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Sanguine Salvation: Pilgrimage and Penance at the Sanctuary of Chimayo

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By

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Acknowledgements

Thank you, David Shein, for letting me graduate.

Dedicated to baby Z, in the hopes her college years are an exploration of what impassions her.

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Foreword

When I began researching the Sanctuary at Chimayo, I struggled with the question of whether or not I was also a pilgrim. Studying religious art often kept me a degree removed, observant but not practicing. With eight years of Catholic school behind me, I thought I was running away from religion when I attended an East Coast liberal arts college. Somehow, whether you attribute it to the Grace of God, or my unwillingness to let go of the familiar, I dedicated a year of writing and research to a tiny Catholic church in Chimayo, New Mexico. To the delight of my elderly aunties, and to the bemusement of my fellow left-leaning friends, the rabbit hole of religious existential crises reopened from my Catholic school days. When asked about my faith I often fumble with uncertainties, and I find myself manipulating my answers to suit the questioning party. Truthfully, I wasn't sure what I believed, and my spirituality has waxed and waned over my life. However, my devotion has been unwavering to one feature: the power of religious imagery. If there is such a thing as experiencing the presence of the divine, I have felt it only in the manifestation of art.

The hour drive from Santa Fe to Chimayo is through a zone of no cellular service. The line between population and remoteness is more defined in New Mexico than in upstate New York. Where the concentration of population from Manhattan spreads thinner as the radius widens farther from it, leaving Santa Fe felt more like crossing a boundary into the desert. There is an exhilaration and fear that comes with occupying a space so remote. The removal of a constant availability to others forces one to feel the potency and strength of the self. As I've spent more time in the American desert, the connection between the landscape and its people felt undeniably intertwined. Travelling farther away from the city, the Sangre de Cristo Mountains become their own force, their presence asserting itself in your consciousness in a way I never

experienced with the Catskill Mountains at home. Landscape was not just a backdrop here. Standing in the desert overlooking the expanse of rising crests I felt undeniably insignificant.

Entering the Sanctuary, I was struck by both the beauty and the humility. My art historical experience with Catholic churches seemed to oppose everything this church offered. When I studied in Rome, I saw masters fighting for the conversion of souls, offering a glimpse of God through the handling of the brush in gifted hands. This was not the experience in Chimayo. Church artworks were painted with house paints on pine plywood. The art was created by folk artists. But it was moving, I felt overcome with the sense of true devotion, the piety to celebrate God even by humble means. So, I collected my holy soil, I prayed, and I knew I wasn't a tourist. I became a pilgrim.

Introduction

To be honest, what drew me to visit the Sanctuary of Chimayo was the story of the Penitentes. I had learned about the Penitentes multiple times in classes about Latin American Art, and the stories surrounding cloaked men performing acts of self-mutilation to absolve their sins were seductive. To add to the enticement, the site also contained a pit in the ground filled with miraculously healing soil. Entering into the project, I knew I would have to research folk art. I knew some of the religious images would be violent. I also knew the site attracted pilgrims from around the world for the healing properties of its miraculous soil. What I hadn't expected was the effect of the site to move me. The artwork within the church was created by artists with no classical training. The materials they used were humble and inexpensive. Despite years of art history courses that taught me what "good" art was, I was as moved walking through the Sanctuary of Chimayo as I was when I first saw Bernini's *Apollo and Daphne* in the Galleria Borghese.

So, the exploration that ultimately manifested itself as this project, came out of the simple question: why was I moved? Devotees were still performing acts of penance by carrying crosses to Chimayo during Holy Week to this day. What kept these people devoted to this site to perform these acts? What was it about the history of the site, the program of its structure, and the artwork displayed that made the Sanctuary so persuasive?

Scholarship

The published works on Chimayo are few. With the exception of the 2017 publication by Brett Hendrickson on the history of tourism at Chimayo, my research has brought up no more than small, often locally published, pamphlets on the history of the site. While the retablos in the sanctuary have appeared in a handful of art historical texts on *santeros* and Spanish Colonial Arts, there is no scholarship linking the history of the site with meaning in the artwork. Using the

material culture of Chimayo as my guide, I will connect the religious history of the past to the present design and decoration of the site. Ultimately, the Sanctuary of Chimayo is an emotional appeal to the humanity of Christ. By emphasizing the human aspects of Christ, empathy is invoked in the pilgrim. While a large portion of the Sanctuary is dedicated to the Passion, the story of the site is fundamentally about redemption and healing, as manifested in the miraculous Holy Soil.

Santuario de Chimayo's Indigenous Roots

Our western perception of time calls us to pinpoint a moment in history on a linear trajectory. As art historians, we often try to contain change in a frame of years, periods, and movements, holding tight to the belief that an accumulation of past events brings us to an understanding of the present. If there is one thing I've learned in studying active sites of worship, it is that time has a curious ability to fold in on itself. Traditions of past meet the present, all held within adobe walls built two hundred years ago. Who are the worshipers at Chimayo? Who are they the sons and daughters of? Do they feel the faith of their ancestors here?

Reflecting on the history of the American West, the narrative is often weighted with the consciousness of an ancestry of oppressors and oppressed. Indigenous groups in the United States have faced horrific displacement at the hands of Anglo-Americans and the Spanish before them. The importance of land ownership and stewardship is an ugly battle still fought over into the twenty first century. With the sobering acknowledgement of the injustices of the American Government against the American Indigenous over forced diaspora, we must recognize the Pueblo Indigenous around Chimayo are in the minority for continuing to occupy their ancestral lands. The people who live in Chimayo now are descendants of three cultures existing and

influencing each other, the Hispanic, Anglo-American, and Pueblo Indigenous. The exchange of these cultures all creates the unique traditions at Chimayo.

Chimayo is located between Taos and Santa Fe at the base of the Sangre de Christo Mountains. This area was once occupied by the Tewa people of the Pueblo Indigenous. The word "Chimayo" comes from the Tewa name of a nearby mountain, *Tsi Mayoh* or "Eastern Mountain", and is one of four sacred peaks representing the cardinal directions. As oral history goes, there was once a healing spring located close to *Tsi Mayoh.* After the spring ran dry the healing properties absorbed into the surrounding earth. Collecting the sacred earth at this site and mixing it with water to drink for the purpose of healing has roots in Indigenous practices which pilgrims to Chimayo continue to practice today.[1]

Mountain tops were considered sacred spaces by the Tewa. The mountains were a source of protection, and only select members of the community could set foot on the mountains at certain times of the year. Shrines were constructed at the peaks made from loosely placed stones in a keyhole shape, with the opening in the direction of the village. The shrines were known as earth navels and generated good blessings which were then directed at the village. Earth navels could also take the form of natural features including caves and rock ledges. One could communicate with ancestral spirits at these spots, and the soul, once departed from the physical body, found shelter at the shrine. Caves were considered openings into the underworld, and priests were the only members of society allowed to enter a cave. *Towa é,* translated "little people", dwelt in caves and were used as supernatural mediators between the priests and the deities in the underworld.[2]

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[1] Stephen De Borhegyi, *El Santuario de Chimayo* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1956), 8.
[2] Elizabeth Kay, *Chimayó Valley Traditions* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1987), 8-10. Some have linked the Tewa use of supernatural mediators between humans and the divine with the popularity of saints in contemporary worship.

Making claims of connectivity between ancient and contemporary religious practices can be a dangerous generalization for the scholar. Acknowledging my limitations, I do wish to note rock carrying is still practiced in Chimayo as worshippers will bring rocks from the surrounding mountains to the site as a votive, as well as the modern construction of stone crosses along the water stream near the complex (Fig. 1a, 2a). Rocks were carried to mountain peaks to make shrines to the spirits and give blessing to one's family. Likewise, pilgrims to Chimayo will bring a rock from their home area to the Sanctuary as votives for protection and healing.

Converted and Abandoned: 1598-1810

Our story, like many pivotal moments in history, begins with the introduction of a stranger. As European conquistadors spread their influence over Latin America, the gaze of the conqueror turned northward. In 1598, Spanish-born Juan de Oñate, led a colonizing expedition of soldiers and settlers of New Spain upward to present day New Mexico. Despite facing grueling hardship in the remote deserts of the American Southwest, the colony persevered and held Spanish control in the area. Among the first European settlers in Oñate's expedition, Franciscan friars began their missionary work to convert the local Pueblo Natives to Christianity and claim their newly saved souls to the power of the Spanish Monarchy.[3] This religious interaction marks the first contact leading to a long history of cultural exchange the American Southwest is famous for and pinpoints our understanding of Chimayo as a progression of many cultures and histories melding into modernity.

Although the new settlers emerged as a presence in the remoteness of the Santa Fe desert, the harsh climate and lack of mining resources so valued by the Spanish left the area largely

[3] Larry Frank and Skip Miller, *A Land So Remote: Religious Art of New Mexico 1780-1907* (Santa Fe: Red Crane Books, 2001), 1-2.

ignored by the government of New Spain. In effect, the land area of New Mexico acted as a strategic buffer between the valued Spanish silver and gold mines in Mexico and the lustful eyes of the emerging French and British presence in the New World. Although there were a small number of ordained friars in this vast area, the land was claimed under the Franciscan Diocese of Durango in 1729, despite administrative regulations not taking hold until 1797.[4]

Ultimately, the newly converted were left to their own devices. Catholic friars would interact with the Indigenous of the area to convert and baptize, but due to the lack of number and resources of missionaries, a consistent presence of an ordained religious leader was rare. Many priests found assignment to New Mexico undesirable. The desert climate was harsh and difficult to survive in, the land was remote, and villages were sparsely populated and spread out at great distances. On top of it all, the poverty of the area made the stipend low and priests were often reliant on charity to survive. After the fervor of conversion at the start of colonization began to wane, the Catholic Church's attention to the area lessened. Left behind were a people newly converted and navigating the beliefs of a new religion while also upholding an identity deeply rooted in their own Indigenous heritage. The art created in the Colonial Period was not meant to convert but made by the already devout, albeit with a distinct local flavor.

Brotherhood for Survival

Abandoned by the converters, the Catholic population around Chimayo organized their own religious leadership independent from Diocesan oversight. Lay confraternities (also known as the Brotherhood and the Penitentes) became common in the area, not only to keep the religion active but also functioning as a community resource in a rural region where self-reliance in the face of hardship was a must. The primary function of a confraternity was to act as spiritual

[4] Marta Weigle, *Brothers of Blood, Brothers of Light* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1976), 21.

guidance for the community, particularly as it relates to religious ceremonies during Holy Week and Easter. However, the confraternity also performed acts of charity essential for community order and survival. Members provided burial funds, dug the graves of the deceased, and provided care for the sick. Food offerings were also given to the Brotherhood and kept for distribution among the community in desperate times.[5] Predating the organization of a police force, law and justice was turned over to the hands of those most trusted in the community. Problems went in front of officials of the Brotherhood, and the confraternity held the power to give sentences and punish misconduct, it was not uncommon for a crime to be reprimanded by an act of penance performed by the criminal. The Brotherhood functioned beyond religious leadership in the community and was an integrated part in the daily life and order of New Mexican society.

In 1851 the dioceses of Durango, under the guidance of the newly appointed, and French-born bishop, Jean-Baptiste Lamy, condemned the Brotherhood of Penitentes for their violent penitential practices and lack of subordination to the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. Additionally, the growing influence of the United States government in New Mexico after the territory became part of the States in 1850, began to threaten the jurisdictional power the Penitentes held. Introducing a government with a separation of church and state in an area where offenses were resolved through acts religious penance proved a difficult transition. In 1947, public acts of penance were outlawed in the area. The secret nature of confraternities as well as the outside criticism of the religious observances makes studying the Brotherhood difficult as practices are not openly discussed with outsiders, and traditional self-inflicted corporeal penance is no longer practiced in public.[6]

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[5] Ibid., 151.

[6] Marta Weigle, *Penitentes of the Southwest* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1970), 15-18.

Global Connections

Lay confraternities centered on penitential rituals is not unique or original to New Mexico. However, the source of the outside influences on New Mexico is debated among scholars.[7] Penitential Brotherhoods began in Medieval Europe, reaching a religious fervor in Spain in the 15th Century, aligning with the time of conquest. Notably, the city of Seville, has reached global fame for continuing Holy Week processions to this day. Similarities between the Spanish and New Mexican practices should be addressed. Both regions have histories of displaying public acts of penance, including cross-bearing, whipping, and chain-dragging. Processional liters depicting images of the Virgin and the Passion are carried by members during Good Friday. Costumes intended to conceal identity are worn, covering the face of members to keep acts of penance personal to the devotee.[8] While the introduction of these observances carries a direct line from Catholic Spain, the Penitentes in New Mexico was not imposed on practitioners of the area from an outsider. With the lack of ordained leadership, the culture surrounding the Penitentes was ultimately carried out and preserved by the people of the area by their own inclination.

The connections between Chimayo, New Mexico and Esquípulas, Guatemala must also be addressed. The crucifix found miraculously at Chimayo bears the name, Our Lord of Esquípulas, a reference to the Black Christ of Esquípulas. Like Chimayo, Esquípulas holds a shrine venerated for its miraculous healing soil. Geophagy was a Pre-Columbian practice in Central America and Mexico, as earth around sulfur springs was consumed for medicinal

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[7] Espinosa's work offers the three central theories of how the Penitentes came to New Mexico, still debated by scholars today. 1. Indigenous Influence: Connecting penitential acts to Mexican Aztec blood penance (this connection is discredited by many scholars today) 2. Influence of Franciscan Missionaries and flagellant practices of Medieval Europe. 3. The late introduction of a stranger associated with a European penitential confraternity.
[8] Manuel Espinosa, "The Origins of the Penitentes of New Mexico" *Catholic Historical Review* (1993), 456-8.

purposes. When Catholic missionaries entered the area, they adopted the Indigenous practices for easier conversion, except attributing the miraculous nature of the soil to Christian origins, hence the introduction of The Black Christ of Esquípulas.[9] How this Guatemalan icon came to New Mexico is a mystery, but someone in the 19th century made the connection between the Holy Soil at Esquípulas and attributed the same apparition to the healing power of the earth at Chimayo.

Chapter Outlines

My thesis is structured in three sections as follows:

Chapter I: A Divine Intervention and the Creation of Sanctuary

The first chapter will act as an introduction to the site. The miraculous story of the Christ of Esquípulas will be retold, as well as the history of Chimayo's founder, Bernardo Abeyta. As artwork was commissioned for Abeyta's new church, the history of New Mexican religious folk artists will be discussed as well as a visual analysis of the five colonial retablos at the site. The artwork and the meaning of the work all contribute to Abeyta's plan to legitimize the Sanctuary of Chimayo.

Chapter II: Violent Images: The Body and Blood of Christ

Chimayo features many gruesome images of Christ suffering during the Passion. Chapter II discusses the medieval philosophy of affective piety, or an emotional plea to the humanity of Christ. The psychological effects of these images will be discussed and compared to similar representations in Europe. Chimayo's effectiveness on the viewer comes from this emotional appeal of sympathy that bonds the viewer and Christ. These images also reveal the religious intentions of the community who built the site- the Brotherhood of Penitentes, and their ideology of penance.

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[9] Kay, *Valley Traditions,* 29-32.

Chapter III: Pilgrims of Redemption

With the influence of images of affective piety from Europe, the West also influenced the development of Chimayo by introducing new penitential practices of religious devotion. The formation of the Brotherhood of Penitentes acts as a means to preserve these traditions, often memorializing the suffering of Christ through physical acts of suffering. These practices, although violent, act as a means of redemption for the sins one committed. The sentiment of these practices is still remembered today in contemporary pilgrimage and cross bearing. Moving through the space of the site holds clues into the program of the meaning behind this sanctuary, ultimately concluding in a story about healing.

Conclusion: Tourist or Pilgrim? An Uncertain Future?

As Chimayo increasingly becomes a destination spot for those traveling to New Mexico, the future of the site seems ever uncertain as the question of pilgrimage versus tourism is considered.

Chapter I:

A Divine Intervention and the Creation of the Sanctuary

Miraculous stories often accompany the formation of a new pilgrimage site. One of my favorites is the *Santa Casa di Loreto* (Holy House of Loreto). According to the legend, the home of the Blessed Virgin, finding the Muslim occupants of Jerusalem unworthy, was carried off by angels in the fourteenth century and dropped in the Italian city of Loreto. The accuracy of this legend? Debated. But the story encompasses a larger theme about the politics of pilgrimage. The fourteenth century wasn't exactly a great time for Catholic pilgrims to visit holy relics in Jerusalem, when the crusades were in full swing. The solution? Relocate the relics. A sleepy hill town on the eastern coast of Italy proved a much better location for a Catholic pilgrim to travel to than in the hotbed of the Holy Land under the Arab Caliphate. Often the dialog of where pilgrimage sites began popping up in Western Europe during the Middle Ages spoke to political climates as well. Let's look at *Santiago de Compostela,* located in present-day Spain. The site claims to hold the remains of the apostle James Major, and scholars argue the placing of this major pilgrimage site outside of Rome functioned as a means to break Rome's monopoly on relics and, therefore, the divine legitimacy and economic benefits of pilgrimage.[10]

Fast forwarding to the Colonial Period in Mexico, similar tactics were applied to solidify political independence from Spain. The most popular example of this being the Virgin of Guadalupe. Throughout the Colonial Period, stories of miraculous apparitions, demanding churches built in their names, were occurring all over New Spain. These claims were often enthusiastically supported by clergy as the political message behind sights of these apparitions declared New Spain and its occupants as the chosen location and people of the divine. As Spain

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[10] William Melczer, *Pilgrim's Guide to Santiago de Compostela* (New York: Ithaca Press, 1993), 21-2.

asserted its religious authority with the legitimacy of its relics, New Spain was beginning to collect its own divine jurisdiction.[11]

The story of Chimayo also begins with a miraculous event. Alongside the occurrence of miracles, the founders of Chimayo were also creating the foundations to validate the site in the eyes of the Catholic Church. To build the sanctuary, the people of Chimayo must have the permission of the Catholic Church. Erecting a church that would ultimately not have a priest, was a bold endeavor when the lay confraternities in the area were already getting backlash from the church authority. But as history unfolded, the Sanctuary of Chimayo was built under the leadership of Bernardo Abeyta and the politics of power between the confraternity of Chimayo and the authority of the Catholic Church in Santa Fe began to unfold.

The following chapter discusses the four central figures responsible for the physical creation of Chimayo. While the site of Chimayo has gone through many alternations over the years, the early art and patronage should be credited to one influential community member and three New Mexican *santero* artists. None of these men worked alone. Abeyta had the man power and community around the confraternity in Chimayo, and the three *santeros* often had other hands helping with large scale projects such as altar screens. The next chapters will examine the psychological and theological ideas represented in visuals within the church, as well as discussing the relationship between the space and the collective performance of ritual. In contrast, chapter one aims to discuss the visions and artistic styles of individuals.

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[11] Stafford Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 83.

Don Bernardo Abeyta

According to legend, on the night of Good Friday in 1810, a local Chimayo man was performing penance on a mountain peak when a divine light shone on a patch of earth at the foothill. When the man, known as Bernardo Abeyta, followed to the location where the light shone, he discovered a crucifix semi-buried in the soil. Abeyta removed the crucifix from the earth, and following the advice of his family and neighbors, brought the crucifix to the nearest church in Española. The local priest took the finding and placed it in the Church of Santa Cruz. However, the next day the crucifix had mysteriously disappeared. Miraculously, Abeyta once again found the crucifix semi-buried in the soil of the foothills and returned it to the church. When the crucifix continued to miraculously appear, the locals took this inexplicable event as a sign from God to erect a church at Chimayo.[12]

A letter written by Abeyta in 1813 to the head priest of Santa Cruz offers historical documentation for those weary of church lore. The letter asks the parish for permission to build a chapel in honor of The Christ of Esquípulas. Abeyta recounts that a small shelter attached to his home has served as a place of worship to the Christ of Esquípulas for the past three years and was built at Abeyta's own expense. The sheltered covered the spot where the crucifix was found, and the earth surrounding the crucifix was believed to have miraculous healing powers. In February 1814, the residents were granted permission to build a chapel by the priest in charge of all missions in New Mexico, Father Francisco de Otocio. The large adobe structure housing the sacred crucifix to this day is the same one completed in 1816 by Abeyta and the community.[13]

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[12] Fr. Julio Gonzalez, *Sanctuario de Chimayo* (Chimayo, Brothers of the Holy Family, 2013), 13.

[13] An updated pamphlet at the site now exists as of 2019, Gonzalez identified the additions of the bell towers, tin roof, and front chapel rooms to the parish priest in charge at the time and when the additions were added.

Bernardo Abeyta not only was a member of the Penitente Brotherhood, but an influential leader given the title, *Hermanos Mayor,* "Elder Brother". Abeyta's name appears in Penitente documents of the ninetieth century, including a document instructing novices to kiss the holy soil in their initiation process.[14] Abeyta's role in Chimayo's construction is central, and his high rank within the Penitente Brotherhood links the impact of the religious order to the site and the symbolic artwork within. Abeyta, if not the Penitente Brotherhood as a whole, conceived the making of the church and commissioned the religious art within.

In 1826, an ecclesiastic visitor from the Catholic Church came to inspect the sanctuary. Disturbed by the *santos* paintings on animal hides and rough boards, the church official suggested the removal of these works from the church.[15] Important to note, often the priests placed in higher positions in the church were outsiders of New Mexico and were unaccustomed to the religious practices occurring in the South West. As discussed later, when Bishop Jean-Baptiste Lamy, a native of France, was appointed to the Diocese of Santa Fe in 1853 he was shocked by the penitential practices he witnessed and openly condemned them. The only artwork to remain after the redecoration was the original crucifix of Our Lord of Esquípulas and the green and gold frame around the main altar.[16] After this order, the reredoses that currently stand in the church were commissioned by Abeyta. There are five in total, the main altar and a side retablo attributed to Molleno, two side retablos attributed to José Aragón, and one retablo attributed to the school of José Rafael Aragón. All the works are dated between 1820-1850.

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[14] Kay, *Valley Traditions*, 32-7.

[15] The tradition of hide painting comes from the early days of conquest. With the lack of prepared canvases, missionaries sometimes painted religious images on hides. Hide painting was also prevalent among Indigenous before contact. Colonial Period hide paintings are extremely rare as they often did not remain in good condition over the years, and hide painting was beginning to be replaced by prints and wood painting. E. Boyd, a past curator of the Latin American department of the International Folk Art Museum in Santa Fe claims to know of only a dozen hide paintings from this period still in existence.

[16] Borhegyi, *El Sanctuario,* 15. Borhegyi believes the pieces allowed to stay were probably imported from Mexico.

Abeyta passed away in 1856. With special permission granted by Bishop Lamy, he was buried at the Sanctuary of Chimayo. He is memorialized as the chosen individual to receive the holy sign to find the Cross of Esquípulas, as well as historically honored as the patron and advocate for the building of the site.

Layout of the Site

Today, the Sanctuary of Chimayo encompasses a multi-acre complex of chapels, a visitor museum, and multiple gift shops and monuments. For the purpose of this paper, when referring to the Sanctuary of Chimayo, I am referencing the original adobe structure built in 1816 and the surrounding courtyard and wall (Fig.1b). The church is located on the top of an incline, today the path to the church is paved so the walk is accessible, but assumedly one would have to scale the hillside to reach the church before this addition. Adobe walls, only two or three feet tall surrounds the church, create a courtyard before the church façade. The original wall would have surrounded the building, but parts of the wall have been knocked down to allow for more open access. Aligning with the front door of the church, the entrance of the wall is arched, creating a central line to follow and enter the church. The courtyard functions as a cemetery for important people associated with the church.

The church façade is unadorned. The original entrance of the church sits behind a later addition of two side rooms and a narthex as one enters. Originally, the room additions were used as spaces to sell candles and other religious accoutrements to worshipers.[17] Above, two bell towers frame the second story, which includes an open porch and the exterior of the clerestory windows of the main chapel. An A-frame wooden roof covers the second-floor section, and a door is located within the roof area. Accessible by a ladder from the second story porch, this area

[17] Brett Hendrickson, "Whose Dirt Is It?" Lecture, University of New Mexico, February 4, 2019.

gave access into the bell towers for ringing. The second story would have also been accessed by a ladder from the ground outside.

There are six rooms that compose the layout of the church erected in 1816 (Fig.2b). One enters the church on the central axis at the narthex. This room acts as the greeting room to patrons, offering three options to continue onto. Two small detached rooms are located to the left and right of the narthex. The room on the left is currently used as an office for the priest, and to the right is a small chapel in Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament which was added in 2000. The original tabernacle constructed in the main altar of the church is no longer used to store the Eucharist and is currently stored in this side chapel. The two side rooms of the narthex are also the bases of the two bell towers adjoined to the façade of the church. Continuing forward from the narthex along the central axis, one enters the largest room of the sanctuary, the main chapel. One central nave runs from the entrance of the room from the narthex and leads up to the main altar. The room is coffin-shaped, with the head of the coffin acting as an apse for the main altar. Along each side of the main chapel are two retablos.

To the left of the front altar a door leads out of the main chapel and into a long rectangular space sharing a wall with the main church area. Currently this room is being used as a chapel for the Niño de Atocha, a popular Holy Child image among Hispanic cultures.[18] One enters the Holy Soil room adjoined to this devotional space. There is a single door leading out of the Niño de Atocha room, which exits back out on the courtyard.

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[18] The original use of this space as a chapel for the Niño de Atocha would have not occurred until after 1856. After the death of Abeyta, another family, the Medinas, erected their own adobe chapel to the Niño de Atocha near the Santuario in 1857. Now experiencing competition for pilgrims, the Santuario created their own devotional space for the Niño. The Chapel to Santo Niño de Atocha eventually became part of the larger complex of Chimayo.
The long rectangular shape of the Niño de Atocha room with one door and one window reminds me of the layout of penitential *moradas*. The brotherhood would gather in these secret spaces, and with the history of the original space of the Holy Soil being adjoined to Abeyta's property, I wonder if this room is following the same shape of the original building that stood there before the 1813 construction, and whether this space originally functioned as a meeting place for the Penitentes.

Santeros and Santos: The Saint Makers and Saints

The history of saint images in New Mexico begins with the Franciscan missionary efforts after the colonization of the territory by Spain in 1598. To aid in conversion, missionaries often kept portable religious images, such as prints, or more rarely paintings on hide, from Europe or reproductions made in Mexico with them. When a new church was erected in the area, locals crafted the artwork for the church using the images from mission priests as examples. Later on, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, devotees living in rural areas would often make pilgrimages to churches and bring home woodcut prints (*estampas populares*) of saints that would also be used as reference materials for local *santeros*. Sometimes the prints were pasted into niches on retablos, some citing this practice as one of the influences on the two-dimensionality of many retablo painters.[19]

New Mexico (and Latin America more broadly) has a special connection between the devout and the saints. Where European art often emphasizes the holy life a mortal saint lead, Hispano-American use of saints is often a call for divine help.[20] The canon of saints is a central feature in New Mexican Catholicism, as saints are used as adversaries between mankind and God. Endowed with miraculous powers for specific causes, the saints act on behalf of God to give aid. Which saint is evoked for what cause is determined by the patronage assigned to the saint, usually associated with an event in the saint's life or the manner in which the saint died. For instance, St. Lucy of Syracuse is the patron saint of those suffering from eye ailments because her eyes were gouged out as torture before her martyrdom. Likewise, St. Matthew is the protector over accountants and aids during bankruptcy because he worked as a tax collector before becoming a follower of Christ.

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[19]Marie Romero Cash, *Santos: Enduring Images*, (Niwot: University of Colorado, 1999), 11-2
[20]Thomas Steele, *Santos and Saints* (Santa Fe: Ancient City Press, 1982), 49-50.

The prominence of *santos* is undeniable when one enters into a New Mexican Catholic Church. Often, churches are decorated with large wooden retablos in which images of the saint are painted or carved into niches. The great number of saints represented in the same repeated iconic style creates a sensation of endlessness to their number. Like a chef picking through a cabinet of spices, the devotee can find the perfect saint for his or her cause among the rows of the retablos. Once the saint is chosen, acts of devotion are performed to call on aid.

Often these acts of devotion can be small, such as praying directly to the saint, lighting a candle, or leaving a small offering. However, during more desperate times, a devotee may make a *promesa* to the saint, offering to perform a task in exchange for the saint's favor. Sometimes this task can manifest as physically challenging pilgrimage to the shrine of the saint, giving up an addictive substance, or donating money to a cause. Hispanic saint devotion is also unique because the devotee can also "punish" the saint for ineffectiveness. When a saint does not deliver, the image of the saint will be turned away, covered, or an article removed.[21]

Promesas are highly personal acts of devotion and while the devotee may have an intimate relationship with the *santos* he or she favors to pray to, *santos* can also be part of larger community events. Often a town will have a patron saint favored by the community, and on that saint's feast day, the image of the saint is taken from the church and placed on a liter which is carried in a procession through the town. The *santo* is then placed in a shrine which is visited by the community and neighboring areas until the *santo* is returned to its home in the church. Santos will also be called on by the larger community in times of crisis such as flood or to guarantee a good crop. The *santo* responsible for agriculture or plentiful rain is brought to the fields by the

[21] Cash, *Santos*, 22.

community and often spends the night in the field and given offerings by the community who all benefit from a plentiful agricultural year.

One of the most fascinating theories on New Mexican *santos* comes from art historian Thomas Steele. Steele discusses the significance of pictorial representations in the church as stand in relics. Due to the poverty and remoteness of many New Mexican churches, holy relics were often not available. Holy relics were central aspects to Catholic worship, as visitation and proximity to the material object of a saint carried divine powers that benefitted the devotee. Steele proposes that with the lack of relics at these churches, painted images of implements of the passion, or representations of saints became stand ins for religious relics. While an individual could commission images or sculpture for home altars, making the journey to the *santos* in the church proved the dedication of the devotee.

Santos act as devotional tools in worship. The representation of saints in Western Europe are often given particular religious power as the sculpture often functions as a reliquary for physical remains of the saints. Religious art that is not a reliquary is often intended for religious contemplation. The physical use of *santos* in New Mexican religious practices elevates their function beyond a symbolism and act rather as a vessel for the intended holy person in spirit, present and ready to receive the prayers and wishes of the devotee. As art historian Marie Romero Cash explains, "In Colonial times, as today, *santos* provided the worshiper with moments of solitude and peace, linking them to the divine realm of God. The images of the *santos* rarely suggest action. Many quietly gaze directly into the spectator's eyes. Static and immobile, they gently touch the emotions of the viewer."[22]

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[22] Qtd. In Cash, *Santos,* 22.

Construction of a New Mexican Retablo

The retablos (decorative boards) at Chimayo, as well as all over the south west, are completed by folk artists using affordable materials. When researching the process of erecting the wooden structure of the retablo, I turned to New Mexican furniture making to give insight into the process of carpentry. Like most of the wooden furniture in the nineteenth century in New Mexico, the retablos of Chimayo are constructed from pine. Looking at the braces and panels, assumedly the retablo was placed together much like a framed chest, a carpentry style with a tradition centered in New Mexico. Wooden brace frames would have been carved with interlocking pegs and hammered into each other. Carving ribs into the bottom of the brace frames, panels of wood slide into the frames to form the walls (Fig.3b). The interlocking wood frames is best illustrated on Molleno's side retablo. Architectural elements were added to the paneling by carving wood molding which was then nailed to braces and panels.[23] In all the retablos, arch shapes are carved into wood molding then fixed onto the top of each *santo* panel to give the illusion of a niche with three-dimensional space.

A historical phenomenon of note during this period was Mexico's declaration of independence from Spain in 1821 (remember the territory of New Mexico was still part of Mexico at this time). While under Spanish rule, New Mexico was prohibited from trading with countries outside the Spanish Empire. While this rule was often illegally broken, once Mexico held her independence, trade between New Mexico and the United States flourished. Started by William Becknell in 1821, the Santa Fe Trail, spanning from Independence, Missouri to Santa Fe, New Mexico brought new exchanges between New Mexican Hispanics and Anglo-Americans. One of the biggest influences on New Mexican wood working was the introduction

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[23] Lonn Taylor and Dessa Bokides, *New Mexican Furniture 1600-1940* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1987), 23-4.

of the frame saw and the molding plane. The frame saw allowed for making close circular cuts and the molding plane created the ribbed decorative cuts seen in some of the frame bracing.[24]

The wood was then primed with a coat of gesso made from gypsum and wheat paste. A water-soluble tempera paint, with pigmentation extracted from minerals or plants, was painted over the gesso to create the image. Most commonly, the resources used for pigmentation were natively found in New Mexico. Although gold leaf painting was common in Mexico, the expense made gold pigments very rare in New Mexico.[25] Impressively, there is a little gold used on the side retablo and the main altar by Molleno. Gold leaf pigment is used to paint the Cross of Esquipulás and decorates the halo and knife seen on the Virgin of Sorrows. The splurge of gold used on these images emphasize the centrality of the passion and the suffering of the Madonna among the devoted in this area.

By 1880, a decline in retablo making occurred due to the greater introduction of ready-made objects and plaster-of-Paris brought on by the American markets on the Santa Fe Trail. With the ease and affordability of these products, the demand for the slower-made and more expensive works of the *santeros* began to decline. While the production of *santeros* has declined in demand from the Colonial Period, the practice has not stopped. Many families with histories of *santeros* in their line continue to create and pass down the arts of their ancestors. While some of the original materials used have been updated with contemporary paints and tools, the heritage and tradition of *santos* is still alive in New Mexico.[26]

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[24] Ibid., 119, 124.
[25] Larry Frank, *New Kingdom of the Saints* (Santa Fe: Red Crane Books, 1992), 24.
[26] Marie Romera Cash, *Santos*, 22.

Antonio Molleno, "The Chili Painter"

Antonio Molleno completed the main altar of the church as well as a front retablo to the right of the altar. Originally unnamed by art historians, Molleno received the nickname "the Chili Painter" for his chili-shaped abstract designs in the corners of his work. E. Boyd recognizes these forms as the artist's shorthand for Spanish-style decorative scrolls seen on Mexican arts. Molleno's career spans from 1800-1830, and his workshop is believed to have been centered in Taos. Molleno is unique among *santeros* for having three distinct stylistic periods in his career.

Art historian Larry Frank attributes an influence from the Laguna Santero on Molleno's early works. The Laguna Santero would have been at the peak of his career when Molleno began his. Both artists share an attention to realism, with more portrait-like features in the face, as well as a layering of gesso to create more depth in the painting. Molleno's middle style veered away from the influence of the Laguna Santero and create a distinct personal style for Molleno, attributed to three-quarter views of a figure with attention given to details in the nose, beard and garments. Molleno's late style is marked by an increase in abstraction, using abbreviations of Christian iconography for pictorial representation.[27]

Molleno was working in his middle style when he was commissioned for work at Chimayo. His side retablo exemplifies the characteristics of his middle period in the features of the painted saints. The images of the front altar are representational, depicting implements and symbols of the passion and Eucharist instead of saint images. The placement of the supportive beams in design and construction of the front altar is unusual and suggests Molleno was constructing his retablo around the pre-existing green screen at the center of the altar. Believed to be Mexican in origin, the bordering green screen features ornate baroque flora carving painted in

[27] Frank, *Land so Remote*, 75-7.

gold leaf against a green backdrop. The advanced craftsmanship of the carpentry of the green screen does not match the hand of Molleno, and the artist is currently unknown. The gold leaves against green are repeated on the green cross of the statue of Our Lord of Esquipulas, referencing the tree of life (which also acts as an axis mundi) in Indigenous Guatemalan religious practices.[28] There is a physical niche behind the Mexican screen which is home to the Crucifix of Our Lord of Esquípulas. Behind the statue, Molleno paints a backdrop of faux curtains and in the style exemplary of the artist, the shape of the curtains dissolve into abstract ribbons of vibrant colors and curving lines. Molleno combines two-dimensional painting with structural carvings. Twisting columns, perhaps inspired by Solomonic columns, are affixed to each side of the altar. Again, Molleno's preference for bright colors is exemplified in the use of bright red and blue intertwining.

The five faux niches surrounding Our Lord of Esquípulas (one on either side and three above) depict symbolic representations of the passion and Eucharist (Fig. 4b). On either side of the crucifix, the Eucharist is represented by a bundle of wheat and grapes. The three faux niches above from the left to right contain a cross with implements of the Passion, the emblem of the Franciscan Order associated with the church, and the cross of Calvary on the right. These three symbolic depictions above the main crucifix highlight the importance of the Passion to the images and ideology of the Sanctuary. Also of note, the St. Francis shares the same hand wound as Christ in the Franciscan Order emblem at center. St. Francis was a stigmata and receiving the same wounds as Christ is considered a sign of honor. Below the crucifix, the tabernacle is built into the retablo and is decorated with a painted monstrance. Interestingly, while these vessels are used to hold a consecrated host, Molleno painted a tiny crucifix in the center, highlighting the

[28] Borghetyi, *El Sanctuario*, 15.

emphasis on the sacrifice of Christ in the religious understanding of this church. Remember, since priests rarely visited outlying churches like Chimayó, there was no one to perform the transubstantiation needed to transform the host to the Eucharist regularly.[29]

Molleno also completed a side retablo for the church, which is located to the right og the altar in the back (Fig. 5b). The screen is composed of three registers, the bottom two containing real and faux niches to hold saints, and the top register is a decorative crest made from adding an additional panel. Traditional Spanish retablos would have contained niches to hold relics, paintings, and statuary. The New Mexican folk religious retablos are giving the illusion of niches through two dimensional trompe l'oiel. The saints represented within the niches are not representations of a humans but rather paintings of saint statues for the faux niche. There is one real carved niche in the bottom center of Molleno's side retablo. It is currently holding a *bulto* (three dimensional wooden statue) of St. Cajetan by Alex Oritz.[30]

Each niche is painted with a red curtain decorated with gold flowers, alluding to the golden foliage on the cross of Our Lord of Esquípulas. The beams of wood between the niches are decorated with the same curving lines seen on the main altar. On the bottom register adjacent to the three-dimensional niche are two painted male saints. The saint on the right is identified as St. Francis Xavier, wearing the dark cassock with the belt of the Jesuit Order.[31] The saint on the left is currently unidentified.[32] Sometimes the donor of the commissioned work would request

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[29] The later addition of the Chapel in Adoration of the Holy Sacrament calls on the history of the lacking availability to receive the Eucharist at the Sanctuary.

[30] Gonzalez *Sanctario de Chimayo*, 20.

[31] Gonzalez identified these saints in his pamphlet. The 2013 pamphlet I used for this work has been updated as of April 2019, the unidentified saints in the Molleno side retablo are now identified by Gonzalez as St. Dominic (top register) and St. Cajetan (bottom register).

[32] I believe the identity of this saint is St. Bernardino of Siena. The saint depicted on Molleno's retablo wears the cassock and rope belt of the Franciscan Order, which Bernardino was a part of. Additionally, the hat on the ground to the left of the saint could be a biretta, a cap worn by academic members of the clergy. Bernardino is remembered as a scholar of economics. Refusing promotion as a bishop, Bernardino is sometimes depicted standing over bishop miters. Was this iconography abbreviated? St. Bernardino is also the patron saint of chest ailments which could

his patron saint added into large public pieces and could be a lesser known saint of a patron. The middle register also holds three separate faux niches. From the left to right the images are identified as: another unidentified saint, the cross of Our Lord of Esquípulas, and the Madonna of Sorrows.[33] Molleno drops a horizon line behind his saints, creating depth and a position in space in an otherwise very flat style. Finally, the top of the retablo is crowned with a semi-circle wooden panel decorated with a scallop design along with other abstract decorative lines hallmarked to Molleno's style. The scallop design is sometimes attributed to the shell associated with pilgrimage to Compostela, Spain. The scallop shell marked the route to Compostela, and since the Niño de Atocha appears as a pilgrim, the scallop also refers to the Christ Child. However, Molleno's retablo pre-dates the Niño de Atocha Chapel. Since the scallop design is also featured above the tabernacle on the main altar also completed by Molleno, I believe this design is another trompe l'oiel to scallop molding on top of niches seen in Europe and Mexico.

José Aragón

The two retablos to the left of the altar were completed by José Aragón and his followers, a group working out of the village of Arroyo Hondo, near Taos. His work at Chimayo would have been early in his career in New Mexico, as scholars date his emergence in the area around 1820. Concluded from the prolific number of works, Aragón had a large workshop under his

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explain the exposed ribs of the saint. Lastly, instead of holding a cross, Molleno depicts this saint with a torch. One of St. Bernardino's attribute is to hold an emblem of the Holy Name of Jesus (monogram IHS) which is depicted surrounded in a halo of light. Could this attribute also be abbreviated to a torch of light?

[33] When I first was trying to identify the second unidentified saint in the Molleno retablo, at first, I thought he may be holding a martyr's palm. However, the proximity to the Cross of Esquipulas, with the Madonna of Sorrows on the opposite end reminded me of many motifs of Christ on the cross planked by the grieving Virgin and St. John the Apostle, the beloved disciple. However, St. John the Apostle is often depicted as a youth with bare face, and this saint is bearded. However, St. John the Evangelist, author of one of the Gospels and sometimes thought to be the same John, carries a writing quill. Is the attribute in the hand of Molleno's saint, which I thought at first to be a martyr's palm a quill? To complicate things further, the cross with a banner could be attributed to the cross-like staff of St. John the Baptist which holds a banner inscribed with *Ecce Angus Dei*. Is it possible the unidentified saint is a combination of all the St. Johns?

guidance. Aragón is considered a literate man because of the lettering featured on many of his retablos. In some works, he writes out prayers to the *santos* and copies out bible verses. His works are usually signed, some as Don José Aragón, and others using the term *escultería*, "school". E. Boyd believed Aragón originally came from Spain due to his fine craftsmanship and carving abilities, as well as his large workshop. His hand is identified by his dot and arch style eyes and single line noses connected to the right eyebrow. Aragón worked until the 1850s but moved his workshop to Chamisal (near the Sangre de Cristo Mountains) sometime in the 1830s.[34]

The work of José Aragón is the most ornate in the church. His side retablo across from Molleno's farther from the altar, reflects the same design as Molleno: registers of faux niches by three, with the bottom center niche carved out to hold a three-dimensional *bulto* (Fig. 6b). However, Aragón adds an additional register, completing his retablo with three rows of niches crowned by the semicircle fourth tier crest. Each register contains three related holy persons. The bottom register depicts three archangels, from left to right, Gabriel, Raphael, and Michael.[35] The background of the real niche holding the *bulto* of Archangel Raphael is painted with wings, as the statue held in the niche is missing his wings, the painted background completes the archangel, asserting this niche was meant to hold an angel. The second register represents male saints celebrated for their humility, all visually uniform by sporting the monastic tonsure. They proceed as such from left to right: St. Francis of Assisi, St. Jerome, and St. Anthony of Padua. The third register depicts three apparitions of the Virgin Mother, from left to right: Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, and Our Lady of St. John of the Lakes.

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[34] Frank, *Land so Remote*, 179-82.
[35] Gonzalez, *Sanctuario*, 10.

The fourth register portrays God the Father, winged and surrounded by the clouds of heaven, hands stretched out in blessing, looking down at his creation.

Like Molleno, Aragón borders his saints with red curtains. However, unlike Molleno, who fills his horror vacui with abstract design, Aragón paints columns. Aragón also paints no background or horizon line behind his saints in this retablo. The carving on the Aragón retablos is of higher quality than the other retablos. Solomonic columns frame the retablo, each notch of the spiral hand carved. The carving on his second retablo also features the advanced carving. The retablo is bordered in carved scallop niche designs. The capital of his applied columns feature two carved birds, assumedly representations of the dove of the Holy Spirit.

Aragón's second retablo is the most elaborate in the church. Breaking from the strict registers of the other retablos, the bottom central niche holding a *bulto* is larger in scale and reaches up to the center register (Fig. 7b). The large niche contains a theatrical puppet of Jesus the Nazarene (discussed in Chapter II). The bottom register is composed of all real niches, making this retablo the most difficult to construct. The smaller niches on either side of the large central one are half the size of the central niche. Currently they hold *bultos* of St. Anthony of Padua on the left and St. Francis of Assisi on the right.[36] In the second register above also flanking the large niche are two painted saints, St. John of Nepomuk on left and St. Joseph with Christ Child on right. The third register depicts from left to right: Archangel Raphael, Our Lady of Guadalupe, and Archangel Michael. Crowning the retablo is an image of Holy Trinity, represented by three images of enthroned men sitting on globes. Each wears a triangular halo, numerically representing the trinity.[37]

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[36] The bulto of St. Francis was constructed by Horacio Valdez.

[37] The representation of the Trinity as three men is unique to the New World. This image was considered blasphemous in Europe. However, it was allowed by missionaries in Latin America as a visual explanation of the concept of the Trinity to the newly converted Indigenous.

Rafael Aragón

José Rafael Aragón (or just Rafael Aragón) is considered one the most famous *santeros* in New Mexico, completing almost all of the altar pieces in the area in a very productive ten-year span in the 1830s. Originally, his identity was confused and combined with José Aragón, but scholarship in the 1970s distinguished Rafael Aragón as a separate hand. Aragón was born to New Mexican parents living in Santa Fe, where he began his career as a young artist. Aragón's association with confraternities in the area was well known, which provided him favorable backing from churches ran by Brotherhoods. In 1832, following the death of his first wife, Aragón moved to Pueblo Quemado (today Córdova), where he began to receive numerous commissions. During this time period, it is believed Aragón became a full member of the Penitentes. His personal style is identified by using a light background with dark figures to create an illuminating effect. By 1838, Aragón began signing his work with *maestro*, attributing the high respect he earned as an artist and teacher to a growing workshop. He passed in 1862, with his burial expenses paid for by Don Juan de Jesús Trujillo, the secular priest in charge of the church at Santa Cruz and the most important religious official in the area.[38]

The retablo in Chimayo is credited to the workshop of Jose Rafael Aragon, so the artist's hand has not been identified in this piece. Located to the right of the altar in the front, this retablo is the most simplistic work of the five (Fig. 8b). Following the blueprint of two registers of *santos* in niches capped by a decorative semicircle, the only carved out niche is again at the central bottom. The *bulto* currently residing in this niche is an undressed female, without the symbolic garments she cannot be identified, and the practice of changing the garments of a *bulto*

[38] Frank, *Land so Remote*, 289-91.

to change the identity of the saint is common. The workshop of Aragón retablo is the only female central retablo. To the left of the bottom niche is St. Rosalie of Palermo, and to the right is St. Clare of Assisi. The use of the red curtain is abbreviated in the bottom register to simple terracotta colored triangles. There is no background behind these two *santos*.

The second register above from left to right depicts the *santos*: St. Aloysius, St. Joseph with Child, and St. Gertrude the Great. There are no painted curtains in the niches of these saints. However, the second register does contain a background of dotted rows. The geometric designs in white, terracotta, and black around the frame of the niches reminds me distinctly of the pottery of the Acoma and Laguna Pueblos. Could members of Rafael Aragón's workshop have been Acoma and Laguna potters? Since pottery was traditionally a female art, would the possible presence of female artists account for the female centric *santos* chosen for this altar? We must also keep in mind the artist of the figures and the artist of the geometric designs around the figures may have been separate individuals, or multiple individuals.[39]

Crowned with another crest, a painted white dove representing the Holy Spirt, flies down in a burst of light. When looking closely at the top of this retablo, one notices the width of the crowning panel exceeds the width of the main retablo by about a foot on each side. The mismatched size along with the darker use of color and thicker use of line in the top panel indicates to me the panel was not meant for this retablo. Since the style of Rafael Aragón is identified by light backgrounds, and the top panel fills in empty space with color, I do not believe the top panel came from the workshop of Rafael Aragón.

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[39] Women's roles in early *santos* making is less known. The clothing used to dress saint statues was sewn by women. Scholars also agree women in families of *santeros* would prepare paints and apply the finishing layer of gesso.

Conclusion: The Politics of Miracles

Some scholars assert the Sanctuary of Chimayo was never intended to be a pilgrimage site.[40] But the fact remains, the desire for a church in Chimayo existed and succeeded in its erection. Bernardo Abeyta is the central figure in both the miraculous events in the discovery of the Crucifix of Esquípulas, as well as the leader of the community in their efforts to build the Sanctuary. The story of the miraculous events contains a message about the relationship of Chimayo and the church authority at Santa Fe. The confraternity claims loyalty to the authority of the Catholic Church, and as a righteous Catholic, Abeyta brought his miraculous findings to the church in Santa Cruz. However, it was the will of the Christ of Esquípulas that continued to relocate itself to Chimayo, asserting the desire for a church in that area.

Traditionally, Catholics in remote places in New Mexico would congregate in meeting houses of the lay confraternity, known as *morados*. The *morados* were no more than a large communal space and a smaller room for a chapel. The resulting Sanctuary of Chimayo boasted a beautiful structure complete with bell towers and a courtyard, a unique complex in a remote area, as larger churches were often only found in more populous cities. Interestingly, after a church official expressed disapproval of the original artworks in the church, Abeyta responded by commissioning retablos from some of the best *santeros* working at the time. The retablos, designed to look like altar screens in more traditional European-style churches, and created by more skilled hands than the original art in the church, added more legitimacy to the Sanctuary and met the expectations of outsiders.

[40] Brett Hendrickson, "Whose Dirt Is It?", lecture from February 4, 2019.

Finally, the presence of the Holy Soil at Chimayo opens continued questions about how far Abeyta and the confraternity were pushing church authority. Only an ordained priest has the authority and power of transubstantiation during mass. Catholic mass acts as the ritual practice surrounding the Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist. The lay confraternity of the Penitentes would not be able to offer traditional mass, as it is defined by the church, to its community without the Eucharist. However, along with the discovery of the Crucifix of Esquípulas, the earth where the cross was submerged became consecrated.

To avoid the grey area of assumption making, I will highlight what is known. In Guatemala, where the original Crucifix of Esquípulas derives, the soil where the crucifix was found likewise is considered sacred. At the Cathedral Basilica of Esquípulas, the Holy Soil is packed into molds to form a small cake of earth, which is then consumed by devotees. The history of geophagy at Chimayo is less documented. However, there are sources the Holy Soil was consumed in initiation rituals performed by the Brotherhood of Penitentes.[41] Was the presence of Holy Soil at Chimayo a loophole for the lay confraternity to offer mass to the community? We cannot be certain.

What is known, Abeyta worked diligently to give Chimayo the agency to erect its own church, and further validated the space by commissioning artwork from the area's best. Which leads us to the continued question, why? What was Abeyta declaring in the creation of the Sanctuary? Further clues into the ideology of the Sanctuary can be read in the violent images present in the artwork.

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[41] Boreghyi, *El Sanctuario*, 25.

Chapter II:

Violent Images: The Body and Blood of Christ

The following chapter aims to address the phenomena of bloodied images of Christ present at Chimayo. The events of the Passion are central to the artwork within the Sanctuary and speak to the religious focus of the confraternity who commissioned the works. Medieval European theology and iconography deeply influenced New Mexican religious images. These similarities will be discussed, showing New Mexican interpretation of European models, and the distinctly New Mexican icons inspired by Catholic Europe.

Affective Piety and a Fascination with Blood

The term affective piety applies to the phenomena of highly emotional religious devotion which influenced iconography and literature in the late Medieval period in Europe. Affective piety is unique as the humanity of Christ is emphasized rather than Christ's divinity. The two events central to the humanity of Christ are his infancy and death. The Passion especially has produced extensive imagery and literature detailing the torture and humiliation of Christ before the crucifixion. The resulting work from affective piety highlights the human feelings of humiliation, pain, and sorrow experienced by Christ to create empathy in the viewer. Being able to identify and sympathize with the suffering of Christ offered fuel for intense religious devotion.

Bloodied images of Christ during the Passion were shocking and gruesome, made to stir an emotional response. As medievalist Caroline Bynum argues, the blood imagery was secondary to the greater intension to emphasize Christ's humanity. However, the blood of Christ evolved into a symbol of its own. Bynum points out the bloodied images always show living blood pouring out. Blood is a symbol of fertility, a life-giving force that is poured out from

Christ and given to his flock through the Eucharist. Offering blood means giving oneself and acts of penance create a sense of sharing in the suffering.[42]

Iconographic Influences from Europe

Although the greatest concentration of bloodied images comes from the area of modern-day Germany, these images spread throughout Medieval Europe. As seen in the city of Seville, found in modern-day Spain, penance and community ritual around the Passion were also present and strong in what would become the area of colonizing power in the territory of early New Mexico. To exemplify by comparison, I will discuss the iconographic images of the Man of Sorrows and the Precious Blood as originating in 14th-15th century Europe and continuing in the local art of 19th century and contemporary New Mexico.

Corporal penance remained throughout 19th century New Mexico, deriving from Catholic European practices in the 15th century.[43] Looking to a Germanic print of *Christ, the Man of Sorrows* from 1480-1500 (Fig.1c), Christ holds scourging whips in each hand, his body marked by cuts from the lashes and flowing blood. This image refers to the Scourging at the Pillar, a scene of Christ's torture during the Passion. Interestingly, instead of showing a Roman soldier as the man of action in the torture of Christ's body, Christ holds the implements. By depicting Christ as the agent of his torture, the message of penance is emphasized. Christ willingly performs an act of self-mutilation, demonstrating the sacrifice of the Passion, voluntarily offered for the salvation of Man.

Images like the Germanic print must have been used in conversion by missionaries to New Mexico in the 15th century when colonizing efforts began in the territory. Images of the Man of Sorrows persisted hundreds of years after their introduction in New Mexico. *Jesus*

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[42] Caroline Bynum, *Wonderful Blood* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 9, 153-204.
[43] William Worth, *Images of Penance Images of Mercy* (Colorado Springs: University of Oklahoma, 1991), 71.

Nazareno by José Benito Ortega (Fig.2c), depicts a bloodied Christ holding a whip made from Yucca fibers, the same as used by flagellants of penance in the area. As the theory of affective piety evokes religious experience through the empathizing of Christ's humanity and suffering, the penitents suffer along with Christ in acts of penance to demonstrate their devotion and remorse for their sins.

Images of Precious Blood also derive from 15th century Europe. The allegory of blood in the chalice, as seen in another Germanic print, *Christ on the Cross with Angels* dated from 1481 (Fig.3c), creates a direct connection to the Eucharist. Blood gushes from the wounds of Christ into chalices held by angels. Images of divine beings collecting the Sacred Blood in a chalice similarly used in Mass were present in some of the earliest colonial hide paintings created by New Mexican locals.[44] These images create a visual to represent the sacrifice of Christ and the sealing of the sacrifice with divine blood to offer eternal life for Man.

The continuation of iconographic images from Europe in New Mexico not only speaks to the lasting influence of early missionaries in this area, but the endurance of traditions and continued devotion by the locals of New Mexico. Especially in the 19th century before the larger influence of Anglo-Americans in the area with the introduction of train and car, the remoteness of the area kept small towns like Chimayo removed from some of the influences of time.

Crucifix of Our Lord of Esquípulas

In the spectacle of miraculous soil, the Crucifix of Our Lord of Esquípulas can be easy to overlook. Keeping in mind the miraculous founding story of Chimayo, the discovery of the Crucifix of Esquípulas half buried in the earth places the crucifix as the sanctifier of the holy

[44] Ibid., 73.

soil. Placed in the center of the front altar along the main axis of the church, Esquípulas greets the pilgrim upon entry, and leads the devotee to the altar of the church.

The Christ of the Crucifix of Esquípulas (Fig.4c) is rendered by Molleno in a style commonly found among Folk artists in New Mexico of the time. Christ leans his head to the left, with eyes downcast, representing Christ has already passed. The five wounds of Christ (both hands and feet as well as side wound from the lance of Longinus) are emphasized by painting the dripping blood of the wounds down his arms and chest. In the style of New Mexico, the knees of Christ are also shown bloodied and dripping. The attention is placed on the suffering, the sacrifice of blood and life, and the pain afflicted for the sacrifice.

Molleno's delicacy in detail exemplifies the fine craftmanship and importance of this piece as an object of pilgrimage.[45] Christ wears a crown of thrones hand woven from reed and a cotton loin cloth painted with gesso to keep the fabric stiff and structural. Each rib of Christ is carved out, a detail often rendered through paint instead of carving. Small cuts and wounds pox the skin of Christ on his left cheek, arms, and thighs. Each cut is textured to appear more life-like. A large boil painfully rises from the left shoulder.[46]

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[45] Early scholarship (re: pamphlet by Borhegyi) suggests the crucifix was imported from Mexico due to the fine details. However, the bloodied wounds are so characteristic of images of the crucifix in New Mexico, I must believe the piece was created by a New Mexican santero. More contemporary scholarship credits the crucifix to Molleno, the painter of the main altar where the crucifix is held. This is an ironic crediting as Molleno produced very few bultos in his career, and the Crucifix of Esqípulas is one of the finest examples of New Mexican sculpture making. However, sources believe the crucifix and the green and gold frame in the main altar pre-date the commission from Molleno. Borgeyti (1956 work) hypothesizes these two pieces may have been imported from Mexico, however the symbolism of the green painted cross with gold leaves is a Guatemalan style (related to Indigenous tree of life).

[46] There are multiple crucifixes from the area from the nineteenth century I've been curious about the shoulder wound on the crucifix in the main altar. This wound is different than the five wounds normally attributed to Christ. The emblem of the Franciscan Order on the reredos features the same shoulder wound on the outstretched arm of Christ crossing with St. Francis. Originally, I thought this wound could be connected to the penitential practice of cross bearing performed by the Brotherhood. There are other shoulder wound crucifixes in the New Mexico region dated after the Chimayo time frame, the ones I found were also associated with Franciscan orders (some theories believe Penitentes came from the Franciscan third order)

Unique to the Crucifix of Esquípulas, the cross is painted green with flowers in gold leaf behind. The cross is meant to represent the Tree of Life in Mayan Indigenous mythology, the home region of the original Crucifix of Esquípulas. In Mayan cosmology the Tree of Life represents an axis mundus, connecting the earth with the heavens. As Christ moves through the space of the living and the dead and returns, his connection to the Tree of Life acts as a passageway. The blood shed is the promise made to mankind for redemption, an act of sacrifice so man may be able be in communion with God in heaven. As blood may also symbolize fertility and life, the image of Christ bleeding over the Tree of Life nourishes the Tree, spilling blood for new growth.

Recalling the circumstances in which Abeyta found the Crucifix of Esquípulas, Abeyta was performing penance through flagellation when a divine force revealed the location of the Crucifix. This detail is important as it reflects the Penitentes' belief one may connect to the divine through the process of purification via self-harm. Also of note, the Crucifix was found half submerged in soil, alluding to the sprouting of the Tree of Life. As Easter has its connections to resurrection, rebirth, and the starting anew of the seasons, the Tree of Life grows to offer bounty and rejuvenation. Christ is symbolically crucified on the Tree of Life, as his death marks the beginning of a sacrificial covenant to heal and absolve humanity, so they are fit to join Him in heaven.

Ecce Homo and Christ in the Sepulcher

There are two additional passion sculptures in the triad of images associated with New Mexican churches, the *Ecce Homo* and the *Christ in Lamentation*. Both of these sculptures are placed to the left and right of the door just as one enters into the church. The *Ecce Homo* (Fig.5c) is on the right, a late work completed in 1982 by José Benjamin Lopez and donated by the family

in 2000. *Christ in Lamentation* (Fig.6c) is on left, lying in a liter, a contemporary piece completed by area local, Felix Lopez.

*Ecce Homo (*Fig.5c) by José Lopez stands at about seven feet. This massive piece represents the tortured Christ before he is made to bear his cross. Lopez dresses his Christ in a crown of thrones, a small cotton loincloth, and binds his hands in ropes. The artist also constructs the arms with moving joints at the elbows so the sculpture may be used in Passion processions with varying props. In the style of works associated with the Penitentes, the feet and hands are enlarged to emphasize the wounds. To make the wood appear more life-like, Lopez brandishes the wood, which also gives a glossy finish. As is the style of the area, Lopez cuts textured lashes and sores into the smooth flesh and paints blood dripping over the body. The theme of *Ecce Homo* has its origins in Europe. Translated from Latin, the title calls the viewer to look at the man, the bloodied and tortured Christ, the Man of Sorrow. The images of suffering are designed to call an emotional response from the viewer. The hollow almond eyes and open mouth of the statue is haunting and full of deep pain. The viewer is reminded of the cruelty of man during the scourging, sympathizes with the pleading face of sorrow, and the viewer is moved to feel shame of his or her own cruelties, invoking a desire to repent and suffer in the place of Christ.

To the left of the entrance, a statue of *Christ in the Holy Sepulcher* (Fig. 6c) by Chimayo local, Felix Lopez. Motifs to pilgrimage are added to the movable liter of the sepulcher. Along the bottom, a large scallop shell decorates the liter (scallop shells around Chimayo will be addressed further in Chapter III). The artist embellishes the canopy with green vines, alluding to bounty, growth, and renewal about to come. Implements of the passion are carved into the side of the liter, telling the story of the events preceding. On top of one of the posts of the canopy, a white dove is perched, looking down at the body. This symbolizes the Holy Spirit, and the

continued presence of God even after Christ's death. The dead Christ held within is depicted less bloodied, but the wounds are carved out and painted red against the snowy flesh of the blood-drained corpse. The artist pierced the forehead of Christ with holes, indicating where the Crown of Thorns perforated the flesh. Christ's eyes are closed, but his lips are parted as the viewer anticipates when He will reawaken.

The display of the bloodied *Ecce Homo* and *Christ in the Sepulcher* as one enters the church announces the fundamental beliefs of the Sanctuary. This is the body and blood of Christ. The acts of suffering and death are at the heart of the sacrifice memorialized in mass. Looking to the front altar, Molleno flanks the Crucifix on the bottom register with depictions of wheat and grapes, meant to symbolize the Eucharist. As *Christ in the Sepulcher* sits on the side of the wheat, and *Ecce Homo* on the side of the grapes, a dialog is created between symbol and figure.

New Mexican Death Cart

Unique to regional New Mexico, images of Death in a cart have appeared in altars alongside images of Christ and the saints. Traditionally, these images depict Death seated in a cart used to haul coffins, with a bow and arrow in her hands.[47] Scholars have traditionally associated the presence of Death at the altar as a reminder of Christ's triumph over death, however anthropologist Marta Weigle suggests Death is a reminder of the ever-approaching inevitability of death, warning the viewer to be prepared, and therefore, repent.[48] The death cart carries additional meaning to New Mexican Penitentes as the cart was often used in penance. The penitent would drag the cart, carrying Death, and often filled with rocks. The cart was also used

[47] Multiple sources suggest the bow and arrow is styled after the image of Death from the trump cards in the Tarot Deck, which depicts Death holding a bow or a scythe. Since Death more commonly holds a bow and arrow in New Mexico, Death is sometimes given the nickname *Doña Sebastiana,* in reference to St. Sebastian who was martyred by arrows.

[48] Marta Weigle, *Brothers of Blood,* 170.

to carry newly elected officials of the Penitentes in processions, symbolizing their roles in the community to prepare souls for a good death.[49]

Chimayo is home to a unique representation of Death in her cart (Fig.7c), which was once held in the chapel (now the chapel of Niño de Atocha) adjacent to the main church space. The statue is now kept in the museum next to the church. The parish priest commissioned the piece from a local *santero,* and was completed in 2010. The piece is large in scale, almost life-size. Death sits in her cart, depicted with white locks to represent her gender, with her mouth agape in laughter as she clutches a globe in one hand. Standing across from her, St. Francis of Assisi stretches out his arms, accepting Death in a dialog. The work was based after a prayer from St. Francis,

> "All praise be yours my Lord, all praise be yours,
> For our Sister Death,
> From whose embrace no mortal can escape.
> Woe to those who die in mortal sin!
> Happy are those she finds doing Your most holy will!
> Sister Death can do no harm to them"[50]

In front of the cart, a plaque reads, "To die with the sacred joy of not having done harm to oneself nor to a single soul". This quote refers to the death of St. Francis, having lived a virtuous life, joins Death on her cart unafraid. Death laughs, and Francis greets her as an old friend.

The contemporary commission of this work at Chimayo reflects continued New Mexican traditions, as well as the desire to continue contemplating death at this site. Hispanic culture differs from Anglo-American notions about death. Death is not hidden away but embraced in every day. Chimayo offers a space to confront death and suffering, but also offers comfort: do not fear death if you prepare your soul.

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[49] Wroth, *Images of Penance Images of Mercy,* 48.
[50] Qtd. in R. Andrew Chestnut, "Sister Death and Brother Francis", https://skeletonsaint.com/2014/04/16/sister-death/ (accessed April 20, 2019)

Conclusions: The Cost of Blood

Walking into the Sanctuary, I was immediately confronted with images of violence. A beaten, bound, and bloodied Christ gasped out in agony, across from Him, the corpse of Christ rested in a macabre display of a murdered man. Looking between these statues, an exhilaration of fear and pity washed over me. There is profound humanity in beaten flesh, in bleeding wounds, and a dead body. Continuing forward, the retablos with their rows of saints, many of whom where martyrs, recalls the willingness to sacrifice life in the name of God. Finally, hooded under the beauty of the vibrant colors of the main altar, Christ hangs from the cross, His fresh blood pouring above the altar table.

Images of suffering and pain remind church goers of the extreme nature of Christ's death. Suffering and dying for the salvation of man is the ultimate gift Christ could freely offer. His sacrifice should be glorified and remembered as it is at the core of Christian belief in eternal life. The core ideology of the Sanctuary is salvation through suffering. As discussed in the last chapter, these values are continued through a lay organization dedicated to the events of Holy Week and the practice of penance.

Chapter III:

Physical Acts: Pilgrims and Penitents

The Brotherhood of Penitentes has reached an almost super-star status in the South West as stories circulate about extreme acts of self-harm. The horrific and gory stories are often exaggerated, and the secret nature of gatherings of members in the Penitentes leaves room for speculation and outsider embellishment. During my trips to New Mexico, I often would ask locals about the Penitentes. Some were excited to tell me the stories they've heard, claiming to know a-friend-of-a-friend who is a member, while others raised their brows and told me they weren't supposed to discuss those kinds of things with outsiders. To save readers from an undue suspense, I did not find any secret meeting places. However, the contemporary practices during Holy Week at the Sanctuary continue the tradition of the Penitentes in an interesting way which combines the act of pilgrimage with penance.

The Brotherhood of Penitentes

As discussed earlier, due to the remoteness, practicing Catholics in rural areas of Northern New Mexico were often only visited by a priest every few months. Without the direct religious guidance of an ordained member of the Catholic Church, locals around Chimayo had more freedom to interpret and practice their faith as they saw fit. Confraternities composed of laymen were common throughout New Mexico, some officially acknowledged by church documentations, and many more uncommented on by the official church. Working from the anthropological works on the Penitentes by Marta Weigle and Michael Carroll, both make parallels that the practices of the Penitentes acted as stand ins for the ceremony of mass. In Catholic faith, only an ordained priest has the power to perform transubstantiation of the Eucharist, a rule respected by the Penitentes, as their allegiance ultimately falls to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church.

The artwork of the Sanctuary of Chimayo cannot hold full meaning without understanding of the practices of the Penitentes and the theology surrounding their rituals. The confraternity who built the Sanctuary of Chimayo named themselves, *Los Hermanos de la Fraternidad Piadosa de Nuestro Padre Jesús Nazareno* (The Brothers of the Pious Fraternity of Our Father Jesus the Nazarene). The centrality of the Jesus the Nazarene to the ideology of the confraternity emphasizes the importance of the Passion. The torture, humiliation, and death of Christ during the Passion exemplifies Jesus at his most human, reiterating again the influence of affective piety on the people of Chimayo.

Initiation

When a young man decides to enter into the Brotherhood of Penitentes, he must go through a physically demanding initiation ritual. The new initiate must have a sponsor who is already a member of the Penitentes. On Holy Tuesday, the initiate and his sponsor enter the local Penitente meeting house, the *morada*. The initiate then removes his shirt and makes an oath of allegiance to the Penitentes. A member then cuts the seal of obligation, two to six vertical lines to the left and right of the spine, into the back of the initiate. After the cut is made, the initiate requests, "for the love of God", to receive whippings equal to the three meditations of Christ before the Passion, the five wounds of Christ, the seven last words of Christ, and the forty days Christ spent in the wilderness (totaling fifty-five). The fifty-five lashes are then administrated by current members of the Penitentes, the initiate only becoming a full member when he receives all fifty-five lashes without fainting.

Today, members of the Penitentes are still required to receive the seal of obligation, but the form of penance performed after is the choice of the initiate. This may still be corporeal

lashings, but now may also take the form of prayers, fasting, long periods of kneeling, abstinence, prostration, etc.[51]

Holy Week Performed

Central to the duties of the Penitentes are the rituals performed during Holy Week. While the Penitentes are still active in New Mexican communities, the back lash from the introduction of Anglo-American culture in the twentieth century has out lawed public displays of self-mutilation. The following description of Penitente Holy Week rituals would have been prevalent in the nineteenth century when Chimayo was built. Contemporary Holy Week practices will be discussed later in this chapter; this section discusses accounts from 1888-1925. The primary sources documenting Penitente Holy Week rituals have spanned from Northern New Mexico, up into Colorado. Ultimately, the kind of penitential practices performed by the community was their choice and the degree in which penance was performed varied from accounts and places.

The most common Holy Week observances practiced by the Penitentes includes a constant vigil of prayers from Palm Sunday to Holy Saturday, where members stay in their local *morada*, and the community provides Lenten meals. The days of prayer often included retellings of the Station of the Cross to the community, as well as the reciting of *alabados,* which were highly emotional hymns describing the events of the Passion. Participants pause at each station, meditating on Christ's suffering.

Some communities chose to reenact the Passion using the *santos* of the church. On Holy Thursday, members of the Penitentes would remove the statue of Christ from the local church, to symbolize the seizure and trial of Christ. Later in the day, the Encounter would be performed, where the Penitentes would bring out the statue of Christ (usually of Jesus the Nazarene) and the

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[51] Marta Weigle, *Brother of Blood,* 155-7.

women of the community, carrying images of the Mother of Sorrow, would greet each other to symbolize Christ meeting his mother before being taken to Cavalry. This was a highly emotive event, and sources recount women weeping intensely. Also, during this time, some of the younger women of the community would step out and wipe the face of the statue of Christ with a cloth to represent Veronica.

On Good Friday, the statue of Christ was taken to a mock Calvary by the Penitentes, followed by members of the community. During this procession, members would perform corporeal penance which often included self-flagellation, or carrying heavy crosses. The Christ statue was then tied to a cross, later taken down, and placed lying down back in the church for viewing during Holy Saturday. In rarer but documented cases, the role of Christ was performed by a member of the Penitentes and a simulated crucifixion was performed. The member playing the role of Christ would be taken to "Calvary" and tied to cross. There is no documentation that nails were ever used, and the member was not expected to die.[52]

Contemporary Practices

Although public acts of corporeal penance no longer happen at Chimayo, the site still attracts thousands of pilgrims a year, especially during Holy Week. Making my own trip to Chimayo on Good Friday, I was surprised by the huge crowds pouring in. Along my hour drive from Santa Fe, portions of the road were blocked off for walkers to the site. Known as the Way of Sorrows, the walk to Chimayo is a reminder of Christ's walk to Calvary. Many of the walkers I passed held small crosses, often with pictures attached and names written on them. The walkers brought these crosses for the blessings and protection of those whose names and pictures appeared on the cross. While the journey for many of the walkers was long and tiring, the

[52] Ibid., 162-73.

experience was far from somber. All along the way to Chimayo, volunteers and community organizations set up tables with free water and snacks for the walkers on their journey in support of their efforts. I saw young babies under a year old being carried by parents, and the elderly pushed in wheelchairs all along the road.

Nearing the site, more venders appeared selling roasted corn, fried tomatoes, and cotton candy. Families joined together happily sharing snacks and lounging in the sun by the flowing water of the river nearby. A huge line formed flowing outside the doors of the Sanctuary, as people waited their turn to enter the small church. Once inside, the cheery fair-like atmosphere outside seemed closed out of the dark space of the Sanctuary. Votive candles were the main source of illumination in the otherwise dark church, as the shutters to the few windows were closed. The church was packed, with many stopping to kneel and pray at the two statues as one enters the sanctuary, *Ecce Homo* and *Christ in the Sepulcher.* Milagros (a type of votive) covered the works. The traffic flowed slowly, as pilgrims inched their way to the front of the altar, to kneel and pray in front of Our Lord of Esquípulas. After finishing their prayers, the traffic in the church moved through the door to the left of the main altar into the room of the Holy Soil. After collecting the soil, one exited through the Chapel of Niño de Atcoha, and entered back into the sunny day and loud merriment happening outside the church.

At noon, the Good Friday procession began. Starting at the top of the hill, the procession was led by three men carrying the processional crucifix and lanterns while singing Spanish hymns about the suffering of Christ during the Passion. Four men in red friar-like robes carrying a liter with Jesus the Nazarene followed (Fig. 1d). The red robes evoked the blood of Christ, and the suffering image called to mind the sacrifice Christ made. Closely behind, a group of all-women in brown robes carried a liter with the Madonna of Sorrows, wearing black in mourning

(Fig.2d). Turquoise decorated the liter, giving a regional flare and representing the association of the Madonna with water. The Sorrowful Mother is depicted with seven swords piercing her immaculate heart to represent the seven agonies she suffered to watch the death of her son.

The third liter was carried by a co-sex group of young adults in purple robes, carrying Veronica holding up her veil with the image of Christ's face imprinted (Fig.3d). The adult liter bearers carried the weight of the liter on their shoulders, but the youth group carried their liter by their hands. The shoulder bearing would have been more painful, as the wooden beam would have cut into the shoulder, so assumedly the younger group was spared from more rigorous liter bearing until they were older.

A liter with a replica of the Crucifix of Esquípulas carried by men in brown robes and flanked by two lantern bearers ended the procession. This liter paused at a statue of a pilgrim outside the church, where a woman sang to the crucifix in Spanish (Fig 4d). Her highly emotional singing sympathized with the suffering of Christ on his way to Calvary, declaring she would suffer along with her Savior and repent from her sins. The four liters were carried down the hill, all the bearers walking rhythmically in a side-to-side slow shuffle. Spectators then followed after the procession, ending at the base of the hill where the liters were placed side by side on the ground and the church priest prayed over the liters. The use of the religious statuary in processions speaks to the life of the artwork at Chimayo. Artwork is not static but used to represent the presence of holy individuals and therefore given great respect in handling.

Promesa and Pilgrimage

I began my drive to Chimayo from Santa Fe, about a forty-mile distance. Roads were marked off for walkers as soon as I hit the road, and from conversation at Chimayo, I heard people were walking from Albuquerque (ninety miles) and farther, often taking days to make

their journey. While I saw no one whipping themselves, the physical exertion people were putting themselves through was reminiscent of the physical acts of the Penitentes.

While the Penitentes of the nineteenth century dragged heavy crosses, the small crosses carried by the walkers ended up being left at Chimayo and acting as votives rather than implements of penance. The exchange of self-suffering to clean the spirit or give blessings is continued contemporarily from this tradition brought into the area over five hundred years ago.

Also of note, entering into the Sanctuary, contemporary additions have included motifs of scallop shells along the paved walkway to the Sanctuary (Fig. 6d). This is in reference to the scallop shells marking the way to *Santiago de Compostela* in Spain. While this is a contemporary addition, the Sanctuary is aware of the role of pilgrimage to the site and is applying motifs from Europe.

Conclusions: The Cycle of Purgation and Healing

In his book, *Images of Penance, Images of Mercy,* scholar William Wroth describes the process of salvation in Catholicism as a cycle of three stages: penance, love, and union. He argues purification implies a sacrifice or a suffering. When one chooses to repent and perform an act of penance, they renounce past sins and transgressions. After completing an act of penance, one suffers along with Christ, mirroring critical last events in the life of Christ. To suffer with one's God brings the devotee to an ecstasy of love for his or her God as one is willing to share in the humanity and pain. After reaching a state of sympathy and love, the devotee is then in union with his or her God. Reaching this sense of union is at the heart of penance-making and is further supported in the participation of the Eucharist, a sacrament where one consumes the body of Christ in order to join in union.[53]

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[53] William Wroth, *Images of Penance, Images of Mercy*, 1-10.

While the images of violence at the Sanctuary of Chimayo on the surface tells the story of pain and suffering, it is this process of penance to union that is the true story of Chimayo. Going through the chapel space, visitors exit through the chapel of the healing soil, where the soil is ingested, topically applied, and carried home in vessels (Fig. 5d). While one must go through a process of penance, the story of Chimayo concludes with the gift of Holy Soil, reaffirming a new beginning and the opportunity to heal. While the acts of Holy Week penance making is a unique expression in Hispanic Latin America, the story of Chimayo is more universally comforting: your pain can lead to your deliverance.

Conclusion:

Tourist or Pilgrim? An Uncertain Future?

I remember the outrage I felt when confronted with a sign declaring an additional five euros must be "donated" to see the relics in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris. Would I get a discount for being Catholic? The reliquary holding the crown of thrones was placed on a high shelf with a mirror behind it, so the tourists, craning their necks below, could see what was on the forbidden shelf. I squinted. I stood on my tiptoes. In between the glint of gold from the reliquary, I thought I possibly saw some dust inside. Was that the crown? How intact could a two-thousand-year-old branch be?

Leaving the cathedral, I was struck by how noisy the space was. The many voices of the crowd echoed around hollowly in the tall stone structure. In the middle of the mayhem, a priest, trying to give mass, spoke over the buzz. Ropes marked off the section where mass was held, directing tourists around so the main altar could still be accessed for photographs. I watched as people moved in and out of the pews, pausing for a few minutes to listen, say a prayer, and then getting up to continue the tour.

I don't consider myself particularly religious, nor a stickler for the rules of Catholic etiquette. However, my experience at Notre-Dame de Paris left me feeling disenchanted. The history of pilgrimage and tourism has always gone hand-in-hand, but something was lost in the mass-produced keychains I found in the gift shop.

The question of tourism at Chimayo has stirred emotional responses from locals and parish members at the Sanctuary. In a lecture by Brett Hendrickson, at the University of New

Mexico in February of this year, the debate about the increasing number of visitors at the site, and the development of the area was further discussed.[54]

The land at the Sanctuary of Chimayo was owned by the Abeyta family until 1929, when a family descendant of the original patron, Bernardo Abeyta, sold the Sanctuary to the Art Society of Spanish Colonial Art, which is centered in Santa Fe. This was the first time the Sanctuary was no longer in private hands since its creation, and this shift meant the lay confraternity at the Sanctuary would move their center meeting area (now located at the Chapel of the Blood of Christ, a few minutes' drive from the Sanctuary).

In the 1970's the Art Society eventually sold the Sanctuary to the Roman Catholic Church, again marking a shift from the Sanctuary's independence from church authority. Since the Catholic Church's acquisition, the question of who owns the Holy Soil at the Sanctuary has been in question. In 1990, the State of New Mexico Department of Tourism began running advertisements for the Sanctuary of Chimayo, which received backlash from the Roman Catholic Church who condemns the marketing of the Holy Soil.

However, this is ironic coming from the Catholic Church, as the complex of the Sanctuary has been added to extensively since their purchase of the land. The Sanctuary now includes a welcome center and museum, the Chapel of the Native, the Madonna Gardens, the Barn of the Holy Family, as well as three gift shops. Many locals complain the spirit of Chimayo has changed over the last twenty years, arguing the big crowds are only interested in the Holy Soil and the additions have made the Sanctuary a "religious Disneyland".

My own experiences at the Sanctuary, especially during Holy Week, has asserted the religious spirit of pilgrims of Chimayo is still active. However, when I was talking to the cashier

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[54] Brett Hendrickson, "Whose Dirt Is It?", Lecture.

at the gift shop, she complained the site would get busier and busier with tourists now (April) until September. While the tourism has brought a new resurgence to the economy of this otherwise small and rural town, the question of where Chimayo will be in the next ten years seems to frighten locals who can trace their family heritage, and their cultural identity, to the site.

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Images

Introduction:

Figure 1a: Stone crosses constructed on the path leading to the Sanctuary

Figure 2a: Detail of votives in the stone crosses

Figure 1b: Sanctuary of Chimayo (standing in front) and Church Interior

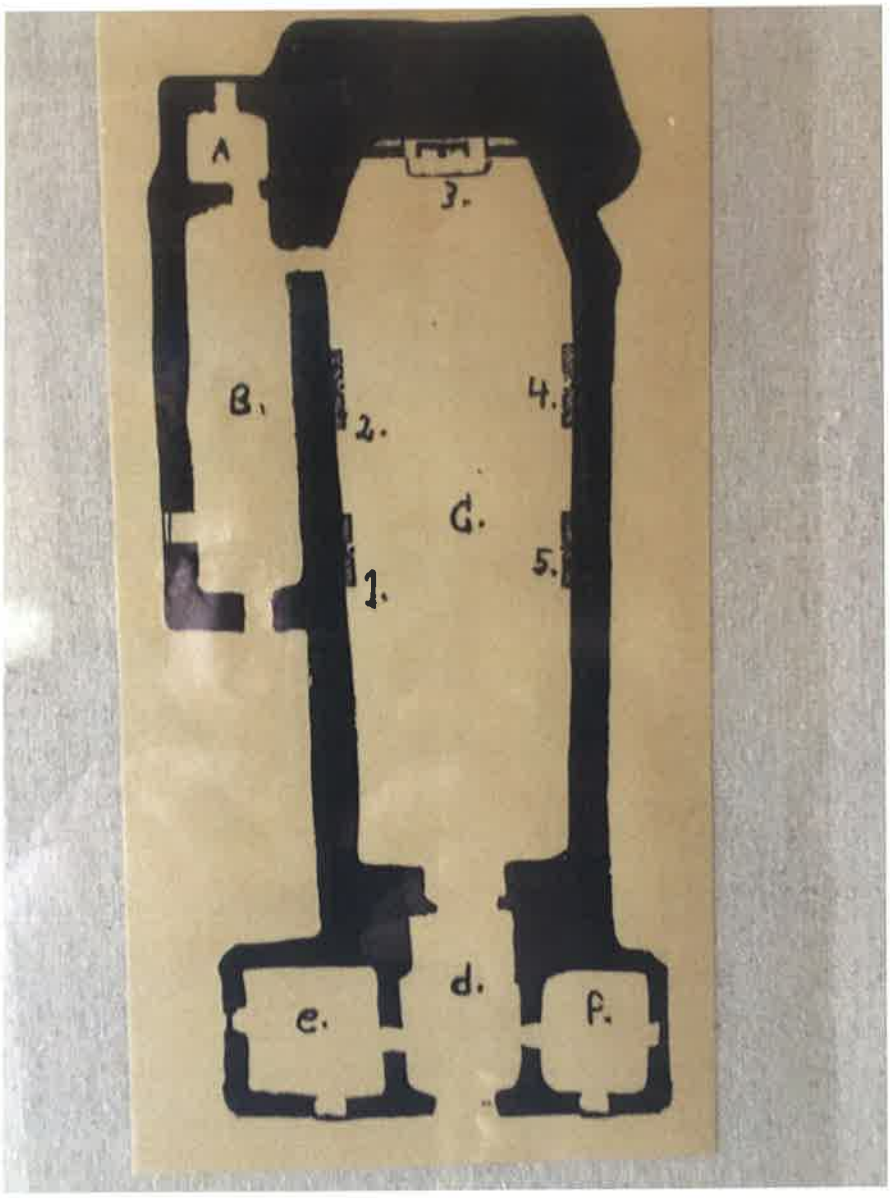

Figure 2b: Floor Plan of the Sanctuary (photo taken from the site)
A. Chapel of the Holy Soil
B. Chapel of the Niño de Atocha
C. Nave/Main Chapel Area
D. Narthex
E. Office
F. Chapel of the Adoration of the Sacrament
Retablos:
1. Jose Aragón Retablo I
2. Jose Aragón Retablo II
3. Antonio Molleno Main Altar
4. School of Rafael Jose Aragón Retablo
5. Antonio Molleno Side Retablo

Figure 3b: New Mexican Chest Assembly
Image from
New Mexican Furniture 1600-1940: The Origins, Survival and Revival of Furniture Making in the Hispanic Southwest by Long Taylor and Dessa Bokides (pg. 23)

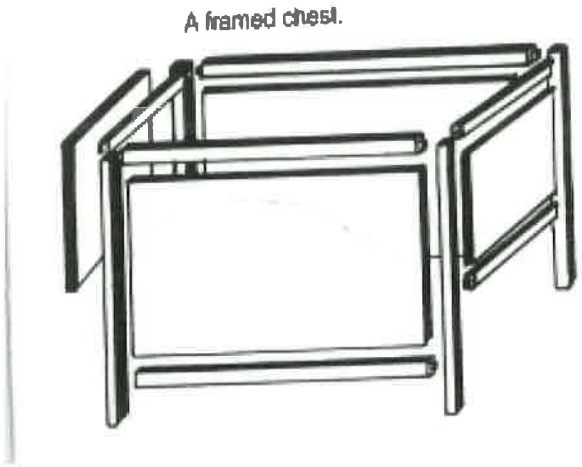

Figure 4b: Antonio Molleno's Front Altar

Above: Symbolic Representations from left to right:
Implements of the Passion (Cross, Five Wounds, Sacred Heart, and two Lances), Emblem of the Franciscan Order (with Implements at Bottom), the Cross of Calvary

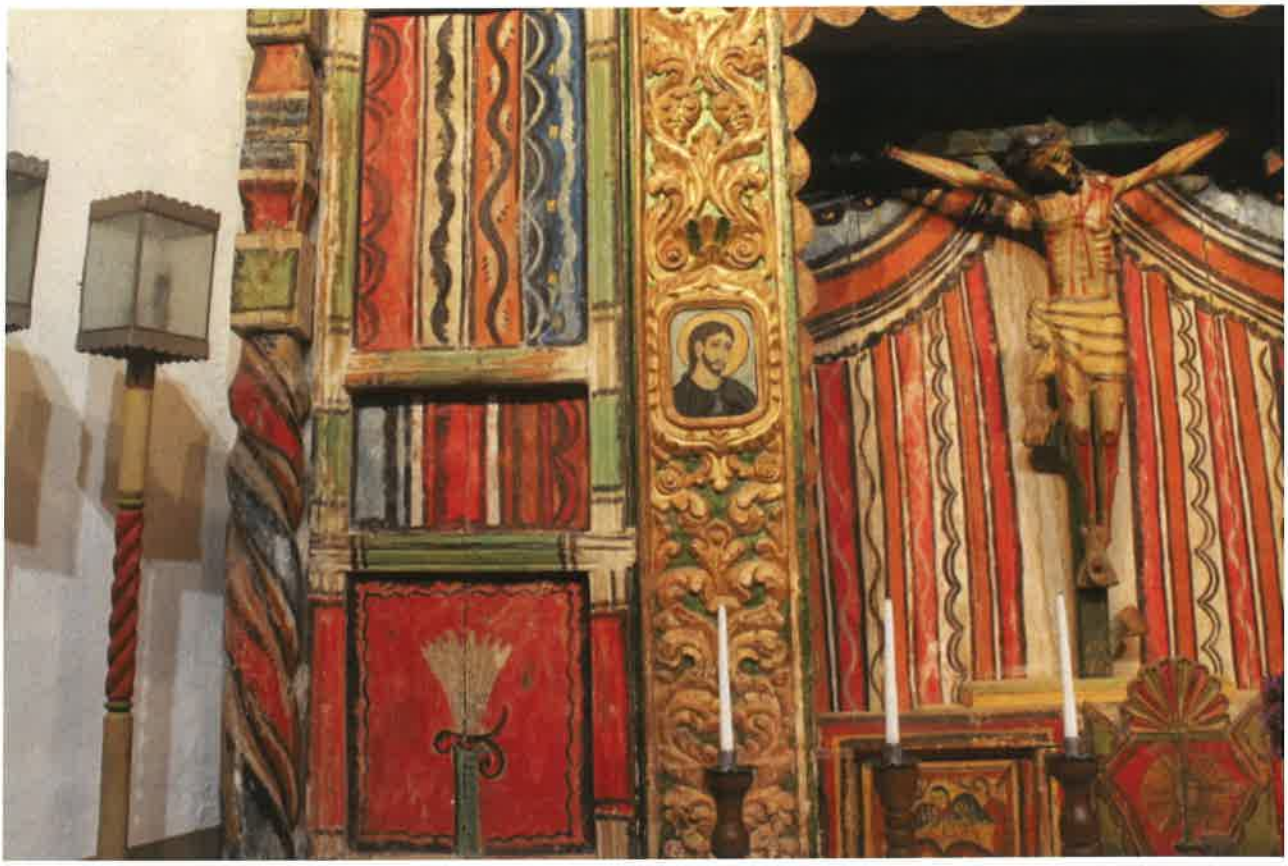

Figure 5b: Antonio Molleno's Side Retablo

Above (left to right): Unidentified Saint, the Cross of Esquípulas, the Madonna of Sorrows

Below (left to right): Unidentified Saint, Bulto of St. Cajetan by Alex Oritz, St. Francis Xavier

Figure 6b: J. Aragón Retablo I

Top Register (left to right): Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, and Our Lady of St. John of the Lakes

Center Register (left to right): St. Francis of Assisi, St. Jerome, and St. Anthony of Padua

Bottom Register (left to right): Gabriel, Rafael, Michael

Figure 7b: J. Aragon Retablo II

Top Register: Archangel Rafael, Our Lady of Guadalupe, Archangel Michael

Middle Register (flanking Jesus the Nazarene): St. John of Nepomuk on left and St. Joseph with Christ Child on right

Bottom Bultos: St. Anthony of Padua by Enrique Rendon and St. Francis of Assisi by Horacio Valdez

Figure 8b: School of R. Aragón Retablo

Above (left to right): St. Aloysius, St. Joseph with Child, and St. Gertrude the Great

Below (Left to right): To the left of the bottom niche is St. Rosalie of Palermo, and to the right is St. Clare of Assisi, the *bulto* in center is unidentified without proper dressing

CHAPTER II

Figure 1c: Germanic Man of Sorrows

Engraver: unknown Swabian or Rhenish. Medieval; creation date: 1480-1500. Christ as the Man of Sorrows. prints (visual works); relief prints (visual works); wood engravings (prints). Place: Rosenwald Collection, National Gallery of Art, Washington, District of Columbia, United States. https://library.artstor.org/asset/SS34871_34871_21909183.

Figure 2c: *Man of Sorrows* by José Benito Oretega
Image from
Images of Penance, Images of Mercy: Southwestern Santos in the Late Nineteenth Century by William Wroth (pg. 71)

Plate 7. *Jesus Nazarene*/Jesús Nazareno
José Benito Ortega
Ca. 1875–1907
36"
Wood, water-based paints, gesso, cotton cloth
TM 3594
Purchased from Harry H. Garnett and accessioned in 1948. According to Garnett, this piece came from a *morada* near Cimarron and is the companion to the *Christ Crucified* (TM 3593) illustrated above.

Figure 3c: Germanic Sacred Blood Print

German 15th Century, German. 1490. *Christ on the Cross with Angels*. Print. Place: The National Gallery of Art (Washington, D.C.), Rosenwald Collection. https://library.artstor.org/asset/ANGAIG_10313961636.

Figure 4c: Crucifix of Esquípulas, Molleno

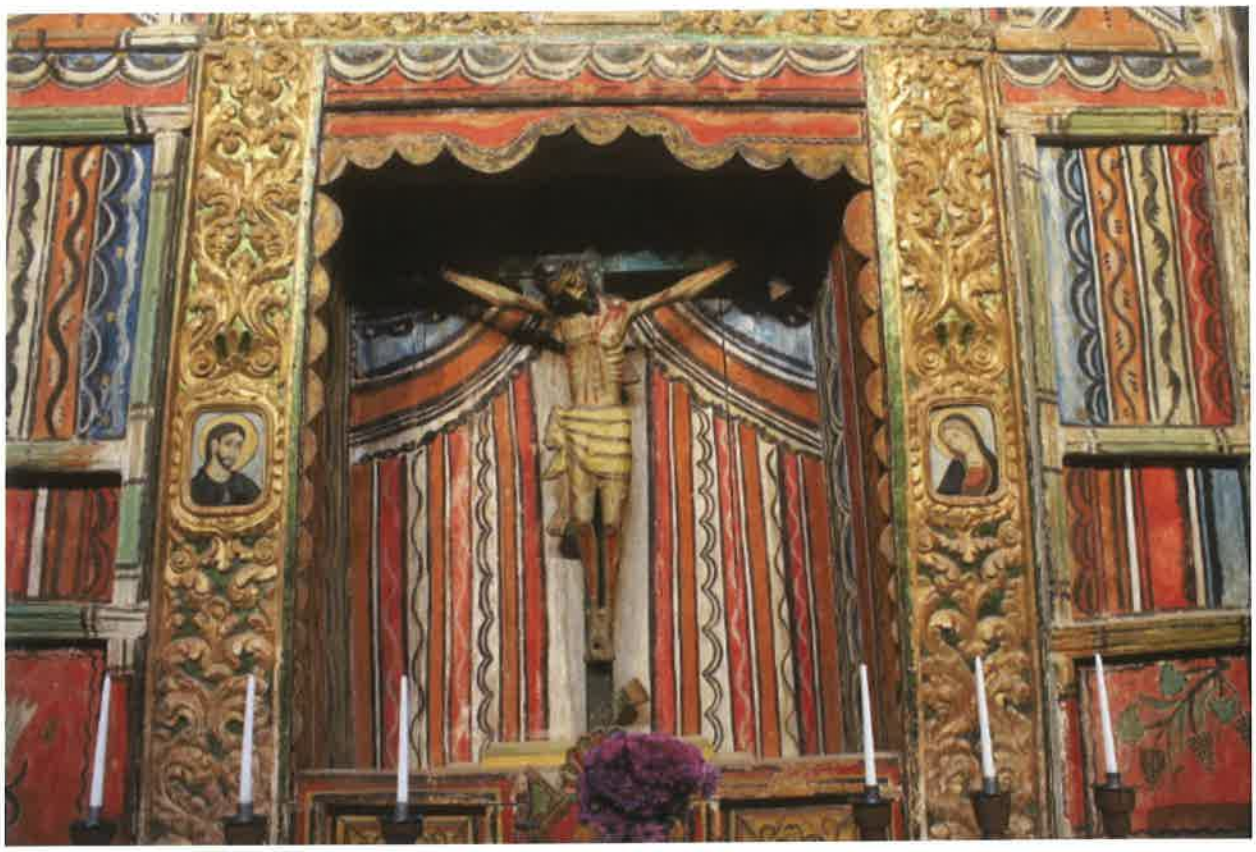

Figure 5c: *Ecce Homo* by José Lopez (1982)

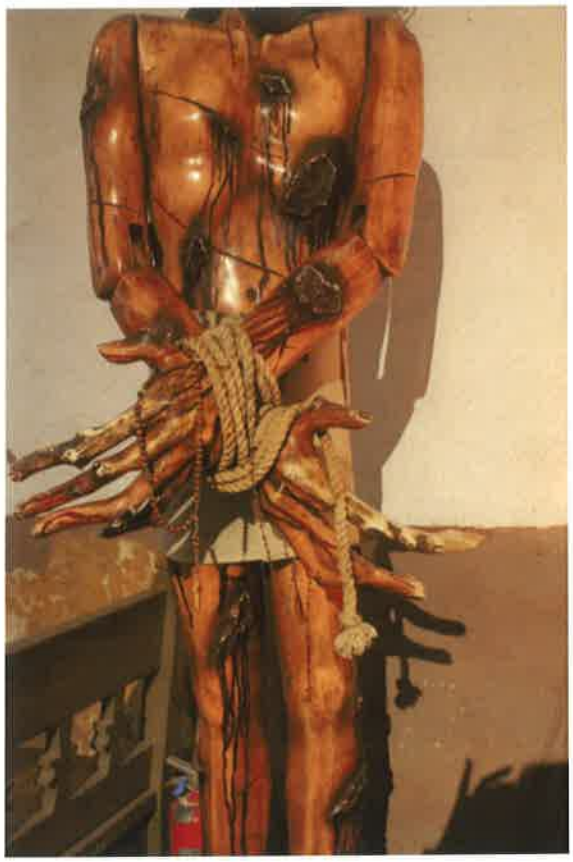

Figure 6c: *Christ in the Sepulcher* by Felix Lopez

Figure 7c: *Francis and Death in the Cart*
UnnamedLocal *Santero* (2010)

CHAPTER III

Figure 1d: Procession carrying the liter with Jesus the Nazarene (taken April 19, 2019)

Figure 2d: Procession carrying the liter with the Madonna of Sorrows (taken April 19, 2019)

Detail of the Madonna of Sorrows Liter

Figure 3d: Procession carrying the liter with Veronica (taken April 19, 2019)

Figure 4d:
Procession carrying the liter of Our Lord of Esquípulas and stopping for a woman singing (taken April 19, 2019)

Figure 5d: The Holy Soil

Figure 6d: Motif to scallop shells on the path to the Sanctuary