

# For want of Women's Lib: Sex, Religion and Politics under the Catholic Monarchy

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Melveena McKendrick, in a work recently published on *Woman and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age*, makes the point that there was during this period of the 16th and 17th centuries no change in the social position of the vast majority of women, that is, those of the rural peasantry, and she then adds:

'To the remainder of Spanish women, four main courses were open. They could join the ranks of the *mujeres de mala vida* somewhere in the hierarchy from courtesan to common prostitute. They could enter a convent. They could enter into service as a *dueña* or a lady-in-waiting. Or they could remain with their families, marrying or not as inclination or opportunity decided. Those who embarked on this last course concern us most, for the life of the prostitute and the nun, by the nature of their calling, ran along fixed and predictable lines . . .'<sup>1</sup>

Initially, I found the throw-away line about the prostitute and the nun quietly amusing, or rather, amusingly sardonic in a low pitch way. The juxtaposition seemed to be sufficiently slightly outrageous to underscore the delicate irony of the order of presentation—prostitute first, nun second, capping it all with the application of the term *calling* to both. Donnish humour at its best? But, on second thoughts, its clever, quiet and telling effectiveness seemed to me to betray a very bourgeois understanding or misunderstanding of the nature of professional sex, politics and religion. I don't think Buñuel, Genet or Pasolini would have tried to be so neatly clever about such vital things as prostitution and the religious life. You see, deep down, what is wrong is not the question of coupling the two and regarding them both as vocations, the real trouble is to think for one moment that the lives of these practitioners of the most ancient of female professions run along fixed and prescribed lines. But let's try and put the question into some sort of perspective.

Most historians are agreed that something rather peculiar was happening in the Iberian Peninsula at the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th centuries.<sup>2</sup> This had not necessarily anything to do

<sup>1</sup>Melveena McKendrick, *Woman and Society in the Spanish Drama of the Golden Age* (Cambridge, 1974), 24.

<sup>2</sup>It is interesting to note that around 1509 the German humanist, Agrippa von Nettesheim, penned the treatise, *De nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus*, which argues in favour of female superiority, in an apparently vain attempt to gain the patronage of one of these ladies, Margaret of Austria. See Charles G. Nauert, Jr., *Agrippa and the Crisis of Renaissance Thought* (Urbana, 1965), 27.

with the number of exceptional royal ladies, who were to play a big part in Iberian and European politics. But it did have something to do with religion.

When we deal with organised religion in the *Siglo de Oro* we've got to tread rather cautiously. First of all, we must realise that our contemporary assumptions are not necessarily valid, even if the terminology we use does not appear to have changed. We must remember, contrary to what most pious Catholics would care to admit, that the Religious Orders reflected and still do reflect the priorities, preoccupations and prejudices of the age. For instance, even Giles of Viterbo, the great reforming Prior General of the Augustinians, saw nothing amiss in the fact that Masters of Theology within this technically eremitical, mendicant order should have the right to enjoy the services of a personal servant.<sup>3</sup> This in itself is a detail, of course, but a significant one. Even more significant, in a different way, was the numerical strength and composition of the religious orders. Today, it is a statistical and sociological commonplace to point out that nuns far outnumber monks and friars. This was not the case under the Catholic Monarchy of the *Siglo de Oro*. Then, male religious were far more numerous, and the great Orders, both old and new, did their best to attract young men of merit. Indeed, recruiting policy was deliberately allowed to influence the foundation policy of the Orders. Fray Jerónimo Gracián, one of the leading lights of the newly established Discalced branch of the Carmelites, showed in his *Peregrinación de Anastasio* how well the lesson taught by Ignatius of Loyola had been learned:

'For an Order to grow there is no better way than establishing seminaries at universities, because there good people take the habit, as I found out in Alcalá, Baeza, Seville and Granada, where there are also universities. I failed to found in Salamanca, Toledo and Valladolid, which have universities, and although I was invited to make divers foundations in several towns I was always of the opinion that there should be only a few convents of well chosen people, in major cities, particularly universities, for this Order of the Holy Virgin Mary to spread throughout the world as the Society of Jesus has done'.<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, if we disregard the *limpieza de sangre* controversies,<sup>5</sup> the Spanish religious orders provided boys and young men of the lower classes not only with the opportunity to get a first-rate higher education, but also of reaching the very highest posts in the Catholic Monarchy. Martínez Guijarro, significantly latinised to Silíceo, Philip II's tutor, and later Cardinal Archbishop of Toledo, was, as we shall see later, not singular or especially remarkable in this respect.

But with nuns the case was different. Professed religious came from

<sup>3</sup>John W. O'Malley SJ, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform. A Study in Renaissance Thought* (Leiden, 1968), 164.

<sup>4</sup>*Diálogo XIII*, quoted by Melquiades Andrés Martín, *Historia de la Teología en Espana* (Rome, 1962), 188.

<sup>5</sup>For the authoritative history of this topic see Albert A. Sircroff, *Les controverses des statuts de 'Pureté de sang' en Espagne du XVe au XVIIe siècle* (Paris, 1960).

the upper classes. It was essential to have money to take the habit. It was necessary to have a dowry to become a bride; to become a bride of Christ needed a comparatively large one.<sup>6</sup> Needless to say, this being the case, the truly great nunneries of Castile and Aragon fully deserved their title of *Royal*, for they were the preserve not only of the highest aristocracy but of royalty itself. For instance, the Poor Clares of Segovia, as well as those of Tordesillas, occupied royal palaces. The art treasures of the Descalzas Reales of Madrid to this day reflect that it was founded by the Infanta Juana,<sup>7</sup> Dowager Princess of Portugal and mother of the ill-fated Don Sebastian, for, and patronised by widowed queens, unmarried infantas and illegitimate daughters of the House of Habsburg.<sup>8</sup> Sacheverell Sitwell has written charmingly of the noblest nunnery of the Kingdom of Aragon, the royal convent of Sigena, where right up to the Civil War, on high feasts and holidays, the noble dames in their magnificent, elaborate habits of the Order of Calatrava, all held a silver sceptre in their hand, as they sang their office in choir. The Plantagenet coats-of-arms still mark the tombs of English Queens and their offspring, in the royal Cistercian house of Las Huelgas on the outskirts of Burgos, but it's only when we go back to the old documents and history books that we can begin to get a glimmering of the richness of the pickings, or the extent of the power, enjoyed by the Lady Abbesses. The Cistercian historian, Fr Roberto Muñiz writes in volume 5 of his *Medula historica cisterciense*, published in Valladolid in 1786, only three years before the outbreak of the French Revolution, that the most illustrious Abbess of the Royal Monastery 'recognises no bishop as her immediate superior, nor is it possible to appeal against her sentences to other judges, other than the Supreme Pontiff' (p. 126), and he goes on:

'The jurisdiction both temporal and ecclesiastical of the most illustrious Abbess includes not only the royal convent, but also the affiliated ones, the great King's Hospital, and all the ecclesiastics, inhabitants and people, who live within the walls of the royal monastery and of the hospital and its confines. In all these places and taking in all the people, who make and constitute this territory and separate diocese, the most illustrious Abbess is considered to be, and is judge ordinary, and, as such, it pertains to her to confer the livings and curacies of the diocese and district; she herself can impart the full faculty of authorisation, similar to that received by other parish priests instituted by bishops' (p. 127).

<sup>6</sup>For instance, the wronged Leonor in Calderón's play *El médico de su honra* (Jornada primera, Escena XIV), asks the King to get her into a convent, which she cannot do herself because she is poor.

<sup>7</sup>See *Juana de Austria (1535-1573)* in *Diccionario de Historia de España*, 2 (Madrid, 1952), 136.

<sup>8</sup>The Spanish theatre of the day exploited the connection, as may be seen in the entry: '7. März, Seite 72. Nachmittag habe ich die *Suor Dorotea à las descalzas Reales* besucht. Sie ist des Kaisers Rudolf *hija natural* und mit 12 Jahren aus Teutschland hereinkommen', in Ferdinand Bonaventure Graf Harrach, *Tagebuch über den Aufenthalt in Spanien in den Jahren 1673-1674* (Wien, 1913), as quoted by Arnold G. Reichenberger, 'The Counts Harrach and the Spanish Theater' in *Homenaje a Rodríguez-Monino*, II (Madrid, 1966), 101.

By the same token :

'It is also within the power of this lady to convoke synods within her diocese, and to make constitutions and laws not only for her subjects who are regulars, but also for the seculars . . .' (p. 147).

And he ends by listing the 17 *villas* and 17 *lugares* that formed part of this *diócesis separada*, together with 16 *lugares* pertaining to the Hospital, plus the 12 affiliated houses. Altogether the Abbess had in her gift 66 churches (pp. 159-160).

Clearly, in this sort of world the humble classes had no status whatsoever. So for girls of the labouring classes with a religious vocation their only way out was to become a *beata*, that is, they could live lives of Christian prayer, humility, modesty and charity, alone or in small lay communities. The most they could aspire to were the third orders of Saint Dominic or Saint Francis, or membership of some sodality or confraternity. For those of a more ascetic or eremitical inclination there was the possibility of becoming an *emparedada* or anchorite. . . . Yet, by the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th centuries, such was the number and activity of the *beatas* that they attracted the attention of visitors to the Peninsula, as has been noted by Bataillon :

'It is "a new sort of cult that's spreading now", as the chronicler Peter Martyr of Anghiera writes in 1509 à propos of the most famous of them, Sr María de Santo Domingo. This sister of the Third Order of St Dominic, known in her time by the sobriquet, "Beata of Piedrahita", was becoming famous at the time for her ecstasies, during which she would remain stock still with her arms outstretched in the form of a cross. Although she was an unlettered woman, she had the reputation of being the equal of the wisest of theologians, thanks to her supernatural lights'.<sup>9</sup>

And this is where, it seems to me, that Iberian religious, male and female, throughout the *Siglo de Oro* have much in common, in spite of the difference in life-style. Through sanctity or apparent personal holiness they could reach the very centre of political power in the Catholic Monarchy.

From the 15th century right through to the 19th and 20th centuries the importance of religious has been one of the distinctive features of Iberian politics and society. At the beginning of the period under consideration, there was the spectacular rise of Cisneros himself. Furthermore, in the case of

'Mother Marta, a benedictine of the convent of Santo Domingo el Antiguo of Toledo, Cisneros believed that she enjoyed miraculous favours; her reputation was so great that she received visits from the king and all the prelates'.<sup>10</sup>

Also under the Franciscan Cardinal Archbishop's protection were Mother Juana de la Cruz and Sr María de Toledo, 'La Pobre'.<sup>10</sup> In the reign of Charles V the Dominican Las Casas, supported by the principal theologians of San Esteban in Salamanca, was a juridical

<sup>9</sup>M. Bataillon, *Erasmus y España*, 2nd ed. (Mexico, 1966), 69-70.

<sup>10</sup>M. Menéndez y Pelayo. *Historia de los heterodoxos españoles*, National ed., 2nd ed., IV (Madrid, 1963), 70.

force to be reckoned with at the Court.<sup>11</sup> Philip II, surrounded by his Hieronymites at the Escorial, as we all know, was to become the archetypal figure of the priest-ridden Catholic Monarchy, with Saint Ignatius of Loyola and Saint Teresa of Avila skilfully exploiting their influence at Court as major minor figures, if you know what I mean. In the reign of Philip III it is no surprise that the anti-Lerma faction should be led by two religious, Fray Juan de Santa María and Sor Mariana de San José; and how typical that this favourite should protect himself towards the end of his aegis by securing for himself a cardinal's hat! When we come to the reign of Philip IV we have to change location. On the outskirts of the Sorian town of Agreda, on the N 110, in the local convent, to this very day there lies in a glass-topped coffin, fully dressed in her Conceptionist habit, the smiling skeleton of the Venerable María de Jesús, surrounded by a proud display of portraits and *objets d'art* donated by her royal suppliant and penitent. And in the following reign we have the Queen Mother, the Regent Mariana of Austria, guided, not to say dominated, by her Jesuit confessor, the future Cardinal Nidhard, whilst her son, the King, Carlos II, entertained a long succession of Dominican confessors who were really favourites. And so it went on. Isabel II with Sor Patrocinio and St Antonio María Claret in attendance, was indeed truly *castiza* in a profoundly Castilian sense in more ways than one. But these cases are much too well known to dwell on here. I think it is much more revealing to take a look at those who, unlike Teresa of Avila and María of Agreda and Sor Patrocinio, did not quite make the big time.

It should not be too difficult for us to grasp the incredible social success that these holy persons and *beatas* enjoyed during this period, if we remind ourselves how the British establishment jumped on the Beatles' handwagon. Fr Luis de Granada, writing to St Juan de Ribera, at that time in 1588 Patriarch of Antioch and Archbishop of Valencia, recounts what was happening in Lisbon to the stigmatic Dominican Sor María de la Visitación :

‘ . . . what's happening is that all the noble ladies of this land are dying to visit her, and they look for the means they can to achieve their end. And since the nobility of this city is so numerous and the noble matrons are so ticklish on points of honour, so that on no account will they take no for an answer; and since this Mother has a very soft disposition, she can't bear to upset anyone, or deny anybody anything, so she is forced to go there [to the nun's parlour] many times. . . . And very important ladies try to use me as intermediary to ask for an appointment. And all the gentlemen who come from Castile insist on seeing her and talking to her. Not even the prelates are powerful enough to prevent people of such quality. Moreover, I can tell your lordship that there is no man coming

<sup>11</sup>This well-known link referred to, for instance, in Bernice Hamilton, *Political Thought in Sixteenth Century Spain* (Oxford, 1963), 175.

here, either soldier or foreigner, who doesn't say he has come to see the holy nun and does all he can to see her'.<sup>12</sup>

Possibly it's rather more difficult for us to appreciate the power of the spoken word of the man of God. Robres Lluich comments:

'When the preacher was famous for his virtue he could achieve surprising effects. A religious was preaching during Lent in the parish of St Andrews [in Valencia]. One Friday, during a fit of fervour, he took off his tunic and beat himself with iron chains; seven women of easy virtue were converted and a clergyman became a friar'.<sup>13</sup>

But it was not only the professed religious who enjoyed these experiences. The *beatas* also achieved liberation through their vocation. For example, there is the case I've already mentioned of the Beata de Piedrahita:

'The daughter of a peasant of the mountains of Avila and brought up in Salamanca, she gave herself with such fervour to prayer and the contemplative life, that she got to believing that she was talking with Our Lord Jesus Christ, and that she was always accompanied by the Virgin Mary'.<sup>14</sup>

Antonio Márquez in his study of the *alumbrados* of Guadalajara has shown how within this select sect there was 'one sole magisterium that of Isabel de la Cruz',<sup>15</sup> a woman. And it was truly a case of liberation, as I think can be seen in 'An account of a rapture experienced by Mother [María de la Visitación] on the feast of St John of the Latin Gate', preserved in the archives of the Colegio de Corpus Christi in Valencia:

'I saw a clear light which came from heaven that enraptured and lifted me up; and so, losing all corporal senses, and through the eyes of the soul alone, I saw things that I dare not mention. . . . And I said "Oh my sweet Lord, don't let me depart from here". And He told me to wait patiently until the time appointed by him. Those who were the most desirous of this were the virgins, who were there with palms in their hands and crowns of great brightness on their heads, and the signs of their martyrdom shining like the Sun. . . . That day, after communion, I saw with the eyes of my soul such great beauty and I felt such smoothness and sweetness, that I can't explain it in words. And what I saw in such a way so captivates me that now everything is tedious (*pesadas*). The Spouse showed me his heart and put my mouth in his most holy wound and my heart, with great desire, entered into him, and there found such great knowledge of his divinity, which cannot be described in words and which would be terrible if it were understood, and which would come to enrapture the heart with the greatness of love. I would be very afraid to tell of the great secrets I saw in the sweetness and smoothness of words that the Spouse spoke to my soul, and he was so

<sup>12</sup>Ramón Robres y José Ramón Ortolá, *La monja de Lisboa* (Castellón de la Plana, 1947), 66.

<sup>13</sup>Ramón Robres Lluich, *San Juan de Ribera* (Barcelona, 1960), 112.

<sup>14</sup>M. Menéndez y Pelayo, *op. cit.*, 2nd ed., IV (Madrid, 1963), 215.

<sup>15</sup>Antonio Márquez, *Los alumbrados. Orígenes y filosofía 1525-1559* (Madrid, 1972), 110.



merciful with it, like a mother with a very small child she loves very much; now giving him her breast, now hiding it, then taking him in her arms to feed it again most copiously. Thus he, most desirous of giving me his breast to taste, made me suffer great thirst, and he showed me it from afar, and weeping greatly, he could not contain himself and he gave it to me more abundantly. Let nobody be shocked because nothing is impossible for him. He regarded me with great pity and mercy. And he is all my love, my riches and my goodness. And I am most certain of this and his love is my impregnable bulwark. I am ready to die to everything to find his love. My life is hidden in his, "quia vivo ego jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus"'.<sup>16</sup>

Quite clearly, on hearing language like this, it doesn't need a degree in psychology to realise the dangers of this type of experience. But at the same time one must beware of cheap 'psychologistic' explanations. Hatzfeld has shown that 'the lover being a child at the beloved's breast' is a 'Lullian' motif.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, the inquisitors were men of sound common sense and were fully aware that this sort of activity could prove to be a very dangerous therapy indeed. For instance, the so-called *alumbrados* of Llerena, led by eight secular clerics, had been operating between 1574 and 1578, and they found that after prayer and meditation there followed 'strong and feeling movements of the senses' that resulted in 'libidinous movements which those wretches called 'melting in the love of God'.<sup>18</sup> And again all the danger signals start flashing for us when we learn of the participation of the *beatas*:

'The women affiliated to the sect dressed like *beatas*, with brown head-dress and tunic. They always went about absorbed in their so-called contemplation, death-like and wan, and they felt a terrible ardour that burned them, and palpitations (*unos saltos y ahincos en el corazón*) that afflicted them, and a rage and pounding and fracturing (*molimiento y quebramientos*) in their bones and limbs that made them reckless and disjoined, and they saw and heard strange noises and voices'.<sup>19</sup>

The case of Magdalena de la Cruz, a Poor Clare of Santa Isabel de los Angeles in Cordova, reveals the terrible plight of females who followed this course misguidedly. On May 3, 1546, she declared to the Inquisition that from the age of seven the devil had persuaded her to pretend to be a saint:

'One day, Satan himself appeared to her in the shape of Jesus crucified and he stigmatised her on the fingers of her hand. At the age of twelve she made a pact with two incubi devils, called *Balbán* and *Pithonius*, who appeared to her in divers forms: as a negro, a camel, a Hieronymite, a Franciscan, and revealed to her absent and far-off things, so that she could pass herself off as a prophetess. . . . For ten or twelve years she pretended to live off nothing more than the

<sup>16</sup>Ramón Robres y José Ramón Ortolá, *op. cit.*, 89-91.

<sup>17</sup>Helmut A. Hatzfeld, *Santa Teresa de Avila* (New York, 1969), 139.

<sup>18</sup>M. Menéndez y Pelayo, *op. cit.*, 2nd ed., IV (Madrid, 1963), 232.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 233.

consecrated Host, although she ate and regaled herself in secret. She took her sacriligious pretence to the absurd extreme of insisting that she had given birth to the Baby Jesus, and that through her intercession sixty souls had obtained release from purgatory'.<sup>20</sup>

Of course, it's all very well for Menéndez y Pelayo to sneer about 'el absurdo extremo' *a posteriori*, but it can't have been as simple as that at the time, for as he himself goes on to say, Mother Magdalena :

'achieved a great reputation within her order; she was elected Abbess three times, in 1533, 1536 and 1539, and for thirty-eight years almost everybody thought she was a saint. . . . [He adds that even] The empress sent her her portrait . . .'.<sup>21</sup>

Not even the typically early Carmelite, no-nonsense approach of the Prioress Ana de Jesús, nor the usually exquisite discernment of spirits of the future saint John of the Cross was foolproof against this type of fraud, as is shown by the rather arch and coy account of Fr Crisógono de la Cruz of the case of Juana Calancha, who was admitted into the convent of Beas on the advice of John of the Cross himself :

'Scarcely within the convent, Juana Calancha began to have raptures, sometimes adversely affecting the work she had to do. Mother Ana de Jesús was prioress, and one day she said to Calancha, "Sister, we don't need your raptures here, but we do need you to scrub the plates well". A short time afterwards, one night, about eleven o'clock, Sr Catalina de Jesús, the cook, . . . heard a voice saying to her, "Watch out and there's good reason to watch out". And paying attention she heard confused and unintelligible voices coming from the window of Juana Calancha; she took her lighted lamp and went to the cell of the nun of the ecstasies. An intolerable stench knocked her back. On the bunk, Juana naked, in an indecorous posture, says that she is with Jesus Christ. Sr Catalina cries out, "Oh sister, it's the devil that has deceived you and won't let you confess the truth to the confessors". The visionary resists. She insists that from the age of seven she had been accompanied by a beautiful boy, who had grown up with her. At the age of thirteen the lad had said he wanted to marry and live with her, but that she had not to tell anybody, not even the confessors, because he was Jesus Christ. As proof of this he favoured her with visions, revelations and miracles. It was not easy to dissuade the poor dreamer from her abominable dealings with the devil. After leaving the convent, she persisted in her attitude for many years. It was necessary for the Inquisition of Murcia to intervene. Brought up before it, she appeared in a public *auto* with a black candle in her hand, was given a hundred lashes through the streets, and threatened with burning alive if she relapsed'.<sup>22</sup>

The intervention of the Inquisition in these cases of religious fraud was quite relentless; naturally and inevitably, sooner or later, politics

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 218-219.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>22</sup>Ramón Robres y José Ramón Ortola, *op. cit.*, 35-36, quoting Crisógono de la Cruz, *Vida y obras de San Juan de la Cruz* (BAC, Madrid, 1946), 260-261.



in the crudest sense reared its ugly head. There is the case of the Lisbonian stigmatic Sor María de la Visitación, in which it is not the inevitability of the outcome that is significant, but rather that these poor creatures should have been willing to use these means to achieve a purely political end. We can see that as regards Sor María de la Visitación:

'She became the inspired prophetess of the oppressed fatherland. She said: "The kingdom of Portugal does not belong to Philip II, King of Spain, but to the Braganza family. If the King of Spain does not restore the throne he has usurped unjustly, God will punish him severely!" Sr María de la Visitación was presented to the people as a living image of the fatherland, for the five wounds she exhibited represented the five wounds of the Saviour borne by the arms of Portugal'.<sup>23</sup>

It is hardly surprising that inquisitorial officials should turn up at the convent of the Annunciation quite unexpectedly on Friday, October 14, 1588. They brought with them some very good soap and, ignoring the holy nun's signs of pain, discomfort and distress, they vigorously scrubbed her hands until the signs of the stigmata disappeared. The biographer of her, till then, principal supporter Fr Luis de Granada, continues:

'Confronted with this fact [the Mother] became greatly disturbed and confused, not knowing what to say. On the following day prostrate before the judges, with many tears of repentance, she declared that the wounds were faked; the raptures, ecstasies and revelations, pretended; the clarity, bogus; that Christ had never appeared to her; that she had made the marks on her head fourteen years ago with the sharp end of a knife, and that she had renewed them five or six times, when expecting to be examined. That the wound in her side she made by using red paint nine years ago, afterwards opening it with a knife . . .'.<sup>24</sup>

In the England of Elizabeth I, given the implications of the crime, this religious would have been liquidated. Not so in the Catholic Monarchy, because there the case came within the competence of the Inquisition. This factor should be borne in mind when we take note of the sentence, as retailed by the Dominican historian Mortier:

'Here is the penance imposed on Sr María de la Visitación, which was mitigated since there had been no pact with the devil; perpetual deprivation from any active or passive share in office; loss of the black veil, and loss of all rank of seniority; life imprisonment from which no release, other than to hear Holy Mass; fasting on bread and water every Wednesday and Friday, sitting on the floor of the refectory; on the same days, discipline for the duration of the Miserere in the Chapter; solitary confinement for the first five years, other than on the feasts of Easter, Pentecost and Christmas'.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup>Ramón Robres y José Ramón Ortolá, *op. cit.*, 23.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 25, quoting Licenciado Munoz, *Vida de Fray Luis de Granada* (Valverde, 1730), Lib. II, cap. IX.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 26, quoting A. Mortier OP, *Histoire des Maîtres Généraux de l'Ordre des Prêcheurs*, V (Paris, 1911), 650.

The mercy of the tribunal was justified, or, according to one's point of view, the justice of the Portuguese nun's cause was vindicated *sub specie aeternitatis*, at the end of her life, for:

'With a humility worthy of her early years [in the Order] Sr María de la Visitación returned to the good path, carrying out with fervour the harsh penances. Kept in the monastery of Abrantes, not only did she improve her conduct, but she also managed to die with the reputation of a true saint'.<sup>26</sup>

And the tribunal was equally merciful with those of lesser rank, as can be seen:

'In the Madrid *auto-da-fe* of June 21, 1621, there appeared, wearing the *sambenito*, *coroza* and gagged, the famous trickstress, María de la Concepción, a *beata* who claimed to be a saint and pretended to have visions and ecstasies, although she was lustful and licentious. She was condemned to two hundred lashes and life imprisonment'.<sup>27</sup>

Clearly, in rigidly male-dominated, hierarchical societies, women and the lower orders are bound to find themselves classed together; the 'women and idiots' phase,<sup>28</sup> current during this period of the Catholic Monarchy, bears this out. Even a cursory glance at Iberian history of the time shows that physical beauty or superior intelligence were the usual ways of overcoming what would normally be regarded as insuperable obstacles. Indeed, it was possible to reach the very highest social circles. Philip II promoted men of humble origin to high office in Church and State, as we have seen. La Calderona became the mistress of Philip IV and the mother of his bastards. Then there is the career of Valenzuela, the pretty, young favourite of the Regent Mariana of Austria. Against this sort of background, we can appreciate the importance of religion, institutional religion, as a means of providing at least the possibility of liberation for women and the lower orders in general, and we see that the same criteria apply; sanctity, i.e. spiritual beauty, and learning or wisdom, i.e. intellectual talent. Above all, religion provided the opportunity for 'different' women to seek some sort of outlet for their abilities; distinctive, strange women, like the Mexican Hieronymite poetess, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, who astounded the mid-17th century viceregal court of Mexico with her learning. Or the mother of María of Agreda, who literally managed to put all her family into religion, including her poor husband, and converted the home into a convent with herself as Abbess. Something similar was done by Doña Teresa de Silva in Madrid. She was obviously left a reasonable inheritance when she became a widow at the age of 28; instead of becoming subject to a second husband, she

<sup>26</sup>Ramón Robres y José Ramón Ortolá, *op. cit.*, 26.

<sup>27</sup>M. Menéndez y Pelayo, *op. cit.*, IV (Madrid, 1963), 249. Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of Spain*, IV (New York, 1907), gives a full account of female impostors and makes the general point: 'The Inquisition did good work in its ceaseless efforts to repress the prostitution of Mysticism—a work which no other tribunal could venture to attempt' (p. 81). On the much wider point of women and heresy, R. A. Knox, *Enthusiasm* (Oxford, 1962 pr.), 319, quotes with apparent approval Père D'Avrigny's opinion: 'Les hommes font les hérésies, les femmes leur donnent cours et les rendent immortelles'.

<sup>28</sup>Antonio Márquez, *op. cit.*, 157.

founded the Benedictine convent of San Plácido with herself as prioress. Clearly, Castilian, or may we say Spanish piety, in spite of its excesses had a very level-headed side, and there are the records of Ignatius of Loyola's and Teresa of Avila's prodigious discernment of spirits to prove it.

Professor Lázaro Carreter, in a different context, talking about Quevedo, makes a very good point about this period in general:

'The sacred was, moreover, too familiar in his time; the demarcation lines between grace and nature were much too blurred, and it was not necessary to make an effort to come across heavenly matters'.<sup>29</sup>

That religion and politics should be inextricably connected is only to be expected if we take seriously, just for one moment, the official name of this Habsburg dynastic confederation *La Monarquía Católica*. For it might not be too strong to insist that the Catholicism of this Monarchy was a political reality, in a way that the Christianity of the Kingdom of France, or the Apostolicity of the Kingdom of Hungary, or the later Fidelity of the Kingdom of Portugal, was not. But perhaps it is only right and proper that the contemporary Quevedo should have the last word, for he is so aptly quoted for our purpose by Dr McKendrick. Writing to the Countess of Olivares, who wanted to marry him off, Don Francisco insisted, possibly wisely in view of the content of this paper:

'Her virtue should be that of a married woman, and not that of a hermit, *beata* or religious; her choir and her oratory have to be her duty and her husband. And if she were to be knowledgeable with the trickiness (*resabios*) of a professor, I would rather have her foolish'.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>F. Lázaro Carreter, 'Originalidad del *Buscón*' in *Studia Philologica. Homenaje ofrecido a Dámaso Alonso*, II (Madrid, 1961), 333.

<sup>30</sup>M. McKendrick, *op. cit.*, 14, quoting *Epistolario completo de D. Francisco de Quevedo Villegas*, ed. L. Astrana Marín, Carta CXXXVI (Madrid, 1946), 264.