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Profane Bodies: The Shifting Conceptions of the Sacred and the Profane in the Spanish Atlantic Enlightenment

Rachael Johnson

Introduction

During his tenure as archbishop of Mexico City before the turn of the nineteenth century, the formidable Spanish Catholic reformer Alonso Núñez de Haro y Peralta delivered “a grand sermon, filled with unction and vehemence” (as described by the editor of his published discourses). The topic was on “true worship,” and Núñez was determined to persuade his parishioners of the “enormity of their profanations” that polluted God’s temples. And what was the nature of their profanations?

Haro y Peralta clarified what he meant with a startling comparison. The ancient pagans, he wrote, had blasphemed the “adorable mystery of the cross” by placing an idol of Venus on “the same place the Cross was buried and hidden, and offered infamous sacrifices to their false God.” This illustration epitomized the conventional understanding of profanation— an antagonistic act of idolatry or heresy that defiled the true faith. But, the archbishop continued, while “we are horrified to hear of this abomination...the Devil has invented in our days a more abominable strategy.” In the “very sight of the sacrificed Jesus [the Eucharist]” he wrote, the devil “incites you... to present him idols of flesh... [and] inflame [your] most lively passions; and... in place of putting your eyes on my sweet Jesus, you set your eyes on other [people’s] eyes” with “seductive glances.” With “the imagination on carnal idols, with the spirit attached to your passions and tastes, and with your heart attached to money,” he accused, eighteenth-century Catholic worshippers were worse than the pagan profaners of yore.¹ Catholics themselves “profaned” the temples of God, not by worshipping false idols, but by worshiping idols of worldly concerns and sensory pleasure.

The archbishop’s use of the term “profane” to refer to sensual distraction represents a significant shift in the concept’s evolution from an anti-religious act to an a-religious realm. In centuries prior, “profane” was most often used as a verb signifying an abuse or pollution of the sacred.² Worshipping demonic idols in a

¹ Núñez de Haro y Peralta, Alonso. “Sermon X, Sobre el verdadero culto,” in *Sermones escogidos, pláticas espirituales privadas, y dos pastorales, vol I-III*, 208–29 (Madrid: en la Imprenta de la Hija de Ibarra, 1806), 210-211. All translations are the author’s own.

² A search of the Inquisition records of the AGN before the 1690s, for example, only yields configurations of “profanar” (as a verb), after which “profano/a” is more common and has a different meaning, as discussed below. When it is used as a verb after 1690s, it is virtually always in the context of dancing, singing, eating, etc. One exception: “Informe dirigido al licenciado Gaspar de A. por Don Joan de Ledezma y Francisco Calderón, relativo a las comedias que les fueron enviados para su revisión, las cuales consideran profanas,” 1629, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Inquisición,

church “profaned” the House of God; erecting a pagan altar over a Christian site “profaned” the sacred space; whipping figurines of the crucified Christ “profaned” the holy image. An active anti-religious attitude, a battle between the demonic and the divine, undergirded these crimes. But by the late seventeenth century, French, English, and Spanish dictionaries defined the “profane” as not only what was “against” God, but also what was “outside” God. In 1694, the French academic dictionary added to the traditional definition of profane “that which regards purely secular things, as opposed to those concerning religion.”³ In 1737, the Spanish Royal Academy’s *Diccionario de autoridades* followed suit, and Samuel Johnson’s 1768 dictionary was one of the first English versions to similarly define “profane” in both senses (what “violated, polluted”, or was “irreverent to sacred names or things” and that which was “not sacred, secular.”)⁴

Many scholars have studied the historical genealogies of the sacred and the profane that belie their seemingly naturalized character. In the footsteps of Michel Foucault, Talal Asad traced the concomitant emergence of “the sacred” and “the secular” as essentialized domains at the hands of anthropologists and theologians of the nineteenth century, rooted in European encounters with the non-European world in the early modern period.⁵ Jonathan Sheehan finds a similar phenomenon but two centuries earlier, tracing the collapse of the profane into a species of the

caja 5140, exp. 038, fs. 2; However, as early as the Council of Trent the dual meaning of “profane” emerged: in the fourth session, the council prohibited “profanors and violators of the word of God” from “turn[ing] and twist[ing] [sacred scripture] to all sorts of profane uses, to wit, to things scurrilous, fabulous, vain, to flatteries, detractions, superstitions, impious and diabolical incantations, sorceries, and defamatory libels.” The anti-religious undertones to “profane” in that context can be juxtaposed to the twenty-fifth session regarding the veneration of saints and relics, in which the council urged bishops to ensure “nothing [be] seen that is disorderly, or that is unbecomingly or confusedly arranged, nothing that is profane, nothing indecorous, seeing that holiness becometh the house of God.” J. Waterworth, ed., “Council of Trent, Session 4, Concerning the Canonical Scriptures,” in *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent* (London: Dolman, 1848); Waterworth, “Council of Trent, Session 25, On the Invocation, Veneration, and Relics, of Saints, and on Sacred Images”; Juan de Avila recommended to the Toledo Synod, in the wake of Tridentine decrees, that bishops do away with dressed images because of the “profane way that they are often dressed and because of the dangers that may come from this.” As cited in Weber, “‘When Heaven Hovered Close to Earth’: Images and Miracles in Early Modern Spain,” 19

³ Académie française, “Profane,” *Le Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française, Tomo 2, L-Z* (Paris: Vve J. B. Coignard et J. B. Coignard, 1694).

⁴ Real Academia Española, “Profano,” *Diccionario de la lengua castellana, en que se explica el verdadero sentido de las voces, su naturaleza y calidad, con las frases o modos de hablar, los proverbios o refranes, y otras cosas convenientes al uso de la lengua [...]. Compuesto por la Real Academia Española. Tomo quinto. Que contiene las letras O.P.Q.R.* (Madrid: Imprenta de la Real Academia Española, por los herederos de Francisco del Hierro, 1737) and Samuel Johnson, “Profane,” *A Dictionary of the English Language...* (W. G. Jones, 1768).

⁵ Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

“secular” in seventeenth-century Protestant apologetics and polemics.⁶ While he attributes this shift to an emerging academic anthropology of religion that countered a Calvinist theology about idolatry, different stakes were at play for eighteenth-century Spanish Catholics.

Here I argue that in the hands of Catholic reformers influenced by Jansenist antagonism to the body, the term “profane” came to reflect a pessimistic dualism and an increasing distrust of the consumerism and pursuits of “pleasure” that were becoming more characteristic of eighteenth-century Spanish socioeconomic life.⁷ Secular reformers lent support to these theological shifts, bent on engineering a more productive and prosperous cadre of citizens. Such reformers were equally wary of sensual and social pursuits that, in their eyes, wasted valuable time, energy, and resources.⁸ These influences led reformers to increasingly link the term “profane” with the realm of the flesh, the passions, and the public realm. In other words, the “profane” was an elastic term that conveyed elite cultural and religious concerns, in Spain and elsewhere.⁹ As the urgency of rooting out Islamic and Protestant heresies and indigenous idols faded while anxieties about socioeconomic shifts rose in the Spanish eighteenth century, the primary meaning of the profane shifted from violating the sacred to that which was immodest and excessive. Elites were demarcating religion by new polarities—not by the demonic and the divine, but the ostentatious and the modest; that which drew attention to or delighted the body and that which minimized and disciplined it. The concern was less about

⁶ Jonathan Sheehan, “Sacred and Profane: Idolatry, Antiquarianism and the Polemics of Distinction in the Seventeenth Century,” *Past & Present* 192, no. 1 (August 2006): 35–66.

⁷ Porter and Mulvey’s collection examines how pleasure “came into its own in the eighteenth century” Roy Porter and Marie Mulvey Roberts, eds., *Pleasure in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 1. Other classic works that treat the regulatory anxieties around consumer culture include Thomas Laqueur’s *Solitary Sex* (New York: Zone Books, 2003) and Patricia Seed’s *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

⁸ For a representation of such views, see Pedro Rodríguez Campomanes, *Discurso sobre el fomento de la industria popular*, Edición digital por la Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, cotejada con la edición crítica de John Reeder (Madrid, Ministerio de Hacienda, 1975) (Madrid: Imprenta de Antonio Sancha, 1774), http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/discurso-sobre-el-fomento-de-la-industria-popular--0/html/fee99972-82b1-11df-acc7-002185ce6064_2.html/marca/trelles.

⁹ For comparison, consider the register of the term in the French context: starting in 1762, academic authorities began to also define “profane” in reference to “the plebeians,” or those who were ignorant, unrefined, and undesirable company in polite, educated society (“Profane,” *Le Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* [Paris: Brunet, 1762]). In 1737, on the other hand, the Spanish dictionary included this definition: “regularly taken to mean that which is excessive in ostentation and splendor, with disorder, that touches on irreligiosity or less modesty.” (Real Academia Española, “Diccionario de la lengua castellana,” 1737). This prong of the definition became more explicit over time; by 1846, the French-Spanish Universal Dictionary equated “mundane” with “profanity, [or] the accumulation of pleasures that delight the senses (“Profane,” *Diccionario Universal Francés-Español, Español-Francés: Francés-Español. M-Z* [Madrid: Imp. de la Viuda de Jordán e Hijos, 1846]).

“true” religion and more about “pure” religion, demarcating its affective and behavioral contours in a newly configured arrangement of an increasingly narrowed, enclosed sacred realm in an expanding, and theologically diluted, profane world.

In shifting the concerns about the profane from demonic idols to idols of flesh in their endeavors to “purify” worship, reformers upended the festive universe their predecessors in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had helped construct and had long condoned. Thus, it may not be adequate to remark, as many historiographies do, that eighteenth-century reformers finally found the “mixture of the sacred and profane” intolerable and set about untangling them.¹⁰ We must ask instead how elites and laity defined the sacred and the profane, how those meanings changed, and how the laity challenged reformers’ new parameters of the sacred and its relationship to the individual and social body.¹¹

This article uses the attempted suppression of Spanish confraternal comedies as a case study for illuminating these shifts. Driven by ascendant bourgeois values and a Jansenist-inspired theological antipathy to the sensorium, reformers contributed to essentialized reconfigurations of the profane as a domain characterized by social passions and sensual indulgence.¹² The sacred, in contrast, became essentialized as a domain marked by a uniform psycho-emotional profile and monolithic code of bodily comportment. Baroque Catholics resisted these shifts, embedding the sacred within the world of community, of labor, and of

¹⁰ As an example, Gruzinski’s excellent work on eighteenth-century reforms against indigenous Catholicism observes that reformers began to find the “mix of the profane with the sacred intolerable” (“se había vuelto intolerable la mezcla de lo profano con lo sagrado”): S Gruzinski, “La ‘segunda Aculturación’: El Estado Ilustrado y La Religiosidad Indígena En Nueva España (1775-1800),” *Estudios de Historia Novohispana* (1985), 189; See also Curcio-Nagy’s comment that “Festivals, with that unique mixture of the sacred and the profane, were right in the line of Bourbon fire”: Linda Curcio-Nagy, “Giants and Gypsies: Corpus Christi in Colonial Mexico City,” in *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, ed. William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1994), 18.

¹¹ While reformers since the Council of Trent had targeted the presence of food and drink in temples, the mixture of men and women, and unapproved comedies, they did not, as far as I have been able to tell, typically utilize the term “profane” to describe such activities—though historians have continually paraphrased the reforms in such terms. For example, Alías and Muñoz describe some of these early reforms, while also utilizing the shorthand “profane”: Inmaculada Arias de Saavedra Alías and Miguel Luis López-Guadalupe Muñoz, *La represión de la religiosidad popular: crítica y acción contra las cofradías en la España del siglo XVIII* (Granada: Universidad de Granada, 2002), 41.

¹² See Andrea Schmidt, “Enlightened Absolutism and New Frontiers for Political Authority,” in *The Limits of Empire: European Imperial Formations in Early Modern World History: Essays in Honor of Geoffrey Parker*, ed. Tonio Andrade and William Reger (New York: Routledge, 2016), for a discussion of how the French-originating and Augustinian-based reform movement of Jansenism became, in Spain, wedded to regalist reforms in the project of Catholic renewal and Spanish progress.

embodied human beings. Thus, they attempted to preserve a more variegated emotional register and more pragmatic range of acceptable social and individual attitudes in the celebration of the sacred. A discursive analysis of the rhetoric of the sacred and profane in popular sermons and pastoral writings reveals the concepts' shifting configurations, while confraternal records and political decrees surrounding confraternal comedies show how these ideas played out at the local level.

The Pure and the Profane: Rhetorical Divisions

It is important to emphasize both the continuity and distinctions in prior reforms, especially those emanating from the Council of Trent, and those of the Enlightenment. As Allyson Poska summarizes, Tridentine reformers targeted confraternal disorders and advocated a “solemn, constrained notion of religious ritual” that echoed in many eighteenth-century reformers' writings.¹³ Early reformers, however, often cast the problem of raucous behavior accompanying confraternal celebrations as one of disordered human desires and behavior requiring regulation and moderation. But starting in the late seventeenth century, and predominantly in the eighteenth, reformers reconfigured the problem more as a problem of contamination that relied on mutually exclusive conceptions of the body and its passions, and the spiritual. The issue was no longer an issue of degree (toning down the “disorders inevitable to any large gathering of people,” as one practical eighteenth-century priest pragmatically summarized) but of kind.¹⁴ As Asad suggests, the sacred became an “essence” characterizing an entire domain, requiring a uniform set of behaviors and attitudes, rather than a quality adhering to a particular thing or place, with a variety of properly corresponding behaviors and attitudes.¹⁵ The newly configured “profane”—the sensual, social, and exuberant—was utterly antithetical to the kind of piety now demanded by Catholic reformers; for God, they claimed, was “purest spirit and eternal truth,” and was “owed a spiritual and true worship.”¹⁶

In their sermons and treatises, eighteenth-century reformers called for a “pure piety” that contrasted with “profane” disorders. “Pure piety” was sterilized of the senses and the passions, rendered emotionally monotone and physically still: reformers sought to eliminate laughter, exuberance, and even “rejoicing” from

¹³ Poska, “From Parties to Pieties: Redefining Confraternal Activity in Seventeenth-Century Ourense (Spain),” 217-218.

¹⁴ “Costumbre de armados y mascareras,” 1804, AGN, Cofradías, vol. 14, exp. 3, f. 146r.

¹⁵ Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, 25-33.

¹⁶ Núñez de Haro y Peralta, “Sermon X, Sobre el verdadero culto,” 210-11. Brian Larkin emphasizes the shift—though I’d suggest it may be more a matter of homiletic emphasis than theological shift—in characterizing God as “spirit” as a key element in enlightened reforms and criticisms against Baroque spirituality. See *The Very Nature of God: Baroque Catholicism and Religious Reform in Bourbon Mexico City* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010).

fiestas to instill the decorum and gravity appropriate to the religious occasions they believed were better called “solemnities [*solemnidades*].”¹⁷ Since they also believed passions and sensual impulses (like lust, vanity, and revelry) caught flame in the social realm, pure piety was only legitimately cultivated as an internal project. Consequently, the economic imprint of pure piety ought to be minimal, without the propensity for costly and unproductive expenses.¹⁸ Lastly, pure piety entailed a rigorous moralism that was intolerant not only of traditional vices but of a vast realm of extra-liturgical activities and attitudes that Catholics had long accepted and incorporated into the realm of festive worship as benign or indirectly beneficial. To use Charles Taylor’s term, reformers sought to unify social and religious behavior in one “omnicompetent code.”¹⁹ In Taylor’s analysis, Protestant reformers and subsequently Enlightenment progressives demanded that all live up to a single standard of morality and spiritual righteousness as they understood it. Eighteenth-century Spanish Catholic reformers shared in this vision (even if Jansenist pessimism added an undercurrent of absolutist rigor that departed from the optimism of other European Enlightenment thinkers).²⁰ As one priest insisted, “Every Christian in his respective state, whether he be priest, monk, married, military, etc., has the obligation of exactly keeping the Divine Commandments.”²¹

¹⁷ Luis Belluga y Moncada, *Contra los trages, y adornos profanos: en que de doctrina de la sagrada escritura, padres de la iglesia, y todo genero de escritores ...: donde se dan doctrinas importantissimas, y transcendentales contra todo genero de vicios, muy utiles para predicadores, y confesores ...* (Murcia: por Jayme Mesnier, 1722).

¹⁸ Other scholars have examined the financial aspects of confraternal activities that reformers targeted. Reformers by and large deemed their expenditures a harmful diversion from national prosperity and local wellbeing, but other documentary evidence shows that the local festivities were important to local economy. See, for example, Brooks’ argument that “the public entertainments provided necessary charity funds for the hospitals, and also created commercial opportunities for candlemakers, carpenters, weavers...” Lynn Matluck Brooks, *The Dances of the Processions of Seville in Spain’s Golden Age* (Edition Reichenberger, 1988), 339; for one direct example, see the complaint of costume renters, tailors, silversmiths, and other local artisans complaining to reformers that their reductions of festive practices would irreparably harm their financial wellbeing: “Representación de los alquiladores de trajes de la Semana Santa,” March 1794, AGN, Historia, vol. 437, f. 4r-5v; and for another overview of confraternal finances and reform, see Elisa Luque Alcaide, “El Debate Sobre Las Cofradías En El México Borbónico (1775-1794),” *Dieciocho* 26, no. 1 (2003): 25–42 ; and John K. Chance and William B. Taylor, “Cofradías and Cargos: An Historical Perspective on the Mesoamerican Civil-Religious Hierarchy,” *American Ethnologist* 12, no. 1 (1985): 1–26.

¹⁹ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 52.

²⁰ See Smidt’s analysis of the differences and similarities between Spanish Jansenist reformers and Enlightenment reformers (410). Smidt, “Luces Por La Fe: The Cause of Catholic Enlightenment in 18th-Century Spain.”

²¹ Josef, “Respuesta del R. P. Fr. Diego Josef de Cadiz, misionero apostolico, a un regidor de una de las ciudades de España.”

The accommodation for the varied capacities of human beings in their diverse stations of life that characterized baroque Catholics was rigorously opposed by philo-Jansenist reformers who, in the words of Archbishop Núñez, found the notion of a “soft law [of the Gospel], light and favorable and accommodated to our nature,” to be a corruption inimical to true piety.²² Baroque accommodation was associated with a kind of pragmatism that permitted “honest and licit diversions,” as one priest defended, that were not strictly liturgical but were effective in drawing more people under the elevating influence of the mass, the procession, the sermons, and general umbrella of “devotion.”²³

Reform hostility to a “softer law” of the Gospel that “accommodated” man’s passionate and sensual nature was illustrated starkly in a pastoral letter by Don Felipe Bertrán, the bishop of Salamanca, circulated in 1783, which rebuked the excesses of carnival week that turned what should be a time of mourning and sobriety into one of “diversion.” The gaiety and excesses of the week, he lambasted, exposed how men had become “slaves to their senses and their passions” and thus “established religion to the measure of their taste.” As disciples of Christ, whom he characterized as one who “always carried in his spirit and heart the cross and sorrows,” “the spirit of mortification and penitence should extinguish in us” the pleasures of the flesh. “We have not been born on the earth in order to be happy in it,” he claimed; “conceived in sin, it is just that we live between sorrows.” The disciple—not a member of a select cadre of spiritual elites but representing all believers in Christ—should accordingly “mortify with just and holy rigor his senses, break his heart, crucify his flesh of all desires, and with a wise severity prevent evil and punishment.” The real enemy was “pleasure”—that “sweet attraction that praises the senses, enchants the understanding, intoxicates the heart, and resuscitates, feeds, and inflames the passions.” One must choose between “a delicate and delicious life among feasts and spectacles, and a life of retreat, of mortification, and of tears.”²⁴ The battle lines were clear and uncompromising.

²² Núñez de Haro y Peralta, *Sermones escogidos*, 209; there is a vast literature on the theological battles between Jansenists and Jesuits over the latter’s perceived moral laxity, in light of their ideas on probabilism. Even the less controversial Spiritual Exercises, however, explicitly endorsed the customization of spiritual exercises and expectations to one’s individual circumstances and capacities. For overviews on the debates between Jesuits and Jansenists regarding this issue, see Dale K. Van Kley, *Reform Catholicism and the International Suppression of the Jesuits in Enlightenment Europe* (Yale University Press, 2017); and Smidt, “Enlightened Absolutism and New Frontiers for Political Authority: Building Towards a State Religion in Eighteenth-Century Spain”; and Camacho, *La Compañía de Jesús, imágenes e ideas*.

²³ N.1 Fol 77-79 - Sept. 16, 1769

²⁴ Don Felipe Bertrán, *Carta Pastoral que el Exc.mo Señor Don Felipe Bertran Obispo de Salamanca, Del Consejo de S.M. Inquisidor General, Prelado Caballero Gran Cruz de la Real y Distinguida Orden Española de Carlos III dirige a los fieles de su obispado sobre los desordenes del carnaval* (Madrid: Don Antonio de Sancha, 1783), 8, 14–15, 17–18.

While themes of discipline, sensory mortification, and the battle against the passions and the carnal pleasures were hardly novel by the eighteenth-century, it is notable that reformers associated the body and senses almost exclusively in such terms. Passions and the senses were intrinsically antithetical to spiritual piety, rather than simply potentially so; they were depraved, not disordered. Compare Bertrán's rhetoric above to that of a baroque contemporary, the archdeacon of Toledo, Gregorio Alfonso Villagomer y Lorenzana, who preached that it was *through* these passions and senses that God brought mankind into divine communion, for while God was spiritual, humans certainly were not. Echoing Thomistic sentiments in St. Teresa of Avila's writing from centuries before, he wrote in defense of the physical apparatus and emotional technologies of baroque festivals:

If men were purely spiritual, they would not need sensible images to arrive at an understanding of the incorporeal; but, since we not only consist of a rational, spiritual Soul, but also a body, we are incapable of understanding anything without the ministry of the Senses, by whose medium species are introduced to the Soul. For this reason, the All-knowing Lord provides all his Creatures...according to the condition of each one...the most convenient mode of grasping His perfections, [giving us] similitudes and examples proportionate to our coarseness and limitation ...peculiar to and characteristic of bodies... to inspire the most tender sentiments of piety.”²⁵

But in the sermons of reformers, the passions and the senses were depicted in a monotone register as forces of a hostile takeover disguised by their “sweetness” and “pleasure.” This led to some semantic gymnastics when reformers tried to invoke Tridentine principles of reform, for Tridentine reformers—as did baroque Catholics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—maintained a more multivalent register for the senses and the passions. For example, Don Antonio Martíenz, Bishop of Cádiz sought to purge the “profane” pleasures that sullied the late-eighteenth century festivities of San Sebastián by “remov[ing] the objects that distract and perturb devotion,” particularly the brilliance and splendor of the chapel and the enjoyment of feasts and “profane diversions.” Don Antonio appealed to the Tridentine rationale for processions as a guiding and restraining principle, but inserted a significant, if subtle, addition. The Fathers at Trent, he wrote, had sanctioned these “majestic ceremonies” so that “the heart of man, cast down

²⁵ Gregorio Alfonso Villagomer y Lorenzana, *Oracion que en la solemne fiesta de la Santisima Trinidad y dedicacion del ... altar mayor de la Iglesia de religiosos Trinitarios Calzados de ... Toledo* (Toledo: en la oficina de los herederos de Nicolás de Almanzano, 1789), 6–7, 10.

towards earthly things, would be “imperceptibly [*insensiblemente*] raised to contemplate the divine.” Yet the passage he cited from the Council of Trent did not include the term *insensiblemente*. Rather, it read:

And whereas such is the nature of man, that, without external helps, he cannot easily be raised to the meditation of divine things; therefore has holy Mother Church instituted certain rites...[and] ceremonies...[so] the minds of the faithful [might] be excited, by those visible signs of religion and piety, to the contemplation of those most sublime things which are hidden in this sacrifice.²⁶

The bishop’s addition seemed to depart significantly from the council’s original intentions. It was precisely because man was an embodied creature that God had ordained “visible” and “external helps” (by means of the senses) to “excite” the minds of the faithful towards the sublime. In Thomistic language, the sensible was the road to the insensible; only through the sensory faculties could man reach the divine. The bishop’s addition, *insensiblemente*, in contrast, meant “that which [was] not perceived by the senses... not known or discerned.”²⁷ Such a reading was incompatible with the Council’s intentions to use instruments and strategies that deliberately appealed to the sensitive faculty. The bishop seems to have obscured this context to perhaps bolster his prescription of a disembodied “solemnity acceptable to the divine presence.”²⁸

²⁶ J. Waterworth, ed., “Council of Trent, Session 22, Doctrine on the Sacrifice of the Mass,” in *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Ecumenical Council of Trent* (London: Dolman, 1848), chapter 5. Emphasis mine.

²⁷ Esteban de Terreros y Pando, “Insensible,” *Diccionario castellano con las voces de ciencias y artes y sus correspondientes en las tres lenguas francesa, latina e italiana [...]. Tomo segundo* (Madrid: Viuda de Ibarra, 1787).

²⁸ Martínez de la Plaza, *Resolucion del Ill.mo Sr. D. Antonio Martinez*, 26, 11, 15–16, 22; his predecessor decades before had also given a distinctive gloss to biblical interpretations to convey his views on sensual pleasure. The bishop of Cádiz wrote a sermon in 1693 in which he interpreted the story of Christ healing on the Sabbath as proof that “on the day of Fiesta one must cure the hydropsic [dropsy] sinner of delights, correcting with penitence the thirst of the appetites.” The original scriptural passage emphasized Christ’s intervention in the Pharisees’ debate as to whether it was lawful to heal, or “labor,” on the Sabbath. The bishop, however, focused on the condition Christ healed (dropsy, a condition thought to be brought on by excessive drinking) and interpreted the narrative as a testament against the sins and appetites of the flesh. Such sins, the bishop told his congregants, were all too pervasive, as people came to the Temple for “conversations, jokes [porifas], business, laughter, profanities...” These activities were a far cry from the reverent silence God expected in his temple, he pronounced. Lamentably, he wrote, many judged “that it was not a [religious] fiesta when there was not an abundance of profane dances, theater, lascivious comedies, dangerous paseos, drunkenness,” and the like. Far from sanctifying the fiestas, he argued, these profane diversions “made fuel for burning in hell.” José de Barcia y Zambrana, *Despertador christiano de sermones doctrinales, sobre particulares assumptos ...: que despues de las*

Reformers imposed a single emotional register in seeking to eliminate any “ridiculous and indecent profanations” that might cause “laughter and lack of devotion,” for “solemnity” was the only tone befitting holy celebrations. In contrast, lay and elite baroque Catholics endorsed a sensibility of counterpoint. Counterpoint, as Fastiggi and Pereira note, is “the great Baroque passion, expressing antitheses like drama and repose, darkness and light, abasement and glory . . . resurrection through the Passion, greatness through humility, and glory of beatitude through the agony of the Cross.”²⁹

Thus, while the most common descriptions in publications for lay audiences recounting religious festivities connoted jubilation, happiness, and rejoicing, there were also occasions for solemnity and somberness, and often, a counterpoint between or mixture of the two. The processional route of the festival for the miraculous image of *Christo de la Villa de Igualada* in 1736 was marked by rich decorations and adornments, impressive orchestras, comic plays, fireworks, and squadrons of dancers. The chronicler unabashedly praised the “diversion of fireworks” that erupted out of elaborate machinery, “giving a fun and happy time to the great concourse that attended.” The “happy commotion” mixed comfortably with the “pomp and solemnity” of the occasion.³⁰ The religious writer Ignacio Carrillo y Pérez boasted of how the 1808 festival in Mexico for Our Lady of Remedies was marked by a joyful, festive atmosphere: “Everything brimmed over with pleasure and happiness, everything was festive, and everything contributed to making the devoted accompaniment most joyful.”³¹ Other descriptions of holy festivals commonly remarked on the sensory strategies and apparatuses—fireworks, processions, bull races, comedies, music, dramatic reenactments, lavish decorations—that produced the “jubilation” and “happiness” requisite for such occasions.

Indeed, solemnity could not be the sole emotional register of religious festivities, one confraternity argued, because while some occasions certainly warranted it (like Holy Friday), other occasions demanded “happiness, acts of thanksgiving, in celebration of . . . our liberty and redemption” from death and sin.³²

impressiones en cinco, y en dos tomos, sale aora en tres ... : tomo segundo (Madrid: por Juan Garcia Infanzon, 1693), 489.

²⁹ As cited in J. Michele Molina, *To Overcome Oneself*, 204.

³⁰ Padró i Serrals, *La Sagrada, y Prodigiosa Imagen Del S. Christo de La Villa de Igualada*, 68–69, 67.

³¹ Ignacio Carrillo y Pérez, *Lo máximo en lo mínimo: la portentosa Imágen de Nuestra Señora de los Remedios, Conquistadora y Patrona de la Imperial Ciudad de México ...* (México: por Don Mariano de Zúñiga y Ontiveros, 1808), 126.

³² “Solicitan al obispo que el dia de la Preciosísima Sangre de Cristo sea declarado festivo, con precepto de oír misa para todos los que viven de garitas para adentro, y libertad de poder trabajar;” see letter beginning with “Expediente formado por el Illmo Sor Arzobpo de Mexico a concecuencia de la Pretension...”

Likewise, the Frenchman who wrote under the name Juan Álvarez de Colmenar observed that in certain Spanish and Portuguese holy days the joyful dancing of men and women before sacred images “to the sound of castanets and other instruments,” in contrast to the “austerities” practiced and the “long and painful wailing” that resounded during Holy Week. He noted that Corpus Christi was the most festive and jubilant; accompanying the “solemn and numerous” procession were “jesters...with colorful clothes of braids” and “hat[s] bedecked with a bouquet of feathers and bells,” “dancing and doing stunts and antics and many beautiful shows of agility.” Dancing, dining, and comedies followed the procession. Holy Week, on the other hand, had a “mournful air,” with everything—even the very instruments—draped in black. Funerary music and a “mournful air” pervaded all of Holy Friday. Joy and mourning, laughter and tears, had their place among the emotionally variegated religious celebrations.³³

In contrast, one can detect the disappointment in one diarist who, in the wake of a slew of reforms to the local fiesta for the *Virgin de los Remedios* in 1790, commented that “since the beginning of this kingdom, there had never been such a serious function.”³⁴ Clearly, somberness and gravity were out of tune with the thanksgiving and celebration that typically characterized local celebrations. For these reasons, many local communities and confraternities defended their traditional performances of religious comedies even as reformers insisted that whatever produced emotional and physical boisterousness or excitement was, by definition, “profane” and antithetical to true piety.

Comedies and Diversions

Religious plays and comedies had long been a controversial devotional practice and pedagogy. Religious dramas, particularly *comedias devotas* or *comedias de santos*, became particularly popular in Spain by seventeenth century thanks to playwrights like Lope de Vega, Tirso de Molina, and Pedro Calderón de la Barca, who in turn, were influenced by the Jesuits, famous for training generations of actors and playwrights. (According to one account, some even called

³³ Álvarez de Colmenar, *Les delices de l’Espagne & du Portugal* (Leide: Pierre Vander Aa, 1707), 880–81, 887–88.

³⁴ As cited in Pamela Voekel, “Peeing on the Palace: Bodily Resistance to Bourbon Reforms in Mexico City,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 5, no. 2 (1992): 198–99; Compare his response to the European counterparts post-suppression, described by Barbara Ehrenrich: one French man told his reforming priest he “could not promise to renounce dancing and abstain from the festivals...It would be impossible not to mingle and rejoice with his friends and relations,” while a Buckinghamshire resident observed that “while formerly the common ‘presented a lively and pleasing aspect, dotted with parties of cheerful lookers-on,’ it was now ‘left lonely and empty of loungers,’ leaving the men and boys with nothing to do but hang out in the pubs and drink”; as cited in Barbara Ehrenreich, *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2007), 100.

Jesuits “the comedy priests” for their well-known productions).³⁵ The Jesuits had long embraced the classical and humanist underpinnings in their pedagogical approach to plays, embracing the need to “please” a lay audience in order for them to pay attention to a message that would propagate the faith. While Jesuits were often financially equipped to produce lavish spectacles, confraternities paid local actors or utilized *cofrades* and often humble trappings to dramatize scriptural narratives or, more often, colorful or folkloric interpretations of lives of the saints, sometimes borrowing from or parodying popular secular tales and comedies.³⁶

A nineteenth-century English encyclopedia claimed religious comedy had been “peculiar to the Spaniards,” but claimed that with the eighteenth-century era of Bourbon sovereignty and their “French taste,” its popularity declined.³⁷ While perhaps this was one prong of critique, seventeenth-century ecclesiastical elites raised concerns that were echoed by eighteenth-century “religious and moral crusaders [who] equated the theater, and the actors...with iniquity and moral laxity.”³⁸ They opposed the representation of vice and sin (plots of redemptive transformations notwithstanding) for its ability to arouse (misguided) sympathy and disturb the emotions, corrupting the audience. One clerical writer, Fray Diego Josef, claimed that starting in 1687 the Church began including confraternal comedies, even those on “pious subjects,” with other activities deemed as “profanities” or “profane, useless, and vain fiestas,” and henceforth forbade *cofrades* from spending

³⁵ See the following summary of Jesuit comedies: “Another paradox of Jesuit drama was that in spite of this disregard for the secular stage, the Jesuits created remarkable drama (often the most ‘professional’ performances in the locale in which the Jesuits presented theater) which then had a profound influence on the secular drama, educating and influencing such theater artists as Moliere, Corneille, and Félix Lope de Vega (1562–1635). This tension between the sacred and educational purposes and the entertaining performances would be resolved differently in the minds of the Jesuits than it would their secular audiences: As Hilaire Kallendorf reports, in Bologna, “the Jesuits became so synonymous with comic theatrical productions that children in the streets would point to them and shout, ‘Ecco li preti delle comedie!’ (Here come the comedy priests!)” Kevin J. Wetmore, Jr., “Jesuit Theater and Drama,” *Oxford Handbooks Online*, July 7, 2016, <http://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935420.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199935420-e-55>.

³⁶ Pedro Juan Duque, *Spanish and English Religious Drama* (Kassel: Edition Reichenberger, 1993), 28–32; See also Poska’s comment that while “professional actors performed auto sacramentales, religious plays, in the Cathedral, confraternities often put on their own dramatic spectacles in the streets.” Poska, “From Parties to Pieties: Redefining Confraternal Activity in Seventeenth-Century Ourense (Spain),” 222.

³⁷ *The Popular Encyclopedia: Or, Conversations Lexicon: Being a General Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature, Biography, History, and Political Economy*, 2nd ed. (London: Blackie and Son, Paternoster Row, 1862), 345.

³⁸ David Thatcher Gies, *The Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Spain* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6-7.

alms on those activities.³⁹ In 1765, the crown directly prohibited religious plays to ensure proper respect for religion (supported by ecclesiastical reformers concerned for preserving its purity against the raucousness of crowds and immorality of the actors).⁴⁰ Defenders, on the other hand, claimed that comedies provided examples of the rewards for virtuous behavior and the punishments for vice, and incited people to devotion.⁴¹ Indirectly, comedies could draw people to the main devotional event by attracting them with potentially edifying, promise of entertainment, laughter, and warm conviviality that, in turn, would soften their hearts in preparation for the spiritual work of divine grace.

A richly documented conflict in 1768 between the bishop of the peninsular city of Rodrigo and the confraternity in San Felices de Gallegos provides local insights into the criticisms and defenses of the comedies. In March of that year, officials of the confraternity *del Santísimo* hurriedly called a meeting with the sacristan and rector to discuss the recent order that Bishop Cuadrillero had issued to suppress their organization.⁴² The relationship between the confraternity and the bishop had frayed over the preceding years as the bishop imposed severer restrictions on their activities, which they had countered with partially successful appeals to the political leadership for exemptions and revocations.

Two years after the *alcalde mayor*, under direction of the bishop, had

³⁹ R. P. Fr. Diego Josef, “Respuesta del R. P. Fr. Diego Josef de Cadiz, misionero apostolico, a un regidor de una de las ciudades de España,” in *Dictamen del mui Reverendo Padre Fr. Diego de Cadiz... sobre asunto de comedias, i bailes: fundado en los principios mas solidos... para desengaño de incautos...* (Sevilla: Vazquez, Hidalgo y Compañía, 1789).

⁴⁰ Juan Pedro Viqueira Albán describes some of these reforms, like the strict separation of the sexes in the balconies and boxes; disciplining actors that talked, signaled, or distracted the audience or interacted with the prompters, musicians, or public; forbidding alcohol backstage, ensuring rehearsals and prompt performance times, imprisoning rowdy audience members, actors, and actresses, and so on. Albán characterizes these reforms as a reflection of bourgeois ideals about decorum and class distinctions paraded as natural rules for behavior and for art. Albán concludes that these reforms had little effect; theater changed when it became privatized and thus more organically reflected bourgeois values. The *ilustrados*, on the other hand, were also keenly aware of theater’s ability to corrupt audience, but generally held that when the behavior of actors and audience were strictly regulated, and the plays adhered to realism, theater (at least of the secular variety) could be effective and useful in inculcating enlightened morals. In the words of Gaspar Melchor de Jovellanos, theater was not just a “more rational, more profitable, and...most appropriate diversion for the attention,” but “a spectacle that can instruct or pervert the spirit; it can perfect or corrupt the heart of citizens.” See Juan Pedro Viqueira Albán, *Propriety and Permissiveness in Bourbon Mexico* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), 39–40, 41–44, 47–48.

⁴¹ Merveena McKendrick, *Playing the King: Lope de Vega and the Limits of Conformity* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer Ltd, 2000), 10, 28.

⁴² “Expediente iniciado por la cofradía del Santísimo de la villa de San Felices de Gallegos para que se le conceda licencia para poder representar tres comedias en días distintos durante la celebración de la octava del Corpus Christi o Santísimo Sacramento. Licencia no concedida,” March 15, 1770, AHN, Consejos, 7090, exp. 1, n. 1, fs. 20r-22r.

suppressed all of the functions completely in 1766, the confraternity appealed to the Count of Aranda that without their customary festivities, the divine worship was nearing “total extinction.” The Count agreed to restore two of the three comedies, though he continued to forbid the feasts. Because of some “sinister report,” the confraternity wrote, the bishop of Rodrigo mandated that the institution be extinguished in spite of the Conde’s ruling. The confraternity initially appealed to the bishop “by the hand of the city attorney” to “moderate with paternal affability” his mandate, and “graciously approve all that inflames and attracts [devotion] without violence.” While the confraternity had complied with demands to reduce the expenses of their feasts and fireworks over the years, they resisted the cancellation of their Corpus Christi comedies. They urged him specifically to revoke his condemnation of the plays which had long “serve[d] as a general diversion and licit means of attracting greater concourses of people to the solemnity and devotions.” In their appeal, they explained that depriving the town of their “festive worship and devotion” would “alter their spirits” and “cause displeasure and disturbances,” which in turn would “cool devotion” and ultimately result in the total decline of worship.⁴³

It was precisely their concern for fomenting devotion that the confraternity first put on the plays, they explained; a day of festivity like Corpus Christi was intended to express thanks to God. The comedies, far from causing even the least “scandal or disturbance or disorder,” had fomented “expressions of greatest happiness, and by which every day the devotion and divine worship increased,” the confraternal leaders asserted. In other words, comedies produced the affects and attitudes they believed were appropriate to expressions of thanksgiving and worship: happiness and delight. In contrast, collective distress and confusion “cooled” the warmth of zeal that generated devotion, and thus the bishop’s interference—not the comedies—was to blame for any spiritual decline.

In addition, the confraternity argued, because many of the inhabitants took advantage of the holiday to pass their time in “harmful diversions,” the mayordomos found it beneficial to put on these comedies in the plaza (during broad daylight, with no women participants, they added) as an “honest,” or more wholesome, alternative. The confraternity was also conscious of the commonly touted economic concerns that festivities kept people from work. In response, they proffered the creative defense that the comedies especially appealed to the rustic laborers, who came in great numbers and, rejuvenated by the wholesome recreation,

⁴³ “Expediente iniciado por la cofradía del Santísimo de la villa de San Felices de Gallegos”, fs. 38v, 39v, 21v. Their initial letter also mentioned bull races, but they seem to have been prohibited with the feasts, and do not show up again in any of the exchanges between the confraternity, bishop, alcade mayor, and viceroy.

returned to work with more pleasure.⁴⁴ To locals, the collective practice of devotion was intertwined with pragmatic matters of labor and social stability; to practice one at the expense of the other would ignore the broader relationship between religion and daily life.⁴⁵

Several witnesses attached their testimonies to the appeal, affirming that the comedies had never caused any disorders, but only “resulted in the greater increase of Devotion.” But since the bishop had suspended the comedies, they attested, alms had dropped, no one wanted to be confraternal members or *mayordomos*, and devotion threatened to fade altogether.⁴⁶ The head of the consistory added his letter “as a protective father and defender of the republic” confirming that the confraternity had already complied peacefully with the first round of reforms, but this complete extermination of “festive worship” had caused great displeasure and disturbances among the villagers. He urged the bishop to “allow this immemorial custom to continue, which has served the confraternity and the devotion of the villagers.”⁴⁷

According to the response written by the bishop’s scribe, the bishop didn’t even finish reading their appeal before he slammed it shut with impatience.⁴⁸ The confraternity then appealed to the viceroy, who responded that their comedies were permitted, but not any feasts, drunkenness, or disorder. The bishop, explicitly annoyed at the interference, penned another letter challenging the claims of the confraternity and reiterating his own concerns. He concluded the letter accusing the villagers of “utmost foolishness” in thinking that such comedies “served God.” The very fact that the villagers thought such diversions were appropriate for worship was reason enough to cancel them in order to disabuse them of such a “harmful

⁴⁴ In recognition of the ongoing royal concerns about the ever-burgeoning liturgical calendar and the loss of productivity from prohibitions against working on holy days, several papal bulls were issued clarifying the mandated holy days, and on certain holy days, granting exceptions to Indians from the prohibitions against work, and then eventually to Spanish laborers as well, as long as they attended mass. “Breve y tabla sobre fiestas,” 1732, Archivo del Cabildo (Mexico City), Edictos, libro 3, caja 0, exp 0, u. 15.1; “Avisa haver recibido, y publicado el Breve de la Santidad de Benedicto XIV en el que a instancias piadosas de S.M. ha extendido a aquellos R.nos la gracia de poder trabajar en los dias de fiesta, que señala, con la obligacion de oir misa,” November 26, 1752, AGI, Lima, 522; Exceptions were also granted on a case-by-case basis when economic urgency was demonstrated. See, for example, “Solicitud de permiso para trabajar los domingos y días de fiesta,” 1810, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Cultos Religiosos, caja 1395, exp. 050, fs. 1.

⁴⁵ “Expediente iniciado por la cofradía del Santísimo de la villa de San Felices de Gallegos,” fs. 36r-37r.

⁴⁶ “Expediente iniciado por la cofradía del Santísimo de la villa de San Felices de Gallegos,” fs. 29r, 30r-31r.

⁴⁷ “Expediente iniciado por la cofradía del Santísimo de la villa de San Felices de Gallegos,” fs. 25r-27v.

⁴⁸ “Expediente iniciado por la cofradía del Santísimo de la villa de San Felices de Gallegos,” f. 22r.

misconception.” The bishop insisted that devotion had not waned, as the confraternity claimed, but had merely become more solemn and pure, and thus more pleasing to God, and was welcomed by the village.⁴⁹

Once more, the confraternity defended a more accommodating view of acceptable devotional activity. They retorted that “exteriorities of rejoicing” like the “diversions” of comedies and the spectacle of fireworks were not offensive of the worship of God. Rather, they “fomented fervor in the pure-minded,” and to those who were not of quite as pure of conscience, they “neither decreased nor increased fervor”; and in the perverse, there was at least no increase of evil. In other words, they insisted that “exteriorities of rejoicing” were either spiritually beneficial or at worst neutral, depending on the state of one’s soul and intentions. Instead of a one-size-fits-all set of norms, they believed that the efficacy of devotional practices and “exteriorities” depended, in part, on the state of the particular individual, so that there needed to be a panoply of options, rather than just one. Other diversions, like dances, were not so harmless, they agreed. But they were reluctant to categorically condemn even dances, for “in these times we cannot expect the innocence of the primitive Church,” they reasoned; but the comedies, they insisted, were “positively good.”⁵⁰

In short, the confraternity defended their comedies on several fronts. Against the somberness demanded by reformers, they posited a clear correlation between public happiness and devotion, and public disappointment or grief and the cooling of devotion (invoking the baroque trope between heat and devotion often utilized by defenders of sensory devotion). In their eyes, the spirit was warmed by laughter and happiness, making it more conducive to the spiritual movements fundamental to piety, in contrast to the gravity and composure exclusively urged by reformers. Secondly, the confraternity valued social participation and attendance in the enactment of public ritual.⁵¹ The comedies were instrumental in attracting crowds, particularly secluded or overworked “rustic laborers” (another common class trope) to these religious occasions and thus “inflamed” public devotion as well

⁴⁹ “Expediente iniciado por la cofradía del Santísimo de la villa de San Felices de Gallegos”, fs. 54v-55r, 58r-58v.

⁵⁰ “Expediente iniciado por la cofradía del Santísimo de la villa de San Felices de Gallegos”, fs. 78r-78v.

⁵¹ Aizpurú also comments on the coexistence of solemnity and attractive activities (though, as argued above, there may have been more than sheer pragmatic strategy at play): “In the celebrations of colonial Mexico, if the solemnity corresponding to festive ritual was always exalted, neither did the activities lack complementary activities designed to attract the public, actor or spectator, without which [i.e. the public] the fiesta had no meaning.” Pilar Gonzalbo Aizpuru, “Auge y Ocaso de La Fiesta. Las Fiestas En La Nueva España. Júbilo y Piedad, Programación y Espontaneidad.” in *Fiesta y Celebración, Discurso y Espacio Novohispanos*, Biblioteca Novohispana, Estudios Número 1 (México: El Colegio de México, 2009), 69, <https://docplayer.es/57370544-Auge-y-ocaso-de-la-fiesta-las-fiestas-en-la-nueva-espana-jubilo-y-piedad-programacion-y-espontaneidad.html>.

as the perpetuation of alms and confraternal prestige and participation.⁵² The added benefits of redirecting the public away from sinful diversions towards “licit” and “honest” ones also reflected their more pragmatic approach to human behavior; whereas the moral code of reformers entailed a black-and-white view of virtue and vice, to the confraternity, the “licit” and “honest” were a perfectly reasonable expectation for the masses. However, like many reformers, the bishop of Rodrigo did not measure devotion in the quantity of attendees or quality of collective enthusiasm, but in its achievement of ritual “purity”—the absence of any “profane” pleasures and delights that detracted from total attention to the liturgical offices.

This debate over comedies and whether they were “profane” or spiritually neutral, if not beneficial, replayed in other contexts. The popular and highly conservative Capuchin preacher Diego Josef penned an especially lengthy treatment of the question, published in 1789, which sheds light on how comedies served as an indication of reformers’ push to enforce one universal code of moral behavior. A city council member had caught wind of Father Diego’s indictments of comedies, dances, and bull runs, and wrote to persuade the priest to drop his petitions to the cathedral chapter to prohibit comedies.⁵³ While the *regidor* did not go so far as to argue that comedies were absolutely beneficial to devotion like the confraternity of San Felices did, he maintained that they were “indifferent” and should be allowed the general populace. After all, he argued, people were saved by adhering to “more or less strict rules that correspond to their state” in order to achieve “sufficient virtue.” Those who were called, by their [ecclesiastical] office or by the manifestations of their will, to aspire to a “heroic” grade of virtue could not afford morally indifferent recreations. But enforcing overly strict rules on the general populace was simply not convenient or feasible; “their labors precisely require some recreation and diversion in order to conserve themselves...to discharge their respective obligations.” He feared that the priest’s authority, however, would persuade the *capitulares* to carry out the prohibitions, as “repugnant” as they may be to the “benefit, will and desire [*gusto*], and liberty of

⁵²This reasoning was echoed by a late eighteenth-century archbishop who opposed the prohibition of military costumes utilized by natives to dress as soldiers capturing Christ in reenactments of the Passion. These representations, he argued, were “no doubt a motive for the people to come, attracted only by this curiosity, but this does not keep them from attending all the offices of religion and achieving by this mode that those who live in secluded places come out to listen o sermons and exhortations....and achieve and rejoice in the spiritual.” “Costumbre de armados y masceras”, f. 146r.

⁵³ The *regidor* agreed with the prohibition against bull runs, finding them to be barbaric and sinful. Josef, “Respuesta del R. P. Fr. Diego Josef de Cadiz, misionero apostolico, a un regidor de una de las ciudades de España.”

the Common.”⁵⁴

Fray Diego was not as interested in the benefit, will, or liberty of the Common as he was in holding the populace to the law of the Gospel. The “clear, soft” precept that the regidor defended, allowing for different moral expectations based on the various stations and capacities of human beings, fell as “heresy” on Diego José’s ears. To deny that ordinary people could not comply with their obligations under such “strict rules” negated the “grace of God,” he claimed; one could not rely on “profane” principles (like willpower, perhaps), for it was only with God’s “divine assistance” that one could fulfill what he commanded. Unless, he challenged, the regidor meant to say that “those who live in the dealings of the world [*negocios del siglo*] are not obligated under the promise they made in baptism to imitate and follow Jesus Christ and live according to the laws of his Gospel, and have a life not less than observing the solemn renunciation...of the three enemies of the soul— pomp, delights, and vanities?” Of course they were, he thundered: “All are obligated without distinction to this Law.” While he conceded that “priests and monks have greater obligation to flee diversions and vanities of the World, than those who live in it,” he insisted that “the laity have the same obligation, if not as grave.”

And comedies, according to the friar, were one of the most dangerous of such diversions and vanities. Refuting the regidor’s defense that comedies were far better than the barbaric bull runs, Josef argued that they were, in fact, much worse. While comedies certainly had “less noise and were less grand...and were peaceable, with greater softness and sweetness,” he acknowledged, therein precisely lay their danger. Like “pleasurable liquors...filled with poison and venom,” comedies disguised their insidious influence on the passions and senses. Almost undoubtedly an attack on Jesuit theater practices (though Capuchines were also fond of , he condemned their “artificial machines, filled with pieces, springs, ingenious secrets, their cunning and devilish knowledge, [which] have managed to tear down, with the utmost softness, the most precious edifice of souls, and submerge them in the most pernicious delights of the world.” Fray Diego clearly found such attempts to “please” the audience not as a way to disarm them in order to teach them, but a way to corrupt them. The soft, sweet delights of the senses belonged exclusively to the domain of sin.⁵⁵

Whereas earlier inquisitors and reformers seemed to be more disturbed by the creative license, bordering on heresy or sacrilegious levity, that could creep into

⁵⁴ The regidor’s emphasis on the will and liberty of the people will be revisited in chapter five, which treats defenses of traditional confraternity activity through the lens of private spending and expressions of will.

⁵⁵ Josef, “Respuesta del R. P. Fr. Diego Josef de Cadiz, misionero apostolico, a un regidor de una de las ciudades de España,” n.p.

religious comedies,⁵⁶ by the mid-eighteenth-century, it was enough to incite or exhibit sensory pleasure to warrant censure. In 1751, one priest reprised the criticisms of the Church Fathers against comedies for their “profanity,” though he acknowledged that “there is not found in them yet the worship of idolatry” or “corrupted [*torpe*]” worship. He accredited the sinfulness to the actors, particularly the female ones; their “appearance, makeup, their beauty and abandon” were “pernicious.”⁵⁷ The priest subtly juxtaposed the old and new conceptions of the profane—instead of referring to the “worship of idolatry” as the profane, it was the sensuality of the actresses that merited the label.

Reformers drew a bright line was between the body and the spirit, the visible or social, and the private and interior. As another inquisition tribunal decreed in 1769, comics took the “sacred mysteries that we are commanded to...ingest in the most intimate depths of our soul” and instead used them for the “taste and pleasure [*gusto y complacencia*] of the senses.” Such comedies, they explained, were not merely dangerous for inventing *coloquios*, or scripts that departed from the scripture, but for exposing the audience to “profane” distractions. The audience in one comedy, they claimed, instantly “forgot the purposes” of the play—inciting admiration and joy for the saints represented—when a scene involving dancing “took their sight to the feet of the ballerinas” instead. Such dances, along with secular or “profane” songs, they decreed, served only to “excite laughter and libertinism without any attention to the most sacred mysteries.”⁵⁸

Despite the repeated prohibitions, inquisition records attest that many villages persisted in promoting *comedias de santos* in their celebrations, or even took them out of the public sphere and into private homes in the form of comedic *coloquios*. One inquisition tribunal lamented this transference in 1793, claiming that if “presenting the life of saints in the Coliseum theater” was prohibited, “how much more” should these plays “represented in particular houses or patios” be prohibited?⁵⁹ In the viceregal city of Puebla in 1794, almost thirty years after the formal prohibition by the town’s tribunal in 1765, the archbishop accused the city of continuing to present *comedias de santos* in the theaters and *coloquios* in

⁵⁶ One glimpse into such content is offered by a French Catholic’s “Travels into Spain,” where she observed that “They acted the most impertinent piece that ever I saw in my days. This is the subject of it. Jesus wants to join the knights of St James, but they refuse because he is of ignoble birth, St Joseph being a carpenter and the holy Virgin working a needle, but they compromise by making an order just for Christ like they have in Portugal.” (81-82) Le Jumel de Barneville, baronne d’Aulnoy, *Travels into Spain*.

⁵⁷ Francisco de Moya y Correa, *Triunfo sagrado de la conciencia: ciencia divina del humano regocijo ...* (Salamanca, 1751), 130.

⁵⁸ “Prohibición de comedias, expediente formado sobre la indecente y ridícula representación de comedias de santos que así en el Coliseo de Puebla, como en el de esta corte se practica,” 1769, AGN, Inquisición, vol. 1009, exp. 4, fs. 87r-v.

⁵⁹ “Expediente de coloquios y de se cuenta,” 1793, AGN, Inquisición, vol. 1312, f. 134

homes.⁶⁰ In 1799, another inquisitor charged the city for continuing “their representations of *comedias de santos* in the coliseum” despite repeated prohibitions.⁶¹ Another undated but late eighteenth-century record describes another denunciation against a man for representing a comedy about Our Lady of Guadalupe to the Indians in the presbytery of the high altar in the church of Tuspa.⁶²

While many apparently preserved the performance of comedies in spite of repeated prohibitions, the fate of the Corpus Christi comedies of the confraternity in San Felices de is unclear—the documentary trail is eclipsed by sweeping royal reforms instigated by the bishop’s complaints (though the title of the *expediente* includes mention that the “license was not granted.”) One can at least infer from their tenacious efforts and the inquisitorial record that other villages continued their religious comedies for similarly entrenched reasons. Comedies promoted jubilant passions that deepened devotion and acts of thanksgiving, especially in celebratory occasions like Corpus Christi. The entertainments were “honest” and licit, providing a wholesome, or at the very least, neutral respite from daily labor and mundane cares or more sinful diversions. They represented time-honored traditions supported by the community, and overturning their traditional devotions provoked an unrest that local confraternities and leaders deemed inimical to piety.

Conclusion

Bishop Cayetano Cuadrillero’s accusations of the “profane” nature of the *Cofradía del Santísimo*’s activities were enough to provoke the royal council to request reports on the state of confraternities across the kingdom, spawning a concerted ecclesiastical and political effort to investigate, reform, and suppress

⁶⁰ “Sobre el abuso que se ha extendido en Puebla de representar comedias de santos en los teatros. Edicto del Illmo. Sr. D. Francisco Fabian y Fuero, Obispo de la Puebla de los Angeles, prohibiendo las comedias de santos y recomendando que en las casas particulares, o en sitios publicos, aunque se tengan imagenes, altares y adornos dedicados a la Sma. Virgen de Dolores, de ningun modo los franqueen, ni tengan a puerta abierta, ni patentes para que se visiten de noche etc.,” 1794, AGN, Inquisición, vol. 1312, exp. 16, fs. 140-148.

⁶¹ “D. Francisco Zarco, notario del Sto. Oficio en Puebla, sobre que en el Coliseo de esta ciudad se han continuado las representaciones de comedias de santos, prohibidas no solamente por ese tribunal, sino por real cedula de 9 de junio de 1765; y se esta disponiendo la de S. Guillermo, y el sainete de Juanito y Juanita. No siendo de menos atencion, el abuso con que se profanan algunos templos en las misas nombradas de aguinaldo, permitiendo entre los desordenados pitos que la plebe toca, bailes disimuladamente ejecutados por ella con que acompañan las musicas y coplas indecorosas, en que se suelen cantar versos obscenos, como el son nombrado: el cuando.,” 1799, AGN, Inquisición, vol. 1281, exp. 7, fs. 26.

⁶² “El Promotor Fiscal, denuncia criminalmente al Bachiller Juan de Ribera, del pueblo de Tepequaquilco, por haber hecho representar una comedia a los indios en el presbiterio del altar mayor de la Iglesia del pueblo de Tuspa, referente a Nuestra Señora de Gu.,” s.f., AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Clero Regular y Secular, caja 2831, exp. 001, fs. 1.

confraternities in Spain, and soon after, across the ocean in viceregal territories.⁶³ The responses trickled in over the 1770s (and even later over in New Spain, with some archbishops failing to respond until the 1790s).⁶⁴ Some archbishops responded with alacrity, obviously overwhelmed by their own lack of success in curbing “profane” activities. The “mixture of the sacred and the profane” was a common accusation throughout their reports and attests to the growing polarization among ecclesiastical reformers regarding God and the world, the spirit and the senses, devotion and the passions.

In 1773, the Count of Aranda weighed in, expressing the reformers’ refrain that pure piety must be protected from the corrupting mixtures with the profane. He excoriated confraternities for preying on the needy and ignorant, for being motivated by concerns for petty honor more than genuine devotion or even subsistence, for causing competition and divisions with their “fanaticism for ostentation,” and for turning religious events into displays of entertainment, luxury, and commerce. Of the “immensity of Confraternities,” the only ones he thought should be spared being felled by the reform were those that provided “pure spiritual exercises without fiestas [and] without rejoicings [*sin fiestas ni regocijos*] such that their devout acts and repeated word of God contain vices.” (He also made an allowance for those dedicated to relief and hospitality as long as they did not “defraud [funds] in festivities.”) The political leader had joined the chorus of ecclesiastical reformers who strove to create a bright line between “pure” piety and the sensual, social “rejoicings” of the “profane” realm.⁶⁵

In 1775, the Procurador General issued a report detailing how to proceed with the suppression and reform of confraternities. As he explained, “dances, mock battles, military displays, banquets, comedies, bull runs, and other public or private diversions” were, with the proper licenses, perfectly “licit.” Thus “they should not be proscribed lightly,” but only when necessary to avoid dangerous disorders, and with “prudence and as the circumstances of the Pueblos, their *genio* [essence], and Character of the Nations demand.” But they were licit as *diversions*, for in the realm of devotion, they had no place:

⁶³ For a comparative overview of how royal reform of confraternities played out in the peninsula and New Spain, see Carbajal López, “La reforma de las cofradías en el siglo XVIII.”

⁶⁴ Gruzinski interprets this delay as a form of New World ecclesiastical resistance against royal intrusions, in contrast to peninsular reformers, who welcomed royal interventions. Serge Gruzinski, “La ‘segunda aculturación’: El estado ilustrado y la religiosidad indígena en Nueva España (1775-1800),” *Estudios de historia novohispana*, 1985, 177.

⁶⁵ “Exposición realizada por el conde de Aranda, presidente del consejo, sobre el excesivo número de Hermandades y Cofradías que hay en el reino, junto con los informes y noticias que le habían comunicado los Intendentes de Castilla y Corregidores de Aragón, en virtud de una Orden Comunicada del 28 de septiembre de 1770,” August 9, 1773, AHN, Consejos, 7090, exp. 1, n. 2, fs. 168r-v, 167v.

Under the pretext of Divine Worship, such activities should not be tolerated. God and the World do not mix well. The mixing of the profane with the sacred does not lead Souls to the good, nor does it foment true Piety among the Faithful.⁶⁶

The pronouncement crystallized the elite boundary between the sacred and the profane in its new, polarized configuration. The very language of “mixture” implied that there were discrete elements to be untangled—a bifurcation that clearly fell on many deaf ears. The realm of the body, firmly associated in Jansenist reformers’ minds with the violence of passions and the delights (or assaults) of the senses, took on an increasingly negative charge, while the formerly anti-religious connotations of the profane were diluted. The relationship was no longer one of true and false worship, God and the Devil, the religious and the anti-religious. Rather, the sacred was enclosed to the confines of interior, largely incorporeal piety, while the profane expanded to encompass “the World.”

One *cofradía* took these norms so seriously that they wrote in their constitutions that no dances or comedies were permitted at their fiesta— “not even those with the title of *Autos Sacramentales*, nor any other thing of noise or uproar, *which even appear to be profane even if they are not*” (emphasis mine).⁶⁷ The configurations of the sacred and profane were increasingly defined by socially visible norms, a profile of quietude and discipline, regardless of whether the act was in essence “profane” or not. But can one sense a note of resistance in the *cofradía*’s concession; did they maintain that “noise and uproar” were not essentially antithetical to the sacred, even if they complied by outwardly proscribing activities with such features? In insisting that something could appear to be profane, but not actually be, perhaps the confraternity was rejecting the ongoing redefinition of the profane as a matter of form rather than content.

Indeed, a mid-century dispute over music in religious settings sparked resistance from several theologians over what they perceived as the dilution of the profane into a mere matter of form, rather than content. In 1756, Don Pedro Antonio de Barroeta y Angel, the archbishop of Lima, issued an edict against the use of profane music in church services. The common practice of putting religious texts to popular music had been targeted by Benedict XIV several years prior, resulting

⁶⁶ “Informe del Procurador General interino sobre la manera de proceder en la supresión y reforma de las Cofradías inclinándose por la creación en cada una de las capitales de las diócesis de unas Juntas compuestas por el ordinario eclesiástico, el corregidor, algunos regidores del ayuntamiento y diputados del común para que examinen la agregación o supresión de las hermandades, formen ordenanzas nuevas, y las remitan al Consejo para su aprobación, aboliendo y recogiendo las antiguas,” November 20, 1775, AHN, Consejos, 7090, exp. 1, n. 2, fs. 226r-v.

⁶⁷ “Huizuco, iglesia del Santísimo Sacramento, noticia de la erección, de la necesidad de personas para atender enfermos, la administración del culto, colecta de limosna, entre otros,” 1759, AGN, Indiferente Virreinal, Cofradías y Archicofradías, caja 3439, exp. 001, f. 2r.

in an encyclical mandating that “all music in the temples be grave, and entirely stripped of the pleasing attractions of the theater.” Barroeta’s edict echoed Pope Benedict’s prohibition, but went even further, forbidding various instruments, musical forms, dances, and chants. As part of his polemical strategy, the archbishop invoked a comparison with pagan Gentiles and Romans of old. He claimed God favored the Romans and granted them success for so long because they worshiped, if not the right object, at least in the right mode: with reverence and gravity. While the pagans knew “divinity only in the shadows,” they knew enough to erect sumptuous temples and render solemn worship. Christians knew divinity in the light, but turned the temples into “profane theaters.” The traditionally “profane” worship of the pagans was subsumed within the eighteenth-century criteria of the “sacred” because of their form—decorum and solemnity. In Barroeta’s interpretation, the pagans had earned God’s blessing in contrast to the “true” worship of contemporary Christians contaminated by “profane” (or worldly and sensual) attractions.⁶⁸

Barroeta’s edict came under inquisitorial censure from representatives of diverse religious orders and implicitly exposed the multiple registers in which “profane” was used and understood in this period. The Mercedarian inquisitor disagreed with the archbishop’s total prohibition against musical instruments and Gregorian chant. It is right to “prohibit toccatas, minuets, and arias in profane meters,” the Mercedarian concurred, “because the imagination is distracted with the sweetness of these instruments, and thus the proper and devoted attention will be lacking, which should attend to the required [divine] praises.” Yet the instruments should not be entirely prohibited, the inquisitor argued, for even King David played the harp and had his musicians sing psalms in the holy tabernacle. The form was not adequate criteria for distinguishing the sacred and profane, for the Romans used instruments and music in their unclean human sacrifices, while the Hebrews themselves used music to adore their idolatrous golden calf. “These sacrifices being so unclean, the music of their celebration must be profane and obscene,” he concluded. And far from favoring them, God had punished them for their idolatry. The Archbishop had committed a heretical blasphemy in attributing their success to some sort of divine favor, which violated divine justice. God couldn’t reward evil, and their worship was evil.⁶⁹

The other two inquisitors on the case— a Jesuit and an Augustinian— were even more adamant in reinforcing the traditional notion of “profane” as false, evil, demonic worship against the archbishop’s revisionist account of the profane as merely sensual and distracting forms. As the Jesuit inquisitor explained, the content

⁶⁸ “Sobre q.e no se use Musica profana en las Iglesias: Papeles sobre las Censuras del Edicto del S.or Arzobispo de Lima,” 1756, AHN, Consejos, Censuras, Seccion de Inquisicion, leg. 4459, no. 23, fs. 1r-3r, 4r-v .

⁶⁹ “Sobre q.e no se use Musica profana en las Iglesias”, fs. 5r-v.

is what mattered: the Romans worshipped the wrong things, and thus their grave and decorous religious observations still constituted superstitious and false worship. They didn't receive any divine favor for merely inhabiting the correct affective register and comportment.⁷⁰ The inquisitors insisted on preserving the distinctions of "true" and "false" worship, the divine and diabolical that had long demarcated the sacred and the profane. When the archbishop and other reformers reconfigured the profane as a sin of sensory indulgence and distracted attention at the cost of a more robust definition of the profane as the idolatrous and demonic, they were sacrificing truth and error's clear dichotomy. The new notion of the "profane," for all its rhetorical appeal in reformers' efforts, was not only largely dismissed by the laity, but attacked by other Catholic theologians for such unintended consequences.

Thus, while many scholars have noted the eighteenth-century reform efforts to separate (and reconfigure, as I argue here) the sacred and profane, this article tempers such conclusions by showing how many lay Catholics and ecclesiastical elites perceived and resisted the costs. The confraternities examined here resisted the enclosure of the sacred, while the inquisitors resisted the dilution of the profane. Confraternal members contested the bifurcation of the sacred from social and economic life and opposed the narrowing of its affective and bodily profile to the monotone register of self-disciplined solemnity. Ecclesiastical elites perceived a dangerous blurring of the demonic and divine when the profane was reduced to a matter of mere form. The campaign of philo-Jansenist religious reformers and state allies cannot, then, be taken as merely "purifying" religious devotions of their "profane" accretions. Under the influences of socioeconomic anxieties about increased access to consumer pleasures, Jansenist-inspired polarization of the body and spirit, and expanding state jurisdiction into social and religious reform, ecclesiastic and royal reformers employed a discursive strategy that ultimately facilitated what Andreas Mahler terms a "desubstantialization of religious discourse." By substituting form for substance, Spanish reformers relativized the sacred and the profane and enabled, ironically, the very dilution and category-mixture they claimed to prevent. As Mahler describes the ending of *Bartholomew Fair*, in which a protagonist debates inanely with a puppet over the profanity of the puppet-show, there is ultimately no argument left at their disposal other than: "'It is profane. / It is not profane. / It is profane. / It is not profane.'"⁷¹

The devotional conflicts and state reforms of the Spanish Atlantic Enlightenment as examined in these case studies affirm that the "sacred" and

⁷⁰ "Sobre q.e no se use Musica profana en las Iglesias", fs. 55r-58v.

⁷¹ Andreas Mahler, "The Sacred Becomes Profane- The Profane Becomes Sacred: Observations on the Desubstantialisation of Religious Discourse in the Early Modern Age," in *Knowledge and Profanation: Transgressing the Boundaries of Religion in Premodern Scholarship*, ed. Martin Mulsow and Asaph Ben-Tov (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 138, 149.

“profane,” as Asad has argued, are concomitant, co-created discursive categories. Many eighteenth-century Spanish Catholics rejected the categories produced by an Enlightenment and Jansenist-infused worldview (and still embedded in much of contemporary historiography) that sought to excarnate and enclose the practice of piety against the forces of the sensual and social body. I would argue that this was one reason that Spain and its territories did not follow the same path of secularization trod by many of its European counterparts. These eighteenth-century reforms entailed a greater spiritual loss than many were willing to pay in the pursuit of a purportedly “pure” piety.