

## Power Struggles in an 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Mexican Convent

Megan Meyer

As a result of the Counter-Reformation, the Catholic Church began to implement new policies governing monastic life. Convents in the Americas during the 18<sup>th</sup> century were directly affected by these reforms, although the implications of these reforms were often distinct from those of Europe due to different social circumstances. While a large number of historical facts are known about Church reforms, these facts are too infrequently applied to real life examples within convents. Without an understanding of how the reforms actually played out in the daily life of a nun, their true significance is left unclear. The key to revealing the truth about convent life lies in the historical archives that house nuns' personal testimonies. The experiences of Conceptionist nuns from San Miguel de Allende, Mexico provide excellent insight into how Church reforms, coupled with contemporaneous social conditions, actually affected convent life. The struggle for power amongst these nuns shows how the diversity within convents and the imposition of the vow of enclosure and communal living could potentially cause divisiveness on both a personal and a group level. Through archival research, scholars have the potential to continue to shed more light on the personal life of a nun as well as the true implications of large-scale Church policies.

Scholastic inquiry into the lives of Hispanic nuns is a relatively new field of research that is continuously growing. Scholars such as Electa Arenal, Stacey Schlau, Asunción Lavrín and Kathryn McKnight, among others, have already broken ground in the field of women's writing within the monastic tradition. There remain, however, many manuscripts that have yet to be found, let alone transcribed and

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translated. One of the principal methods used for such research has been analysis of the personal letters written by nuns while living inside the convent. This essay will focus on what the letters of a few nuns in 18<sup>th</sup> century Mexico can reveal to scholars about convent life in general.

### **Historical Background**

The monastic tradition was born as a means for the most devout Christians living in the Roman Empire to show their utmost devotion to Jesus by removing themselves from the world and devoting their lives to him through prayer and sacrifice. Over time, however, monastic institutions seemed to many to have become corrupted, and different groups had different visions of how to rectify this situation, leading to internal fragmentation. Smaller groups were formed, such as the Franciscans and Dominicans, all with different policies aimed at amending the corrupted state of monastic life.

Nonetheless, the debate over reform of the monastic tradition and the Church in its entirety continued and culminated in the Protestant Movement. While the Protestant Movement was an attempt to reform from outside the Church, the Church itself attempted to rectify the corruption existent within its own institutions — a movement that came to be called the Counter-Reformation.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) can be viewed as the culmination of the Counter-Reformation, as it established the new dogma of the Catholic Church. Its reforms are extremely relevant here because they directly affected convents throughout Europe and, later, the Americas as a result of Spain's colonial conquests. While the majority of the religious dogma from Europe was upheld in the Americas, there were differing social conditions existent in the Americas that affected its implementation.

### **Social Conditions in the Americas**

One of the most distinctive aspects of Catholicism in the Americas was the great increase in the construction of convents during colonial times and beyond. Whereas traditionally in Spain, daughter convents were born due to the need or desire of the mother order, in the New World convents were often built as a response to social conditions, such as economic and educational limitations for women at the time.<sup>1</sup>

Women living in this society generally had two respectable options for their lives: get married or join a convent. Moreover, during this time in the New World, there were an increasing number of young women in society that Asunción Lavrín refers to as “noble but poor.”<sup>2</sup> These women were *criollas*, meaning they were born in the New World yet of Spanish blood. But their families could not afford to pay their marriage dowries. While convents also required dowries, they were often more affordable than marriage. Some convents even prohibited the entrance of wealthy women unless there were no poor women that wanted to enter.<sup>3</sup> The convent, therefore, became an ideal answer to the problem these noble but poor women and their families faced. Furthermore, if a woman desired an education, the convent was the only realistic option, as universities were exclusively male and married women had little private time to study.

As the number of women who entered the convents increased, so too did the diversity of their spiritual motivation and social class. Octavio Paz argues that during the 17<sup>th</sup> century the definition of a nun changed from a spiritual calling to a profession.<sup>4</sup> This is perhaps an exaggeration of the lack of piety of nuns at this time; it is likely that the majority of these nuns were truly religious. Due to the lack of other opportunities, however, some women did use convent life as a means by which to fulfill secular needs, such as protection of social class or education. In any case, there was an overall increase in the variety of women who chose to take their vows in New World convents.

While the increasing number and diversity of convents certainly enriched the experience of many nuns in the New World, it also often resulted in the weakening of the nuns’ overall power in the Church. Eleanor McLaughlin claims that “the great boom in monastic foundations coincided with an acute decline in the power and intellectual possibilities for nuns.”<sup>5</sup> This is because increasing numbers of convents often led to increasing tensions within them. The Church often responded to these tensions by implementing arduous reforms, such as the vow of enclosure and *la vida común* (communal life).

### **Reform in the Americas**

The vow of enclosure was one of the most significant reforms of the Council of Trent in relation to convent life. Before the Council of

Trent, the first and most important rule for a nun within the convent was the vow of poverty, which said that a nun could not have any private possessions while living in the convent. As a result of the Council of Trent, however, the vow of poverty was subordinated to what had previously been the second rule, the vow of enclosure.<sup>6</sup> While leaving the convent was never the ideal circumstance for a nun before the Council of Trent, it was now strictly forbidden. Two of the leading factors for this change were concern for the spiritual purity of women and fear from the patriarchy of the power of women in religious life. By interning them in the convent, the patriarchy presumed they could establish additional control. Nuns' power was limited by reducing their ability to interact with the outside world and forcing them to depend on males to be their liaisons to secular society.

One of the main problems that resulted from the enforcement of enclosure was the increased literal and figurative entrance of males into the convent. Though nuns could not leave the convent, it was still necessary that the convent have economic relations with the outside world in order to continue its daily operations. Asunción Lavrín notes, "despite having renounced the world spiritually, [the nuns] could not help remaining in touch with it to sustain the material underpinnings of their religious life."<sup>7</sup> Now that the nuns could not partake in these operations themselves, male members of the church were permitted and required to enter with much greater frequency. Furthermore, unlike their predecessors who had to learn to balance the necessary exposure to the secular world with religious life, these nuns were forced to ignore this need even as it still greatly affected their daily lives. For many nuns this created a dichotomy that caused an intense and perhaps insurmountable psychological and spiritual burden.

Another reform of the Council of Trent that caused great distress for many nuns during this time was the imposition of *la vida común*. In many convents the nuns had been able to have private quarters in which they could read, eat, sleep and find solitude. The Council of Trent attempted to end this ability and mandated that nuns must live, sleep and eat in communal quarters, without rooms of their own.<sup>8</sup> In theory this would hamper the entrance of secular ideas into the convent, as all the nuns could monitor the actions of others. But this constant monitoring could quickly grow unbearable: one can only imagine the

difficulty in coping with a conflict when one has no escape from the problem. So this reform was continuously evaded, and when it was put in place, tension within the convent was often the result.

These changes and reforms of the Catholic Church in the New World were certainly made with the intent of improving convent life; however, the standards for ideal life were often set by male members of the church who had little idea of what convent life was truly like. Therefore, the goal of improving the lives of nuns was not always achieved. In fact, it was through the many attempts to rectify the corruption of convents that the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Conceptionist nuns from San Miguel de Allende found themselves in conflict.

### **Sor Phelipa Josepha and the Conceptionists**

In the letters written by the Conceptionists who lived in San Miguel de Allende in the 1770's, one can see real-life examples of the tensions that arose in convents as a result of Church reforms. In this section, I outline the origins of the convent and the events that led up to a scandal involving nearly everyone within its walls.<sup>9</sup>

Sor María Josepha Lina de la Santísima Trinidad was a very pious young girl. At the age of only fifteen years, after the death of her parents, she decided to donate five hundred pesos of her inheritance to the foundation of a convent.<sup>10</sup> In 1756 her contribution allowed for the foundation of the *Convento de la Purísima Concepción* in the city of San Miguel el Grande, today called San Miguel de Allende.<sup>11</sup> The construction of the convent was complete in 1766, and the first nuns arrived at the convent in February of the same year. They were accompanied to their new home by the Bishop Pedro Anselmo Sánchez de Tagle. *Las fundadoras*, the original nuns to arrive at the convent, were María Lina, María Antonio del Santísimo Sacramento, Ana Gertrudis de San Rafael and Phelipa Josepha de San Antonio. All of these women, except María Lina, came from the convent Regina Coeli in Mexico City. Since María Lina was only fifteen years old, she could not hold an office in the convent; therefore, María Antonio del Santísimo Sacramento obtained the title of *Vicaria Abadesa*, or the Vicar Abbess. Ana Gertrudis was the *Vicaria del Coro* and Phelipa Joespha was the *Sacristana*.<sup>12</sup> In 1770, four years after the foundation of the Convento de la Purísima Concepción, twenty nuns were living in the convent,

and its hierarchy had changed.<sup>13</sup> Sor María Ana de la Santísima Trindiad had become gravely ill and could not continue to fulfill the obligations of Vicar Abbess. Thus, an election was held in the convent, resulting in the appointment of Sor Phelipa Josepha de San Antonio as Vicar Abbess. This appointment was a primary cause for the struggles and tensions within the convent for the few years that followed.

The information we have about the Conceptionist nuns comes mainly from seven nuns' responses to a questionnaire administered by the Bishop Pedro Anselmo de Tagle. The Bishop initiated an investigation into the convent because of complaints he had received from clergy members regarding the behavior of a select group of nuns. For example, the Secretary Carlos de Navía wrote the Bishop saying, "hemos llegado a percibir el lamentable estado y lastimosa decadencia en que se halla el Convento Real de la Purísima Concepción...desde que se eligió de Vicaria Abadesa a la Reverenda Madre Sor Josepha Phelipa de San Antonio."<sup>14</sup> Due to opinions such as this, the Bishop wrote a questionnaire to the seven nuns "más juiciosas y de mayor virtud"<sup>15</sup> to investigate the situation in the convent and the governing of Sor Phelipa Josepha. It appears that two factions had formed within the convent: one group of thirteen nuns who were allied with Sor Phelipa Josepha, and another faction of seven nuns, all of whom received the questionnaire.<sup>16</sup> An investigation of the seven questionnaires, along with supplementary documents, demonstrates the enormity of the problems within the walls of the convent. The opinions expressed in the questionnaires do not always correspond and likely are biased; however, they provide the important role of describing the situation within the convent from the point of view of those involved.

Many of the concerns expressed by the seven nuns who received the questionnaire can be related to an increase in diversity within the convent. In the Convento de la Purísima Concepción there seems to have been a clash of values; there was group of nuns who desired a devout way of life (those that responded to the questionnaire) and a group of nuns who, while likely desiring religious life, hoped to create a less strict environment, perhaps one more similar to their previous experience in the secular world.

This idea is supported by the fact that the most frequently complaint

of the seven nuns who responded to the bishop's questionnaire addresses the lack of piety and obedience to the convent rules since Sor Phelipa Josepha became the Vicar Abbess. For example, most nuns mention that Sor Phelipa Josepha changed and sometimes removed designated prayer time. Regarding the litany, María Lina comments, "por cualquier cosa no la hay y cuando la hay es con tanta violencia que mejor fuera no hacerlo por la desedificación de los que están en la iglesia."<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, María Manuela notes that there was an overall decrease in the number of nuns present for group prayer because some nuns were holding private meetings instead at the designated time. She says, "dicha Madre Abadesa lo más falta del coro por las consultas que se están ofreciendo con sus parciales."<sup>18</sup>

The claim that such problems were caused by differing degrees of piety among the nuns in the Convento de la Purísima Concepción can be further supported by other details given by the seven nuns. María Manuela believed that Sor Phelipa bribed other nuns with administrative positions in the convent in exchange for votes. She claims:

Se atrajo las voluntades de la mayor parte de esta comunidad, prometiéndolas oficios y empleos aun a las que no podían obtenerlos... diciendo estas que si votaban a dicha Madre les daría tal o tal oficio o empleo... Con estas y otras promesas se las atrajo para este fin.<sup>19</sup>

In general, the opinion of María Manuela is stronger than those of the other six nuns; however, almost all seven nuns believed that Sor Phelipa Josepha used suspicious means to gain her position.

Another related and suspicious occurrence addressed in the questionnaires is the illness that had spread throughout the convent. The illness, referred to as *el mal* or *el accidente*, is perhaps the most enigmatic aspect of the conflict. It seems that the illness first affected Sor Phelipa Josepha and later spread to other nuns in the convent. The illness is described as something similar to epilepsy. Dr. Vicente Coronel wrote to the Bishop, "...es dicho accidente una sofocación y vapores internos que originan varios síntomas perniciosos que inquietan y decomponen la comunidad."<sup>20</sup> Curiously, it seems the

illness affected only the nuns that were part of Sor Phelipa Josepha's faction.

In the questionnaire, the Bishop asks whether the nuns believe that Sor Phelipa Josepha and her associates are faking the illness and, furthermore, whether certain nuns are teaching other nuns how to fake the symptoms. The majority of the nuns express uncertainty as to whether the nuns are faking the illness. María Manuela, however, feels very certain that the illness is being faked because, "le da el mal cuando quiere y cuando no quiere, no le da."<sup>21</sup> Ana María de los Dolores says, "no puedo decir si es verdadero o fingido, pero sí es inentendible... parece que tiene ello mucho parte del Diablo."<sup>22</sup>

The illness is very relevant to the theory that some nuns were trying to create a more secular life within the convent, since those who were or claimed to be ill did not have the same religious obligations in the convent as those who were well. For example, María Teresa says, "por temporadas largas no asiste [Sor Phelipa Josepha] a los actos de comunidad... de que me hago al juicio será por su accidente."<sup>23</sup> Those that were sick were not expected to perform as many hours of prayer and other duties throughout the day as the other nuns. Therefore, it is possible that nuns were faking the illness in order to avoid having to adhere to the strict religious requirements of the convent.

The discussion of the illness can also be related to the Council of Trent's imposition of the vow of enclosure. Due to the illness, it appears that there was a dramatic increase of males, typically doctors, entering the convent. Some of the nuns imply that Sor Phelipa Josepha and others who are ill used the ability to allow doctors into the convent as a form of entertainment. For example, María de Jesús describes an incident when the doctor entered "una tarde desde la media por las dos de la tarde hasta las siete de la noche... en todo este tiempo no le hice ningún medicamento, pero hizo que entrara el médico sin tal necesidad."<sup>24</sup> María Gertrudis claims that during the time that Sor Phelipa Josepha was alone with the doctors, they were playing instruments and even smoking cigars. She says, "dijo la Madre Abadesa que lo consideraba mortificada antecedente sin chupar, que chupara, que lo que no era pecado se podía hacer. Así lo hace; ya luego entra, saca su cigarro muy despacio."<sup>25</sup>

In general, the regulation of who and what entered the convent



seems to have been lax while Sor Phelipa Josepha was in control. Many nuns claim that a second door was used by certain nuns when it should not be.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the presence of *escuchas*, nuns designated to observe and moderate conversations that occurred between nuns and secular people in order to protect purity, may have been selectively reduced by Sor Phelipa Josepha. María Lina says, “las rejas están sin escuchas algunas ocasiones...me dijo su Reverenda que así lo hacía con todas porque podían tener algo que decir a sus padres o hermanos y no querer [sic] supiera la escucha.”<sup>27</sup> María Manuela claims that Sor Phelipa Josepha allowed those nuns in her faction to meet with people without an *escucha*, while others were required to have one present.<sup>28</sup> It appears that Sor Phelipa had something to hide from the rest of her more religiously devout sisters. The excessive entrance of males into the convent and selective monitoring of nuns’ conversations support the idea that, due to the mandated enclosure of nuns, Sor Phelipa Josepha and other nuns in the Convento de la Purísima Concepción intended create a world inside a convent similar to the one outside that they were prohibited to be part of.

The nuns also discuss conflicts that arose as a result of communal life in the convent. María Teresa says:

Dice la regla “duerman todas en un dormitorio,” lo cual se va extinguiendo porque las religiosas que lo ocupaban han ido saliendo poco a poco y quedando casi vacío, aunque oí decir lo hacían por estar enfermas.<sup>29</sup>

It appears that while the Church intended to implement communal life, some nuns within the convent were not pleased by this change, and chose to take matters into their own hands. Asunción Lavrín (1965) shows that this situation was not uncommon. He says, “the majority of nuns of New Spain rejected quite strongly the establishment of the common life.”<sup>30</sup> It is possible that Sor Phelipa Josepha and her cohorts used the illness to evade the rules and create a private life within the convent. A key point here is that the imposition of communal life in convents at this time created conflict because, while some nuns desired the strict way of life in which they kept constant watch over themselves and other nuns to protect spiritual purity, other nuns felt a need for

privacy. It should be mentioned that one of the clergy members' suggestion as to how to correct the problem in the convent is the following, "se procura aun aumentar más y estrechar con el establecimiento y practica de la vida común."<sup>31</sup> Therefore, some members of the Church felt very strongly that communal life was essential to creating the best religious environment in a convent. On the other hand, it appears Sor Phelipa Josepha and other nuns felt this was too demanding and imposing and, consequently, attempted to establish privacy by any means possible.

### **Conclusion**

These testimonies are only a select few that represent the general sentiment of the seven nuns the Bishop surveyed. Overall, they show that these nuns believed that Sor Phelipa Josepha and her administration were the main causes of the dramatic changes in the convent that they felt were injurious to convent life. The Bishop and other clergy members reviewed these responses and also recorded their personal opinions on the matter. The details are not clear, but it appears that the clergy took the opinions expressed by these seven nuns seriously and took action to correct to the corruption within the convent. As a result of the information collected in the seven questionnaires, an election was held shortly thereafter and neither Sor Phelipa Josepha nor any of the members of her faction even appeared on the ballot.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, it can be inferred that the clergy members and the nuns who received the questionnaires held similar opinions on the appropriate values for convent life. These seven nuns obviously disagreed with the relaxation of convent regulations and were presumably the nuns who had entered the convent with primarily religious motivations, believing that a strict environment would foster their spiritual development. Based on the information given by these seven nuns, Sor Phelipa Josepha and her cohorts did not believe that strict religious practices were the highest priority within the convent. It is possible that these women had entered the convent for a variety of other reasons, and that they cunningly tried to create a life within the convent similar to the secular life they had previously experienced. One cannot assume, however, that these nuns had no religious devotion; it is very likely that they did.

What can be assumed, however, is that the differing piety amongst the nuns and the policy changes made by the patriarchy were principal causes for the conflict in the Convento de la Purísima Concepción. Asunción Lavrín notes, “the great commotion caused by the reform did not lead to the desired results and appears as a vigorous but ephemeral state of agitation. It only provoked a sterner attitude of rebellion among the nuns...[they] were thrown into a state of anxiety and discomfort quite contrary to the ultimate purpose of their profession.”<sup>33</sup> It can be inferred that there existed a series of dichotomies for the nuns within the convent. On a personal level, Sor Phelipa and her band may have found it very difficult to balance their religious life with contact with the outside world due, in part, to the vow of enclosure and communal life. As a community, the two groups of nuns had to balance their views of piety, but those views obviously became so opposed that they led to the intervention of the clergy.

The questionnaires describing the conflict that occurred in the Convento de la Purísima Concepción are unique and noteworthy for a number of reasons. First, the style of writing is different than what is commonly analyzed by scholars. In my investigation of religious writing I never encountered other examples of a questionnaire administered by the patriarchy to nuns. What is more, these nuns provide further insight to the life of “average” nuns living in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Mexico. While the documents found are unique, one should not assume that the same is true of their circumstances. Due to the social and religious conditions that existed in convents in the New World at this time, these women may offer an excellent example of the struggles faced by many nuns during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Their story shows a dramatic web of manipulation and divisiveness in a convent that was dealing with the dichotomies inherent in the monastic tradition of the time.

#### **Author’s Note**

This essay is a result of the research I conducted while living in Morelia, Mexico for six weeks during the summer of 2003. During these six weeks I worked in the archive Casa de Morelos in downtown Morelia where my faculty advisor, Dr. Sarah Owens, had previously found an interesting set of documents written by a group of Conceptionist nuns from San Miguel de Allende in 1770. I located

these documents, transcribed them to modern Spanish, and later translated a select few into English. This research and once-in-a-lifetime experience were made possible due to the generous Student Undergraduate Research (SUR) grant awarded to me by the College of Charleston, S.C. I am very grateful to the college for providing me the opportunity to have such a rewarding research experience. I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Sarah Owens, the staff of the Casa de Morelos archive and Dr. Margaret Chowning for all their willing help and information.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Kathryn Joy McKnight, *The Mystic of Tunja: the Writings of Madre Castillo* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), p. 82.

<sup>2</sup> Asunción Lavrín, *Cities and Society in Colonial Latin America*, ed. Louisa S. Hoberman and Susan M. Socolow (University of New Mexico Press, 1986), p. 168.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Octavio Paz, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las Trampas de la Fe* (Biblioteca Breve, 1998), p. 149.

<sup>3</sup> Eleanor McLaughlin, "Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Women in Medieval Theology," in Rosemary Radford Ruether (ed.), *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Simon and Schuster, 1974), p. 76.

<sup>4</sup> McKnight, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> Lavrín, p. 186.

<sup>6</sup> Nuria Salazar de Garza, *La Vida Común en los Conventos de Monjas de la Ciudad de Puebla* (Biblioteca Angelopolitana, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> All of the following information relating to this group of nuns came from: Archivo de Casa Morelia, Morelia Michoacán, MX. Fondo: Diocesano; Sección: Gobierno; Siglo: SVIII; Capuchinas; Caja 209; Expediente 23.

<sup>8</sup> Juan Benito Díaz de Gamarra y Davalos, *Vida de la muy Reverenda Madre Sor María Lina de la Santísima Trinidad* (Prebitero secular de la Congregación del Oratorio de la Ciudad de México, 1831), p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Medina, p. 227.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 225.

<sup>11</sup> The twenty nuns living in the convent in 1770 were: María Josepha Lina de la Santísima Trinidad, María Manuel de la Santísima Trinidad, María Gertrudis de Senor San Joseph, María de Jesús, María Rita Josepha de la Santísima Trinidad, María Teresa de la Luz, María Ana del Santísimo Sacramento, Josepha de San Luiz Gonzalga, María de Senor San Miguel, María Cayetana de las Llagas, Josepha Ignacia de la Santa Gertrudis, María Agustina de la Santísima Encarnación, María Josepha del Rosario, Javiera de la Sangre de Cristo, Vicente del Corazón de Jesús, María Antonia de San Joseph, María Gertrudis de San Joaquín, Ana María Rita de Jesús, Ana María de los Dolores, and Phelipa Josepha de San Antonio (Expediente 23).

<sup>12</sup> Expediente 23, p.18a: “we have come to sense the regretful and shameful state of the Royal Convento de la Purísima Concepción... since the Reverend Sor Phelipa Josepha de San Antonio was elected as Vicar Abbess.” All translations are my own.

<sup>13</sup> “the wisest and of utmost virtue.”

<sup>14</sup> The group allied with Sor Phelipa Josepha appears to have been: María Ana del Santísimo Sacramento, Josepha de San Luiz Gonzaga, Josepha Ignacia de la Santa Gertrudis, María Cayetana de las Llagas, María Agustina de la Santísima Encarnación, María Josepha del Rosario, María Ana del Corazón de Jesús, Javiera de la Sangre de Cristo, Vicente del Corazón de Jesús, María Antonia de San Joseph, María Gertrudis de San Joaquín y Ana María de los Dolores.

The seven nuns who received the questionnaire were: María Lina, María Ana de los Dolores, María Manuela, María Gertrudis de Senor San Joseph, María de Jesús, María Rita Josepha de la Santísima Trinidad, María Teresa de la Luz.

<sup>15</sup> “for whatever reason we don’t have it, and when we do it is done with such violence that it would be better to not have it at all due to the disturbance to those present in the Church” (Expediente 23, p. 3).

<sup>16</sup> “the aforementioned Mother Abbess is most often absent from group prayer because of the meetings she and her cohorts are having” (Expediente 23, pp. 20-21).

<sup>17</sup> “She lured most of this community, promising them offices and jobs, even to those who could not hold them... telling them that if they voted for the aforementioned Mother she would give them such

and such office or job... with this and other promises she lured them for the purpose [of winning votes]" (Expediente 23, p. 22).

<sup>18</sup> "the aforementioned illness is characterized by suffocation and internal vapors that cause various annoying symptoms that disrupt and disturb the community" (Expediente 23, p. 18a).

<sup>19</sup> "She is sick when she wants to be and when she does not want to be, she isn't" (Expediente 23, p. 20).

<sup>20</sup> "I can't say if it is real or fake, but it is not understandable... much of it seems to be the work of the Devil" (Expediente 23, p. 10).

<sup>21</sup> "For long periods of time [Sor Phelipa Josepha] doesn't attend the community acts... I believe because of her illness" (Expediente 23, p. 69).

<sup>22</sup> "One afternoon from one thirty in the afternoon until seven at night... in all this time he didn't administer any medicine, but she made him come for no reason" (Expediente 23, p. 54).

<sup>23</sup> "the Mother Abbess said that before she considered herself (religiously) mortified by not smoking, but that she would smoke now, that she could do it because it was not a sin. This is how she does it: she enters and pulls out her cigar very slowly" (Expediente 23, p. 42).

<sup>24</sup> Expediente 23, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup> "Sometimes the escuchas are not present at the meeting rooms... the Reverend Mother told me it was done this way because they might have something to say to their parents or siblings and they wouldn't want the escucha to find out" (Expediente 23, p. 4).

<sup>26</sup> Expediente 23, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> "The rules say 'everyone must sleep in the same room,' which is happening less frequently because the nuns who use to live there are leaving little by little and leaving [the room] almost empty, even though I heard it is because they are sick" (Expediente 23, p. 68).

<sup>28</sup> Asunción Lavrín, "Ecclesiastical Reform of Nunneries in New Spain in the Eighteenth Century," *The Americas* 22 (October 1965), p. 188.

<sup>29</sup> "we will try to increase and expand the establishment and practice of communal life" (Expediente 23, p. 12b).

<sup>30</sup> Information discussed with Dr. Margaret Chowning of Stanford University.

<sup>31</sup> Expediente 23, p. 202.