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# INTRODUCTION

RELIGION FIGURED IN four of the major wars Mexico endured after its independence from Spain in 1821.[1] In none of them were the proper roles of Catholicism and the Catholic church in Mexican society the only issues that drove people to take sides. But they were significant, and they were the ones that generated "culture wars" before the military battles began and after they were over. As we know from our twenty-first-century experience in culture warring, questions of profound cultural significance—the nature of marriage, the role of the state in the lives of families and individuals, the extent to which the public practice of religion is permitted by law, gender equality, school choice and prayer in schools, religious liberty vs. civil rights (all present in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Mexico as well)—can become intensely political even in the absence of armed conflict. Mexico was in a state of cultural warfare from the middle of the nineteenth century to at least the middle of the twentieth. At times the debates were more intense than at others, and always, behind the polarizing discourse, there were Catholic liberals and liberal Catholics and a whole, complicated spectrum of belief and behavior, but the taking of sides and rhetoric ginning up partisan divides over religion and church were never absent.

Catholic women were fully engaged in the culture wars that bookended and permeated the hot wars. They were part of the public attack on tolerance of other religions in the middle of the nineteenth century, and in the defense of religious liberty as a way to safeguard Catholic institutions and values after 1867. They worked mainly behind the scenes to advance the church's political agenda during the long Díaz dictatorship (1876–1911), and returned to the center of the political stage in very public ways after the Revolution in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s. Most historians agree that Mexico's delay in granting women full suffrage (until 1953) was directly linked to their perceived dedication to the church and Catholicism. A high-ranking Mason expressed liberal fears when he warned about the dangers of female suffrage in 1931: "Twenty-five thousand women coming before the Chamber to demand the vote for women! How horrible! If they attain their objective, we shall soon have a Bishop for President!"[2]

This book explores the connections between Catholic politics (the defense of church and religion) and gender in Mexico from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, though its center of gravity is the century from 1810 to 1910. At the broadest level, it is concerned with two questions that have preoccupied historians since it became clear—no later than the 1980s—that secularization was not a necessary part of modernization. How have religion and the churches that organize religion survived and even thrived since the nineteenth century? And does gendering the question provide fresh answers?[3]

The first question has been asked surprisingly infrequently by political historians of Mexico (or any other part of Latin America), despite the pervasive political power of the Catholic church everywhere in the region. For many Catholics and conservatives, both in the past and in the present, the answer is clear: the multiple challenges of the modern world *require* religion as a moral compass.[4] But for the most part, it is a liberal, secular narrative that has dominated the construction of national histories in Latin America. For Mexico, the outlines of this narrative were first framed in the nineteenth century, and later largely accepted by revolutionaries and progressives, who on the topics of the church and religion quite resembled nineteenth-century liberals. In their answers to the question of why religion and the Catholic church have endured, they have been largely dismissive: religion was and is more of a residue of colonialism than an ongoing source of personal meaning and empowerment. The church, in this story, comes across as pesky, stubborn, and venal rather than a continuing repository of political or moral power. This understanding of church and religion as irrational, lacking legitimacy, and destined to fade away has led liberals and progressives to tell the story of the history of Mexico in a way that has marginalized Catholic politics and Catholic actors. One does not have to agree with the church's positions or favor the strengthening of religious rights in order to see that to downplay the historical importance of these actors is misleading.

The same liberal history-writing project has also marginalized women, as national histories commonly do. To the extent that women figure in the liberal story, they are, with a few notable heroic exceptions, mothers. These are either admirable mothers who raised good liberal citizens, or retrograde mothers who raised resisters of the liberal project. In neither case are they themselves direct agents of change. They are timeless in these roles. Men, by contrast, change and progress. With their "natural" inclination to "modern" thinking and greater involvement in the secular worlds of business and politics, they slowly abandoned the church, or at least the most inimical of the church's teachings, beginning in the late colonial period. (This view privileging liberal men also tends to dismiss male indigenous peasants, who are seen as the only men who as a group failed to emancipate themselves from the hold of the Catholic church.)

For Mexico, the discursive marginalization of women has yielded a particularly skewed picture of historical change, especially where religion and the Catholic church are concerned. What if, following US historian Ann Braude, we center

women, and pay more attention to the ways that women supported the church than to the ways that men abandoned it?[5] This perspective shift shapes the narrative arc of this book. The capsule version goes like this. After independence from Spain (1821), denied full rights as citizens in the new nation, women forged their own form of "citizenship" in the church: they aimed to become, and did become, both more included and more equal to men in church institutions, as well as more obligated and responsible for maintaining family and community piety, than they had been in the colonial past. These "reactionary feminists," as Edward Wright-Ríos calls them, then entered the political arena on behalf of the church, defending it and their religion as fiercely as many men defended the nation.[6] The conventional wisdom is that it took the Mexican Revolution of 1910 to open up spaces for large numbers of women to act politically in meaningful ways in Mexico. But while that does seem to be true for liberal or radical women, this book shows that Catholic women had aggressively entered national politics by the 1850s. The church's struggle to survive disestablishment and to remain relevant in the nineteenth century became women's struggle. Thus the politically active Catholic women of the 1920s who so concerned our Mason were the product of historical processes set in motion in the colonial period and dramatically shaped between 1810 and 1910. Catholic women's actions put the story of the church's survival as a political actor in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in a new perspective.

An important vehicle—indeed, I argue, a crucially important vehicle—through which Catholic women helped the church survive was the lay association or confraternity (*cofradía* in Spanish). After the outbreak of the wars for independence in 1810, male-led lay associations declined significantly in number and activity, for reasons that are explored in chapter 2. In response to the post-independence debility of these associations, women created new and different lay associations whose distinguishing feature was female leadership. These associations proved to be extremely popular and proliferated rapidly, especially in parts of the country where the wars had most damaged the older ones, at first to the chagrin of the ecclesiastical hierarchy (archbishops and bishops) and with the lukewarm support of at least some parish priests—who needed these new associations but were not sure they wanted to deal with women in positions of local power—but later with the enthusiastic encouragement of both priests and bishops, as women's domination of lay associations spread throughout the country.

The appeals for women of founding, joining, and leading lay associations were manifold, from the social to the spiritual. But social and spiritual satisfactions could also be earned elsewhere, for example by practicing great personal piety, or by making donations to the church. What the associations did uniquely—and what the women who reinvented and led them envisioned—was to build and sustain a literal community of the faithful at the parish level. This was not the metaphorical community of all believers that was imagined

by Catholic intellectuals and church doctrine, but rather an actual, bounded group of Catholics, formed to provide crucial support to the parish church and its priest. The priest, in turn, supported families and the lay associations in the all-important project of moralizing the children of the parish, inculcating "Catholic values" (rarely spelled out, but including not just understandings of right and wrong but also an emphasis on the social good, the community, and faith over individual interest, the nuclear family, and science) that made certain children would grow up to be pillars of the community and, after independence, the nation.

This understanding that without religion children would grow up as selfish individuals without a moral center combined with the relatively new expectation that moralization was the responsibility of the mother and the priest (and not, as in the past, the father; this is another point explored in more detail in chapter 2). The urgency of the task of moralization grew as liberal and secular challenges to previously unquestioned Catholic values mounted in the post-independence era. Thus two changes—the transfer of responsibility of Christianization from father to mother, and the building political strength of secular liberalism—give us the core explanation not only for why women formed new associations beginning in the 1840s, but also for why women continued to found, join, and dominate them throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Lay associations gave women an essential tool with which to support their churches, defend Catholic values, promote their community's spiritual well-being, and moralize their children, vital projects for which they were understood and understood themselves to be responsible.

These associations served the implicit political role of keeping Catholicism alive and vibrant at the grassroots. But the new women-led lay associations also served a more explicit political role: around the middle of the nineteenth century, I argue that they formed the organizational base for women's movement into the national political arena in defense of the church, in the form of major, highly visible petition campaigns. Thus Catholic women, as members and leaders of lay associations and as mobilizers of nonmembers, formed a crucial bridge between the late colony, with its strong male support for and participation in the church, and the last decade or so of the nineteenth century. At that time Mexico experienced its version of Catholic revival and men once again became interested in defending the church, as a way to oppose liberal dictatorship and liberal models of modernization (though without returning in large numbers to Catholic associational life). The Mexican church's recovery thus had an important homegrown, gendered dimension. By this time women, especially as members of lay associations, were firmly ensconced at the right hands of priests whose diminished ability to act publicly—in a climate of anticlericalism and in a material context of diminished resources—they had compensated for with faith-nurturing and parish-supporting activities at the grassroots, and vocal advocacy at times of political crisis.

## *The Colonial Urban Cofradía*

What exactly was a lay association (*cofradía*) in the late colonial period, when this story begins? In both indigenous villages and Hispanic towns and cities, the church had, from the early sixteenth century, encouraged the formation of lay associations. The central role of both indigenous and urban cofradías was to organize devotional practices that honored a saint or a divine figure (usually Christ or Mary in one of her many devotional titles), but while there was overlap, indigenous cofradías were quite different from the urban ones that are the focus of this book.[7]

In the towns and cities, cofradías generally sponsored a special mass one day a month, and most participated in citywide processions, notably Corpus Christi, during which the images to which the association was devoted were taken out of the church and paraded solemnly through the streets on the shoulders of select members.[8] Almost all put on an annual "function" that might include a procession, sermons, music, extra candles for the church, luminarias, fireworks, bullfights, and refreshments.

These out-of-the-ordinary events on the calendar provided a special and invigorating spiritual and community experience. People looked forward to them, praised them when they were carried out with appropriate pomp, and criticized them when they weren't. Cofradías spent a significant portion of their income to make sure they were not seen as skimping on the drama and lavishness of the annual functions. The Cofradía del Rosario in Valladolid, for example, in the late eighteenth century purchased a new set of armor for the Roman centurions that accompanied the Virgin in procession (seated on her new throne), hundreds of fireworks, and a bull for the bullfight in her honor, all in order to "enhance the splendor of the titular functions of the cofradía."[9]

Besides organizing devotions and sponsoring the annual function and the special monthly masses, urban cofradías provided members a "good death." Members earned indulgences that reduced their time in purgatory. They prayed for each other when death was at hand, and lit the path of the Host with candles and luminarias as it was transported to the homes of the dying. Sometimes the cofradía provided valued embellishments to the administration of viaticum to its members: the Cofradía del Santísimo Sacramento of Durango, for example, had on retainer a marching band that accompanied the Host as it visited the houses of the moribund. (The band featured two French horns, a double bass, a drum, a bass drum, and two clarinets, and commanded a substantial yearly stipend of over 550 pesos.)[10] Members also joined their *cofrades'* funeral corteges and attended anniversary masses. Besides these aspects of a good death, many of the larger cofradías went farther, operating as burial societies. This meant that they guaranteed members a coffin, shroud, burial fees, and a burial as well as a one-time cash payment to survivors, often fairly significant (as much as three to four months' wages for the poorest members).[11]

These popular cofradía-sponsored practices (masses, processions, sermons, fiestas, transport of the Host, funeral and anniversary masses, death benefits) had to be paid for.[12] Some cofradías were purely devotional and existed on alms, but many, and a majority of the largest ones, were supported by initiation fees, membership fees, and rental or interest income produced by houses, lots, and funds that members had bequeathed or donated to the organization over time.[13] Some, like the Archicofradía del Santísimo Sacramento in Mexico City with its late colonial endowment of over 500,000 pesos, were extremely wealthy.[14] The income from these investments was used for upkeep on the properties that the cofradía owned, as well as to fulfill their spiritual obligations. Most of the larger cofradías and even some of the smaller ones thus spent and took in a good bit of money, and their finances were complicated enough to require a business manager (mayordomo). Chapter 1 provides more details, but the point I wish to emphasize here is that the colonial cofradías had spiritual and public functions that were expensive and that required a good bit of administration, and for this reason were seen as necessarily led by men.

## *Settings and Actors*

The book is set in urban Mexico. By "urban" I mean not only the large cities that are usually the settings for urban histories, but also the larger mestizo or Hispanic towns, in the neighborhood of 2,000–3,000 inhabitants and up.[15] In these cities and towns, there were multiple cofradías in different parish churches and in the convents of the male and female orders. In late eighteenth-century Mexico City, for example, with a population of about 137,000, there were probably at least one hundred cofradías.[16] In the city of Guanajuato, with a population of about 27,000, there were twenty cofradías; in San Miguel el Grande, a villa of about 14,000, there were fifteen; and in smallish Puruándiro, with around 4,400 inhabitants, there were four.[17]

In both the mestizo towns and the neighborhoods of the larger cities, people knew each other. Their lives came together at numerous points almost on a daily basis: in the streets, in the markets, in the churches, and in lay associations. A majority of urban dwellers probably belonged to one of the cofradías in their town or neighborhood, and some of them belonged to more than one, making cofradías microcosms of colonial society: most were racially and socially diverse, with both men and women represented.[18] They included workers (servants, municipal workers, laundresses, seamstresses, food sellers, and lower-prestige artisans like cobblers, masons, tanners or smiths, market sellers, and other plebeians); elites (merchants, ranchers, estate owners, high-ranking people in both the ecclesiastical and municipal bureaucracies); and "respectable" people, or *gente decente*, neither workers nor, quite, elites. Some in the middle groups were educated and practiced professions based on that

education (teachers, scribes, notaries); others might be shopkeepers, artisans in higher prestige crafts, or managers and privileged employees of the businesses owned by elites.

The women who are the primary actors in this study were either elites or gente decente: solid, pious, cross-wearing, bourgeois women, like those on the cover of this book, women painted by Hermenegildo Bustos in and around Guanajuato in the second half of the nineteenth century. These were the founders and officers of the female-led cofradías, and the organizers and possibly authors of the pro-Catholic petition campaigns of the mid to late century. Simple arithmetic makes it clear that lower-status urban women were also members of these cofradías and signers of these petitions, since there were far too many members/signers for all of them to have come from elite or middling families. These lower-class women were perhaps known to or acquainted with the women who were the leaders of the associations. They might have been their servants, or they were shopkeepers and laundresses and seamstresses with whom the higher-status women came in contact during their daily routines, and many of them were probably women who did not personally know any of the officers of the cofradía or the organizers of the devotions, but knew someone who did. They were a racial mix, but certainly included many more African-descended and Hispanized indigenous peoples than the overwhelmingly white and mestizo women who were the leaders of the new cofradías. But they are elusive. Their words and individual actions rarely show up in the archives. The reader should try to keep their presence in the associations in mind even when I cannot account for them in very satisfying detail. As a result of the murkiness of class and race within the documents concerning associations, I use these frameworks of analysis sparingly.

## *Influences*

First and most obvious, this book has connections to both gender studies and religious studies. My main goal, as it is the goal of most historians, is to complicate and reveal the complexity of driving themes in these theoretical traditions—in my case, especially the theme of the feminization of piety—showing how they operate and change over time, in different places, among different groups. Chapter 2 includes a longer discussion of the feminization of religion in the Mexican case, but since the debates over how to view this phenomenon are multiple and unresolved, it may be helpful to say a few words here, by way of framing the reading experience.

Religion seems, throughout the Western world, to have become more and more the social domain of women in the nineteenth century. By "social domain of women," scholars mean two things: that religious vocations soared among women in many Catholic countries, while declining among men; and that women became increasingly numerically dominant in religious practices and

institutions (sometimes referred to as the feminization of the pews). A third understanding of the feminization of religion comes from scholars' observations of changing religious language and symbols, which they have argued became more "feminized" in the nineteenth century.

Some scholars have tried to go beyond gathering and analyzing empirical evidence and have endeavored to make the feminization of religion into a theoretical construct or master narrative, often operating in tandem with secularization. They have attributed causation to multiple factors: enlightened ideas about the irrationality of religion that led men (but not women) away from the church; the rise of the market economy that required men to be increasingly away from their communities, leaving women behind to preserve church and family; liberal ideas about the separation of church and state and the assignment of the church to the private sphere; republicanism, which gendered citizenship and concretized the notion of separate gender spheres; the expansion of the masculine public sphere (clubs, societies, and so on), drawing men away from church organizations; and, in the case of Catholicism, the actions of the church itself, which has been seen as reacting to threats to its dominance by recruiting women, rendering Jesus, for example, into a more gentle and feminine image, and introducing new devotions aimed at women, thus making the feminization of religion an intentional action on the part of the church.

This brief recap of the variety of definitions of the feminization of religion—should we define it as stylistic or discursive change, or as something more demographic and social?—and of the multiple causes offered to explain it already suggests that as a theory, the feminization of religion is impossibly messy. And this just scratches the surface. Others problems include dating the various kinds of feminization (one could make an argument for the beginnings of both discursive and the demographic feminization as early as the sixteenth century and as late as the twentieth century); accounting for male religiosity and female irreligiosity; accounting for class differences among women and/or the devout; ascertaining whether a presence in the pews necessarily implies great piety; and accounting for women who were not displaced from the public sphere. Further, as a theory, feminization can be seen as reifying gender at a time when many scholars are looking to complicate it. The concept of the feminization of religion as a discursive change cannot be very useful unless we have relatively firm definitions of what is feminine and what is masculine, and these have been shown to change over time and from place to place.[19]

However, there is no question that at the very least the demographic phenomenon of greater female dominance in church institutions—Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish—existed. It existed in Mexico, too, as I have already made clear, and here it had important implications for Mexican politics and, at a scholarly level, for how we periodize Mexican history.[20] This book advances the ideas that the feminization of religion was integral to the mobilization of Catholics in culture wars against liberalism in the era of the Reform; and that the Reform,

because of its assault on church and to a considerable extent religion, deepened and hardened cultural divides even more thoroughly than did the Revolution of 1910. As a theory, then, the feminization of religion is not tenable. But as a way to think differently about Mexican history, it is helpful.

Besides work on gender/women and religion/church, a number of different literatures on politics have helped me make sense of the Mexican evidence. Because of my core interest in lay associations and their possible role in shaping women's political actions and thinking, I have mined the historical and sociological literature on associationalism and politics for insights and comparisons.[21] An argument in this literature particular to women's associations is that they are important in raising consciousness of women's issues and women's culture, and empowering women to speak out on political matters of concern to their sex, even if the reasons for any given group to have been founded in the first place were not particularly political. My own interpretation of the connection between women's lay associations and the petition campaigns in which women participated, as the reader will see in chapters 4 and 6, is based partly on the theoretical contributions of this literature, since direct evidence—for a variety of reasons spelled out in the chapters—was hard to find.

Another important argument in the writing on the relationship between associations and politics is that clubs, societies, and other groups help develop habits of cooperation across kinship or occupation as they elect officers and/or create bylaws or constitutions. Associations, then, were inherently political, a point of obvious importance for this book. Women members and officers, especially after the rise of all-female associations or female-led associations, developed leadership and other skills, amassed social capital, and formed a group identity outside of the family through their participation in associations (just as men did). They also had to learn to defend their associations against the ubiquitous presence of a priest as the director of the association.[22] Both priest and church had an interest in controlling the associations, and tensions between members/officers and ecclesiastical authorities provided proving grounds for women as political actors. Yet women's lay associations never, in my research, fundamentally challenged the "right" of the priest to supervise their operations. Lay associations were not, then, leading a trend toward democracy, and arguably their success reinforced the anti-democratic (a point made skillfully by Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann about Germany in the nineteenth century), even as they did bring women previously excluded from politics into this arena.[23]

Studies of political conservatism in the West that highlight important roles for religion and gender have also been helpful.[24] Many of these studies usefully emphasize the extent to which people have viewed churches and religion as defenders of "family values" (as they are sometimes labeled in the US). They also explore how religious conservatives have successfully characterized liberal

individualism as a threat to the family, a point that was made implicitly by the female founders of associations by the very act of forming a group to restore community piety, and was made explicitly and repeatedly by Mexican women in the petition drives they participated in as signers and organizers. When the liberal (or, later, revolutionary) state could be painted as undermining the family, the church became the main institutional resource for protecting it, and religious practice the means by which God was enlisted in the project. As prime defenders of religious practice, Catholic women and the associations to which they belonged became pillars of anti-liberal and anti-revolutionary movements in Mexico.

One assumption that has long informed most literature on politics, and that I very firmly share, is that politics is much more than the actions of statesmen and politicians and military leaders, extending well beyond the electoral arena. As Susan Moller Okin put it in 1979: "The exclusion from 'politics' of all that is domestic, familial, private, personal, and sexual clearly depends on the exclusion of women and cannot be sustained once women are included as full and equal partners in either political theory or political practice."[25] For Latin America, the literature that points to women as direct political actors, at least before their enfranchisement, is small and is overwhelmingly concentrated on the twentieth century.[26] But thinking of women's indirect or informal impact on politics as powerful and meaningful gives us a bigger canvas. In the case of Mexico in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, when politics to a considerable extent revolved around whether religious values and institutions were deemed worthy of protection or destruction by competing armies or parties, the women who cleaned the church or planned the parish raffle or taught in the parochial schools or led lay associations became important political actors. They preserved and extended religious community at the local level—a political act, even if it was unconsciously so. Sometimes they entered the political arena quite self-consciously, but even when they didn't, they were acting politically.

Finally, I should address a key concept in much work on women in politics. Most scholars nowadays recoil at the long-dominant assumption that Catholic priests manipulated gullible female parishioners, assuming instead that women had "agency."[27] "Agency" is, of course, a core concept of social/political historians, and it is surely important to evaluate historical evidence with the idea that subaltern people might have possessed or devised tools they could use to "negotiate" with those in power. But at the same time, it seems to me that the hyperaware search for agency can be (and frankly often has been) as distorting as assuming that subalterns have none. In my story, there are times when women unmistakably act as "agents," but at other times it is not clear whether it is they or priests or some other male authority who are dominating a certain situation—if indeed any one group is dominant—and I never discount the possibility that priests, as well as other male Catholic leaders,

tried and succeeded in getting women to do what they wanted. Time and context matter, and sometimes in this book the stereotype of the manipulative priest is shown to be more or less accurate. That stereotype's counterpart, the clueless and fickle woman, is less likely to show up in the archival record and there are not many examples of such women in this book, although there are certainly women for whom their priests were great and much-admired allies in the Catholic versus secular culture wars.

## *Historiography*

When I first began this project some twenty years ago, there was very little written about women's relationship either to the church or to politics in Mexico in the nineteenth century (and not much about nineteenth-century women in any historical context).[28] There was a fairly robust literature on church-state relations and the thinking of Catholic intellectuals and the clergy, but it was based on the assumption that the actions of the church in the national arena were influenced by ideas and institutional self-interest, and were largely independent of the laity, certainly of the female laity.[29] Although the number of studies that strive to understand the connections between women, the church, and Mexican politics remains minuscule, there are now more relevant works, especially for the twentieth century.[30] For the nineteenth, we have the first major book-length analysis of a lay association in Mexico, Silvia Arrom's *Volunteering for a Cause*, on the Ladies of Charity, and Edward Wright-Ríos's *Searching for Madre Matiana*, both of which successfully integrate religion, gender, and political change.[31]

The literature on the Catholic church and religion in Mexico in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is mature enough to have developed a mutually respectful debate around whether conflict (what I have called "culture war") or coexistence is the best framework through which to engage the changing roles of Catholicism in modern Mexico.[32] In large part the answer depends on what is meant by "Catholicism." The ecclesiastical hierarchy? Catholic intellectuals? Ordinary Catholics? There is a body of excellent work that rejects the "old" culture war arguments, which depicted the hierarchy as bitterly opposed on philosophical grounds to the modern state, and instead emphasizes cooperation and negotiation between these actors.[33] A modernizing church, these authors show, could and did work with a modernizing state. Another tendency in the recent literature on Catholicism, however, is to burrow into local religious cultures—featuring the laity, not taking their acquiescence for granted—and here authors have found what we might broadly classify as "secularizing" actions by the state (e.g., the establishment of public schools that were forbidden to teach religion) or even "modernizing" actions by the church itself to be deeply troubling to ordinary people.[34] As historian José Alberto Moreno Chávez emphasizes, these were not just rural folk resentful of anyone who took their

religious practices away from them, but also urban Catholics who had a different understanding of "modernity" from positivist and progress-oriented liberals, and who sought a "utopia in which everyone would be converted to a single faith and would comport themselves in accordance with its morality."[35] This book is about such ordinary Catholics and the ways they could wield power and influence politics. In fact, I see the power of the church hierarchy to confront or coexist with the state as dependent on demonstrations of loyalty to the church on the part of the laity, without which the hierarchy's negotiations in the political sphere would have no teeth.

## *Methods and Sources*

The book interweaves two approaches. First, it is a social history of women in lay associations, using pedestrian materials like membership lists, parish surveys, financial records, and correspondence among leaders of lay associations, priests, and bishops or other diocesan officials. Who joined these institutions and why? How did women function within them? Were power relationships with priests and other male authorities confrontational? Deferential? Collegial? Did class differences between women and priests matter, and how? In pursuit of this kind of source I primarily used the archiepiscopal archives of Mexico, Michoacán, Guadalajara, Oaxaca, and Durango, as well as documents in the National Archive that ended up there following the transfer of documents during and after the Reform.[36]

Second, it is a study of political action and discourses, of how petitioners and the liberal and conservative press had gendered agendas and used gendered language in the political arena. Here the sources are quite different: the petitions themselves, the partisan press, debates in the national congress, speeches. I relied especially on the partisan press to evaluate the response to the petitions; it allowed me to follow polemical calls and responses between opposing newspapers, over a period of days or weeks. I found the back-and-forth to be especially useful in understanding the issues as people defined them in real time.

Both of these approaches—social history and analysis of political discourse and behavior—can fruitfully be employed separately, but together they are far more powerful. Social history can establish that women assumed new roles in local church institutions, for example, but it cannot help us understand whether or why they became politically active, or what was at stake when they did. Similarly, bringing gender to the surface of politics is an important scholarly task, but gendered political discourses are made more intelligible when paired with gendered social and institutional histories. When liberals wrote about the church "hiding behind the petticoats" of its female supporters (see chapters 4 and 6), for example, it is easy (and no doubt correct) to interpret this as an attempt to diminish the church by feminizing it. But if we know

something about institutional and social changes in the relationship of women to church, the phrase takes on additional meaning: it becomes not only the use of gendered language to dislodge the church's patriarchal power and shift it to the state, but also liberals' recognition of social—and political—realities. New alliances between women and the church, in other words, gave the church some of the power that the liberals hoped to undermine by caricaturing its relationship to women.

## *Organization*

It is standard practice at the end of an introduction to lay out the organization of the book. In this case it is particularly important that the structure of presentation be made clear to the reader at the outset. The dual social history/political history approach that is the core of this book's methods requires an organizational scheme that is not quite as straightforward as one that is either simply chronological or thematic. Parts I, II, and III do proceed chronologically: Part I deals with the late colony and the aftermath of independence; Part II with the era of the Reform (1856–75); and Part III with the Díaz period (1876–1910). But within Parts II and III, the chapters advance along two different fronts, alternating a social history story and a political story. So, beginning with chapter 3, chapters on changes in women's relationship to the church and to lay associations (the odd-numbered chapters) are followed by chapters devoted to the role that Catholic women and lay associations played in politics (the even-numbered chapters). An alternative organization might have grouped together the social history chapters and the political discourse chapters. But I firmly believe that the social and the political constantly informed each other. In other words, cross-fertilization between women's joining practices and women's political practices is an essential part of my story, and the organization of the book needed to reflect that.

Part I (the first two chapters) establishes key contexts. Chapter 1 deals with women in colonial lay associations, and demonstrates the importance of women for those male-led associations. This is something like a background chapter, although, unlike many such chapters, this one is squarely based on archival material. Chapter 2 accounts for the collapse or near-collapse of the cofradía system analyzed in chapter 1 in the five decades after the crisis of the independence wars beginning in 1810. It establishes the regional and gendered breakdown of that system, and it probes the origins and nature of the "feminization of piety" in Mexico from 1810 to 1860.

Part II consists of four chapters on women's lay associations and their role in politicizing their members and their communities in the context of the lead-up to and aftermath of the 1856 liberal reforms. The liberal *Reforma* in Mexico, beginning in 1856, moved to aggressively secularize society and economy, so much so that it led to a civil war, a church-sponsored foreign intervention,

and another war to expel the invaders. It was more punishing toward the church than any of the liberal measures taken by governments elsewhere in Latin America, calling for (among other things) the nationalization of church wealth (not just the forced sale of church property) and the expulsion of nuns from the convents. Chapter 3 has least to do with these political changes since it begins in 1840, so sixteen years before the Reform government took power. But it is focused on the rise of new, female-led lay associations in the center-west, and as such puts in place the structures from which Catholic women were positioned to move into politics if they saw the need to do so. Its (rough) chronological pair, chapter 4, moves from these local religious institutional changes to the national political level. It analyzes two petition campaigns: one in 1849 and one in 1856, both against religious tolerance, in both of which political petitions were presented from Mexican women. I explore whether the presence of new female-led lay associations had something to do with the decision to petition, and I analyze both liberal and conservative receptions of Catholic women's move into politics, mainly in the press. As the reader will see, the liberal response is quite predictable and sounds much like responses to activist women elsewhere in the West (that is to say, disparaging and dismissive). But the conservative response was necessarily more subtle, and as a result is more interesting.

The second pairing of chapters in Part II begins with chapter 5. This chapter deals with the impact of the liberal Reform on lay associations, explaining the apparent paradox that in an era of intense anticlericalism and episcopal timidity, lay associations for both men and women, but especially women, flourished and diversified. The chapter covers the period from 1856 to 1875, and I characterize this as a kind of "golden age" of local organizing and local autonomy of women-led lay associations. Chapter 6 returns to the national political arena with an analysis of another petition campaign in 1875 in which women participated, this time much more broadly than in the earlier campaign. Like chapter 4, it makes the case that lay associations were once again important promoters of these campaigns, and it discusses changes in the ways the liberal and Catholic press dealt with the reappearance of women in the political arena.

Part III deals with the thirty-five-year regime of Porfirio Díaz, the "Porfiriato." From the Catholic point of view the regime was a mixed bag. Díaz sought "conciliation" with the church as part of a broader project to stabilize the country, which gave a church weakened by two wartime losses the political space to regroup. But as a Mason and a liberal hero, Díaz was not inclined to go beyond conciliation with the church, refusing to overturn the laws of the Reform. As a result, the cultural/political conflicts that had been so front and center in the previous twenty years continued a low-grade churn. Chapter 7 genders the development of lay associations during the Porfiriato, documenting the continued dominance of women in lay associations and the difficulties

of getting men to participate. This period featured an increasingly dense set of ecclesiastical networks; regular meetings of priests to discuss theological and other questions; the publication of *Boletines Eclesiásticas* intended to inform priests and interested laymen of national and international events; Catholic conferences to which women were not invited; and Vatican training for Mexican priests. The Catholic press also expanded its reach. In other words, these were years of reassertion of priestly and masculine power in the church and in pro-church secular society. These moves constituted the church's (and their allies in the press) best efforts to reestablish colonial-style gender hierarchy and gender segregation, and to treat the performance of piety in lay associations as gender neutral (against all evidence, as any parish priest could attest). The chapter's pair, chapter 8, deals with the (still strongly female-dominated) lay associations' key roles in promoting the church's political projects during the Porfiriato, especially religious education, the Catholic press, and keeping Catholic practice as visible and publicly present as possible. The perceived "morality" of Catholicism versus the moral neutrality of liberalism—many of whose advocates persistently contrasted their "scientific" and "rational" worldview with that of Catholic "fanatics"—was at the center of these projects.

In pairing the rise of women-led and women-dominated lay associations in the 1840s with the rise of politically active Catholic women around the same time, this book tells a new story. It also provides a genealogy for the militant and highly visible Catholic activism in the 1910s, 1920s, and 1930s, which is taken up in the epilogue. Women's political activism in the decades after the 1910 Revolution is generally written about as if it were something new, something that grew out of openings for women provided by the Revolution itself (as liberal women's activism seems fairly clearly to have done). A genealogy—unlike mere "background"—should show us a new way of thinking about something not only in the past, like the activism of Catholic women in the early part of the century, but also in the present. Historicizing and gendering the question of the survival of religion in Mexico does that, as I hope the following chapters show.

# INDEX

**Boldface** numbers refer to figures and tables.