the dagger seems to specifically symbolize the death of Christ for the symbols of the Passion are included. In this retablo, the common phenomenon in folk art of translating articles into elements more commonly understood is clearly seen. The reed or cane used to scourge Christ has been interpreted as a corn stalk. In the bottom left corner has been written "Mater Dei"; however, she would by description be called "Mater Dolorosa."
Extremely popular in retablo art but rarely seen today in prints, N.S. de los Dolores was invoked against worry, sorrow or pain, or at the hour of death.

The retablo is a little larger than shown here; the careful handling and loving attention to details make it an exquisite little painting.
Figure 17. N.S. de Guadalupe
Figure 18. N.S. de Guadalupe con Juan Diego
Our Lady of Guadalupe

In December, 1531, the Virgin appeared to an Indian neophyte, Juan Diego. In a series of appearances to him, she stated her desire to have a church built upon the site of her appearance, the hill of Tepeyac, just outside the Mexican capital. Her wishes were fulfilled when Juan Diego presented a cloak full of roses that she had given him for the unbelieving Bishop. The cloak appeared miraculously imprinted with her image. This tilma is presently in the basilica of Guadalupe where it has been since it was transferred in 1709 from earlier chapels, and is the basis for any subsequent reproduction of her.

The original image is on a piece of very roughly woven material with a seam running from top to bottom. Mary is represented as almost life-sized, Indian in appearance, with hands together in a prayerful attitude and lowered eyes. She is completely surrounded by a mandorla of golden rays and stands on a crescent moon supported by a cherub. This type of praying Madonna, standing on the moon and encircled by a large halo or aureole, has developed from medieval illustrations of the Apocalyptic Woman and can be traced back to the tenth and
eleventh centuries. The Mexican version displays this Woman in Renaissance forms at their height. She stands with a quietness and restraint later forsaken for the surge of the Baroque. Her pose is a subtle tilt of the head and a gently curving body. Her garments are not confused with details and their softness is in harmony with her oval-shaped face. The color scheme, a blue mantle with gold stars and trim, and a red robe enriched with gold embroidery never deviates. Nor does the patient cherub with brightly colored, Byzantine-like wings which appears beneath her. She is one of the few Virgins in Mexico who is immediately recognizable.

Her miraculous appearance was an important factor in the conversion of the Indians. On the hill of Tepeyac stood at the time of the conquest a temple to the goddess Tonantzin, "Mother of the People, Our Mother," also known as Teotonantzin, "Mother of the Gods." Although a statue of the Virgin Mary had been placed in the Indian shrine in hopes that the Indians would cease to worship the pagan goddess, this move was not successful and attendance to the site was slight. Fray Bernardino de Sahagún reported:

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10 Wilder, op. cit., Plate 14.
In 1529, in order to keep the natives from abandoning their periodic visits of thanksgiving, we urged them to return to Tonantzin, as was their ancient custom and when they resumed their pilgrimages, many went to worship their ancient goddess, as much as the new one.  

The miraculous appearance of the Virgin in 1531 with her dark complexion and compassion for the poor and humble natives accomplished a conquest far more important than the mere enslavement of the Indians' bodies. She is notably dark and is clad like Tonantzin in the garb of the Mexican heaven, "A blue mantle dotted with stars like toasted maize grains."  

The most popular and well known of all the Mexican images, her popularity has increased during the last century with honors bestowed upon her by various popes. Patroness of Mexico and of the Americas, she is besought to remedy all ills.

The second illustration depicts her in a slightly different context. Here Juan Diego is shown holding the tilma as if he were presenting the miracle to the viewer much as he did to the doubting Bishop.

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11 Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, O.F.M., Historia general de la Nueva España (Mexico, 1576), [no pagination].

Figure 19. N.S. de Merced
N.S. DE MERCED

Our Lady of Mercy

The Mercedarian Order was founded by St. Peter Nolasco and the King of Aragon in 1218 for the purpose of ransoming Christian captives in the hands of the Moors. For this reason their white habit bears the arms of Aragon as their badge.13

In her role as Protectress she is shown here holding the Child, and both of them hold scapulars resembling the shield of the order. She is painted in a quaint, primitive manner and seems very Mexican with her dark complexion, her black hair, and her elaborate decoration and jewelry.

She is traditionally the Patroness for those enslaved.

13 Indistinguishable except for a different badge is N.S. de Carmel, who holds the Child and scapulars with the Carmelite emblem. She is not as common as the Mercedarian image.
Figure 20. N. S. de la Piedad or María Santísima de los Angustias
Our Lady of Pity or Most Holy Mary of Anguish

The titles may be used interchangeably, but the first is the more common and is often shortened to La Piedad.

This motif in the strictest sense includes the Madonna and her Son; He has been removed from the cross and she is holding His inanimate body. This seems to have been derived from the traditional representation of the Virgin holding the Infant Jesus, the Crucified Christ having been substituted for the Child. Often, as here, the two figures are seen just as they appear in another popular scene in early Christian art—The Lamentation at the Foot of the Cross (Beweinung Christi) but without the figures of St. John and the Three Marys.

This element of art originated in fourteenth century Germany and is an expression of Northern piety stressing the relationship between Christ and Mary. The influence of mysticism focused the early German artists' attention on a specifically German product, the devotional image. This theme, one of a group developed at this

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14 Réau, op. cit., p. 1314.

time, is called Vesperbild, or Image for the Evening Prayer. Others included the "Virgin of Misery" and the "Man of Sorrows." The Pietà is also believed to have drawn its foundations from the mystical meditations of the Franciscan saint, Bonaventure, and from poignant descriptions in the writings of St. Brigette of Sweden.\(^1\)

The earliest example might well be the group in stone at the Cathedral of Nuremberg done around 1320. Others dating from about the same time are found at Coburg, Wetzlar, and Bonn. An early French representation is at the Chartreuse de Champanal near Dijon, dated 1388, and attributed to Claus Sluter.\(^2\)

As a German-French Gothic art creation, it later spread to Italy. In the fifteenth century Italian artists such as Carlo Crivelli and Cosimo Tura were painting the motif. Mantegna also did a miniature of a similar rendition including the Three Marys grouped around the dead Christ.\(^3\)

Entering Spain, possibly through Flanders, Pietàs in marble dating from the end of the fifteenth century are found in the Cathedral of Toledo and the Cathedral of

\(^{1}\) Réau, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 103.
\(^{2}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 107.
\(^{3}\) Réau, \textit{loc. cit.}
Santa María de Nieve in Segovia. Bartolomé Bermejo's
Pietà (c. 1490) in the Cathedral of Barcelona uses many
northern devices, including the subject; however, at this
time the Spanish traits of drama and realism are clearly
evident in this genius's work.

Later developments include Michelangelo's work at
St. Peter's and his moving last sculpture, the Rondanini
Pietà. Annibale Carracci was yet another sixteenth
century Italian contributing to the list with his painting
for the Church of San Francesco in Rome. A Flemish
continuation may be seen in a painting attributed to
Quentin Matsys around 1550.

Seventeenth century examples include a bronze by
Simon Huitrelle; and in the eighteenth century Louis XIII
commissioned a marble for the choir in Notre Dame, Paris,
by Nicholas Coustou in 1723. The subject was continued
even into the nineteenth century with Eugène Delacroix's
painting for the Church of St. Denis in Paris.

There are two principal types of Pietàs. In the
fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Christ is seen lying on

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19 Réau, loc. cit.
20 José Gudiol, The Arts of Spain (Garden City, New
21 Réau, loc. cit.
22 Ibid.
His mother's knees. In the sixteenth century under the influence of the Renaissance ideal of formal beauty, He is depicted stretched out with only His head supported by her knees. In the example shown, as well as in other retablos examined, the later type is the one generally seen.

Mary appears veiled and has the sword of sorrow in her chest. As in European art, the Virgin in this Pieta is often incorporated with N.S. de los Angustias or La Virgen de los Cuchillos, as the addition of the dagger indicates. In this particular painting, the European source of the original painting or (more likely) print is reflected in the background containing spires crowned with half moons, an attempt to provide an atmosphere of the Near East. With its predominant red and blue coloring, strong linear qualities, peculiarly misunderstood anatomy and the elongated faces, noses, and pursed lips, this retablo acquires an almost Byzantine air. The careful display of the instruments of the Crucifixion is commonly seen.

Although regarded as a symbol of motherly love and reflected upon during the hour of death, there is no particular patronage attributed to this topic.

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23Ibid., p. 103.
Figure 21. N.S. de Refugio de Pecadores
Representations of Our Lady of Refuge constitute perhaps twenty-five per cent of the entire production of retablos. The original painting of this theme is said to have been painted in the early eighteenth century for an altar formerly at Frascati, Italy, in the style of Guido or Salvator Rosa. A copy of the painting was brought to Mexico in 1719 by a Jesuit missionary and placed in the city of Zacatecas.24

This Virgin is always presented without deviation from the original in theme or format, the artists' abilities providing the only difference. She appears crowned and supports the Child, also crowned, whose nude body is covered by a transparent robe. A scarf is drawn across her right shoulder and her blue cape is initialed with her ciphers. The Child rests His right hand on her right arm and grasps her right thumb in His left hand. Half-length, they both appear resting on clouds. The tenderness, warmth, and dignity of the scene could well have occasioned its great popularity.

The two photographs provide examples of the identical subject, painted according to the rules and

tenets for its correct representation, yet reflecting entirely different techniques and skills.
Figure 22. N.S. de Salud de Pátzcuaro
N.S. DE SALUD DE PÁTZCUARO

Our Lady of Health of Pátzcuaro

In 1523 Don Vasco de Quiroga was sent as Bishop to Tzintzunzan, the capital of the Tarascan Indians on the shores of Lake Pátzcuaro. He won their confidence by his concern for them and by his charity.

The Bishop noticed that the Indians created images of their gods by an ancient technique called *titzinguenui*, using corn pith in paste form, bound with the juice of orchids and then painted with gums of certain trees which hardened and preserved the figures. The Bishop had a skilled Tarascan artist model an image of the Virgin and named her "N.S. de Salud." She became immensely popular and the Indians brought their sick to her, receiving cures.

At the end of the seventeenth century the figure's base was shaved down to accommodate the new European fashion of dressing the images in robes of material.

She stands five feet high on a silver pedestal against a red velvet background. She is crowned, there are stars in her halo and a moon at her feet, and her hands are clasped in prayer. She reflects European influence by blue, almond-shaped eyes, fair skin, and long chestnut hair.

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The retablos painted of her show her as a statue. Her popularity is felt to be local for there are few retablos of her and all are identical, suggesting the same artist. While this figure is iconographically indistinguishable from most other images of the Virgin, Mexicans from Michoacán and Jalisco, when shown a photograph of the retablo, consistently responded with this title. The roses on her dress could be a distinguishing factor, for they appear both on the retablos and upon the actual image's gown. Similarly the combination of crown and halo, while not peculiar to this image alone, appears on both statue and the painting.

She is revered by the people of Pátzcuaro, is invoked by the fishermen of the lake nearby, and never fails to bring rain when requested.
Figure 23. La Purísima Concepción
LA PURÍSIMA CONCEPCIÓN

The Immaculate Conception

The title "La Purísima" or "La Inmaculada" may be properly assigned to a variety of Mary figures. These all refer to the purity of Mary although they may appear in a milieu of different poses and allegories.

The basic format is similar to what is illustrated here: the Virgin stands on a globe which might indicate a new moon with the crescent pointing downward, or she stands on a crescent moon pointed upward which in turn rests on a dark globe. The variations upon this one aspect may be traced in Spanish art; but more interesting is the adaptation of motifs from another representation of Mary, incorporating a variety of Biblically unrelated features.

The Virgin in her manifestation as "La Purísima" had been frequently shown as described by the vision of St. John (Revelations 12:1) since the rise of importance of this concept in the mid-fifteenth century. The effort to show "a woman clothed by the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" is faithfully attempted here. The theme of "La Purísima" during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries emphasized Mary suspended from the realm of this world, surrounded by
cherubs and symbols of the Rosary. The serpent, which appeared in this context in Mexico early in the seventeenth century, was not popular although it was referred to in the same passage of Revelations (12:2-9).

An iconographically similar subject, "La Virgen del Apocalipsis," always included the serpent as part of the allegory but omitted the personal attributes of Mary or the Rosary.

In the large oil painting by Francisco Antonio Vallejo, Mater Immaculata, painted in Mexico in 1714, the combination of these elements appears. Mary is the Apocalyptic Woman and is accompanied by various attributes held by angels. The militant Woman of the Apocalypse has been softened to accept the mood and title "La Inmaculada" or "La Purísima." Now, an added element appears. The serpent grasps an apple in his mouth, and Mary represents not only the handmaiden of God and the woman of St. John's vision, but a Second Eve, as Christ is often equated the second Adam.

With certain modifications, this final development appears not uncommonly on these small tin paintings.

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26 Toussaint, op. cit., Illustrations 208 and 230.
27 Ibid., Illustration 194.
28 Ibid., Illustration 295.
29 Museo de Pinacoteca Virreinal, México, D.F.
Modifications such as the placement of the stars encircling the Virgin's head or on her robe, the presence or absence of the serpent, or the representation of personal attributes (here a rose) distinguishes one from another. Consistent, however, is her demure attitude, hands in prayer, the sun behind her, her feet on the globe. There are frequently two trees flanking her, probably a palm and a cypress: the cypress symbolizing death and the palm triumph over sin and death.\(^{30}\) These, however, may result from a misunderstanding of one of the symbols of the Rosary in older paintings and prints—the walled garden.

In this particular retablo and many others like it the Virgin appears directly derived from paintings by Murillo, several of which (and many imitations) were imported into Mexico in the eighteenth century. They were copied and popularized by Mexican painters, including the primitives.

\(^{30}\) Ferguson, op. cit., pp. 30 and 36.
ABBREVIATIONS

Because the section that follows uses a number of abbreviations to designate religious orders, ecclesiastical or social position, manner of death, and so on, a list is presented here for the reader's assistance. These are standard abbreviations found in almost every hagiography or iconographical work. Although not every abbreviation listed here will be found in this thesis, a number of those most commonly used are included. Because most collections of saints' lives are chronologically arranged by the saints' days, these days according to the Roman Martyrology were included to enable the interested reader to find them in other reference works. This synopsized information appears at the beginning of the text upon each saint, just after the anglicized version of the name.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<td>Abs.</td>
<td>Abbess</td>
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<td>Abt.</td>
<td>Abbot</td>
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<td>A.C.</td>
<td>Approved Cult</td>
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<td>Bd.</td>
<td>Beatified</td>
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<td>Blessed</td>
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<td>Card.</td>
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<td>C.C.</td>
<td>Ancient cultus confirmed by Holy See</td>
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<td>Cd.</td>
<td>Canonized</td>
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<td>Comp.</td>
<td>Companions</td>
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<td>Deacon</td>
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<td>Dr.</td>
<td>Doctor</td>
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<td>Ev.</td>
<td>Evangelist</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<td>H.</td>
<td>Hermit</td>
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<td>h.d.q.</td>
<td>hanged, drawn, and quartered</td>
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<td>M.</td>
<td>Martyr</td>
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<td>O. Carm.</td>
<td>Carmelite Order</td>
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<td>O. Cart.</td>
<td>Carthusian Order</td>
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<td>O. Clare</td>
<td>Poor Clares Order</td>
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<td>O.F.M.</td>
<td>Friars Minor (Franciscan) Order</td>
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<td>O. Merc.</td>
<td>Mercedarian Order</td>
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<td>O. Min.</td>
<td>Minims Order (or Hermits of St. Francis)</td>
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<td>O.P.</td>
<td>Dominican Order (Ordines Praedicatorum)</td>
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<td>O. Praem.</td>
<td>Praemonstratensian Order</td>
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<td>O.S.A.</td>
<td>Augustinian Order</td>
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<td>O.S.B.</td>
<td>Benedictine Order</td>
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<td>O.S.B. Cam.</td>
<td>Camoldolese Order</td>
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<td>O.S.B. Vall.</td>
<td>Vallombrosian Order</td>
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<td>O.S.N.</td>
<td>Servite Order</td>
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<td>O.S. Trin.</td>
<td>Trinitarian Order</td>
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<td>P.C.</td>
<td>Popular Cult</td>
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<td>Q.</td>
<td>Queen</td>
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<td>R.M.</td>
<td>Roman Martyrology</td>
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<td>S.J.</td>
<td>Society of Jesus (Jesuits)</td>
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<td>V.</td>
<td>Virgin</td>
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<td>V.M.</td>
<td>Virgin Martyr</td>
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<td>W.</td>
<td>Widow</td>
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Figure 24. San Acacio
SAN ACACIO

St. Acacius of Mt. Ararat, R.M. June 22

Acacius was a supposed martyr of the second century. After an appearance of an angel he and his nine thousand Roman soldiers during a campaign to subdue certain Syrian tribes were said to have been converted to Christianity. They retired to Mt. Ararat in Armenia and founded a community for the contemplative life. Attempts were made first by the Emperor Hadrian (A.D. 76-138) and then by Antoninus Pius (A.D. 138-161) to return them to military duty. A force of an additional one thousand legionaries sent to capture them was in turn converted, bringing the complement to ten thousand. After a series of miracles, all of the community were tortured and martyred by beheading, crucifixion, or being thrown over a cliff. The legend fails to relate who exterminated them, but presumably it was a Roman emperor.¹ Although greatly venerated in Germany, St. Acacius is unknown in the Near East, including Armenia, the supposed site of his death.

This medieval theme was elaborated upon by the Spaniards who made Acacius and his companions Spaniards, and some of their breviaries included lections for the feast taken from these apocryphal acts.

Although Spanish missals indicate that the chief attribute of St. Acacius is a crown of thorns, some histories state that his martyrdom was first by flagellation on a walnut tree and then by crucifixion, or being impaled on a tree of thorns. He is represented in Mexican folk retablos crucified and occasionally crowned with thorns, and his costume is roughly contemporary with the Mexican Independence movement in the early nineteenth century.

His cult in Mexico is not widespread. His identification is confused or unknown by most Mexicans who either refer to the image mistakenly by the names of other crucified martyrs or even assume that it is a costumed Christ.²

The legend relates that at the time of their death, the Lord gave the ten thousand and one martyrs the power of bestowing health and earthly goods to those who would cherish their memory. For this reason, St. Acacius is considered one of the "Fourteen Holy Helpers in Need." He was also sought to cure headaches.

²Nadine Markova, "Living in Guanajuato," Mexico/This Month, XII (September-October, 1966), 26.
Figure 25. Santa Anna
SANTA ANNA
St. Anne, R.M. July 26

Nothing in the Bible specifically refers to Anne's life or background, but at the time when early Christians were eagerly seeking additional information concerning holy personages a rather complete life was compiled. This material is contained in the apocryphal books.

According to one tradition, Anne was married twice before she espoused Joachim, the father of the Blessed Virgin. The first marriage was to Cleophas, by whom she bore Mary, wife of Alpheus and mother of St. James the Lesser, Thaddeus, and Joseph Justus; the second husband was Salome, by whom she bore another Mary, who married Jebedee, a wealthy merchant of Galilee, and whose children were St. James the Major and St. John the Evangelist.\(^3\) Other traditions confine themselves to the statement that Anne and Joachim had no children; but all the sources suggest that they were a wealthy, noble couple.

Anne, not seen in retablo art by herself, appears in connection with her daughter, the Virgin Mary, or in the theme of Cinco Personas (See Illustrations: Figure 4). However, since neither of these are common themes, she appears rarely. When shown with her daughter, she is depicted as an older woman and is seen instructing the Virgin in reading.

\(^3\)de Bles, op. cit., p. 136.
She is considered a patron of the old, is prayed to by women during maternity, and is especially effective against sterility.
Figure 26. San Antonio de Padua
SAN ANTONIO DE PADUA

St. Anthony of Padua, O.F.M., d. 1231, R.M. June 13.

The theme shown here dates from the Counter Reformation when mystical contemplation was inclined toward the childhood of Christ. This type of emotional religious sentimentality was first exploited by artists during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and the sweetness and softness evident here were popularized not only by Murillo but by his Mexican imitators. The motif illustrated here is the one most commonly used in Mexican art to portray St. Anthony. The saint appears as a pleasant young man, holding the Child, a lily, and occasionally a book. According to legend, a host of Anthony’s saw radiant light pouring from under the door of the saint’s room. Peering through the keyhole, he discovered that the source of the light was Christ as a child seated in the saint’s arms. The blue robe shown in this retablo is not unusual in paintings of Franciscans at this time. Spanish Franciscans commonly adopted blue robes for their singular devotion to the Virgin, and not until 1897 after a papal decree did brown become the universal color for Franciscan habits.

St. Anthony’s patronage and his aspect in art reflect a curious paradox. Although he is always pictured as a sweet and meek individual in art, in real life he was far from this image. As Coulson says, “Sweetness of
disposition was not his most noticeable trait." He had a blistering tongue and was noted for boldness, rather than meekness. An aristocrat, he became a special advocate of the poor and downtrodden. A scholar having no living rival as a Biblical expert, he was adopted by the illiterate to become the finder of lost trifles and the saint of trivial appeals. He is also sought to find husbands for unmarried girls and by married women for fertility.

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4Coulson, op. cit., p. 54.
Figure 27. San Benito de Palermo
SAN BENITO DE PALERMO

St. Benedict of Palermo (the Black or the Moor),
O.F.M., d. 1589, R.M. April 3

Benedict was the son of Christian African slaves. He was born in Sicily and his father was promised that his eldest son would be free. Devout and pious from earliest childhood, at the age of ten he was given the nickname "The Holy Black," which remained with him his entire life.

He joined a group of hermits when he was twenty-one; and when he was about thirty-four, his group was ordered by Pope Pius IV either to disband or to join a regular order. Benedict chose the Friars Minor of the Observance, a Franciscan order, near Palermo. His understanding of the Scriptures astonished inquirers, for he could neither read nor write. It is also said that he could read men's minds.

Of moderate popularity, Benedict was the patron of negro slaves in the Americas. He is shown as a negro and always dressed as a Franciscan in blue. He usually holds a crucifix and lily. Occasionally a flaming heart is shown on his breast, indicating the burning fervor of his faith.

Benedict was commonly besought against smallpox.
Figure 28. San Camilo de Leliz
SAN CAMILO DE LELIZ

St. Camillus (or Camillo) of Lellis, Brothers of St. John of God, d. 1614, R.M. July 18

Camillus is often called the "Red Cross Saint" for two obvious reasons. First, as founder of the Ministers of the Sick he instituted humane hospital treatment and, secondly, his order wore a red cross on the right breast of their black habit. (In retablo art, however, the cross is likely to appear anywhere on the garment.)

His early life was dissolute. Addicted to gambling, he managed to lose everything he owned. In observance of a vow to join the Franciscan Order that he had made in a fit of remorse, he accepted work as a laborer on the new Capuchin buildings at Manfredonia. Here, after hearing a moving exhortation by the Guardian of the friars, he completed his conversion. He tried to enter the novitiate of the Franciscans but could not be admitted because of a diseased leg. He then returned to the hospital of San Giacomo (where previously he had been treated) and devoted himself to serving the sick.

Appalled at the conditions that existed in the hospital, he formed a project to attract persons who were interested in devoting themselves to charity. Feeling that the patients' spiritual needs were just as important as their bodily requirements, he took holy orders. Then with two other companions he left the San Giacomo hospital
and started a hospital of his own and his own order.
"They served the sick with so much diligence and affection
that it was visible to all who saw them that they
considered Christ himself as lying sick or wounded." In
addition to caring for their patients physically, by their
exhortations they disposed them for last Sacraments and a
happy death.

The order increased, and they continued to serve
through plagues and pestilences although some of their own
number were lost. Of interest is St. Camillus' rule that
his religious attendants be watchful for those who might
appear dead, to prevent them from being buried alive.
Live burial was not uncommon at that time in many hospi-
tals. To this order can be attributed the first recorded
military field ambulance, for in 1595 and 1601 some of its
members were sent with troops fighting in Hungary and
Croatia.

Camillus continued to care for the sick until his
last days even when he himself was severely ill. He died
at the age of sixty-four and was canonized in 1746,
declared the patron of the sick by Pope Leo XIII, and of
nurses and the nursing associates by Pope Pius XI.

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5Butler, op. cit., III, 135.
In retablo art he always appears ministering to a man who looks more dying or dead than merely ill and the atmosphere of the last rites is suggested. In every case imps or devils are included from whose clutches the saint has managed to secure the soul of the departed and return it to God. These creatures resent St. Camillus and often are portrayed as making rather unkind remarks such as "Mata Usted, Camilo."

Patron of the sick and of nurses, he is a frequently portrayed image in the tin paintings.
Figure 29. San Cayetano
SAN CAYETANO

St. Caietan (or Gaetano da Thiene), Founder O. Theatine, d. 1547, R.M. August 7

The founder of several hospitals and co-founder of the Theatines-Clerks Regular, he was greatly concerned with the corruption and indifference of Catholics during his lifetime. Although of a wealthy family and highly educated, he selected a religious life and was ordained when he was thirty-three years old in 1516. He re-founded a group called the Confraternity of the Divine Love, dedicated to the zealous promotion of the welfare of souls. No job was too menial for this group, who were small, select, and even aristocratic in composition. They strongly emphasized poverty and aiding the sick.

In 1527 Emperor Charles V sacked Rome. The Spanish soldiers, certain that the group was hiding great wealth, brutally tortured the members of the order, including Cajetan. The order fled to Venice where Cajetan was selected as the leader of the Theatines.

His humility became legendary, and stories of miracles multiplied during his own lifetime. On his deathbed he insisted upon lying on a board rather than a mattress, saying: "My Saviour died on a cross, allow me at least to die on wood."

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6Ibid., p. 273.
The manner in which he is shown in Mexican retablos differs from his European appearance. In Spain he is usually portrayed dressed as a priest, denoting his particular interest in the sacred rites and holding the Christ Child, alluding to an early mystical experience in which the Virgin Mary entrusted to him the care of the Divine Infant. In the illustration here, he appears dressed in the black robe of his order and has no child, but a magnificently jeweled chain has been added. This chain is a New World addition possibly symbolizing his rejection of wealth or his leadership of his order. Most probably it is the former, for the Theatines took monastic vows of poverty. It is by this ornament that he is most easily distinguished.

He may hold a lily in one hand and not rarely has a cross shown behind him upon which have been placed crowns of roses and thorns and occasionally a gold crown. The cross and crowns present other identification problems. His desire to lie on a hard board while dying in as close an emulation of Christ as possible may explain the cross. However, the crowns of roses and thorns are reserved for martyrs which he was not. In one corner of the retablo there may appear either descending rays or an equilateral triangle enclosing an eye. Both the triangle and eye and the rays are symbols of God—the Trinity surrounded by rays of the sun.
Miscellaneous symbols sometimes appearing are: a book with or without pens and inkhorn (signifying his authorship or an attribute of his role as founder of an order), the lily (symbolizing purity), flames rising from his chest (a symbol of religious fervor), a skull, and nails (referring perhaps to his mystical experience of the pains of the crucifixion). The additional crown of gold probably is the traditional signification of rejection of this world's royalty and glory for a heavenly crown.

He may be sought in Mexico to bring money and is considered by some to be the patron saint for gamblers.
Figure 30. Santa Elena
SANTA ELENA

St. Helena, d. 330, R.M. August 18

Tradition ascribes the finding of the True Cross to the mother of the Emperor Constantine. She had been converted to Christianity after a vision appeared to her son predicting his victory in a battle. She had as a token of her piety a number of churches built, and at the age of eighty undertook a religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem. There, particularly interested in the Mount of Calvary, she had several excavations made in which three crosses were found. To determine which was the authentic cross, she had a severely ill man placed on each cross in succession. When he touched the True Cross, he was miraculously cured. Similar legends tell of her later finding three nails which shone like gold. Two of these she gave her son for protection in battle.

The legends are conflicting, and details are not consistent concerning her life and her role in finding the True Cross. Furthermore, she was never mentioned in the writing of St. Jerome who lived later in nearby Bethlehem. Nevertheless, at one time she was considered one of the most important women in the world. Her significance during a period perhaps more perilous for the Church than that of the persecutions may have been in her ability to
focus the world's attention on something as simple as the planks of wood.\textsuperscript{7}

She appears, as here, exotically dressed to suggest a Roman empress, either crowned or wearing a turban. She holds the cross and the three nails, if not still in the cross, are held by her or by cherubs. Although her hagiography does not attribute to her the finding of the crown of thorns, she is commonly shown with it.

Well known, but not popular in retablo art, St. Helena had no particular following in Mexico, except as mediator between the baptized newly born and God.

\textsuperscript{7}Coulson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 207.
Figure 31. San Expedito
St. Expeditus, Legendary, no date. P.C. April 19

It is doubtful whether St. Expeditus ever existed. Perhaps a copyist's error is responsible for the occurrence of the name Expeditus in groups of martyrs both on the eighteenth and nineteenth of April, the martyr being assigned in one case to Rome and in the other to Armenia. However, there is no trace of any tradition to corroborate either mention.

Popularly it is related that the saint originated in modern times as the result of a misunderstanding: a packing case, containing a corpo santo from the catacombs, the story goes, had been sent to a community of nuns in Paris for placement in their new chapel. On the outside of the crate were the words "e spedito" and the date of dispatch. Ignorant of Italian, they mistook the words for the name of the saint and immediately set about spreading the cult. The story is destroyed, however, when it is recognized that he was worshiped as far back as the eighteenth century.

His origin is considered to be an adaptation of pagan or mythical themes. He is always depicted as a classical warrior, holding the palm of martyrdom, a cross upon which is usually written "Hodie" (Latin: "today"), and stepping on a crow which, by means of a scroll in this illustration, is saying: "Cras" ("tomorrow"). The patron
saint against procrastination, he suspiciously resembles Mercury, whose rooster has been substituted by a raven, and whose caduceus has become a cross. But he has not changed his classical armor nor Mercury's swiftness.

Although he is almost completely forgotten in Mexico, there does exist a tradition of calling upon him in urgent cases.
Figure 32. San Francisco de Paula
St. Francis of Paola, Founder, O. Min., d. 1507, R.M. April 2

This Italian saint received his name after a visit with his parents to the shrine of St. Francis of Assisi. At the age of fifteen he became a hermit and retired to a cave near Reggio, where his fame drew disciples for whom the country people built cells and a small chapel.

In 1436 he founded the Order of Minims, or Hermits of St. Francis, and preached to his followers with great emphasis on humility and charity. Miraculous cures, raising of the dead, and the averting of plagues are attributed to him.

He is seen in Mexican art as a venerable friar with the word "Caritas" or "Caridad" surrounded by flames near him. The position of his hands suggests that he is holding something, and there are little flames on both sides of the hands. The allusion is to several incidents in his life regarding his immunity to fire. A staff is usually present, and he is generally shown with a lamb emerging from a fiery oven. There is no satisfactory explanation in his life to explain this attribute, which seems to occur only in Mexico and which may also refer to his protection against fire. However, a lamb is the traditional symbol of sacrifice, and there may be some
meaning based on Christ, the bread of life, and the sacrificial lamb.

Extremely popular in retablo art, images of this saint may constitute as much as five per cent of the production of folk artists. He may be sought for protection against fires and plagues, and by lepers, the blind, and the maimed.
Figure 33. Santa Gertrudis la Magna
SANTA GERTRUDIS LA MAGNA

St. Gertrude the Great, O.S.B., d. 1301 (02),
R.M. November 16

There is nothing known of St. Gertrude's birthplace or parentage. She entered the cloister of the Benedictine nuns of Helfta, Saxony, when she was five. Because she was a pupil of St. Mechtildis, sister of the Abbess, Gertrude von Hackeborn, she is sometimes erroneously referred to by the title of "Abbess."

After a series of revelations which began when she was twenty-six, this saint applied herself to sacred studies and concentrated on the Bible and the works of the Church fathers. Five books and a series of prayers are associated with her, although she actually wrote only one book containing a succession of visions and mystical experiences. She was particularly devoted to the worship of the Sacred Heart and was said to have in visions twice reposed her head on the breast of Christ and heard his beating heart.

She is shown here as she commonly appears on retablos in the habit of a Black Benedictine nun, holding the abbess's staff (a consistent mistake throughout this art) and the Sacred Heart, for which reason she is called the Prophetess to its devotion. The veil attached to the staff is usually present, but in this case is a trifle more ornate than usual.
Although she is the Patroness of the West Indies, there does not seem to be any particular devotion to St. Gertrude in Mexico, nor are retablos of her common. She can be considered as mediator for those suffering from epilepsy or heart trouble.
Figure 34. San Gonzalo de Amaranto
SAN GONSALO DE AMARANTO

St. Gonsalvus of Amarante, O.P., d. 1259, A.C. January 10 (or 16)

The life of St. Gonsalvus recorded by his biographer contains many suspect elements which, according to Butler, "are not of a nature to inspire confidence in the sobriety of his biographer's judgment." 8

Once well-to-do, Gonsalvus resigned his wealth and after a lengthy pilgrimage was supernaturally directed to enter an order in which the office began and ended with the "Ave Maria." He became a Dominican and was allowed by his superiors to live as a hermit.

Of prime importance in his life is the fact that he built a bridge over the river Tamega near Amarante, Portugal, largely by himself. When he had helpers and their supply of wine ran short (an event that threatened to halt the work), St. Gonsalvus prayed and struck a rock with his staff, whereupon an abundant supply of excellent wine appeared. When food ran low, he went to the river and summoned fish which competed for the privilege of being eaten for such a worthy cause.

He is identifiable by the Dominican habit and rosary. He holds the fish, a model of a bridge, and a pilgrim's staff—all related to his life and supposed

8Butler, op. cit., I, 103.
acts. Shown here in the background is a larger scale representation of the bridge.

Extremely rare in Mexican art and not associated with any particular cause, this retablo demonstrates more sophisticated handling and skill than many others. Although the drawing of the hands is clumsy, the body is presented with bulk and conviction. The artist achieved depth, and the popular aureole created by clouds that appears so often in these paintings has a realism that is rarely seen.
Figure 35. San Jerónimo
SAN JERÓNIMO

St. Jerome, Dr., d. 420, R.M. September 20.

During a serious illness Jerome experienced a vision in which Christ judged him. Profoundly affected, he withdrew to the wilderness for four years although he had been a serious student and an active disciple of Christianity before this experience. While in the desert he suffered much from ill health and even more from temptations of the flesh. He resisted by fasting and beating his chest with a rock. It was in the desert that he studied Hebrew as a further measure of control over the flesh.

He was ordained a priest after this retreat upon his stipulation that he would never have to serve any church but could remain a monk or recluse. He spent the following seventeen years in Rome, criticizing the existing conditions of the Church society and aroused much resentment. In 385 he embarked for Antioch. Later, through the generosity of a woman recluse, he built a monastery for men and buildings for three communities of women near the Basilica of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

It was here that he accomplished his most important contribution to Christianity, his translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew into Latin and his critical labors on the Scriptures. He revised every book of the Latin Bible, the Vulgate, except the books of Wisdom,
Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, and the two books of Macabees. His studies included personal research in many areas of the Holy Land.

One of the four great doctors of the Church, Jerome is always seen in retablo art as a hermit in a setting suggesting the wilderness. Accompanying him are the symbols of penance and contemplation, the scourge, skull and crucifix, and usually a horn in an upper corner directed toward his ear and signifying the final trump of judgment. Also, a book may be included testifying to his scholarship.

St. Jerome has been mistakenly called a cardinal because of his services for Pope St. Damasus, and this false title is suggested here by his red robe, red being traditionally the color of cardinals. His chest may be wounded and bleeding, or he may have wounds on his arms to suggest his penitential beating with the rock or use of the scourge. In this example the wounds become almost decorative, and the fact that the nearby scourge is dripping blood indicates that this is the method by which he chastized himself, rather than the traditional rock.

St. Jerome's most characteristic and distinguishing attribute is the lion. The beast had been transferred to Jerome because of confusion with a legend of another saint. The Italian spelling of Jerome, Geronimus, was so similar to that of St. Gerasimus that Jerome acquired from Gerasimus the lion and the tradition of removing the thorn
from its paw, whereby it remained loyal to him. Depicted as an attribute rather than as a description of any legend, the animal is greatly reduced in scale and commonly has, as seen here, human facial features.

A popular subject among retablo painters, Jerome was sought for protection against temptation and want. He is also the patron for scholars, philosophers, and librarians.
Figure 36. San Joaquín
The husband of Anne, mother of the Virgin, is almost without exception depicted with them and not alone. He is shown as an older man, bearded, and traditionally gowned in a green robe and red coat trimmed in ermine. The ermine suggests wealth; the green robe symbolizes hope and new life, while red indicates royalty and love. The staff he carries indicates that he was a shepherd. He usually appears in the background in scenes of Anne teaching the Virgin to read.

Nothing is known of his life for certain, but apocryphal tales relate that his gift at the temple was refused because of Anne's barrenness. He left with his flock to pray for forty days and nights. During this time an angel appeared to Anne announcing that her prayers for a child had been answered. She replied that be it male or female, it would be dedicated as an offering to the Lord. Another angel then appeared and informed her of Joachim's approach. Anne met him at the "Golden Gate" as he returned with his flocks and told him of the angel's visit only to learn that he had also been informed by an angel.

Joachim, like Anne, is patron for the elderly.
Figure 37. San José
This saint is a classic example of the tailoring of an image to meet Counter Reformation needs. The seed of his cult took root during the time of Luther when the Catholic Church was searching for new heroes. Previous to this time he had been almost ignored. Sponsored by the Carmelite Order, he was appealed to by St. Theresa for the protection of twelve of her monastic foundations which she had placed under his patronage. St. Joseph was popularized by the Church Militant which Wilder says, "demanded strong and forceful leaders, on earth as well as in Heaven." San José was rejuvenated. Previously shown in art as an old man trusted with the guardianship of Mary, he was later interpreted as much younger, for only in the prime of life, the Church argued, could he have given Mary the proper care and protection. This new Saint Joseph was developed by the artist into a virile man, full of youth and strength. He continued to be portrayed as filled with human tenderness, and this gentle and appealing characteristic was exploited until he finally appears, as in retablo art, suspiciously like a masculine Mary.

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9Wilder, op. cit., Plate 18.
His attribute of a blooming staff or sometimes a lily and his title "refugium agonizantium" may be attributed to the concern of Christendom about his little known life. The demand of popular curiosity and piety had encouraged the "History of Joseph the Carpenter," a chapter in the Apocrypha, perhaps dating back to the fourth century A.D.\textsuperscript{10} Here it is related that Mary's husband was selected by the placing of all eligible suitors' staffs in the courtyard of the temple. The following day Joseph's had bloomed. This staff became his attribute as well as a symbol of his purity. Further legends tell of his death, comforted by the presence of Jesus and Mary. The account of his death contains the promise of Jesus to protect in life and death all those who do good in Joseph's name. For this reason he became the patron for a good death, although this was a much later aspect.\textsuperscript{11}

Here is an image that provides no problem of identification. San José is never shown in retablo art

\textsuperscript{10}Butler, \textit{op. cit.}, I, 631.

\textsuperscript{11}Butler, \textit{loc. cit.} In the fifteenth century certain localities and teachers had developed a cultus and private devotion to him, but the first printed Roman Missal (1474) has no mention of him. It was not until 1505 that a mass was said in his honor in Rome. His aid of the sick and dying must have resulted after 1614 because the \textit{Rituale Romanum} issued by authority at this time fails to mention him in this aspect.
except in company with the Virgin and/or the Child. He rarely deviates from the traditional pose of standing, holding the Child and a flowering staff or lilies, and he may be crowned. He usually wears a green robe and yellow mantle, the colors of new life, marriage, and fertility. Unfortunately, he is generally portrayed with insipid sweetness.

In addition to his protection at death, he is the patron of the family, of fathers, husbands, carpenters, and those seeking a home.
Figure 38. San Juan Nepomuceno
SAN JUAN NEPOMUCENO

St. John Nepomuk, O.S.A., M., d. 1393, R.M. May 16

This Bohemian saint arrived in Mexico from Prague via Rome with the Third Order of St. Francis during the years of the Holy Roman Empire. He was one of the saints who was revived by the Church Militant during the Counter Reformation.

Confessor to King Wenceslaus' wife, he refused all efforts by this king, including the rack and fire, to make him reveal what the Queen had confessed. The saint was bound and thrown into the River Moldau where his body was discovered floating with seven brilliant stars illuminating it. In 1719 the coffin was opened and his tongue was said to have been perfectly preserved.

Not commonly found in Mexico on tin, he is distinguishable by his cassock, the biretta, the stars encircling his head, the bridge in the background, and, of course, the martyr's palm. He may also be shown holding a tongue.

He is the patron saint of confessors, lawyers, and bridges and is invoked for secret keeping.
Figure 39. Santa Librata
SANTA LIBRATA

St. Wilgefortis, Legendary, R.M. July 30

This mythical personage was also known as Uncumber (in England), Ontkommer (in Holland), Kümmernis (in Germany), Regenfeldis (in Flanders), Livrade (in France) and by other names. Her story is a curiosity of hagiology and is hardly worth including in a collection of lives of saints but for the fact that it has the unenviable distinction of being one of the most obviously false and preposterous of the pseudo-pious romances by which simple Christians have been deceived or regaled.\textsuperscript{12}

The popular tale relates how she was one of seven (or nine) children born at one birth to the wife of a heathen king of Portugal, and all seven (or nine) became Christians and suffered martyrdom. Her father wanted her to marry the king of Sicily. However, she had taken a vow of virginity, and when she prayed for help a beard and mustache grew on her face. The suitor promptly withdrew, and her enraged father had her crucified.

Actually, this saint is a complicated mixture of confusion, fact, and fiction and results from pious devotion to the famous crucifix of Lucca, well known in the twelfth century. This image of Christ was gowned and crowned as were many others during the time. In the course of time the long gown caused people to think the crucified figure was a woman, who on account of the beard was called \textit{Vierge-forte}. The legend of her refusing

\textsuperscript{12}Butler, \textit{op. cit.}, III, 151.
marriage and growing the beard began in Steenberger in North Holland around 1400 and was widely circulated. Since "her" real name was unknown, the image was called *Ontkommer*, the one who takes away grief. Molanus, a Flemish scholar had the unfortunate idea of Latinizing the name *Ontkommer* to *Librata*, even though he later dropped this name. The Spanish and Portuguese who already had a Saint *Librata* were greatly flattered that a flourishing cult had spread so far away and considered the two saints identical.\(^\text{13}\) Thus the original *Librata* who had been martyred by beheading, now was absorbed in the *Ontkommer* legend and appears crucified.

In Spain and Mexico she never appeared beared but was shown typically as illustrated, a young girl crowned with roses and crucified. Palm leaves also are common as the traditional symbols of martyrdom.

Traditionally in Spanish and Mexican beliefs she was one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, sought at the time of death, but her popularity has so waned that she is unknown in Mexico today. Several retablos depicting her have been seen; and as is peculiar to illustrations of crucified saints in this folk art, she is attached to the cross without nails. The coloration and format as shown

\(^{13}\text{Wilder, op. cit., Plate 7.}\)
here is generally in keeping with her prescribed treatment by artists.

Although there is a tradition in England of women seeking her aid to relieve them from burdensome husbands or unwanted suitors, in Mexico she is invoked in times of suffering and is a helper in distress.
Figure 40. Santa Lucía
SANTA LUCIA

St. Lucy, V.M., d. 304, R.M. December 13

Martyred because of her Christian beliefs, Lucy was an extremely popular saint in Europe. However, in the examination of the tin paintings, she is rarely found.

She is shown as tradition dictates, as a young woman holding a palm and, on a small dish, two eyes. While legend relates that she plucked out her eyes to relieve the suffering they caused a suitor of hers, it is more likely that her name "Lucia" (light) inspired the attribute of the eyes (or a lantern as is often shown in European art).

Although she is invoked against blindness, protection against this affliction is usually given to the Archangel Raphael, who was very popular, whereas Lucy had limited popularity in Mexican folk art.
Figure 41. San Luis Gonzaga
SAN LUIS GONZAGA

St. Aloysius Gonzaga, S.J., d. 1591, R.M. June 21

The career of St. Aloysius Gonzaga is exceptional in light of his background and heredity. His family were "tyrants ranked with the Visconti, Sforza, and D'Este." When he tried to leave this circle of intrigue, power, and flattery and join the Jesuits, it was a great shock to his family.

From an extremely early age Aloysius had practiced prayer and penance and it was his desire in his early teens to join a religious order. His father, the Marquis of Castiglioni, first grudgingly agreed, but then sought to discourage him and put pressure on him through relatives and eminent churchmen. At last, however, in 1585 the youth renounced his birthright in favor of his brother Rudolfo and joined the Society of Jesus.

In 1591 plague broke out in Rome and Aloysius persevered in his efforts at a hospital though the conditions made him sick and faint. He caught the plague by carrying the sick to the hospital on his back, and despite a brief recovery, died on June 21, a little over twenty-three years old.

He is always pictured as a young Jesuit with a crucifix, lily, and discipline. In this retablo he has

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the additional attributes of a coronet laid aside
(signifying his rejection of his noble life), a skull
(symbol of penitence and memento mori), and books
(symbolic of wisdom), and he is kneeling on a typically
Mexican petate. He is also distinctive among many saints
in that his facial features are consistent in paintings
and retablos. He is almost always shown with a definite
physiognomy marked by a rather pronounced nose and
receding hair.

St. Aloysius is considered the patron of young
students and those choosing their professions, and is
particularly considered to be the patron of youth and
purity.
Figure 42. San Martín de Tours
SAN MARTÍN DE TOURS
St. Martin of Tours, B., d. 397, R.M. November 11 (July 4)

Forced into the army against his will when he was fifteen by his officer father, Martin lived a life more fitting to a monk than a soldier, although he was not formally a Christian. While stationed in Amiens an incident is said to have occurred which tradition and art have made famous. One day during a hard winter a poor man almost naked and trembling from the cold was begging alms at the gates of the city. Martin noticed that no one paid any attention to him and having nothing to give but his armor and clothes, cut his cloak in two and covered the poor man with it. That night Martin in his sleep saw Jesus clothed in the halved cloak saying, "Martin yet a catechumen, has covered me with this garment." Martin was immediately baptized.

It is this incident in his life that is portrayed in folk retablos as well as in almost all sophisticated European depictions of him. Although he was a favorite saint in Mexico during this time, retablos of him are not abundant. He is always seen as portrayed here, a young caballero dividing his cloak with a knife or sword while a poor man meekly waits to one side.

Invoked when someone had a cold or lacked clothing, he is also the patron of beggars, shirtmakers,
and tailors. Earlier traditions also include his protection for horses although this is a forgotten aspect of his patronage today.
Figure 43.  San Miguel
Christian tradition ascribes to the Archangel Michael the role of general of Heaven's angels and protector of the Church Militant. He is dramatically described in Revelation 12:7-9 as leading his angels in battle against a dragon, "that old serpent called the Devil and Satan." Consequently, he is always pictured in Catholic art, and similarly here, as young and beautiful, dressed in mail and helmet or something simulating battle dress. He is subduing a demon or has just trampled him underfoot.

When shown with scales or balances in his hand, he is acting in the capacity of weigher of men's souls. It is not unusual to see him illustrated in this folk art with both sword and scales; having subdued the demon, he stands on him with flaming sword triumphant, holding the scales in his other hand. The pose suggests a more immediate victory over the Evil One in the conflict over men's souls.

In the first example shown, Michael stands almost as if he had been told to cease his battle and pose with his attributes. Reinforcing this impression is the benign-appearing monster, complete with goatee and mustache, patiently resting with his head on his hand—obligingly ceasing to struggle until after the picture was
"taken." Most retablos resemble this illustration in composition and attributes, occasionally replacing the scales by a shield.

In the second unusual retablo, Michael is shown again as a warrior with scales, but here his role is more clearly defined as a soul weigher. Beneath him, shackled and in flames which signify Purgatory, are people including a bishop and (a rare example in this art) a nude woman.

San Miguel is a favorite character in Catholic belief, but he is not very common in this art form. Although not technically a saint but a celestial being, the title "San" is often applied to archangels and other holy personages than saints to denote reverence (See San Rafael, page 215).

His help is sought by sinners, against temptation, and at the hour of death. He is also the patron of charros.
Figure 44. San Pascual Bailón

Bodé Collection
The son of poor shepherds, Paschal was born on Whitsunday, hence his first name. He spent his life until he was twenty-four as a shepherd and then was finally admitted, after having been refused six years before, to the barefoot Friars Minor. He was extremely devoted to the sick and poor and managed to secure special delicacies for them. He was noted for his cheerfulness in his devotions or penances, and was particularly reverent toward the Sacrament, kneeling for hours at a time in front of it.

Although various accounts written about him do not mention specifically this aspect of his life, popular legends consider him the patron saint of the kitchen and of cooks. Tales are told of his duties in the kitchen miraculously accomplished while he spent his time in adoration of the Sacrament.

Invoked for cheerfulness and named the patron of Eucharistic confraternities and shepherds, his role as patron of cooks is one of the most commonly represented by this type of art. Scenes of Mexican kitchens are carefully shown including, as illustrated here, dishes, cooking implements, dressed meat, and usually the kitchen cat. He is occasionally shown in a manner that suggests levitation while praying and the monstrance containing the
Sacrament appears supported on a cloud above and to one side of the saint.

He may also be sought to prevent cattle plagues and contagious ills and is said to advise one three days before death.
Figure 45. San Rafael
St. Raphael, Archangel, R.M. October 24

St. Raphael is one of the two most popular of the seven archangels in Mexican art. His name signifies "God has healed," and this healing function is related in the Book of Tobias where he restored sight to the father of Tobias.

Although the connection between the Angel and Tobias is not always understood, in this type of art Tobias never appears and Raphael becomes a symbol for both. Raphael is somehow reduced from the powerful guardian and agent of God in the Old Testament to the boyish appearance of Tobias, from an imposing archangel to a putto. He holds the traveler's staff, gourd and cloak, and the fish with which he and Tobias sought to cure the father's blindness. The manner in which he appears here is typical of his costume, pose, and attributes in the tin paintings. Generally he wears a diadem. Peculiar to both him and St. Michael is the robe cut, tied, or blown away, exposing their legs and high boots or sandals.

His guarding of young Tobias on his journey also is stressed and because of these two main elements in his legend, Raphael became the patron against eye ailments and for safe journeys. He was also invoked against plagues and malaria.
Figure 46. San Ramón Nonato
SAN RAMÓN NONATO

St. Raymond Nonatus, Card., O. Merc., d. 1240, R.M. August 31

This saint's true story is wrapped in legends and mystery due to the lack of reliable material. He was accepted into the Order of Our Lady of Mercy in Barcelona and was sent to Algiers to ransom Christian hostages from the Moors. After expending the funds given him, he then gave himself to free another hostage. He used this opportunity as a prisoner to convert Mohammedans to Christianity and was saved from being condemned to death for his efforts by influential Christians who were waiting to be ransomed. Instead, he was severely clubbed. He continued, however, in his conversion efforts and in giving spiritual comfort to Christian slaves. The enraged governor then had him whipped at every street corner and directed that his lips be pierced by a hot iron and a padlock inserted. He was freed eight months later and returned to Spain. Made Cardinal by Pope Gregory IX, he died at the age of thirty-six on a journey to Rome on foot.

A popularly portrayed saint in Mexico, he is frequently seen in retablos. He is always pictured as a Mercedarian cardinal with the badge of his order displayed somewhere on his habit. His personal attributes include a palm with three crowns ringing it signifying chastity, eloquence and martyrdom (although he was only tortured,
and not martyred). He always is holding or receiving a monstrance, an allusion to his receiving communion from the hands of an angel when dying.

His last name "Nonatus"—not born—commemorates his caesarean birth at the time of his mother's death. For this reason, he is the patron of midwives and women giving birth. Because of his efforts at ransoming prisoners, he is also the patron of innocent people falsely accused. The padlock on his lips and the silence it implies made the Mexican folk regard him additionally as the patron for silence. Many of the retablos of this saint will have the mouth area completely rubbed away. There is a tradition that to eliminate gossipping or someone's continuous talking, the mouth of the saint is to be rubbed. Current beliefs include the fastening of a five cent piece to the mouth with a wad of gum to convince the saint that help is needed in these situations.
Figure 47. Santa Rita de Casia
SANTA RITA DE CASIA
St. Rita of Cascia, O.S.A., d. 1456, R.M. May 22

Respecting her parent's wishes that she marry instead of entering an Augustinian convent, St. Rita spent eighteen years of her life in absolute terror of the dissolute man she was forced to marry. Her exemplary life finally moved him to reform, but he was killed in a brawl under circumstances that made their two sons vow to avenge him. She prayed that they might die rather than kill, and her prayers were answered.

Her way was now clear to enter the convent which, after refusing her three times, relaxed its rule of allowing only virgins to enter.

St. Rita was particularly devoted to the sufferings of Christ and after she had heard an eloquent sermon on the crown of thorns by St. James della Marca in 1441, a strange physical reaction occurred. As she knelt in prayer she became acutely conscious of pain, as if a thorn had detached itself from the crucifix she was contemplating and had embedded itself in her forehead. This wound became so offensive that she had to be secluded from the rest; and with the exception of a pilgrimage to Rome during the year of the Jubilee in 1450 when the wound healed temporarily, she lived practically as a recluse.

It is this wound in her forehead, signified by a thorn, that most easily identifies her. Dressed as an
Augustinian nun, she appears with symbols of penance and contemplation. Generally she is accompanied by two smaller figures on either side, probably representing her two sons.

She is invoked as patroness of desperate cases or helper in impossibilities because of an incident which occurred at the time of her death. She had asked a visitor to bring her a rose from a garden. The visitor went, knowing that the season was not advanced enough for roses, but found a whole bush blooming and brought her one. She was also considered to be a model for married women.
Figure 48. San Roque
SAN ROQUE
St. Roch, d. 1337, R.M. August 16

Although about all that can be said with certainty about this saint is that he was born in Montpellier and nursed the sick during the plague in Italy, legends about him provided artists with subject matter to present him as he is seen here.

He is always shown as a pilgrim. It is related that in this role he arrived in Rome during a plague and devoted himself to caring for the sick, often healing them by simply making the sign of the cross over them. At Piacenza he contracted the plague himself, but not wishing to be a burden on anyone, he dragged himself off to the woods to die. He was miraculously fed by a dog, whose master found Roch and cared for him.

Roch is usually represented as here illustrated, but missing in this representation is the bread in the dog's mouth and the plague mark which Roch usually points to. His clothing, hat, staff, gourd, and the dog define him.

Although still revered as a popular saint for protection against pestilence in European countries today, in Mexico he is rarely seen in retablos and never in current religious depictions. Because of his infrequent appearance and the lack of any real interest on the part
of the present-day Mexicans, it can only be assumed that he was invoked for similar things in the New World as he had been in Spain, that is, for protection against plagues and against rabies.
Figure 49. Santa Rosa de Lima
SANTA ROSA DE LIMA

St. Rose of Lima, O.P., d. 1617, R.M. August 26 (30)

This saint has the distinction of being the first in the New World to be canonized. She was born in Lima in 1568 and lived thirty-one years wholly in voluntary penance and prayer. Although she was quite attractive, to humble herself she deliberately attempted to destroy her looks by plunging her hands in lye or rubbing her face with ointments that would disfigure and cause pain. She joined the third order of St. Dominic, took the vow of chastity, and choosing as her patroness St. Catherine of Siena, endeavored to model her life upon hers although, as Coulson says, "Rose possessed neither the intellectual caliber nor forceful personality of the great Dominicaness."15

St. Rose had many mystical experiences which were investigated during her lifetime including the vision of Christ as a child appearing to her. These were pronounced by an ecclesiastical commission as of divine origin. She lived as a recluse until the last three years of her life in a hut in a garden. Her death in 1617 was preceded by a lengthy and painful illness.

15Coulson, op. cit., p. 392.
She is easily identifiable by her Dominican habit and the crown of either thorns or roses around her head. The crown recalls the symbolism of martyrdom, but in her case it alludes to her preferring the punishment to her flesh of the thorn crown to the crowns of roses given to her by her parents, complimenting her on her beauty. Her vision of Christ is a common theme.

Patron of Lima, Peru, she had limited popularity in retablos and was not specifically sought for aid in Mexico.
SANTIAGO

St. James the Greater, Apostle, d. 44, R.M. July 25

St. James, brother of St. John the Evangelist, son of Zebedee, was called "the Greater" to distinguish him from another apostle by the same name who was younger. By birth he was a Galilean fisherman with Peter and Andrew. In Mexican retablo art he never appears as mild as his Biblical life suggests.

Certain apocryphal "acts" in Greek—not earlier than the eighth century and quite fictitious—relate of his preaching in Spain, his death in the Holy Land, the transportation of his body back to Spain, and the miraculous happenings concerning his burial in Compostela. A dubious case strenuously defended by some Spanish scholars, he nevertheless was the most important saint in Spain, and Compostela was a site of immense importance for pilgrimages.

In the battle of Clavijo against the Moors in 834, the appearance of this saint dressed in armor upon a white horse rallied the Spaniards to victory. Since then, the Church Militant has used him as a symbol in its fight against infidels and heretics, and he appeared in his soldier role most commonly in Spanish and her colonial art.

He came to the New World as the Patron of Spain and of soldiers at the time of the conquest; with his
appearance and aid during battles in Mexico, he assisted in the defeat of the Indians as he had that of the Moors. In the New World no less than fourteen apparitions of him were recorded in battles, first between the Spanish and the Indians and later between the Spanish and the Mexicans, fighting in the last two instances on the side of the Mexicans.

He may appear in this popular art astride a white horse, carrying a banner with a red cross, and trampling down Moors, or as he appears here, simply mounted on a charging horse, brandishing a sword while the red cross appears on his shield. He appears as a triple personality: the apostle, the pilgrim (identifiable by his cape and hat), and the soldier.

In Mexico he was regarded as patron of soldiers and of Spain, but with the overthrow of colonialism, the demand for his image seems to have waned. Although he was well known and popular, retablos of him are scarce. He was also sought as protector against all ills and for the fertility of mares.
Figure 51. San Vicente Ferrer
SAN VICENTE FERRER
St. Vincent Ferrer, O.P., d. 1418, R.M. April 5

This saint's life is so overladen with legends that no satisfactory account of him has yet been written. Popularly he was presumed born of English or Scottish parents in Spain. His parents, in response to prophecies of his future greatness, are said to have raised him very religiously and with a great love for the poor. Intellectually precocious, he received the Dominican habit in 1367, and before he was twenty-one was a reader of philosophy at Lérida, the most famous Catalan university.

Vincent is generally regarded as one of the most powerful preachers medieval Catholicism had, turning many careless believers to penitents and converting many Jews. He felt himself to be the instrument chosen by God to announce the impending end of the world. In fact, he declared himself at one time to be the Angel of Judgment foretold by St. John (Revelation 14:6). He traveled widely and legends suggest that he even went to England and Ireland. He was said to have the gift of tongues, for when he spoke his sermons, all his listeners understood what he said, no matter what their nationality. He is credited with healing the schism in the Catholic Church which began when the French Cardinal Robert of Geneva took the name of Clement VII and claimed himself pope in
opposition to Urban VI, hastily elected in response to a popular cry for an Italian pope.

He is shown in retablo art as a Dominican. He is always depicted with wings, his most readily identifiable attribute, perhaps referring to his belief of his role as stated in Revelations. The book indicates his effectiveness as a preacher, and the crucifix is usually interpreted as a symbol of preaching Christian faith. The upraised finger originally pointed to an image of Christ on a scroll with the Latin inscription "Timete Dominum et date illi honorem quia venit hora judicii eius." In this type of art, however, the image of Christ and the scroll have disappeared, leaving the finger pointing skyward. A trumpet is considered another one of his identifying attributes as well as the flame over his head. These elements may occasionally occur in Mexican folk paintings.

This retablo depicts the legend that while he was passing by some masons working on a building, one fell. He was asked to help, and although he was famous for his miracles and cures, he had given his promise to the bishop not to perform any. While he went to ask permission to help, the man remained suspended in mid-air. When he returned, he helped the man to a safe landing. Because of this legend he was patron saint of stone masons, and was also invoked by the Mexican folk to alleviate headaches.
Figure 52. San Ysidro el Labrador
SAN YSIDRO LABRADOR

St. Isidore the Farmer, d. 1170, R.M. May 10

This saint is one of the most popular saints among the common people because he is the patron saint of farmers.

Born near Madrid of a poor family just after the beginning of the twelfth century, he was an uneducated farm laborer. Deeply devout, he dressed as a hermit, prayed regularly, and gave everything he owned to the poor. Popular tales relate that, as an industrious farmer, he worked on Sundays. The Lord cautioned him, threatening and materializing a plague of grasshoppers and a torrential rain. Still Isidore continued in his faith and worked on the Sabbath. The Lord threatened him for the third time--this time with bad neighbors--and Isidore consented to observe the Sabbath. Even more popular, however, is the tale that he could not attend church because of the large amount of work he had to do, and the Lord sent an angel to plow the field. It is in this aspect that he is most commonly seen.

He is always surrealistically shown much larger than the angel and cattle. Sometimes, as here, the angel appears with one small set of oxen while Isidore appears with another more his own size. While the angel plows, Isidore prays.
He is prayed to for concerns affecting livestock, agriculture, and good weather—even for picnics.
APPENDIX B

EX-VOTOS
APPENDIX

EX-VOTOS

This paper has previously pointed out the importance of ex-votos for comparison with retablos as to dates, techniques, and similarity of materials and creators, as well as for establishing the popularity of various saints in specific areas. Furthermore, ex-votos are a fascinating study in themselves and a valuable source for an understanding of the Mexican people and their art.

A scattering of articles has been published on ex-votos over the past thirty years, but most of these studies are purely descriptive and include only a few illustrations collected at random throughout Mexico. The Mexican ex-voto deserves a full study on its own merits which this Appendix cannot attempt to supply. A brief discussion of them is here included, however, because of their close relationship with the retablo, and photographs of a few examples are offered with their Spanish texts and English translations. A selected bibliography is also appended which reflects the interest of the authors in these votive paintings but contains no definitive study.
Roberto Montenegro describes the outlook of the ex-voto painter thus:

Stringent needs or rare intuition obliged the Mexican painters of the first half of the 19th century to begin their work painting the so-called "retablos" and it is to their credit and at the same time to the advantage of these artists that they had no examples to guide them nor school of painting to follow. They pictured nature with the sincerity that is apparent in their work, ingenuously and with no other thought than to set down what appeared before them without hurry and without interest. No foreign review came to disturb their peace nor to vary their program. Their creative activity limited itself to work in the endeavor to advance further and further toward perfection in the immense pleasure of painting.

The lack of technique, the discretion of the use of tone and inimitable charm of the fashion of the time, created a school which affords us a sensation of sincerity and makes us see in those old and timeworn portraits the qualities which by their own merit, obliges us to give them a place of preference in our admiration.¹

An ex-voto is a votive painting hung on a church wall or placed near a particular image to commemorate the recovery of the donor from some grave danger. Each is a receipted bill for spiritual or physical boons received.² During the Colonial epoch and until the end of the eighteenth century the offering of votive pictures was

¹Roberto Montenegro, Mexican Painting (1800-1860) (New York and London: Appleton-Century Co., Inc., 1933), pp. 14-16. Here the author uses the term "retablo" instead of the specific term "ex-voto." Although he never defines the retablo, from the context and his use of this term later in other articles it can be assumed he means the ex-voto.

²Jean Chariot, "Mexican Ex-Votos," Magazine of Art, XLII, No. 4 (April, 1948), 141.
almost wholly confined to the aristocracy. Consequently, the early ex-votos reflect more sophistication in styles and techniques than later examples. But adoption of the religious custom by the simple folk brought about a change in the style of ex-votos and also led to the abandonment of this practice by the upper classes. From the early nineteenth century to the present ex-votos continue to be produced in a naive manner characterized by reduction of the given event to its simplest dramatic elements, conventionalization of perspective, and admirable directness.

Of undoubted European origin, ex-votos are bound to the necessities of Catholic worship, and their existence is probably due to the demands of the white aristocracy for pictorial stories in oil on canvas, telling of divine aid received and a public offering of thanks to the image invoked. Although changes have occurred over the past centuries in materials, format, and social classes, there are certain characteristics that remain constant.

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Ex-votos usually show some person prostrate with illness and members of the family or interested persons gathered around praying for the sick person's recovery. Or in an equally tense and dramatic manner, the ex-voto represents an accident or incident where the victim escapes certain death from some frightful circumstance. Occasionally, likenesses seem to have been attempted in the principal characters, but more often than not, physical characteristics melt into a type favored by the artist. Lavish attention is given to costume and to the careful rendering of interior scenes. Hieratic scaling is used and the figures are placed above each other, allowing everyone to be seen and counted. Pyramidally arranged groups are common especially in earlier ex-votos.

The composition of the votive painting is arranged in horizontal bands with the written text appearing at the bottom, the action or miracle portrayed in the middle section, and at the top, less carefully defined, if at all, the area occupied by the image or images invoked.

Man is a kind of deep-air animal crawling on rock bottom, his face lifted to a stratosphere where the holy beings dwell. These in turn bend over the ledge of the dense pool, in search of their faithful.5

Canvas was used until the nineteenth century and occasionally, when done for the wealthy, well-known

5Charlot, loc. cit.
artists were commissioned. Gold leaf might be applied. Wood and copper were also used during the eighteenth century, but with the growing popularity of this type of devotion among the poorer classes, tin became the most popular material, replacing the expensive copper and the inexpensive wood as well. The character of the painting also changed with the less-skilled painters forming their own clichés and modes of observation.

The saints invoked and manifestations of Christ and Mary are so numerous that they rival the vast crowds of godlings in the Aztec theogony. The popularity of the holy personages that appear in retablos is far more general than that of the local miraculous saints or Madonnas who were the recipients of ex-votos. Whereas most people may recognize a distinct type portrayed on a retablo, few can identify correctly by local title the image placed on an ex-voto, unless it is from a popular shrine known throughout Mexico, for ex-votos display a great variety of obscure images.

The slice of life offered to the viewer of these paintings varies from the Colonial period to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While a great deal of attention is given to clothing and interiors in both early and late ex-votos, different effects are sought and

6Ibid.
achieved by the different classes. In ex-votos done for the wealthy up to the end of the eighteenth century, there is a reflection of upper-class concern for wealth and ostentatious appearances. Later a similar magnification is seen among the offerings of the poor, but for a different reason. Bare interiors are transformed into luxurious red brick floors; petates or crude pallets become raised, sometimes canopied beds with sumptuous bolster cushions; jewelry is indicated that might never have existed; the men wear immaculate white or brand-new blue overalls while the women appear in voluminous petticoats and bright rebozos. Here dirt and rags are reserved for the villain. In ex-votos, the poor can dream and present a perhaps more suitable offering to a saint than an exact portrayal of their surroundings might afford.

The period that saw the greatest production of ex-votos is concurrent with the period of retablo production. It is during this time, from the end of the eighteenth century through the nineteenth and rarely in the twentieth century that they are the most appealing. Perhaps because of the illiteracy of the poor, the incidents were depicted in graphic terms for easy transmission to everyone, and they satisfied a certain esthetic

7Ibid., p. 142.
inclination. The graphic methods remained primitive and naive, and their concepts of perspective and color developed a distinct flavor. As Anita Brenner says, "So many people painting so many things common to all developed a language." These aspects, together with the atmosphere created and the feeling conveyed, make the ex-voto a very important part of Mexican art.

* * * * *

In this phase of Mexican art, faith and sincerity are immediately expressed in these "painted miracles." The event is reduced to its most simple dramatic elements and the entire story surrounding the circumstances has an admirable directness. The conventionalization of perspective heightens the charm and often intensifies the dramatic quality.

The characters portrayed reflect the calm serenity of faith, a faith in the reality of the marvelous which results in a description without falseness or overemphasis because there is never a feeling that this was an extraordinary event. No one is trying to sell anything. "The picture, therefore, is the first thing a picture should be, convincing." 

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8 Brenner, op. cit., p. 166.
9 Brenner, loc. cit.
Truly anecdotal, the painting illustrates a written text that relates the circumstances of the cure or rescue. The written commentary is often so full of regional dialect and phonetic spelling that it is impossible to translate it and still maintain the flavor.

* * * * *

Although an ex-voto could have been painted by the person experiencing the miracle, it was traditionally done by a specific individual in the village or barrio. The client would go to him and relate his experience and the artist interpreted this in drawing and paint. Only after the client was satisfied would he take the ex-voto to a church or shrine and place it next to the image invoked or nail it into the wall nearby. Before the twentieth century these votive paintings were always anonymous perhaps because the artist felt that the experience truly belonged to the person to whom it happened or more likely because his work was simply a trade and he was on an artesan level. This product was not for the glorification of the artist, but rather for the commemoration of a miraculous event.

Today, however, not only has the quality deteriorated into something akin to comic book art (complete in some cases with dialogue, enclosed in
bubbles, coming from the characters' mouths) but they are being signed with the painter's name and address.

* * * * *

The value of ex-votos has been recognized for a number of years by Mexican artists and authors. Several feel that they were the only redeeming feature of Mexican art during the nineteenth century and the administration of Porfirio Díaz.¹⁰ Their artistic value as almost a pure art, independent of academic beliefs or prior inhibiting artistic education, has also been commented on, particularly by Diego Rivera.¹¹ The paintings of Gabriel Fernández Ledesma recall ex-votos, of which he has a large and partially published collection. Roberto Montenegro also expresses their value as a document indispensable to the understanding of Mexican painting, from the Pre-Cortesian frescoes, codices, and ceramics, through the murals of the 16th century convents, the colonial epoch with its Spanish influence, and the personal romantic paintings of the 19th century—especially the portraits—to the contemporary school of pictorial representation.¹²

In addition to their artistic merit as natural works of art employing abstract expression and evoking


¹²Montenegro, Retablos de México, p. 13.
significant moods and messages, they are of great importance as sociological studies. An examination of all the ex-votos in any one shrine or church would produce a fascinating record of the people's hopes and fears, their thoughts, lives, and experiences, a record more honest than the most careful statistical study. Anita Brenner writes of the emotional quality of ex-votos:

From place to place and period to period, significantly, occupations, situations, official clothing, progress in caravan against a changeless endless background, vibrant of human trouble and of racial agonies throughout. Plagues, droughts, conflicts, are dated and described. The very emotion concurrent is charted, in kind and quality. In the quiet of miracles some years, the violence others; in the faith that makes them numberless. It is a moving record of a nation, a stethoscopic measure of its heart.13

* * * * *

The illustrations that follow contain samplings from various shrines and churches and depict a variety of miracles over a span of one hundred and seventy years. All of them are painted on tin with the exception of the earliest (Figure 53), which is on canvas, and the most recent (Figure 69), which is on masonite. The blanks in the text are words no longer legible. In the transcripts of the text are included: (1) the original Spanish as it appears written; and (2) the translation into English

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which is often literal in an attempt to retain the flavor of the original Spanish. All of the examples are part of the author's collection.
Figure 53. Ex-Voto 1797
On the 3rd of August of 1797, when Faustina Maria, of the town of Teololluca was sick in bed with her two children sharing the same bed, another son a little older advised his mother to get out because the house was falling. As soon as the boy went outside the house collapsed and covered up the sick woman; instantly she invoked the Holy Sacrament, St. Anthony, the Lord of Chalma, and they were freed.
Figure 54. Ex-Voto 1825
En el año de 1825 en el mes de enero, le aconteció esta desgracia a la casa de Dña. Silberio Agilar, besino del Pueblo de Santa María. Habiéndole quemado la cosina que estaba junto a la puerta del cuarto, dicho cuarto tenía el tejado de sacate que lebañaba la yama de la lumbre y inhocando al Sr del Sacromonte quiso su dibina Majestud no le ofendera el fuego por lo cual prometió asen el retablo.

In the year of 1825 in the month of January, this misfortune happened to the house of Don Silverio Aguilar, resident of the town of Santa Maria.

The kitchen of the house was on fire, which was close to the rest of the house that had a roof made out of grass. The flames from the fire of the kitchen came very close to this roof.

Invoking to the Sr. del Sacromonte, the Lord prevented the rest of the house from catching fire. This is why (she or he) promised to make this retablo.
Figure 55. Ex-Voto 1850
Haviendole acontecido a Jose Justo de los Angeles el dia 3 de Febrero de 1850 la Desgracia de haverle acomadado un _______; por lo que lo perciquieron 10 hombres de la seguridad publica con objeto de quitarle la existencia lo ayaron en su casa y luego corrieron tras Del por las huertas y le tiraron valasos ise metio en una cosina ise tapo con una poca de leña y entraron 3 soldados a dicha cosina ise no lo vieron invoco con todo corazon a estas dos Divinos Imagines y hubo _______________ De gracias ise este retablo ____________

Having happened to Jose Justo de los Angeles in the 3rd of February of 1850, the misfortune of having a _______;[L] This is why ten men of public safety (police, or soldiers) followed him with the purpose of ending his existence, they found him at his house and then they ran after him through the farms and the soldiers started shooting after him. He then got into a kitchen of a house and covered himself with some wood. Then three soldiers entered the kitchen and they did not see him. He invoked with all his heart to these two divine images and there was _______________ In gratitude he made this retablo in the ____________
Figure 56. Ex-Voto 1850
El día 5 de Feb del año de 1850, le aconteció a José Ortiz y a Teclo Baltierra la desgracia de que, mientras llovido por Aguas Calientes los asaltaron cinco ladrones, e improvisado uno de ellos le dio a Baltierra un balazo y lo ______ y a Ortiz, atando los ojos para fusilarlo, invocó al Santo Niño de Nª Sª de Atocha, les perdonaron la vida y en reconocimiento dedicó este retablo.

On February 5, 1850, to Jose Ortiz and Teclo Baltierra fell the misfortune that, while traveling by Aguascalientes, they were held up by five thieves, and, improvidently, one of them shot Baltierra, and ______, and to shoot Ortiz, having had him kneel and having blindfolded him; he invoked to the Holy Child of Atocha to spare their lives, and in gratitude he dedicates this retablo.
Figure 57. Ex-Voto 1861
En la municipalidad de Villa García, por el mes de Setiembre del año de 1861, se vio M_____ Gomez, gravemente enferma, de un fuerte dolor de estomago, de resultas del parto; luego se le aplicaron medicinas por el termino de un mes; no encontrando en lo absoluto la superior medicina, ocurrio con gran prestesa, a la milagrosa imagen del Senor de las Angustias, pidiendole con todas _______ el alivio á su dolencia, y tomando agua de la purísim a, se alivio en poco tiempo, quedando perfectamente sana: á cullo fin pone de manifiesto el presente retablo que testifica la superioridad.

In the municipality of Villa García, during the month of September of the year 1861, M_____ Gomez found herself gravely ill of a severe stomach ache as a result of childbirth. Then several medicines were applied to her for one month. Not having found absolutely the superior medicine, she turned with great haste to the miraculous image of the Lord of Anguishes, asking him with all _______ the cure of her ailment, and, drinking the water of the Purest Conception, she was cured in a short time, remaining perfectly healthy, to which end she manifests this retablo that testifies to the superiority.
Figure 58. Ex-Voto 1861
La Señora Dª Ignacia Hernandez le prometió al Señor de Ameca este retablo por alivio del Señor Dª José Ma.ª Gomez por haberse caída en un caso de manteca caliente en el año de 1861 y en testimonio de tan grande milagro lo presenta el presente.

Mrs. Ignacia Hernandez promised the Lord of Ameca this retablo for having Mr. Jose Maria Gomez healed of the injuries he received when he fell in a pot containing hot lard in the year of 1861, and in testimony of such a great miracle she presents this retablo.
Figure 59. Ex-Voto 1864
El 30 de Marzo de 1864 en la madrugada atacaron los franceses y traidiores a la fuerza de Aguascalientes compuesta de 400 hombres en la hacienda de Eltal paso, perdiéndose en este combate 400 hombres entre muertos y heridos en cuyo caso el Soldado Lucas Hernandez, perteneciente a esta fuerza herido ya y fugitivo, se vio milagrosamente libre de los que

At dawn on March 30, 1864, the French and the traitors attacked the garrison at Aguascalientes, made up of 400 men, on the hacienda of ________, 400 men, dead and wounded, being lost in this battle, in which case the soldier Lucas Hernandez, of the garrison, wounded and fleeing, was miraculously freed from those who ________
Figure 60. Ex-Voto 1870
El cinco de Febrero de 1870, ya ocultandose la luz, sale á traer un cántaro de agua Mónica Garcia, de una noria que está en la huerta del mayordomo en terreno de Aguagorda. Llegando á la noria; puso el pie en una piedrita haciendo estremo, se resbala y cay ella dentro de la noria á 5 varas de agua, al caer exclama Senor de las Angustias me ahogo y luego la esfuerza el agua encima, y pronto se hace á un escalon, alsa las manos, afiansa de otro, queda encompanada entre la noria, hasta que una niña llega á llevar agua, no hallandola dice, onde estará: y Mónica dice, aquí estoy, avisa la niña, y vienen á sacarla, toda mojada y prometen, representar el cuadro a la milagrosa imagen del Senor de las Angustias, que la libró del peligro, y dando humildes las gracias, de tan apurado trance á que se hallaban espuestos.

On the fifth of February of 1870, when night was falling, Monica Garcia goes to bring a pot of water from a well in the orchard of the landlord, in the land of Agua Gorda. Arriving at the well, she puts her foot on a small stone, reaching very far; she slips and falls into the well, at a depth of five yards. Upon falling, she exclaims, "Lord of Anguishes, I am drowning!" And then, the water pushes her to the top, and soon she reaches a step, raises her hands, and grabs another step. She remains suspended in the well until a little girl arrives to take water; not finding it [or her?], she says, "Where would it [or she?] be? And Monica says, "Here I am." The little girl carries the news, and they come to take her out, all wet, and they promise to erect a picture of the event to the miraculous image of the Lord of Anguishes, who saved her from the danger she was exposed to, giving their humble thanks.
Figure 61. Ex-Voto 1870
en el mes de setiembre de 1870 en los minas de Agostadero celebó toda la gente de un fandango a Bartolo Esquivel y mirando Juana Duarte en la situación que se allaban llamó el auxilio del Señor de las angustias. Salieron favorecidos.

In the month of September of 1870 in the mines of Agostadero all the people of a party attacked Bartolo Esquivel, and Juana Duarte, seeing in what situation Bartolo was, asked for the help of the Señor de las Angustias. In receiving his favors, they came out all right.
Figure 62. Ex-Voto 1875
El 15 de Noviembre de 1875, se bio Pioquinto Dominguez grabamente malo de un dolor colico que lo portro en cama 12 dias que no dormia ni de dia ni de noche y no hallando remedio a lo umano apesar de los esfuersos de su inconsolable familia asta q' el y su familia ocorrieron a la milagrosa ymagen del L. de las Angustias quien los allo benigno y les hizo la maravilla de darle la salud y en gratitud te dedica esta retablo a 27 de Abril de 1876. Dicha enfermedad me estaba cortando los pasos de la existencia y esto fue en tiempo. Pioquinto Dominguez _____ la Santa Yglesia el nobenario del divino Senor.

On the fifth of November of 1875, Pioquinto Dominguez was very gravely ill of the colic that put him in bed twelve days, during which he did not sleep either day or night, and not finding human remedy, despite the efforts of his inconsolable family, until he and his family went to the miraculous image of the Lord of Anguishes, who found him sick and performed the marvel of giving him health, and in gratitude he dedicates to Thee this retablo on the twenty-seventh of April, 1876.

Such infirmity was shortening the steps of existence, and this was timely. Pioquinto Dominguez [will recite] in the Holy Church the novena of the Divine Lord.
Figure 63. Ex-Voto 1897
Habiéndose enfermado gravemente de los ojos la Niña Dña Josefa Yslas y la Rosa, al grado de temerse confundirse y perdiese la vista, sus padres agurieron en esta aflicción al patrocinio del Sr. de las Angustias quien se dignó concederle volviese á vér.

Aguascalientes a 29. de Agosto de 1897.

Finding herself gravely ill in the eyes, the little girl Josefa Yslas y La Rosa, to the degree of being afraid of losing her sight, her parents went, in this affliction, to the patronage of the Lord of Anguishes who deigned to grant to them that her sight would return.

Aguascalientes, August 25, 1897
Figure 64. Ex-Voto Nineteenth Century
Rafael Lujan montado en un macho bruto, lo condujo hasta la orilla de un barranco, sin poderlo contener, en cuyo peligroso transe, invocó al Señor de Sacromonte, el que lo libró de una muerte segura, pues su sombrero voló hasta el fondo del precipicio. Por tan singular milagro pone el presente retablo en acción de gracias.

Rafael Lujan mounted on an unbroken mule which conducted him to the edge of a cliff, without being able to control it, he invoked the Sr. del Sacromonte in this dangerous situation. The Sr. del Sacromonte saved him from a sure death, since his hat was blown to the bottom of the precipice. For this unique miracle this retablo is presented as an act of gratitude.
Figure 65. Ex-Voto Nineteenth Century
Allandose el G. capitán Don Panfilo Robleda en el peligro de quedarlo capitułar por el consejo de guerra, impugnó al Divina Sor del Sacromonte que lo sacara con bien en aquel año prometiéndole cullo Retablo. inmediatamente obra el milagro. Santísima el que contrarqué la orden, lo cual le libró la vida.

When G. Capitan Don Panfilo Robleda was in danger of being captured by the war council, he invoked the divine Señor del Sacromonte so that he will help him come out well of this affair.

After he promised this retablo immediately the miracle worked and this miracle brought the order in which his life was spared.
Figure 66. Ex-Voto 1938
En contrandose mi hija muy enferma de anginas y habiendo necesidad de operarlas, la en comende a la Sma. Virgen de los Remedios. y me concedió el milagro de salvarla en las 2 operaciones que le hicieron la 1ª el 13 de septiembre y la 2ª el 20 de octubre de 1938 como prueba de gratitud de dedico el pte.

Dolores Hernandez

Finding my daughter very ill from tonsils and needing an operation, I commended her to the Holiest Virgin of Remedies, and She granted me the miracle of saving her in the two operations that were performed on her, the first on the 13th of September and the second the 20th of October of 1938. As proof of gratitude I dedicate the present.

Dolores Hernandez
Figure 67. Ex-Voto 1945
Dedico el presete con todo el respeto y Veneración al Sto Niño de Plateros, por haber librado a mi hijo Federico y Corral de los duros combates en la Guerra del Año 45, en una parte de Europa nombrado OKENOUA. en ese combate sufrió. 3 heridas en el mismo día la 1ª fue en el costado derecho, 2ª habajo del Corazón y la 3ª en el estómago. las 2 primeras heridas fueron con rifle y la 3ª con Ametralladora. las cuales lo pusieron entre la vida y muerte. pero el Niño Jesús escuchó mis ruegos que que hasía en mi casa por él: y mi hijo que acada momenta lo aclamaba lo libertó: por eso tanto yó, como mi hija damos gracia infinitas y hasemos público sus maravillas 17 de Enero de 1957.

Salinas, California
Everarda y. de Corral

I dedicate this retablo with respect and veneration to the Santo Niño de Plateros for having saved my son Federico y. Corral from the heavy fighting in the war of the year of 1945 in a part of Europe called Okinawa. In that fighting he suffered 3 wounds in the same day. The first one was in the right side, the second one beneath his heart, and the third one in his stomach; the first two wounds were done by a rifle, and the third one with a machine gun.

These wounds had him between life and death, but the child Jesus listened to my prayers that I was making in my house for him, and he also listened to my son who used to acclaim him every moment.

The Holy Niño de Plateros saved him. That is why I and my son give infinite thanks and we make public his power. January 17, 1957.

Salinas, California
Everardo y de Corral
Figure 68. Ex-Voto 1960
Julio 12
En el año 1960 les aconteció la desgrasia a mi padre y mis dos hermanos que andando con un ganado propiedad de la Hacienda de Palula SLP se les cortaron 160 borregos entre ellos 100 cabras de mi padre al ver eso sin esperanzas de allarlas imboque con beras de mi corazón al santo niño de Atocha que me diera su protección. Encontrándoles solo faltando muy pocas y por lo tanto, dedico el presente retablo al santo niño de plateros dando infinitas gracias y testimonio de su marabellía.

J. Carmen Hernandez R de Santiago

On July 12, 1960, a misfortune occurred to my father and two brothers while they were herding sheep, property of the Hacienda Palula, San Luis Potosí. One hundred sixty head were separated, among them 100 goats of my father. Upon seeing this and with no hope of finding them, I invoked with sincerity in my heart the Holy Child of Atocha to give me his protection. Having found most of them, I dedicate this retablo to the Holy Child of Plateros, giving infinite thanks in testimony to his wonder.

J. Carmen Hernandez R. de Santiago
Figure 69. Ex-Voto 1961
Doy infinitas gracias al Santo Niño de plateros por averme dado mi Salud después de averme dado un dolor en el estomago debido al Haverme impuesto a tomar refrescos de coca cola y pepse-cola causandome el dolor en el estomago devide a los gazes y cocaína que tienen dichos refrescos por lo tanto Biendome tan grave pedi al Santo Niño de plateros que me diera mi salud prometiendo llevarle un retablo el cual ahora expongo al Santo Niño de atocha.

Eduardo Benegas
Rancho del Tambor, Jerez, Zac.
7 de Junio de 1961

I give infinite thanks to the Holy Child of Plateros for having given me my health after I had a pain in the stomach from becoming used to drinking Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola refreshments, causing me this pain in the stomach due to the gases and cocaine that these refreshments have. Therefore, seeing myself so ill, I asked the Holy Child of Plateros to give me my health, promising to take Him a retablo which I now display to the Holy Child of Atocha.

Eduardo Benegas
Ranch of the Drum, Jerez, Zacatecas
June 7, 1961
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