

The Devotional Space of Performance in Counter-Reformation Spain

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In sixteenth-century Spain, religious women are expected to follow sanctioned gender roles in the closely bound spheres of social, political, and religious life. To establish theological authority, women appropriated traditional Christian doctrine to increase their status and influence, but they struggled to emerge as leaders in a religious atmosphere that restricted their power. An analysis of the transcript of the Inquisitorial trial of the Toledan *beata* Francisca de los Apóstoles (1539–after 1578) reveals the significant challenges that faced women religious reformers after the Council of Trent, when the heightened urgency to cloister women undermined them as instruments of socio-religious change. The individualistic autonomy and authority of *beatas*, known as holy women, was in jeopardy in the 1570s when the Inquisition's declining tolerance of freedom for uncloistered religious women impacted the socio-religious climate of ecclesiastical reform in Toledo.

In December 1574, the first formal denunciations were lodged against Francisca by two *beatas*, Catalina de Jesús, a woman in Francisca's self-fashioned convent, and Luisa de Aguilera, a supporter of the convent. In addition, Sebastián Hernández, a Jesuit preacher who was Luisa's confessor, voluntarily testified that he believed that Francisca had a pact with the devil (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 165–66).¹ On October 1, 1575, Francisca, at age thirty-six, was imprisoned by the Inquisition to respond to charges of *alumbradismo*, an interior personal religiosity that disregards the Church as intermediary and, consequently, was perceived as heresy.² The multi-part trial started with a two-month interview in which Francisca primarily narrated her life and experience,

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which may have revealed another reason for the Inquisition to hold Francisca suspect. When questioned about her family, Francisca said that she did not know her paternal grandparents and that she was not aware of the birthplace of her maternal grandparents (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 61), an omission that may have been an attempt to conceal her *converso* (convert) lineage. Juan de Llano de Valdés, an Inquisitor in Toledo and Zaragoza, challenged Francisca's humility and prophetic authority when he scrutinized the authenticity of the visions that gave her public status by probing their origin as divine, demonic, or imagined. He ultimately gathered 144 charges of religious fraud against Francisca in the Toledan Inquisitorial tribunal on January 25, 1576.

Francisca was driven by the divine mandate of her apocalyptic visions, which revealed God's intent to destroy the world due to clerical corruption and humanity's sins of pride. In December of 1574, she had a vision of the final judgment and the agony of Christ's humanity. She related that God held in his hand "a decree . . . that had the power to make a general punishment against the entire world. The punishment consisted of five things: great wars, floods, fires, famine, and pestilence, and the pestilence was going to begin in Toledo" (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 80). Francisca was in fear of the warning of God's wrath against the world and she was ill for many days after this vision (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 81). This divine retribution portrayed Francisca's God not as the loving God of forgiveness, but as the castigating God of the Old Testament.

Francisca's visionary revelations depicting divine redress make sense in the framework of Toledo's socioeconomic and religious crises. Before experiencing her visions, Francisca responded to Spain's economic and moral problems with her own individual effort at the social reform of poverty; she provided needy women with lessons in needlework to give them an economic alternative to prostitution. Along with her sister Isabel, she campaigned for authorization to establish a lay community of twelve women devoted to prayers and penance (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 107). However, the tensions between official religion and lay religiosity blocked their efforts to assist the poor and pursue ecclesiastical reform when Francisca was denounced to the Inquisition. Francisca's public prophetic revelations earned her the reputation of a woman of devotion who was sought as a channel to the divine in Toledo, a status that exceeded the acceptable role of a humble and obedient female. Francisca's visions, which prophesied the return of the Toledan Archbishop Bartolomé de Carranza, a champion of the poor who was imprisoned by the Inquisition, branded her as a dissident woman who disrespected religious authorities and who was a danger to traditional patriarchal control. While accepting the possibility of divine messages, religious officials remained skeptical about the content and demeanor of a visionary woman's prophetic plea for reform.

Francisca's aspiration to charismatic authority became her greatest im-

pediment and her influence ended when the Inquisition condemned her to the public humiliation of an auto-da-fé on April 14, 1578. She was publicly declared “an arrogant, bold, miserable heretic, blasphemer, and perjurer” (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 32). Inquisitor Llano de Valdés accused her of deception, spiritual pride, and the abuse of religious authority. Francisca’s life and extensive trial represent a record that encompasses sixteenth-century sociohistorical conflicts and tensions in the midst of the *modus operandi* of the Inquisitional presence that controlled religious life in Counter-Reformation Spain.

There would be no record of the life of Francisca de los Apóstoles if not for her Inquisitional Tribunal and the meticulous documentation of her lengthy trial. Of the slight information revealed about Francisca’s life before the trial, we know that at age sixteen, she left her hometown, Nóves, for Toledo to join the *beatas* at the convent of Santa María La Blanca (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 11–12), a choice that might indicate that Francisca’s family could not provide her the requisite dowry for marriage or the convent. Women chose the semi-religious life of a *beata* to live removed from the family ties of matrimony and the vows of institutionalized religious convent life. They maintained a vow of chastity in the private living space of their own homes or in a *beaterio*, a community of *beatas*.³ In their pursuit of holiness, combining a *vita contemplativa* with endeavors that required their participation in a *vita activa*, they retained a degree of autonomy as they supported themselves and worked in their communities to serve the poor and the sick. Devoting themselves to contemplative prayer, some *beatas* strove to attain the sanctity of mystical and prophetic gifts that would be recognized by their contemporaries and the Church, such as Sor María de Santo Domingo, Madre Juana de la Cruz, and Francisca Hernández.⁴ The communication of divine messages elevated their authority, status, and prestige to a public apostolate, with differing degrees of reception or acceptance through several centuries.⁵

In 1563, when the Council of Trent demanded enclosure for all religious women, these Tridentine mandates for claustration extended to *beatas*, who were suddenly expected to profess in recognized religious orders. The objective vital to the social order was the control and regulation of female religious devotees who, like Francisca, were not obedient to the rule of a religious order. These women were loose cannons without allegiance or compliance to the patriarchal ecclesiastical hierarchy—a perilous freedom for women who were deemed intellectually weak and morally fragile. By 1568, the decrees to reform female monasticism became ecclesiastical law in Spain and were incorporated into the constitutions of established religious orders. However, many *beatas* refused to relinquish their autonomy outside of convents and preferred to remain as liminal personae, to borrow Victor Turner’s terminology, as holy women who disregard class and status (96). In 1575, notwithstand-

ing the Tridentine decree, Toledo was still home to a large number of *beatas* and eight *beaterios* (Kagan, *Lucrecia's Dreams* 18).

Francisca's unregulated life as a *beata* beyond the reach of ecclesiastical control ultimately contributed to the verdict in her trial. She believed that she was mandated by God to reform the Toledan Church. She desired to found, following the rule of St. Jerome, a religious house of twelve women, for those who did not have dowries, and a house of twelve priests who would spread the word of God as the Apostles had (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 74–75). Neither civil nor ecclesiastical approval for these houses ever materialized. In November 1573, without official permission and approval, Francisca independently formed a community of six women dressed in habits who were living under her own written rule of prayer and penance, and that number soon grew to twelve women. She founded this community with the support and consultation of her confessor Miguel Ruiz and the Italian discalced Franciscan friar Juan Bautista; however, the Vicar of Toledo considered this unauthorized house a public scandal that merited the scrutiny of the Inquisition (18).

Francisca's embodied visionary experiences and revelations in the Chapel of Nuestra Señora del Sagrario of Toledo's main cathedral occurred in the presence of audiences who witnessed the physicality of her raptures: "There were many there in the chapel who had seen this because she had experienced great tremors in her body" (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 115). The communal locus for gatherings in which physical forms can connect with transcendent encounters was the church. It was the dominant center that influenced and fulfilled both societal and personal desires. In its requisite centrality to life, it offered members a fertile physical ceremonial area that united a religious forum with performance. For a woman like Francisca, it was the place where she could openly establish her performative persona with the support of a familiar religious community to surround her as she shared her religious devotion in a public space fittingly open to this articulation. The same catalyst that inspired other women mystics also sparked Francisca's visions, the Holy Eucharist. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the desire of religious women to gaze upon and to receive the consecrated Eucharist intensified such that women were at times denied the host to control their impassioned desires. Confessors and religious leaders manipulated feminine access to the Eucharist, a stimulus to their raptures, as a means to the proscriptive governance of women's desires, passions, and societal behavior.⁶

The feast of Corpus Christi in 1264 initiated the cult of the Eucharistic host as an experiential perception of God (Bynum 55). The Catholic dogma of transubstantiation, the conversion of the host into the flesh body of Christ, united Christians to the humanity of Christ. In the tradition of the *imitatio Christi*, commonplace in the period of reform in Spain, "worshippers actively

identified with the humanity of Christ, mobilizing their senses, emotions and imaginations in their religious devotion . . . those who cultivated this model of affective piety tended to experience vividly pictorial, highly emotional, and deeply embodied raptures and revelations” (Keitt 68). After Francisca received the host in the sacrament of Holy Communion at Mass, she was told in her interior, as she explained it, to go to the Chapel of Nuestra Señora del Sagrario, where she was enraptured and God revealed great things to her. Francisca always explained these divine communications, which she believed authorized her religious activities, as an ineffable knowledge, indescribable in human terms, that she received in her interior: “She said publicly that her interior was affected and that she felt in her body a voice that told her to do what she did” (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 105).

The theological incarnation of physical Christ opened the door to the prospect of the human body as an influential vehicle for Francisca’s religious performance and provided her a graphic manifestation that was the focal point for her own corporal and visible engagement. As Sarah Beckwith aptly observes, “There are new possibilities for the body as text and instrumental medium. . . Part and parcel of this renegotiation of the role of the body in worship, was a new appreciation and reevaluation of the role of experience, affectivity and emotion” (50). The physical reception of the sacred host was intended to intensify faith, but for many women, such as Francisca, the image of Christ’s body prompted inflamed bodily responses that were open for interpretation to those in her presence. Visualization was the channel through which Francisca received Christ’s being and experienced an emotional response in her public display of rapture during which her sensual body constituted a meaningful visual performance that simultaneously inspired the devotion of her viewers.⁷ In a climate of affirmation of faith in the face of Protestantism, the public and political performance of receiving the Eucharist in the sacrifice of the Mass reached all ranks and social classes in their roles as participants and spectators.

Ecclesiastical authorities censured *beatas*’ public displays and warned them to avoid the performative space of public spectacles in the ecstatic trances, moaning, and writhing in church aisles that characterized their Eucharistic enthusiasm (Weber 227). Immediately after receiving the Eucharist, Francisca related that her spirit was enraptured and she experienced the visions that she both saw and heard in her interior. In view of others, Francisca performed in a manner of holy drama in bodily gestures and prophetic declarations. She testified that “there were many people in the chapel who had seen her because she experienced a great rending of her body” (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 81). Cultural studies theorists amplify the range of performativity by observing that performance “embraces a much wider range of human behaviors. Such

behaviors may include what Michel de Certeau calls ‘the practice of everyday life’ in which the role of spectator expands into that of participant” (Roach 46). Francisca’s embodied raptures made her an object of public regard observed by spectators in an open display that was predictably unacceptable for a woman whose “female body [had] to be continually monitored and regulated, its basic impulses restrained and reshaped in socially acceptable ways” (Sponsler 63). In a reciprocal interaction, those who saw Francisca in the Chapel became partners in her visual drama and in the physicality of the spiritual event that imposed loftier models of piety and religious significance on the viewers. Sensorial, corporal effects and conceptual, sacred connotations were automatically generated in the spectators simply by virtue of their being in the same room. The viewing of bodies and gestures that transmitted mental states and intentions resulted in moral and devotional implications that endured in a manner of cognitive empathy.⁸ As the inclusion of the body in individuals’ worship intensified, religious leaders were quick to direct these proclivities into sanctioned religious rituals to deter the rise of individual charismatic authority and excessive spirituality that was beyond ecclesiastical control.

As early as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, theologians had expressed their concerns about this public manner of feminine Eucharistic piety. By the mid-fifteenth century, the Church had grown weary of women’s visionary enthusiasm. From then on, female visionary prophets were suspect of diabolical delusion (Kagan, *Lucrecia’s Dreams* 4), as is Francisca de los Apóstoles. Jean de Charlier de Gerson (1363–1429), the Chancellor of the University of Paris and one of the most powerful theologians of his time, developed investigative formulas to distinguish the true prophet from the false. He especially mistrusted the women prophets who could be easily seduced with their raptures, which was cause for “every . . . word or writing . . . to be held suspect” (King 126). He rejected women’s affective sensory and erotic experience of the divine and the writing or teaching that it inspired. Gerson believed that the evils of the schism proceeded not only from what he perceived as the uneducated, inane women who put on airs of sanctity, but also from the lack of discernment by ineffectual spiritual counselors who encouraged their delusions.⁹ In the interest of probing the validity of visionary experience, he argued that “it was necessary for learned, moral churchmen, with university training in Theology and practical experience, to make these judgments” (Field 43). To this end, Gerson authored two books: *De distinctione verarum visionum a falsis* (On Distinguishing True from False Revelations, 1401) and *De probatione spirituum* (On the Proving of Spirits, 1415). He transferred the techniques of interrogation, *inquisitio*, from Roman law to the discourse of discernment. His rules for distinguishing true visions from false endured

into the seventeenth century in the *Interrogatorio para el examen de revelaciones, visiones y sueños* (Interrogation for the Examination of Revelations, Visions and Dreams), a set of instructions distributed to judges by the Inquisition (Kagan, "Politics" 110). Gerson's work inspired Diego de Simancas, the Inquisitor of Archbishop Bartolomé de Carranza, to author the much reprinted *Institutiones catholicae* (Catholic Institute) (1552), a widely used handbook that codified trial procedures for Spain's Inquisitors.¹⁰ By the end of the sixteenth century, "Sensational cases of women who were viewed as visionaries and stigmatics, only to be revealed as frauds, cast aspersions on all female claims to mystical experience" (Bilinkoff, "Confessors" 85). The growing number of women claiming divine visions in Francisca's time required clergy to be adept at discerning their validity.

An index of this unique validity, common to Medieval and Renaissance visionary prophecies, is the reform of a corrupt Church. According to anthropologist Clifford Geertz, religion serves a dual purpose: to maintain societal beliefs and to stimulate and support reform (92). It is this reform that motivated Francisca in her first rapture in the Chapel of Nuestra Señora del Sagrario. She pictured the Blessed Mother interceding with her son for the Toledan Church and for the liberation of Bartolomé de Carranza from the Inquisition.¹¹ Given the dire economic state of the people of Toledo, their Archbishop Carranza, appointed in 1558, had plans to alleviate the suffering of the poor through bread distribution. These plans were never realized because in August 1559 he was imprisoned by the Inquisition for alleged heretical statements. In his absence, the Toledan Church was run by an Administrative Council inattentive to the needs of the poor.

During her trial interrogation, Francisca related a vision that she experienced after communion that reflected her mission to reform a corrupt Church, a vision that conveyed God's anger at the wickedness of the Church,

In this rapture she also saw in her spirit the whole world entangled with demons and all the cities darkened, and Our Lord asked the defendant if she could bear that those demons come into her in order to render an account of what they had made creation do to offend Him. The defendant waited for the space of six months to accept this request, and during this time Our Lord showed her many things that had offended Him. (Ahlgren, *Inquisition*, 66)

To substantiate the authenticity of this vision for the Inquisitor, Francisca alluded to St. Catherine of Siena's submission to similar torments by demons on

behalf of the Church, as recounted in Raymond Capua's *Life of Catherine of Siena*.¹² Believing in the redemptive value of physical suffering to save souls through her own torment, Francisca ultimately affirmed that she, like Catherine, was victorious over the demons.

Through the Inquisitorial process, the Inquisitor's interrogation objective is to determine if an individual's revelations come from God or the devil, or are simply human imagination. The investigation intensifies when the accused is a woman visionary because it is held that, by their nature, women have a propensity toward being deceived by false visions and demonic illusions. In the vision of her interaction with the demons who torment her, Francisca ironically named the devils of pride, unwittingly validating the sin that the Inquisitor will later accuse her of:

around the Octave of the Holy Sacrament (i.e., the eight days following Corpus Christi [May 30]) the defendant felt within her new tribulations and torments in which demons came to her to make a declaration to Miguel Ruiz . . . the devil spoke, through the mouth of the defendant, to Miguel Ruiz, saying that they were the devils of pride who came to her to weary her. After this, other demons came from another sin and others from another until they finished tormenting her, which would be from the Octave of the Sacrament until ten days before All Saints Day. (Ahlgren, *Inquisition*, 67)

In a society that presumes that "Women are associated with a privation of meditative powers (*contemplationis defectus*) which makes them, with rustics and the simple-minded, well suited to devoutness, but ill-suited to intellectual disciplines" (Maclean 63), women are believed to lack judgment and the faculty of *discretio spiritum*: that is, the discernment of spirits and the capacity to distinguish between a message originating from God or from the deceit of demons. The demeaning pairing of women and idiots is not uncommon in early modern treatises. It is considered essential to design laws to protect women who, by their naturally weak and unstable moral nature, are more susceptible to temptation. In the legal codes of Castile, first collected in the Laws of Toro in 1369 and promulgated in 1505, woman is categorized as *imbecilitas sexus* (imbecile by reason of her sex), along with children, invalids, and delinquents (Formica 179).

It is comprehensible then that the Church should question the capacity of women, who were viewed as mentally deficient and morally untrustworthy

beings, to receive divine revelations. This was an age of belief in miracles, together with the constant presence of the devil, demonic possessions, and exorcisms. Indeed, it may be that Francisca was actually possessed or believed herself possessed. Francisca recounted that she and two of her sisters asked Miguel Ruiz, the chaplain of the Hospital of Misericordia, to exorcize them.¹³ Ruiz did so with the license of the Diocesan Council of the government and, in the sisters' recovery, he recommended the frequency of the sacraments, which later he withdrew and only permitted when necessary (Beltrán de Heredia 489).¹⁴

Francisca's visions, which involved current events and contemporary figures, were to be the basis for the foundation of a new order and, thereby, represented a threat to the Church and the State. The veracity of her visions formed the nucleus of her trial interrogations. Her insistence that they were divine was insufficient for the Inquisitor who demanded proof, in judicial and not theological language, that their source was divine and not demonic.¹⁵ The Church's discernment of visions grew problematic in the sixteenth century and it required the implementation of rules for the verification of divine visions.¹⁶ But even with these rules, the Inquisitor's scrutiny of true prophets still remained an ambivalent process because Christianity has accepted that God communicates prophetic messages through ordinary individuals. Beginning with Deborah and Judith in the Old Testament, the Church has recognized a long line of holy women who achieve a state of spiritual grace as the recipients of divine messages, usually in the form of visions. The caution is that prophetic visions are not exclusively personal: "Prophecy is essentially a public endeavor though its origin is quintessentially a private experience, such as a vision or dream. Prophecy is also a social act. Often allied with a particular cause, the prophet is a mediator between the supporters of that cause and the general public, as well as a transmitter of messages received through a miraculous medium" (Kagan, "Politics" 106). The charismatic authority of the prophet and the political content of the revelations often posed a threat to the established social and religious order.

Carolyn Bynum notes that women charismatics feel authorized to wield spiritual authority by virtue of their mystical experiences,

forged, through charity, miracle, and fasting, an alternative role—an essentially lay and charismatic role—authorized not by ordination but by inspiration, not by identification with Christ the high priest but by imitation of Christ the suffering man. Women's charismatic, prophetic role was an alternative to, and therefore a critique of and a substitute for, the characteristic male form of religious authority: the authority of office. (233)

The Church's persecution of prophets was not solely prompted on religious grounds but by the rising political stature of those critical of the ecclesiastical or secular hierarchy. Francisca's charismatic influence on those who saw her performative visions was threatening to the religious hierarchy because of the influential way in which these religious practices may have been processed in the minds of others.

The reformative role of prophecy served Francisca as an ideological weapon to attain legitimacy in her quest for reform. As a holy actor and visionary woman, she suddenly found worth in her life that was swiftly imbued with a mission and meaning: it was a charismatic authority of divine origin and it proceeded from the perceptions of the sanctity of her visions, which inspired the voluntary belief and trust of her followers in a collective phenomenon that addressed a specific audience in the cause of the neglected and marginalized in Toledo.¹⁷ Whether her prophetic ability was real and of divine origin, or not, is not the issue; it is the fact that there was belief in her ability and she was sought after as an intermediary for the divine. This recognition forged Francisca's relationship with her followers who had the same interest in reform and who believed that her actions were legitimate and promised the hope of fulfillment. Gillian Ahlgren affirms that Francisca defends herself against accusations that she shared her visions with others and boasted about them:

Francisca's answers on these points reveal that she clearly had a public reputation in Toledo as a woman of prayer with access to divine wisdom. She was consulted by outsiders and asked to raise their concerns to God, serving as an instrument for divine guidance. Thus, Francisca had most likely achieved a certain and not uncontroversial status. . . . Inquisitional officials never recognized the element of service in Francisca's reforms nor did they acknowledge that as her intent. (*Inquisition* 27)

While visions raised the status of a woman to that of a charismatic authority who could justify her public preaching and influence, there was a warning. Public revelations and preaching were unacceptable for women.¹⁸ The Church condemned women's self-fashioning and the impression management of their public performances as an intentional way of designing their persona for social advancement.

The requisite submissive silence of women in public has historical scriptural foundations. St. Paul's dictum, which originally forbade women to teach the catechism, was perpetuated by the clergy to justify women's

exclusion from the public sphere. Women who preached disregarded these restrictions on maintaining silence, which was sufficient cause to be accused of heresy by the Inquisition. Francisca's live performances were episodes that could fashion intimate sacred connotations for each observer that were beyond the approved system of beliefs. If the Inquisition determined that a woman feigned holiness to gain public attention and social stature, she was condemned for willful and calculating fraud and deceit.

Francisca's Inquisitional tribunal was conducted as what today we would identify as a judicial court of law. Inquisitors were men of legal training, educated in the law, not in theology. They functioned as prosecutors who consulted with theologians as necessary. The coercive interrogations were guided by accusatorial questions that were intended to produce admissions of guilt. Since questions can be manipulative, Inquisitors formulated their inquiries to elicit the responses required to charge the accused. Inquisitor Llano de Valdés himself executed a theory of mind to ascribe a conceptual status to Francisca's visions in a complex cognitive interaction between a dominant and a marginalized group. His specialized experience and familiarity with visionary states, prompted him to simulate her thinking and assume her perspective to conceptualize the rational for Francisca's behavior and to use that to interpret her actions and motivations. He deduced and predicted Francisca's contemplative circumstances to interrogate and ultimately to condemn her through Machiavellian intelligence, a class of mind reading used "when advanced minds seek to understand mental processes, emotions, or beliefs in order to . . . manipulate others" for their purpose (Simerka ix).¹⁹ In a cunning and calculated way, his prosecutorial questioning from his position of power was several steps ahead of Francisca's with a distinct objective in sight. Since the Inquisitor belonged to the dominant class and held all the institutional cultural capital (Bourdieu 7), his complex mental interactions with Francisca, a marginalized member of society—a morally deficient, unlearned, convert woman—had her at a disadvantage. In addition, he repeatedly denied her many requests for the assistance of a defense lawyer, an inquisitional official known as *el abogado de los presos* (lawyer of the prisoners) (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 118–19). The Inquisitor's questioning was a complicated dynamic of social interaction in which he manipulated the interrogation to focus on his knowledge of Francisca's mental peculiarities and on what he considered Francisca's untrustworthy or deceitful mentality, given that women were generally considered deceptive by nature.

On January 5, 1576, after three months of preliminary interrogation, the Inquisitor pronounced 144 formal accusations against Francisca, taken from her testimony and that of twenty-four witnesses, which were read to her over

four hours (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 24–25). The main interrogation of Francisca's activities focused on the nature of her apocalyptic visions, which were interpreted and reinterpreted during the trial. The Inquisitor questioned her about the characteristics of her revelations and the effects that they produced on her and others, since her revelations were always public. He specifically wanted to discern the origin of the visions—God or the devil—and he questioned their theological validity. The Inquisition held several central concerns about the authenticity of her visions, which made them inherently suspicious and incapable of justifying her reform efforts. Francisca's redemptive role for her reform was an unacceptable critique of existing ecclesiastic structures and a negative assessment of the religious climate of Toledo. In addition, the Inquisition disputes her adoption of a public teaching role (Ahlgren, "Francisca de los Apóstoles" 129).

After accusation ninety-nine, which was an extensive questioning about Francisca's victory over the demons, Inquisitor Llano de Valdés delved into Francisca's aptitude for the spiritual discernment of the devil's deceptions. He skillfully employed the techniques of judicial cross-examination and engaged in complex semantics with the unlearned woman as he repeatedly declared her visions incredible, requiring proof from Francisca that they are authentic. He admonished Francisca for inappropriate and untrue responses as he reproached her justification of charismatic authority and reform because he believed that it was founded on suspect revelations and pride. The Inquisitor triumphed over Francisca's resolve when he concluded: "it is a very certain and confirmed thing that none of those revelations was from God and to believe anything else would be a very great deceit" (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 148). Francisca's spirited will to convince the Inquisitor of the veracity of her visions is finally broken, replying with deferential submissiveness: "[Francesca] said that she will not make a determination about whether they were from God or from the devil any more than to say that whatever the Lord Inquisitor says and instructs her, that is what she will believe" (147). If the Inquisitor could not authenticate the visions as divine using his authority to discern their veracity, then they could only be attributed to mental illness or the devil. Francisca was condemned as an *alumbada* (illuminist) who was falsely illumined in her public voice about God's revelations in prayer and was denounced as one who attracts public attention and seeks prophetic authority in performative representations.

Historically, performance has been an interactive way of transmitting religious belief systems. Henry Kamen affirms that ritual dramatic public displays of penitence and punishment, like the auto-da-fé, served a political purpose "to stage a flamboyant public ceremony that would reaffirm the power of the Inquisition and enforce its presence" (205). The Inquisitorial trials and subsequent condemnations in the autos-da-fé were elaborately

designed as an exemplary method for maximum psychological effect on their audience.²⁰ The auto-da-fé attracted thousands of spectators in a visual theater, an interactive performance populated by all social ranks and classes in a public and collective show:

In Toledo the Zocodover, or the square in front of the great Gothic cathedral, was the preferred site. There were two large stages, one for the inquisitors and the upper stratum of secular and ecclesiastical society, the other for the condemned heretics who were to be purified by the official castigators. The balconies of houses surrounding the main square were filled with important people. (Ruiz 157)

There were elaborate preparations to stage the event, from formal invitations to special meals that were planned for ecclesiastical and secular authorities and royal attendees, whose presence was essential to render prestige to the public display. Visual representations were an integral part of pious behaviors and the reception by viewers made for a personal connection in their collaboration and identification with the representation.²¹ This corporal, visual, performative event symbolized the power of the Church and the Crown through which the spectators united in their loyalty and religious faith and which extract long-term spiritual implications of moral consequences.

In the Spain of Francisca de los Apóstoles, “The individual who has charisma is not only a person but a personage, a public character in public drama, who receives and imparts legitimacy” (Blasi 5–6). Francisca experienced the transformative power of performance during her visions and prayer experiences that were delivered through speech, gestures, and body language in the public space of the Cathedral before an audience—all elements descriptive of interactional public preaching. Francisca justified her public prophetic visions as her divine mandate to “go out to all the world and preach penance. She was ordered to make public to the world all of what she saw” (Ahlgren, *Inquisition* 81–82). In the last formal accusation against Francisca, the public nature of her raptures is denounced:

In addition, that in all of the aforesaid and many other things, she says and affirms under oath that these things actually happened and that she saw them and believes them to be true and as such has talked about them publicly with many people. And in addition to that, it is presumable that Francisca de los Apóstoles has said, done and believed many

other things more and less grave and that she has said and done them to other persons and that she has been quiet about them and covered them up maliciously so that they do not come to the attention of Your Honor. (117)

The Inquisitional tribunal places extraordinary and repeated negative condemnatory emphasis on the public nature of Francisca's raptures.

Ultimately, Francisca's unstable charismatic authority was invalidated when she did not produce a reform. Her authority as a prophet was discredited because what would have been the miraculous liberation of Carranza by Christmas 1576 never materialized. Her charismatic public performances culminated in the institutional public spectacle and performance of the auto-da-fé and her ultimate social exclusion in exile from Toledo for three years. Notwithstanding the many insights in the trial transcripts about Francisca's life and her mission, Francisca remains an enigma. Did Francisca truly experience divine visions and revelations? Did she only imagine that she was conceded an intercessory reformatory role to improve social and religious life in Toledo? Did she suffer from mental aberrations that disposed her to assume a prophetic role? These issues remain unresolved with certitude. What is striking in the extensive testimony of her trial is that she never varies her responses about her experiences. She never changes her story. She maintains the same details over and over again and, when the written testimony distorts her words and misrepresents her activities, she assertively challenges these misrepresentations. After her public lashing on April 14, 1578, Francisca de los Apóstoles completely disappeared from historical records and nothing more is known of her.

NOTES

1. *The Inquisition of Francisca: A Sixteenth-Century Visionary on Trial* is Gillian T. W. Ahlgren's superb edition and translation of the transcript of Francisca's Inquisitorial trial, which was discovered in Madrid's Archivo Histórico Nacional. For additional discussions of Francisca, see also Ahlgren's "Francisca de los Apóstoles: A Visionary Voice" and "Francisca de los Apóstoles: A Visionary Speaks."
2. The September 23, 1525, edict of Toledo identifies *alumbradismo* as "heretical in terms of forty-eight propositions formulated by the Inquisitors from statements made by defendants and witnesses during Inquisition trials. *Alumbrados* encouraged interiorized Christianity in the spirit of the medieval *devotio moderna*, the ideas of Erasmus and Lutheranism. A sampling of the propositions from the edict demon-

strates that at the heart of *alumbradismo* was the belief that a personal relationship with God overruled the authority of the Church and nullified the need for its mediation. . . . During the early sixteenth century . . . charismatic women appeared on the spiritual landscape who, in ecstatic teaching and preaching, demonstrated the power of the Holy Spirit to enlighten the lowliest of God's creatures without the benefit of priest, sacrament or institution" (Giles, *Women* 78). For studies on *alumbradismo*, see Antonio Márquez; Bernardino Llorca; Álvaro Huerga's multivolume work; and Marcel Bataillon's well-known study focused on *alumbradismo* and Erasmus (208–14; ff.).

3. See Mary Elizabeth Perry's discussion of the societal perceptions of *beatas*: *Gender* (97–117); and "Beatas" (147–68). For additional studies on *beatas*, see María Palacios Alcalde; John Longhurst; Ángela Muñoz Fernández; and Carmen Soriano Triguero.
4. For a discussion of the *beatas* whose visionary prophecies lend authority to desired reforms, see Madre Juana de la Cruz (Surtz, *Guitar of God*); Francisca Hernández (Giles, "Francisca"); and Sor María de Santo Domingo (Giles, "Holy"; and *Book*).
5. In their study of affective spirituality and visionary phenomenon, Geraldine McKendrick and Angus Mackay examine the prominent role of women in sixteenth-century Spain (95).
6. Through the Eucharist, women experience an intimate access to God without clerical mediation. Carolyn Bynum acknowledges that "Women's visions came most frequently in a Eucharistic context. And women's special and intimate relationship to the holy food was itself often a way of rejecting or bypassing ecclesiastical control" (230).
7. Jill Stevenson elaborates on the viewers' reaction to visual religious stimuli, "like bodies and objects staged in religious performance, the actuality of devotional images, and the material spaces in which people encounter them, reach out to viewers and engender devotional patterns in their bodies" (37).
8. Cognitive empathy, the transposition of ourselves into another's place, is "a movement that allows us to exchange mental perspectives, thoughts, and feelings with another person. This process relates directly to theory of mind research and is therefore related to embodied simulation" (Stevenson 131); see also Lisa Zunshine.
9. Nancy Caciola asserts, "The fact that the schism was so closely linked to unregulated feminine prophecy was therefore a damning indictment. The principal of 'investigating the fulfillment' of supernatural events demanded that prophecies resulting in the schism of Christendom be evaluated as diabolic" (291). Conversant with the medical theories of his day, Gerson "often pairs pathological with demonic causes as explanations for visionary phenomena, clearly preferring such mechanisms to a divine explanation" (293). In the religious climate of the sixteenth century, where the supernatural is as conventional as the earthly, the Church's teachings give the devil a material presence that generates natural and personal adversities as the

- embodiment of evil (Russell 256).
10. Diego de Simancas was a legal consultant whose career served as a model for the Inquisitor as jurist (Caro Baroja 34). He advanced his legal career through the prestige of an Inquisitor's authority and his dedication to the principles of faith. Simancas, who later became a theorist in ecclesiastical governance and law, achieved his personal repute from his prosecution of Archbishop Bartolomé de Carranza. Simanca's *Vida*, which relates the Carranza case, is a successful narrative of his personal exemplary judicial practice; see Kimberly Lynn, 113.
 11. In a letter to her sister Isabel on April 23, 1574, Francisca described her rapture and her vision of the Son of God, who named Carranza as the reformer of the Church and who exhorted her to do great things (Ahlgren, *Inquisition*, 45). Eight of the Inquisition's accusations against Francisca mention her advocacy of Carranza in her prophetic call for reform, which was incompatible with the Church's efforts to maintain authoritative supremacy.
 12. St. Catherine of Siena (1347–1380), a Dominican tertiary at age sixteen and a charismatic leader, was a hagiographic model for Francisca because of her ecstatic visions and physical demonic torments. Francisca related to her Inquisitor that: "During this time that she had this doubt and was in this conflict about accepting what Our Lord was asking of her, she happened to come across in the book of Saint Catherine of Siena a chapter that treats of how she saw similar demons and asked them to come upon her, and she was thus very tormented by them on behalf of the church of God" (Ahlgren, *Inquisition*, 66). Another connection that would draw Francisca to the Saint is the active public apostolate that grew out of Catherine's spiritual contemplative life. Catherine was canonized in 1461 and, in 1970, was named a Doctor of the Church, along with St. Teresa of Ávila.
 13. When arrested as a witness for the Inquisition in Francisca's trial, Miguel Ruiz, who earlier had supported Francisca in her reform, corroborated her testimony that he wrote down her visions (Ahlgren, *Inquisition*, 136). In his self-interest, he testified that he discounted her visions because she was possessed. It is not uncommon for ambitious clerics to seek prestige through their association with those who experience revelations; however, if the visions are judged to be fraudulent, the clerics needed to distance themselves from subversive imposters.
 14. Nancy Caciola recounts an attempted cure for demonic possession in which "demoniacs were sometimes given the Eucharist in an apparent attempt to have God and the demon battle it out in the human body. . . . Another possible remedy was a regime of prolonged prayer and fasting" (232–33).
 15. Dale Shuger affirms the inquisitorial conflict that arises between judicial and mystical language, "The interrogation of would-be mystics represents a prolonged intention to dissociate mystic experience from mystic language, and to get the accused to represent mystic visions in the language of evidence and proof" (941).
 16. In his *Tratado de la verdadera y falsa profecía* (Treatise on True and False Prophecy, 1588), Juan de Horozco y Covarrubias presents seven rules for the discernment of spirits, four of which have to do with the virtue, lifestyle, and attitude of the re-

- ipient (Ahlgren, *Inquisition*, 24). The Inquisitor seeks an answer to the question of whether the visions have a divine source or are an invention forged by sinful pride and the desire to be revered and venerated.
17. Francisca's spiritual experiences display the categories of sanctity, as described by Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell (141–64): she has special access to God in her prophetic revelations; she is devoted to a life of asceticism in fasting, deprivation, and illness; she expresses humility through a lack of regard for herself; and she performs charitable activities.
 18. Jodi Bilinkoff describes St. Teresa of Ávila's frustration as a woman in sixteenth-century Spain where only men were allowed to preach and assume public ministries. Teresa laments that there is no virtue of women that men do not hold suspect (*Way of Perfection* 3:7); ("Teresa" 103). See also Gillian Ahlgren's studies on St. Teresa of Ávila, a woman of visionary authority who accepted the role of religious leader as the reformer of the Carmelite Order (*Teresa of Ávila*; and "Negotiating Sanctity").
 19. In her research on cognitive cultural studies, Barbara Simerka discusses how Theory of Mind allows humans to conceptualize others' reasoning to influence social interactions. See also Paula Leverage; and Richard Byrne and Andrew Whitten.
 20. Michel Foucault remarked that the early modern period was permeated with "The horrifying spectacle of public punishment" (9). Francisca was fearful about her sentence and she implored the Inquisitor for clemency for all that she has endured in her life: "I confess my guilt to your reverence, and for what I have done I ask for mercy from God, but I ask that you do not do with me what this crime merits but according to the mercy of God and what your graces often use against sinners and that you be attentive to the fact that I am a woman and that I am almost desperate from having experienced many trials and illnesses in my life" (Ahlgren, *Inquisition*, 155).
 21. The large painting by Francisco Rizi, "Auto-da-fé en la Plaza Mayor de Madrid" (1683), on view in the Prado Museum, portrays the auto-da-fé that takes place in Madrid's Plaza Mayor on June 30, 1680. The young Charles II and his mother, Mariana of Austria, are the royals who preside over the event. The numerous ecclesiastical and royal dignitaries that populate the background represent both political and religious hierarchies that approve the public punishments; for a discussion of the spectacle depicted in Rizi's painting, see Helen Rawlings.

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