

The Community of Santo Domingo: A Church for Spanish Immigrants in Puebla, Mexico (1904–1993)

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Abstract: *Spaniards from Asturias, with lesser contingents of immigrants from Cantabria, Galicia, and the Basque Country arrived in the city of Puebla, Mexico, from 1880 to the 1930s. The Puebla Archdiocese promoted that the Order of Preacher's from Andalucía tend to the spiritual needs of the Iberian immigrants and Mexicans throughout the twentieth century (1904–1993). The Church of Santo Domingo helped the Spanish community transition to the realities of Puebla through the administration of the Catholic sacraments, the participation of feasts and devotion to the Saints that reaffirmed an Iberian Catholicism. The Dominicans offered the laity a possibility to join their ranks through the tertiaries (later known as Lay Dominicans) and the Confraternity of the Rosary who participated with the Order in the celebration of the mass reinforcing, at the same time, a Spanish identity and spirituality.*

Keywords: Catholic, Dominican Order, Spain, Mexico immigrants

1. Introduction

Reporter Oriol Malló released his book *El cartel español* in 2011, a sensationalist critique of how Spaniards intervened economically and socially in Latin American countries throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One of the aspects Malló analyzes is the Catholic identity Spaniards brought with them to the Western Hemisphere, arguing that one of the policies instituted by the Franco regime (1939–75) was the establishment of relationships between the Catholic Churches of Spain and Latin America, based on a subordinate position which favored Iberian understandings of Catholicism (Malló 2011, 193). The journalist claimed that the Vatican recognized the primacy of peninsular Catholicism over its former Spanish colonies, as a way to halt North American Catholicism, which was viewed with misgiving and had been deemed “erroneous” by Leo XIII’s “Americanism” heresy (Americanism Attacked 1898, 6).

This ideological primacy of Spain over its former colonies in the Western Hemisphere was proven—according to Malló—by a spiritual and intellectual colonization that occurred throughout the twentieth century when Spanish missionary priests and Nuns were sent to teach in Schools and Churches throughout Latin America. The missionaries served the spiritual and educational interests of Spanish immigrants who, in many cases, were part of the economic and social elites of many of the Latin American countries in which they settled. The influx of Catholic Bishops, priests, laity and nuns between Spain and its former colonies during the twentieth century can be understood as a trend which sought to favor Spain’s economic, cultural and ideological interests in certain countries of the Western Hemisphere (Malló 2011, 109). This article explores Malló’s hypothesis in the city of Puebla, Mexico, where Spanish friars of the Order of Preacher’s from the *Baetic* province of Seville ministered the Sacraments from 1904 to 1993 [*The baetic* province was the name that Romans

gave to Andalucía in Spain. The Order of Preacher’s used that name to designate the southern Dominican province in Spain].

The question we will explore throughout the article is why Mexico, with an 89% of the population professing to be Catholic, needed the Order of Preacher’s to run the church of Santo Domingo in Puebla? The hypothesis is that the Order founded by Saint Dominic of Guzmán promoted Spanish cultural and religious interests in Puebla that strengthened Spanish identity within the city through a religious education imparted to the Tertiaries of the Dominican Order and the Confraternity of the Rosary. Spanish Dominican’s considered the territory of Puebla a missionary province, which needed to be taught the correct forms of Catholicism and remained a mission until the early 60s (Peinador 2008, 222). The research was done through participant observation, interviews of members that belong or were a part of the Lay Dominicans between 2008 and 2017 and an analysis of secondary resources.

The Church of Santo Domingo in Puebla, Mexico

The focus of the article is on the Spanish immigrant community of Puebla and their relationship with the Order of Preacher’s through the Dominican Tertiaries and the Confraternity of the Rosary. The narratives of the community in Santo Domingo are what Alex Garcia-Rivera refers to as “the little stories” of faith, differentiated from the ‘Big Story’ narrated by “Christianity... [Which is] told by theologians and other scholars” and refers to the theological aspect of religion (García-Rivera 1995, 2). The “‘little stories... told by specialists and non-specialists” and refer to how religion is interpreted by the laity who practice it (García-Rivera, 1995, pág. 2). These little stories “are in no way exclusive or contradictory from the big story... they are interdependent” (Goizueta, 1997, pág. 563) and reinforce a series of theological beliefs instituted by Catholicism.

The Order of Preacher's arrived in the Viceroyalty of New Spain, now Mexico, in 1526 with the support of the Castilian Crown and Rome to convert Native Mexicans to Catholicism (Ulloa 1977, 276). The Franciscans had preceded them by three years and had received the choicest territories for their missions and by the time the Dominicans arrived, the Order was left with the Upper and Lower Mixtec regions of Puebla and Oaxaca to evangelize. The capitals for the Dominican missions in the region were the city of Puebla de Los Angeles and Antequera (now Oaxaca) (De los Ríos Arce 1910, 125). In Puebla, the first Bishop of the Diocese was the Dominican Julián Garcés,¹ who was instrumental in facilitating two city blocks in the northwest area of the nascent city for his Order (Merlo and Quijano 2000, 359). Dominicans were thus present in Puebla since 1533 because "in 1534 there was a Vicar of the Order and they were building their first Church" (De los Ríos 1910, 58).

One of the characteristics of the Church that still draws tourism is the decoration of the nave which is described by art historians as "rich baroque" which contrasted with the "exuberant baroque" of the side chapel dedicated to the Virgin of the Rosary (Curtis 1906, 13). The rich baroque is characterized by "Solomonic columns, plaster Works in the temple's interior, rich and heavy ornamentation that followed the capricious nature of the designers" (Franco n.d., 5). The entrance can be viewed as a text that reminds the viewer of how intertwined Catholicism is with Dominican theology:² looking on the Church's façade one is struck by the symbolism used to decorate the entrance.³

The eye is drawn to plaster two mastiffs who casually lay above the main door. Between them, there is an image of Archangel Michael, one of the patron saints of Puebla (Lino and Evia 2014).⁴ Over the central window, there is an onyx image of Dominic of Guzmán, the patron saint of the order and the Church that carries his name. Above St. Dominic there is a Dominican cross of *Calatrava* with endings in *fleur de lis*. The heraldry of Dominic's noble parents reminded the Spaniards who visited the Church of the importance of St. Dominic's spiritual sons in the Spanish empire.

Hagiographers and later biographers who wrote about Dominic's family explained that Dominic descended from the noble family of Guzmán through his father Felix, and his mother Joan of Aza. There are doubts in some quarters as to the truth of the affirmation, for his first biographer Blessed Jordan of Saxony, who knew him personally did not write who his parents were in the *Libellus* (Leicht 1981, 437). The clan

¹ The City of Puebla belonged to the Diocese of Tlaxcala and was named as such until the creation of the Archdiocese of Puebla on August 11, 1903 (Knight 2017b)

² [In this article we use the term Order of Preacher's and Dominicans as synonyms].

³ [The church is located at the intersection of the 5 de Mayo and 4 Poniente avenues].

⁴ The Church was named The Church of "Saint Michael and the Holy Angels," but the citizens called it the Church of St. Dominic because of the Friars who served there (Merlo and Quijano 2000, 360)

seemed well connected, for Dominic became a student and later canon at the Cathedral of Osma, under Archpriest Gumiel de Izán, who some claimed was Juana's uncle (Knight 2012).

The dogs we see in the Church's façade relate to the legends of Dominic's birth and baptism:

In a vision Blessed Joan of Aza had before Dominic was born, she dreamt that a dog came out of her womb with a lit torch in its mouth. Unable to understand the meaning of the dream, she looked for the patronage of St. Dominic of Silos, founder of a famous Benedictine monastery close to Caleruega. She made a pilgrimage the monastery to have the dream interpreted. It was there that she understood that her son would light the world on fire with the word of Christ. Thankful for the interpretation, she named her son Dominic, in honor of the Saint of Silos. (*Dominicos* n.d.)

Joined to this legend is the name of the Order in Latin, *Dominicanni*, which was interpreted by some as "the dogs of the Lord" by construing the words as *Domini* (God) *canni* (dogs), which in popular culture was understood, in that the Order of Preacher's would serve God like dogs served their master's (Hearne 2007, 24).

A chance encounter marked St. Dominic's life: in 1203 Alfonso VIII King of Castile and Leon, sought the hand of a Danish princess and sent as Ambassadors to make the negotiations Domingo de Guzmán and Diego de Acevedo, Bishop of the dioceses of Osma (Sajonia 1964, 13). On their way to the Marches, they walked through the region of Occitan (in what is now southern France), which during the eleventh and twelfth centuries was the scene of confrontation between the Cathars and the Catholic Church (Ashley 1990). Exploring the Albigensian heresy is not the purpose of this paper, but it is important to emphasize that the confrontation between St. Dominic and the so-called heretics, impacted the way the Order of Preacher's would understand its role within Catholicism throughout the centuries.

According to hagiographers, Dominic was shocked at how the Cathars won adepts easily with the message that the way to God was through poverty, chastity and the study of the Gospel's. Dominic realized that strategies needed to be changed if Cathar's were to return to the Church: instead of sending monks and Bishops attired in finery accompanied by servants, Dominic proposed that his followers should lead humble lives, travel on foot, live in poverty and study to challenge the Cathar's who were well read in the Gospel's (Pepler 1945, 86) (Sajonia 1964, 45). Dominicans were constituted in three branches, the first branch was comprised by the Friars, the second by the Nuns, and the third by the laity. The laity was divided in two: people who lived within the community helping the Friars and people who made promises, but remained "outside" in the world trying to live the Dominican rule as it suited their situation in life whether they were married or single (Knight 2012).

In Dominic's vision, his followers were meant to do missionary work throughout the world. Biographer's claim

that he sent his Friars out in pairs to evangelize different areas of Europe, claiming that “the wheat that remains together tends to rot” (Sajonia 1964, 65). When Dominic passed in 1221, he had set the basis for a religious order that would be characterized by intellectual rigor, devotion to the Catholic Church and the universality of the Church’s message which would be reinforced when they worked at the medieval universities, worked as missionaries and staffed the Inquisition (Leicht 1981, 437).

The Order of Preacher’s place of work tended to concentrate in medieval cities, which experienced growth from the twelfth century by an influx of migrants from the countryside and a transformation of social classes in medieval Europe (Lawrence 2013, 80). The population shift also changed the religious landscape and the diocesan priesthood seemed unable to fulfill all the spiritual needs of the urban centers. In that scheme, the Mendicant orders promoted a Catholic ethos with a spirituality that attempted to incorporate the realities of the medieval world with the Gospel’s message (Rosenwein and Little 1974, 16). As the name mendicant implies, the religious orders that followed that rule were supposed to live from the almsgivings that the citizens wanted to give for their support (Lawrence 2013, 42). The belief that living off the charity of the citizens was that they were emulating Christ’s poverty and help the people they could in the setting where they established themselves (Pepler 1945, 88).

In the urban setting, the mendicant orders attracted men and women who joined as tertiaries, attracted by the charisma of each order.

Tertiaries, or what is known as “Third Orders”, are those persons who live according to the Third Rule of religious orders, either outside of a monastery in the world or in a religious community. The idea which forms the basis of this institute is, in general, this, that persons who on account of certain circumstances cannot enter a religious order, strictly so-called, may, nevertheless, as far as possible enjoy the advantages and privileges of religious orders. (Knight 2017a)

Tradition states that a Dominican Laity existed since the time of Dominic’s missionary work in Languedoc and these groups would be important in the development of the Dominican Order.⁵ Well, known Dominican Saints belonged to the Tertiary Order like Catherine of Siena, Rose of Lima and Martin of Porras.

When Spaniards who arrived in Mexico brought these groups along to further the spiritual salvation of the Native Mexicans, the different castes and themselves.⁶ Maureen Flynn explains

⁵ The order of Nuns he founded in Prouille, could be viewed as firstly tertiaries before they became Nuns (Saxony 1964, 26).

⁶ However, Counter-Reformation Catholicism also fashioned certain lay groups. "Everett argued that Catholicism after Trent witnessed both the birth of new devotions (e. g. the practice of the Forty Hours of devotion to the consecrated Eucharistic elements in imitation of

the importance Confraternities and Tertiary associations meant for the laity’s relationship with institutional Catholicism:

During the Middle Ages, popular piety in Spain was unencumbered by philosophical distinctions between appearance and essence, matter and form, body and soul. Religious connections were played out in a bodily gesture as well as in private prayer, and the material, as well as the supernatural world, were endowed with spiritual significance. (Flynn 1989, 233)

Those beliefs were “particularly evident in confraternal practices. Medieval confraternities in Spain were voluntary organizations whose members devoted themselves to the public forms of piety to promote the welfare of the community” (Flynn 1989, 233). According to the traditions of the confraternities, its members were to practice charity, with the hope of propitiating God’s blessing of a blissful afterlife (Flynn 1989, 233). Mendicant Orders introduced confraternities and the tertiary orders to Puebla (De los Ríos 1910, 124), whose privilege was to give the status of members of the organization to the laity interested in participating within these movements (Larkin 2006, 223).

Two of these organizations are quite old and still exist in Puebla: the first group founded in 1538 was the Confraternity of the Rosary, led by the Order of Preachers (Maza 1955, 7),⁷ who introduced the devotion in the Viceroyalty of New Spain and formed the first Confraternity of the Rosary in Mexico City on 16 March 1538 (De la Maza 1954, 6). The devotion to the Rosary was particularly strong in the seventeenth century:

It was well known for being prodigious and miraculous. It was a powerful tool of persuasion about its efficacious devotion: numerous military victories were attributed to it, while it scared the devil and destroyed heresy. On one occasion an Indian who died without confessing was resuscitated and was able to take communion. In 1542, three Indians who wore their rosaries around their necks were spared from lightning. In 1622 a fleet escaped from tragedy thanks to their devotion to the Holy Rosary. Through the Virgin, the Rosary provides health, frees people from the devil, stops jealousy, death, and captivity, from sea tempests, storms, and rains (Krutitskaya, 2014, pág. 228)

The Order of Preachers established Chapels of the Rosary in many of its churches through the Viceroyalty of the New Spain for the Laity to join. The use of the Rosary is described by Woods as “nonessential” belief and practice, which are a part of Catholic convictions as a particular devotion which in theory, has little bearing on “The Big Story” of Theology, and yet “too great a deprecation of ‘nonessentials’ fails to reckon

the forty hours Jesus lay in the tomb prior to his resurrection) and the renewal of older ones (such as the rosary)." (Mitchell 2012, 17)

⁷ There is still debate about the foundational date of the Confraternity of the Rosary. De los Ríos claimed it was founded in 1553 or 1554 at the latest (De los Ríos 1910, 123)

with the practices that while not themselves 'essential' to the Catholic faith, having been hallowed by tradition and popular piety, have helped to convert the truly essential features of Catholicism into living realities in the lives of the faithful" (Woods Jr. 2004, 127).⁸ Marian devotions like the Rosary may be categorized as "nonessential" beliefs which have been ignored by historians but constitute an important part of culture throughout time.

The second group founded for the Laity was the Dominican tertiaries in the Church of Santo Domingo (Leicht 1981, 132). Tertiaries partook the spirituality of the Dominicans and incorporated into their daily lives outside the Church. Dominican Tertiaries had existed in Mexico at least since the seventeenth century, and it had also sought to encourage Spaniards to join. The members of the third branch of Dominicans in colonial times in the Cities of Mexico and Bogotá had also been of Spanish nationality, with few exceptions (Elvis 2015). Dominican Tertiaries were established in Mexico City on 10 April 1682. The founder of the Tertiaries in Mexico City was Antonia de Santo Domingo, defined by her biography as "Spanish, clean from any impure race, and neither she nor her relatives had been punished by the Inquisition" (Calvo 1998, 76). Thomas Calvo and William Elvis affirm that membership in the Dominican Tertiaries in both Viceregal cities was a signal of Hispanophilic tendencies, social class, and economic status that hinged on being or descending from Spaniards, the Castilian idea of purity of blood, family ties and clientelism (Calvo 1998, 77–78).

The Friars of the Order of Preacher's supervised both lay groups, and they guaranteed individuals who joined their ranks would be liberated from purgatory swiftly, as members of the Order (Mitchell 2012, 111). Belonging to Church organizations "contributed powerfully to the development of doctrine, devotion, and ritual within the Roman Catholic Church" (Mitchell 2012, 123).

Puebla: A city for Spaniards?

The city of Puebla was founded to wrest power away from the indigenous tribes who lived in the defunct kingdoms of Tlaxcala, Cholula, Huejotzingo, Tepeaca, and Cuautinchán and to benefit the Viceroyalty of New Spain during the 1520s and 1530s. The original hope of the governing Second *Audiencia* of the Viceroyalty of the New Spain and the Queen Regent, Isabella of Portugal (1529–1533), was that Castilian farmers would settle in the valley of *Cuetlaxcoapan* and cultivate the land according to "the uses and traditions of the Kingdoms in Spain" and through their exercise of a correct Catholic morality, help convert Native Mexicans to Catholicism (Shean 2009, 18).⁹

⁸ They are nonessential for praying it or ignoring it, carries no penalty
⁹ By Spaniards, we are referring to the subjects of the Kingdom of Castile. In the sixteenth and seventeenth century being a Castilian also implied being Catholic and what was termed an "Old Christian". In theory "New Christians", descendants from Jews or Moors were not allowed to emigrate to the Viceroyalty of New Spain, though this

What filled *Poblano's* and their descendants with pride was the idea that the Spanish Crown and its administrative representatives in the New Spain had created a city specifically designed for Catholic Spaniards to settle in (González 2014, 94). The economic activities that the city of Puebla and its surroundings would be known for, were textiles and agriculture. The biggest group of peninsular immigrants during colonial times (1521–1821) were originally from the town of Brihuega, in the Guadalajara hills surrounding Madrid.

Though the Briocenses were not the founders of the *Poblano* textile industry, they were responsible for the development of it through mills (Altman 2000, 123). Through the exploitation of slaves, salaried Native Mexicans and "encerrados,"¹⁰ the people from Brihuega were able to accumulate capital that allowed them to form an upper middle class in Puebla that helped to develop the barrio of San Francisco into a commercial area of Puebla (Altman 2000, 123). *Briocenses* had worked on textiles since the late Middle Ages, (1200–1453) and had been known for making wool cloth within the family nucleus throughout the village (Altman 2000, 79).

Towards the second half of the fifteenth century, Brihuega experienced economic decline which prompted the Crown to encourage the immigration of some residents to the *Alpujarras* in the province of Andalucía, with the belief that *Briocenses* with their textile expertise would incorporate into the silk industry there. The *Alpujarras*, however, did not become the last destination, for *Briocenses* began immigrating to Puebla in the second half of the sixteenth century when families witnessed that relatives and neighbors had improved their lots in Puebla. Thanks to the expertise they acquired manufacturing cloth and the contact they had with the silk industry in Las Alpujarras, many of the *Briocenses* who settled in Puebla exploited textile mills, linking Spanish identity with cloths until the first half of the twentieth century (Altman 2000, 35).

Agriculture in Puebla would also be important for the Spanish and French immigrants to Puebla from its founding until the twentieth century. Since the sixteenth century, Spaniards experimented with diverse European ingredients, like grapes in the Valley of the Cristo in Atlixco and wheat (Morales 2006, 9). They also exploited the indigenous agricultural systems which already existed in the valley of Puebla and the surrounding areas. Native Mexicans had grown different crops like maize, beans, *chiles*, tomatoes, and peanuts which were used to sustain their populations and to pay the Aztecs and later their Spaniard overlords as tribute through the *Encomienda* and *Reducción* systems (Coe and Coe 2013, 2615).

was not always enforced. See Francisco Pérez de Salazar y Vereá and Arturo Córdova Durana. 2004. *Sino Novohispano de un Peninsular [Biography of a Peninsular]*. Puebla: BUAP.

¹⁰ Indigenous Mexican's who had accrued a debt with the owner of the land and had to pay it off through work, but worked it out without leaving the premises.

After the decline of the *encomienda* system in the late sixteenth century, hacienda's, ranches and town *ejidos* dominated the *Poblano* countryside growing both European and local produce. Wheat was cultivated to satisfy the hunger of local Spaniards while the surplus was sold to the Spanish fleet and sold to Cuba, while maize, *chile*, and beans satisfied the numerous indigenous and mestizo palates. *Poblano* agriculture declined economically in the eighteenth century when stiffer competition from the *Bajío* region slowed the Puebla economy down (Morales 2004, 9). Despite the economic decline agriculture faced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was a business venture that immigrants to Puebla would continue to pursue until the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917).

Agriculture was deemed important enough for President Manuel González (1880–1884) to engage Italian immigrants from the town of Segusino (in Northern Italy) to create agricultural colonies in Puebla and Michoacán that would develop and modernize the Mexican countryside (Savarino 2006, 278). Agricultural ventures were also pursued by the small French and German colonies who moved to the valley of Puebla throughout the nineteenth century (Rojas 2011, 119). Agriculture and textiles became the businesses in which the immigrants from northern Spain and their descendants would be involved in during the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

In 1827 and 1829 the newly independent Mexican Republic issued decrees that expelled any Spaniards living within the country, confiscating their goods and allowing them to keep only a third of their fortune (Grajeda 1997, 126). The Spanish subjects who were exiled fled to Cuba or Spain while the newly founded country of Mexico broke its social, political and economic bonds with its former imperial overlord. The inauspicious legislature would seem to harken a Mexican republic where Iberians would no longer be welcome, a sentiment that increased when the Kingdom of Spain failed to reconquer Mexico in 1829 (Navarro 2012, 218). Throughout the 1830s, though, a series of political events would modify the relationship between both countries and facilitate transatlantic emigrations from Spain.

In Spain, the death of Ferdinand VII (1833) and the problem of succession occasioned by the recognition of the Pragmatic Sanction in 1830, led the Spanish kingdom into a six-year conflict between the Carlists (conservatives) who supported the Salic Law that would theoretically enthrone Carlos, Count of Montemolín and the Isabellines (liberals) who supported the right of Don Carlos niece, Isabella II, to succeed Ferdinand as Queen regnant (Parker 1937, 17). In Mexico the political strife between federalists and centralists and political parties who supported liberal or conservative agendas prompted civil wars and revolutions that upheld different constitutions, while the military interventions of France (1838, 1861–1866) and the United States (1846–1848)--which led to the loss of half of the Mexican territory--the independence of Texas (1836) and the establishment of a failed second empire (1864–1867), aggravated the tense political and economic situation of the

Aztec country (Walker 1986, 211).¹¹ Civil strife in both countries was responsible in part for the transatlantic migrations to Hispanic-America, while established patterns of emigration from Cantabria, Asturias and the Basque Country to the Western Hemisphere.

The emigration from north-western Spain to Mexico occurred amid legal changes that began in the 1830s and continued until the reign of Alfonso XII (1874–1885), during which a series of Liberal regimes changed Spanish legislation attempting to modernize Spain's economic, political and religious status. Three outcomes followed from the liberal changes that affected the lives of the Spaniards studied in this paper: firstly Spain and Mexico commenced diplomatic relations when the Regency recognized Mexico's independence in 1836:¹² the government's decision allowed Spaniards to immigrate to Mexico with the benefit of diplomatic protection (Grajeda 1997, 129). Secondly, the *Cristino* administration effectively ended the tax exemptions minor nobility had enjoyed since the reign of Charles I (Valero 2015, 240) creating what Spanish historians call the "*confusión de Estados*".¹³ Most of the men from Asturias, Cantabria and the Basque Country were members of the minor nobility who were affected by the changes in the law.¹⁴ Thirdly the reign of Isabella II eliminated laws that hindered migration to the Americas from 1853, while Mexican laws allowed foreigners to participate in any economic activity they wanted to pursue (Gamboa 2008, 16).

Immigrating to Puebla was an interesting choice for the people that lived around the Sea of Biscay: it was the third largest city in Mexico during the nineteenth century, its economic elite was characterized as politically conservative with a strong attachment to Spanish culture.¹⁵ It was industrially developed (when compared to most cities in Mexico) and agriculturally prosperous (Calderón de la Barca 1982). It had been since the sixteenth century the host of immigrants from different parts of Spain, like Andalucía and Canarias but most importantly an inflow of people from the hamlet of Brihuega between 1570

¹¹ For a revision of Mexican History during the nineteenth century see William Beezley. 2012. *Mexico in World History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹² The recognition of Mexican independence from Spain allowed Rome to do the same with the formal Viceroyalty, granting its recognition 5 December 1836. This step was important for the Catholic identity of the Spaniards who resettled in Mexico after the independence for it gave Mexican Bishops the recognition they needed from Rome.

¹³ *Confusión de Estados*: When all Spanish citizens were recognized as equals before the law, after the suppression of rights for the minor nobility

¹⁴ *Fueros*: Rights

¹⁵ Ignacio Zaragoza wrote about conservative *Poblanos* to President Benito Juárez (1858–1872): It would be good to burn Puebla. It is in mourning for the 5 de mayo. It is sad to say, but it is a lamentable reality ("*Que bueno sería quemar Puebla. Está de luto por el acontecimiento del día 5 [de mayo de 1862]. Esto es triste decirlo, pero es una realidad lamentable.*") The telegram was written in the period under study.

and 1640.¹⁶ This migratory movement to the city of Puebla in colonial times would influence the textile industry of the city, which would remain an important economic motor for the region until the twentieth century. It would also foreshadow some aspects of the Spanish immigration in 1880.

In the case of Puebla, the Spaniards who migrated were originally from the province of Asturias, with a small group of highlanders from the Province of Old Castile and the region León (Suárez 2006, 84). Until the 1930s when left-leaning Spaniards moved to Mexico during and after the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), most of the immigrants came from rural backgrounds and small towns. According to Leticia Gamboa Ojeda, the Spanish population of Puebla represented 45% of foreigners in Puebla (Gamboa 2008, 18). Leticia Gamboa Ojeda's doctoral thesis *Los Empresarios de Ayer* analyzed the economic elite in Puebla from 1906 to 1929. Her argument--verified by primary sources--, demonstrates that a cohort of men who were foreigners controlled large flows of economic capital during the Victorian and Edwardian periods (*Porfiriato* in Mexico, 1876–1911):

Entrepreneurs of Spanish origin formed the group that predominated, although there was a minority of Mexicans and another minority of French men. The first group tended to conserve itself as an ethnic group, through the marriage of their children with other Spaniards or children of Spaniards and through the functioning of their own social institutions. (Gamboa 2008, 118)

Gamboa calculates the number of Spaniards as 340 in 1890 and 903 in 1932. 80% of the emigrants were men who frequently married Mexican women, although there was a small percentage of Spaniards who married the daughters of other nationals in the state. Spaniard emigration to Puebla was maintained until the 1970s when it began its decline into the present. Throughout the period of study, the Asturian immigration was the highest and "represented 55% of the Spanish community, migrants from Catalonia represented 12% and immigrants from Galicia represented 10%" (Suárez 2006, 85). Most of them worked in the textile industry (Suárez 2006, 84), and although there were other immigrants from France, Syria, and Lebanon, Spaniards remained the most important group within that industry and out of these a majority (46.3%) were from Asturias, particularly from the region of Llanes. (Gamboa, 2008, 19–21).

Authors like Gavi, Suárez, and Ojeda write of the clericalist and Hispanophilic tendencies of the Puebla bourgeoisie since colonial times.

The textile sector descended from Spaniards had a solid heritage of Iberian Catholicism... it was strongly rooted in the cultural and social fabric, making it a central part of the [Puebla] identity. They [the Spaniards] view the conquest as a quest to civilize the Western Hemisphere and the Catholic religion as the salvation and redemption of souls. In the social

¹⁶*Criollo*: Children of Spaniards who unlike their parents, were born in Mexico.

labor, it implied a paternalistic relationship with the worker and a corporatist vision of society. (Sánchez 2012, 82)

During the twentieth century, it was a common feature for the Spaniards to reach out to the Catholic Church, to cement connections with another powerful group who could influence the relations with the workers of the haciendas and the textile mills (Gutiérrez 2000, 135).

There are a few reasons for the preference the Bishop felt for Spanish religious. Firstly, the belief that Spain's Catholicism was better than the Catholicism of other European countries or the United States, secondly the culture shares by the elites of Puebla looked to Spain as an example of how Mexicans should behave and made them more accepting to religious from Spain (Sánchez 2012, 123). Thirdly, an interest on the part of Leo XIII to intervene in Latin American affairs in a more direct way than had been done before his pontificate (Leo XIII 1898). Fourthly, a desire of the Order of Preachers, led by the Master of the Order, the French-born Hyacinth-Marie Cormier to "restore the desolated provinces of our Order" to their former glory "as was desired by the Holy See" (Peinador 2008, 303) Lastly, a tacit recognition by the Vatican that Latin America's Catholic churches were still under the sphere of both the Spanish monarch and the Iberian bishops (Malló 2011, 189). We will explain these points to understand how they impacted the Spanish community in Puebla.

The "Spanish" Province of Puebla, Mexico

When the Dominican Province of Andalucía was reconfigured in 1897, one of its concerns was helping their brethren in the Caribbean and Central America (Álvarez 1948, 119).¹⁷ There was a belief in the Vatican and European Catholics that Catholicism was not properly followed, because of the instability Hispanic America had suffered throughout the nineteenth century (Edwards 2009, 261). In 1904 Hyacinth de Cormier, the Master of the Order, allowed that the Dominican provinces of Santiago (which represented most of Mexico) and of Puebla be incorporated into two Iberian provinces: Santiago went to the Spanish Province of the Order of Preachers, and the state of Puebla was assigned to the Baetic province of Andalucía (Álvarez 1948, 120). Dominican priests who staffed any church of the Order in the Mexican province of Puebla would be a Spaniards, trained in peninsular seminaries with a view that Mexico was a missionary territory.

Although Churches for immigrants were common north of the Rio Grande, they were not a common feature in Mexico.¹⁸ In the city of Puebla Methodists and Baptists welcomed by the

¹⁷ Particularly Venezuela, Cuba, and Mexico (CIDALIC Conferencia Interprovincial de los Dominicos de América Latina y el Caribe [Interprovincial Conference of Latin American Dominicans]. Accessed February 15, 2018. <http://cidalc.op.org/wp/quienes-somos/historia/>

¹⁸ An example of an immigrant mission in the U.S. was the missionaries founded by St. Frances Cabrini to serve Italians of the first and second generation to transition into the American life without abandoning their traditional faith.

Díazregime to proselytize in Mexico built churches for their congregants (Met President Diaz 1893, 3), opening private schools, seminaries and boarding schools staffed by missionaries' who came from the United States, serving both Mexican and American children in Puebla (Curtis 1906, 13). In the early twentieth century a contingent of Syrians and Lebanese who practiced Maronite Catholicism, and the Archdiocese gave them the Church of Belén to worship according to maroon's liturgy (Sánchez 2012, 123).¹⁹

The Spanish immigrants congregated at Santo Domingo (Sánchez 2012, 123),²⁰ which was used by the Spanish colonists for Easter ceremonies, weddings, first communions and baptisms (Sánchez 2012, 124). It also became the center for any important happenings for the Spanish colony in Puebla: in 1941, they held *arequiem* for the deposed Alfonso XIII who died in Rome 28 February of that same year (Sánchez 2012, 124).²¹

Puebla historiography divides the Spanish immigrants into two categories: those who settled in Puebla before 1931 and those who came after the Franco regime took over Spain. The immigrants who arrived before the 1930s were generally from small towns, with farming backgrounds and little education beyond the primary. The Spaniards that arrived during and after the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), tended to be urban dwellers, had professions and as they sided with the Republic, were communist and either atheistic or agnostic. The Spaniards who arrived before the 1930s and their children were the ones that participated in the community of Santo Domingo, although it was not uncommon for atheist Spaniards to have their children participate in the Catholic sacraments or send their children to religious schools (Larragoiti 2017).

The area where the Dominican Church was located was a prosperous area of the city throughout the twentieth century. It was located next to the Market of "La Victoria", which became the site where many entrepreneurs made their fortunes in the city during the twentieth century.²² Two businesses would help the Friars settle in Mexico: "El Puerto de Veracruz"²³ and "La Tarjeta" (owned by Basilio Sánchez Gutiérrez)²⁴ contributed economically to the Dominican's wellbeing (Cue 2008). *El Puerto de Veracruz* was owned by Victoriano Álvarez and his son in law and nephew, Victoriano García (from Asturias). Álvarez was a Dominican Tertiary

who aided the Spanish Friars to obtain proper documentation to settle in Mexico (Peinador 2008, 135).

Foreigners only had a ninety-day visa to remain in Mexico once they arrived in the country, but the Álvarez family granted them papers which simulated that they worked at the clothing shop, so they would not have problems with the Mexican Government (Peinador 2004, 84). The Álvarez family also contributed along with other Spaniards in the city to give things away for the Bazaar that the Dominicans had once a year. The reputation of the Bazaar was good, for the populace assumed that the things donated to the Friars for the charity were made of a better quality and were worth the price (Silva 2018).

Many of the Spaniards who settled in Puebla contributed to help the Friars, who they viewed as country men who needed help while they lived in Puebla. Until his death Nicasio Medina, owner of the pharmacy that bears his last name gave the Friars medicine without charging them when they required it (Silva 2018).²⁵ Toña Lamuño was helpful to the Friars and was instrumental in purchasing cars for the Friars to drive (Silva 2018). The Cisneros family would send pastries and candies from their business to some of the Friars, like Father Crespo while the Diez family (who were involved in groceries and dried goods), contributed economically to their support and had strong links to the Order thanks to their familial relationship with Father Antonio Del Blanco (Canales 2017).

If the families that helped the Friars were not financially well off, they served the Friars in different projects: Father Crespo asked. Teresina Celorio de Martínez study old documents to write the names of all the members of the Confraternity of the Rosary since colonial times. Her relative Salvador Celorio and his wife ran the store and drove the priests to wherever they needed to go. A middle class woman, a member of the Church who retired, was expected to go and work for the Dominicans in the Church and did so, until she became too ill to do so.

The Friars reciprocated by participating in the lives of the families that helped them, administering the sacraments, blessing the businesses they opened, listening to their problems and preaching (Ángel 2015). The relationships that were fostered encouraged the Friars to invite people to join the order by becoming Tertiaries.²⁶ There was a relationship of clientelism between the Friars and the laity they professed to serve. Calvo explains that clientelism should be understood as the need of wealthy men and women who received social recognition from the Church and their peers for belonging to the Order and supporting the needs of the Dominican Friars (Calvo 1998, 79).

¹⁹ The Church is located on the corner on North 5th Avenue and 4th East Street.

²⁰ These immigrants were known as Turks until the Peace of Sèvres (1920) and as Arabs by the Mexican population who did not know the geography of the Middle East

²¹ The Order of Preacher's were not the only Spanish priests to arrive in Puebla. The Claretians also arrived from Spain and took over two Churches in Puebla: *El Señor de los Trabajos* and *El Parral*. At some time, the Order left Puebla but remained in Mexico (Cue 2008).

²² The market of the Victoria was the orchard of the Dominican priory from the sixteenth through the nineteenth century.

²³ The Department Store was founded in 1933 (Almacenes de Ropa Al Puerto de Veracruz, S.A. 1933, 26)

²⁴ The establishment was a printing press and stationery shop inaugurated in 1935 (Cuatzo 2017).

²⁵ According to their web page, the pharmacy was founded in 1921 (1921 Medina Farmadroguería s.f.)

²⁶ The term Tertiary was used until the 1970s when Dominicans of the third order became known as Lay Dominicans. This was done to eliminate the perception that the laity were a sort of third class within the order.

In the case of Puebla, we find something similar during the twentieth century. Belonging to lay religious community until the 1960s was something women of the Upper or middle-upper classes did.²⁷ Guadalupe Loaeza in a reference to Mexico's high society women of 1951 explained that "most women were devoted to work in their home, work on charities like Missions, the Ladies of Saint Vincent of Paul and the Catholic Mothers... the busiest ones were those who belonged to the Order of the Holy Sepulchre" (Loaeza 2014, 97). In Puebla being Catholic and belonging to Catholic organizations elevated the social status of the individual and increased the social standing of the individuals within the city (Sánchez 2012, 84–85), but did not necessarily make them "good people."²⁸ An informant told me that two of the ladies who belonged to the Puebla chapter of the Holy Sepulchre were "gossipy and pretentious" (Larragoiti 2017).

In the case of Puebla, belonging to the Tertiaries of Saint Dominic was mostly viewed as feminine.²⁹ The Tertiaries were re-established February 1899 by Fr. José Reguero, five years before the Puebla Province was turned over to the Andalusian Dominicans (Peinador 2008, 322). There were two books in Santo Domingo which have recorded acts of the Tertiaries. The first one covers the years from 1899 to June 1921. The second book is titled "*Libro de Toma de hábito y profesión de la Venerable Orden Tercera*" [*Book of the Taking of Habits of the Venerable Tertiary Order*] covering the years from 1906 to 1952.³⁰ Tertiaries were under the Dominican Friars supervision throughout their existence until the second decade of the twenty-first century (Peinador 2008, 323). Nieves Cue who was President of the Lay Dominicans informed me that as a child, she would go to mass and she would see the Tertiary women dressed in black, with a black mantilla covering their heads. As a child (she was born in the early 1930s) they scared her, and she never dreamt of becoming one of them (Cue 2008). But that was what she became when she saw the values that Dominic of Guzmán had taught his spiritual children (Cue 2008).

Another relative of hers, Pilar Caso (family also originated in Asturias) was also involved in the community.³¹ In her case, she was criticized by other Poblanos for being too Catholic and too devoted to the Order of Preacher's. According to gossip her confessor, some say Father del Blanco, convinced

her she should have as many children as God willed, even though some of them were born congenitally deaf and mute (Canales 2017). For some people that was her fault for letting herself be guided by an Order "who was too conservative." Nieves was also criticized for her devotion to the Dominicans. To some, it seemed that Dominicans did not let people think, and that was problematic for Poblanos who were skeptical of Church teaching. This criticism is interesting for there exists an intellectual tradition which required Dominicans of any branch to study (Elvis 2015).

Some of the people who criticized the Dominican Order and their followers were generally acquainted with the Jesuits in town. They did not forget or forgive the Dominicans for staffing the Spanish and Mexican Inquisition and blamed St. Dominic for instituting such an awful institution (Larragoiti 2017). The Jesuits attracted members of the elite through their school for boys, The Sacred Heart.³² A family may have belonged or participated with the Dominicans, but once the children of those families went to school, the Jesuits courted the families of the students they believed had economic potential to help the school. Through organizations like the *curtillos familiares*, the priests from the *Oriente* tried to group women of similar social and economic backgrounds to help the school with its expansion projects (Canales 2017).

There were some people that left the Jesuits for different reasons and returned to the Dominican fold. In the case of one family, the father determined that Jesuits did not have discipline and considered that they spoiled the children too much (Canales 2017). In another instance of interaction, a widow María Gómez de Riobó who had always supported the Jesuits, joined both the Tertiaries and the Confraternity of the Rosary when she felt that the Jesuits were too far away for her to go see them (Riobó 2010).

The 1980s harked the changes that would occur. The market of "*La Victoria*" was emptied out, and with it left many people who would work nearby or shop at the different stores around the Church. In a gradual process the economic elites started abandoning the downtown areas and as stores closed and elites moved out a gradual decline in the people going to Santo Domingo occurred. In 1993, the province was returned to the Dominican province of Santiago Mexico, and the Friars who remained were replaced by Mexican priests who had a different understanding of how things should be done. One of the criticisms leveled at the Spaniards was their harshness. Mexicans according to the informants believed they were too severe and spoke to strongly but were good at disciplining everybody to do the ceremonies correctly (Silva 2018). As the Mexican Friars took over and the Spaniards began to die out or leave for other communities, the Spanish community abandoned the Church as well. By 2007, many people of the Spanish colony had abandoned the Church and moved out to Churches which existed in the suburbs (Canales 2017).

²⁷ The gendering of the Church since the eighteenth century has implied that men generally did not belong to Church organizations, but women did. This was not always the case as can be seen by how men controlled Dominican Tertiaries in Mexico during the 1680s and 1690s.

²⁸ One of the men in the group was accused of having a mistress and illegitimate family in the 1960s.

²⁹ The men who belonged to the order that I know of were Victoriano Álvarez, Salvador Celorio and another Mexican man who had wanted to become a priest but was unable too because of his epilepsy.

³⁰ Another book listing all the members of the Tertiaries and Lay Dominicans was forgotten and lost in a Taxicab by the President Asunción Sobrado (Cue 2008).

³¹ Both descended from Asturian immigrants.

³² Later known as *Instituto Oriente*.

2. Conclusions

Despite not being a high rate of immigration to Mexico, the Order of Preachers understood that after the instability Latin America experienced during the nineteenth century, it was necessary to “help” that Catholic Churches in those countries become what they had been through the years of civil strife.³³ The Order of Preachers assigned the city of Puebla as a mission to the Andalusia province, with the purpose of ministering to the Mexicans and the Spanish community which had settled in Puebla. The Friars encouraged the Spanish citizen’s and their descendants to look at the Church of Santo Domingo as a bastion of Spanish identity within the city of Puebla and to use their ‘soft power’ through the administration of the sacraments and the religious festivities held at the church, to promote unity through a shared Spanish identity under the care of a Castilian Saint who represented the aspirations of a Catholic and conservative Spain. The relationship between the Friars and the Laity was defined by a type of clientelism which ensured the spiritual and material wellbeing of the participants. The Friars administered the sacraments, involved themselves in various aspects of the private lives of the Spaniards and their offspring and in return, the laity made sure that diverse needs of the Priory were met.

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³³ This posture is of course Eurocentric. It was assumed that correct forms of Catholicism could only be found in Europe and that Latin Americans were not completely capable of keeping the proper forms of Catholicism.

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