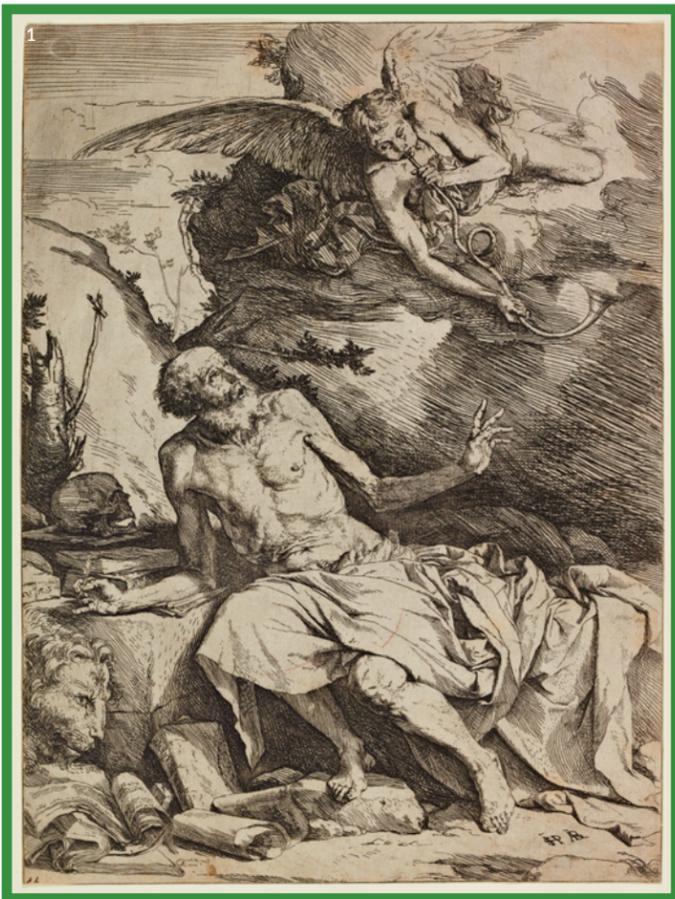


Devotion & Doubt in the Spanish World 1500–1800

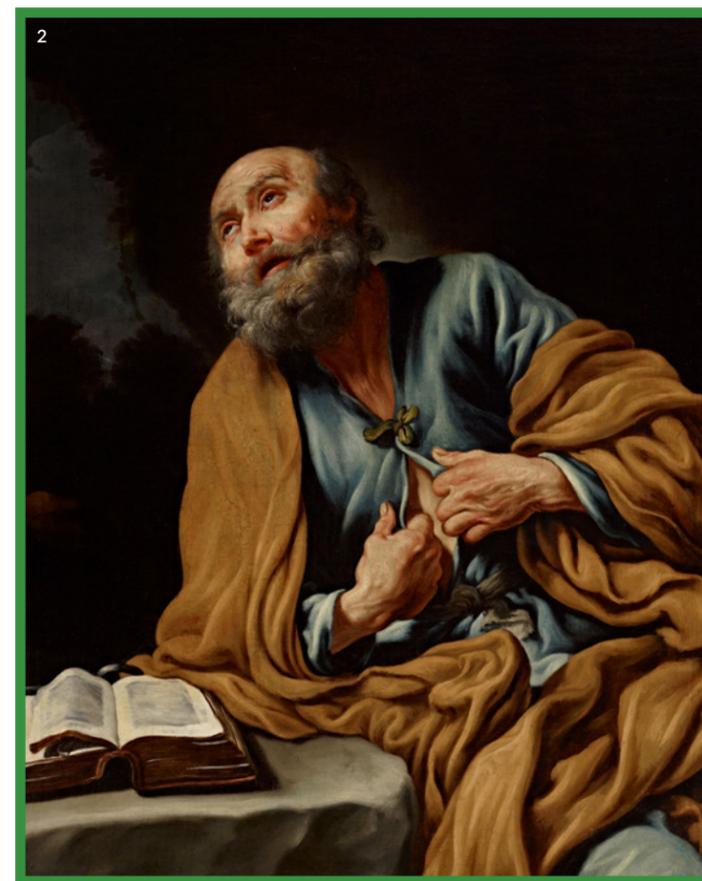
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Introduction

In the sixteenth century, the Christian church in Europe was in crisis. Martin Luther's critiques of church doctrine and practice led to a schism, and the movement soon known as the Reformation spread from its origins in Germany to the rest of Europe. The ruling Habsburg dynasty of Spain – having recently consolidated power, forced Jewish Spaniards to convert or leave the country, and overthrown the last remaining Iberian Islamic kingdom – in partnership with the Inquisition, ensured that the Reformation did not gain much traction there. The Habsburgs understood themselves to be the most exemplary of Catholic kings and were strong proponents of the Catholic revival known as the Counter-Reformation. As its empire grew to encompass much of the newly “discovered” Americas as well as the Philippines, Spain confronted additional challenges to Catholic supremacy in the form of radically different local religious practices. Reformers had accused the church of the very sin – idolatry bordering on paganism – that it was now keen to root out in Mexico, Peru, and beyond. Yet the diversity of beliefs and practices across the Spanish realms, as well as the assimilation of local beliefs into Catholic practice, belies the church's façade of impenetrable orthodoxy. Difference and doubt were always present, always subversive, always a threat. At a time in which the visual was, for the largely illiterate masses, the primary means through which to experience the divine, the art and material culture of the early modern Spanish world testifies to these tensions and contradictions.



■■■ 1. In the Counter-Reformatory Spanish world, the saints maintained a primacy that they were denied in regions more wholly subsumed by the Reformation. Jusepe de Ribera, who spent most of his artistic career in Spanish Naples, depicts St. Jerome interrupted at his writing by an angel announcing the Last Judgement with a blast from his trumpet. The drama of the scene is conveyed not just by Jerome's startled face and gesture, but by the diagonal lines that sweep across the center of the image, echoing the angle of the saint's body and creating a sense of supernatural movement. Ribera counterbalances the godly with the earthiness of Jerome's sinewy musculature and the puffed-out cheeks of the heavenly trumpeter, who looks more like a young boy blowing raspberries than the avant-garde of the end times. Contemplation, asceticism, and aurality are major themes. "Pay attention!" Ribera urges the viewer. "Judgement is our universal fate, the saints no less than you!"



■■■ 2. The tearful St. Peter, expressing penitence for his denial of Christ on the night of his arrest, was a popular theme across southern Europe in the early modern period. The image of the repentant Peter embodied the emotional gravitas that the Counter-Reformatory church advocated. The writings of the Spanish Ignatius of Loyola and others responded to reformers' criticism that the church had become a corrupt machine for granting spiritual privileges to the wealthy. They embraced a less transactional approach to salvation and encouraged an intense empathy with the suffering of Christ and the saints. In contemplating the life of Christ, the faithful were thought to better discern the will of God. Peter's glistening tears recall the hyper-naturalistic tears, often made of glass, that streamed down the sculpted visages of sorrowful Virgins and suffering Christs by Spanish artists like Pedro de Mena. The saint's tears are meant to move the faithful to their own tears – tears for their personal sorrows but also for the suffering and sacrifice of their spiritual betters. If Peter, the rock of the church and the keeper of the keys to heaven (both of which the painter alludes to in this painting), can descend to the depths of depravity yet shed tears of remorse, why can't you?

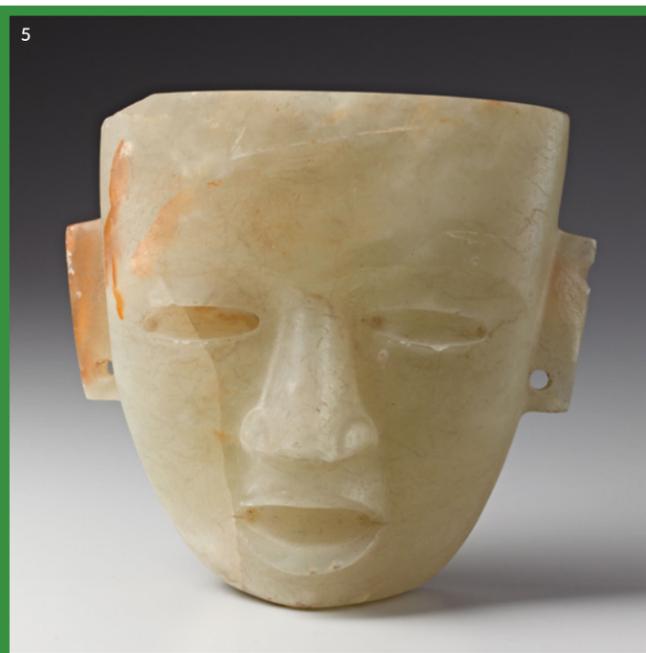
■■■ 3. In early modern Spain, no less than the king himself, Philip II, was a relic fanatic, amassing thousands of them from across Europe and housing them in richly decorated reliquaries in his palatial complex, El Escorial. Philip believed in the metaphysical power of relics. At the end of his life, he was said to have pressed them to his ailing body in the hope of transformation and relief. We know very little about the Cantor's late sixteenth- or seventeenth-century reliquary bust and its companion (1950.33). Clumsily rendered – note the figures' uneven eyes and ears – they may have been mass produced in a workshop in northern or central Spain. Designed to display a physical remnant of the saints they depict – a piece of bone, perhaps, or a torn bit of a robe – the relics themselves are long gone. Santa Emerenciana and Santa Juliana of Nicomedia, the subjects of the Cantor's reliquaries, were both early Christian martyrs, a macabre status that would have conferred prestige and pedigree to the owners of their relics. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the two busts is the inscriptions. Though difficult to parse grammatically, they suggest that they were sculpted by – or, more precisely, under the patronage of – a Doña Bernardina and a Señora Abadesa (abbess). They point to a networked economy of female devotees and patrons who found solace, and perhaps models in faith, in their martyred forebears.



■■■ 4. Juan de Valdés Leal, one of the preeminent painters of later-seventeenth-century Seville, created this print as part of the festivities surrounding the canonization of King Ferdinand III in 1671. He shows us the ephemeral decorations, in the form of a triumphal arch, erected on the interior of the main entrance of Seville Cathedral, opposite the grand, free-standing *Triunfo* (Triumph) that was the centerpiece of the canonization festivities. The human figures in the foreground are dwarfed by the ephemeral architecture as well as the larger machinations of ecclesiastical and earthly power. Ferdinand, who ruled in the thirteenth century, was a key figure in the so-called *Reconquista* (Reconquest) of Spain, bringing large swathes of formerly Islamic Andalusia back into the religious (and political) sphere of Christendom. Upon his death in 1252, Ferdinand was entombed in Seville Cathedral, which itself had only recently been converted from a mosque to a church; the church's bell tower, known as La Giralda, is the minaret of the former mosque. The story of the Reconquest lies at the geographical and metaphorical heart of Seville. Although the last Islamic kingdom of Spain fell nearly 200 years before Ferdinand's canonization, Islam was an ever-present specter. It remained a goad to modern Spain's evangelizing mission in the Americas as well as a reminder of the precariousness of Spain's – and the Catholic church's – power in an era of reformation, economic crisis, and Ottoman ascendancy.

1. Jusepe de Ribera (Italian, born in Spain, c. 1591–1652), *St. Jerome Hearing the Trumpet of the Last Judgment*, c. 1621. Etching. Mortimer C. Leventritt Fund, 1972.32
2. Claude Vignon (French, 1593–1670), *The Lament of St. Peter*, 1623–1630. Oil on canvas. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Wiesenberger, 1960.207

3. Artist unknown (Europe), *Reliquary Bust of Saint Emerenciana*, early 17th century. Gift of Mr. Arthur Wiesenberger, 1950.32
4. Juan de Valdés Leal (Spanish, 1622–1690), *Interior of the Main Entrance of Seville Cathedral*, 1672. Etching. Alice Meyer Buck Fund, 1981.132



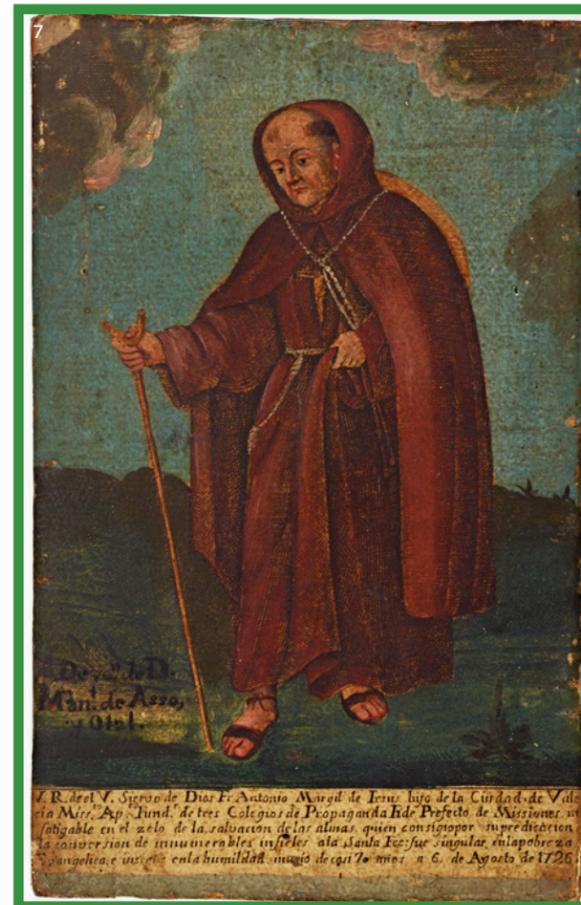
5. Scholars have long thought that the stone faces from Teotihuacan were made for burials. However, recent research suggests otherwise: they may instead have been used in everyday rituals and devotional practices. While many of these faces were looted over the past several hundred years, both Teotihuacan and Olmec faces have also been found in archaeological excavations of the Templo Mayor, the main temple of the Mexica (better known as the Aztecs) in Tenochtitlan (Mexico City). Colonial-period histories of the Aztec empire attest that its rulers purposely buried these objects in the foundations of the temple as a way to align themselves spiritually and politically with their ancient forebears. Yet, for sixteenth-century Spanish invaders, settlers, and *peninsulares*, the faces were considered neither ancient religious objects nor testaments to imperial Aztec power; they were, instead, pagan idols and thus had to be either destroyed or assimilated. For many Mesoamerican green stone objects, the latter was the preference. The Spanish believed that jade and other precious green stones were efficacious in curing abdominal ailments. The assimilation of Teotihuacan ritual objects into systems of Spanish medicine neutralized their idolatrous threat. Soon medicinal Mesoamerican green stone “idols” began appearing in elite Spanish collections, including that of the very Catholic Philip II.



6. By the sixteenth century, Spanish royal and clerical support of the doctrine that the Virgin Mary was immaculate (i.e., conceived free from any taint of sin) was not solely a matter of Counter-Reformatory devotional zeal. It was also a means by which to assert imperial military and political power and to evangelize the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V had images of the Immaculate Virgin engraved on his armor. Hernán Cortés, who invaded Mexico and defeated the ruling Aztecs at Tenochtitlan in 1521, had a battle standard on which her image was displayed. Sculpted in wood, painted, gilded, and rather diminutive in size, the Cantor’s sculpture resembles images of the Virgin of Quito (Ecuador), who was a variation of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception. Like the Quiteño examples at the Metropolitan Museum of Art (64.164.236.a,b) and the Brooklyn Museum (58.37), the Virgin gazes down to the right while gesturing to the upper left, wears a dress of white and gold and a blue mantle lined in red, and rests her feet on a crescent moon and the remnants of what was likely a snake or dragon. The abundant depictions of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception found in the Americas attest to the global spread of the Catholic Marian cult and the facility with which European evangelizers assimilated indigenous mother-goddesses into Counter-Reformatory faith practices.

5. Artist unknown (Teotihuacan, Mexico), *Mask or face*, 300. Travertine. Gift of Mrs. Charlotte Mack, 1960.91

6. Artist unknown (Spain or South America), *Virgin of the Immaculate Conception*, 18th century. Wood, gesso, and pigment. Gift of Edith Whitaker, 1980.21



7. Fray Antonio Margil de Jesus, a Spanish-born Franciscan, immigrated to New Spain (Mexico) in 1683, eventually traveling north to Texas, where in 1720 he founded the mission of San José y San Miguel de Aguayo in San Antonio. Known for his humility, he was said to have referred to himself as “Nothingness Itself”; the friar’s simple Franciscan habit, sandals, and walking stick bolster this image (sources are largely silent on the effect of Margil de Jesus’ “humble” missionary work on the indigenous populations he sought to evangelize). Somewhat ironically, his renown as an evangelizer and his seeming lack of guile made him the object of considerable interest and devotion, as this image attests. The painting’s support is unusual: it consists of an etching affixed to a canvas and then painted over. In painting over the print, the artist has, in effect, repainted the original image of the missionary, which is now at the Museo de Guadalupe in Zacatecas. The inscription at the bottom of the portrait indicates that the image is a *verdadero retrato* (true portrait). By way of its veracity, the image retains some of the friar’s own holiness. A second inscription at the bottom left reads, “A devoci[ón] de D[on] Man[uel] de Asso y Ota[el],” thus revealing the devotional nature of the reproductive act. The making of this painting was Don Manuel’s devotional prayer, his holy meditation.

8. Goya began his career in the 1770s in the employ of the Spanish crown. In 1799, at the same time that he was promoted to first court painter under King Charles IV, he also began working in a more critical mode. The Cantor’s work belongs to the series of 80 prints from this period that are known as *Los Caprichos*. This body of work confronts, often satirically, the mores, hypocrisies, and superstitions of contemporary Spanish society. In many of the *Caprichos*, Goya skewers the ruling class and the clergy, yet is careful to cloak his critiques in ambiguity and allegory. In the Cantor’s print, two hooded male figures, their faces obscured by shadow, are carrying off a woman in distress. Her head is thrown back, hair loose, eyes screwed shut, and mouth open in fear or agony – we can only imagine her curdling scream. Though Goya refuses to provide explicit identifying features, the male figure on the left, shrouded in a long cloak, appears to be a cleric. We are left to contemplate the horrors in which he – and by implication the entire institution of the Church – is not merely complicit, but actively enabling: kidnapping, torture, rape. Unsurprisingly, the incendiary critique of many of the *Caprichos* drew the attention of the Inquisition. Presumably under the threat of further harassment, Goya removed them from sale soon after their publication.

7. Artist unknown (U.S.A.), *Fr. Antonio Margil de Jesus, Franciscan Missionary*, 1726. Painted etching on canvas. Stanford Museum Collections, 1982.250

8. Francisco de Goya (Spanish, 1746–1828), *They Carried Her Off! (Que se la Llevaron)*, 1799. Etching. Mortimer C. Leventritt Fund, 1970.392



■■■ Additional Reading

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Rishel, Joseph J., and Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt. *The Arts in Latin America, 1492–1820*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2006.

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