

Introduction

Colonization, then, was largely a labour of “urbanization.”

—Richard Morse, *Cambridge History of Latin America*

If we had to choose a single, irreducible idea underlying Spanish colonialism in the New World, it would undoubtedly be the propagation of the Catholic faith.

—Adriaan C. van Oss, *Catholic Colonialism*



Scholars have long recognized that Spanish colonialism was inseparable from cities and Catholicism. Cities were a fundamental unit of Iberian society and functioned as cultural hubs, serving as repositories of all that was civilized—law, religion, and the institutions that ensured their diffusion among the people. Catholicism extended into all aspects of Spanish society, shaping laws, culture, and customs as well as people’s systems of belief. Together, cities and Catholicism had served as crucial weapons in the *Reconquista* (reconquest) of the Iberian peninsula, providing bases for the expansion of Spanish territory and culture, and they served similar functions in the Americas. One has only to think of Hernán Cortés founding the city of Veracruz in order to legitimize his campaign into the interior, a campaign launched with the battle cry, “Brothers and comrades, let us follow the sign of the Holy Cross in true faith, for under this sign we shall conquer.”¹ Over the following centuries, Spaniards established scores of cities and erected thousands of churches in an effort to create what might well be called an empire of Catholic towns. The rituals of laying out a city on a grid with its central plaza marked a place as “Spanish,” but what mattered most was not the physical city but its *civitas*, its people, institutions, and culture.² For the Spanish colonial project was an ambitious one that sought a wholesale transformation

of American society, remade into a European likeness. In the words of an adviser to Charles V, the goal was to “give to those strange lands the form of our own.”³ Creating a city thus required more than setting up a familiar pattern of buildings; it required establishing institutions and the ongoing work of creating a citizenry imbued with Spanish culture.

This book is about these cities, their religion, and their religious institutions, and its protagonists are a group of organizations that took a leading role in creating an empire of Catholic towns: mendicant orders. It focuses on central New Spain, where mendicants—Observant and Discalced Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, Discalced Carmelites, and Mercedarians—constituted one of the largest branches of a wealthy and powerful church. Any city of respectable size had a mendicant presence, and most important cities were home to multiple orders. Mexico City and its environs alone included approximately twenty mendicant churches by the 1730s. The orders prospered in these urban locales. From the late sixteenth century onward, the majority of friars lived in urban convents, which were among the orders’ wealthiest houses and home to some of their most ornate churches. In cities, friars ministered to residents of all races and social standings, serving as preachers, confessors, spiritual directors, alms collectors, educators, scholars, and sponsors of charitable works. They were deeply embedded in urban social and cultural life.

To think of these orders as urban is not the conventional view. Their starring roles in most histories of central New Spain have been as missionaries working in Indian settlements during the sixteenth century and on the frontiers of the viceroyalty thereafter. As these accounts go, Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians, who had arrived in New Spain with the charge of bringing the land’s native inhabitants to the Catholic Church, experienced a sixteenth-century golden age. They expanded rapidly throughout central New Spain to hundreds of *pueblos de indios* (Indian towns) where, with an unusual mandate from the crown, they established temporary Indian parishes called *doctrinas de indios*. These locations, where friars functioned like diocesan priests, provided fodder for intense conflicts with diocesan clergy over mendicant privileges. Mendicants in charge of parishes ran contrary to the vision of the church established at Trent, and by the 1560s the Spanish crown had come to prefer more easily controlled diocesan priests. By the 1570s, conventional accounts have it, the mendicants’ golden age had ended. Their expansion halted, they were forced to give up some of their *doctrinas*, and then they watched their positions in society erode until the mid-eighteenth century when the crown allied with the mendicants’ adversaries, the diocesan clergy, to deal the orders a death blow by forcing them to relinquish their remaining *doctrinas*.⁴

The problem with this version of events is not so much its characterization of the orders' precarious position in *doctrinas* as that it overlooks the mendicants' turn to urban work. Focusing solely on the orders' roles as missionaries obscures important parts of their history and overemphasizes the themes of conflict and uninterrupted decline after the sixteenth century. To better understand what happened to New Spain's mendicant orders, I have taken a different perspective. I begin after the so-called golden age, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; shift the focus to cities; examine mendicant purposes beyond Indian evangelization; and include additional orders besides the frequently studied Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians. The result is a very different tale. From the late sixteenth to the end of the eighteenth century, New Spain's mendicant orders underwent a number of transformations, none of which was more dramatic than their urbanization. Even as the orders struggled to keep their *doctrinas*, the number of urban convents grew throughout the colonial period. Whereas in 1570 most of their houses were in Indian towns, two centuries later nearly all were in cities. Not only did the original three orders begin to put new emphasis on urban locations but Discalced Carmelites, Mercedarians, and Discalced Franciscans arrived in New Spain during the last two decades of the sixteenth century, and they established their houses almost exclusively in cities. The seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were a time of expansion and prosperity for the mendicants, when populations of friars increased, new houses were founded in cities throughout New Spain, and friars built up the range of services they offered from those locations. Without the special privileges that friars held in *doctrinas*, urban friars focused on traditional mendicant activities, such as preaching, offering confession, celebrating masses, and praying. Urbanization thus transformed friars from missionaries into more conventional mendicants who had more in common with their European counterparts than with their sixteenth-century predecessors.

Although this book is about a group of institutions, it is not a traditional institutional history concerned, for example, with administrative structures or finances. I am more interested in these corporate bodies as they interacted with society, what they meant to that society, and how they influenced religious practice. To assess these roles, I examine the orders from a comparative perspective. How did Franciscans differ from Dominicans? Did Discalced Franciscans and Mercedarians work in similar ministries? What did it mean to attend an Augustinian instead of a Carmelite church? Each order had its own corporate identity, history, patriarch, saints, devotions, and particular ways of doing things. At the same time, these orders all saw themselves as mendicants with similar features. They required the same three vows of poverty, chas-

tity, and obedience and worked toward the same ultimate goal: helping people achieve salvation. The combination of the orders' distinctiveness and commonalities translated into pastoral work. Each order engaged in the same core mendicant functions, such as preaching and offering confession, but also branched out to activities that fit its particular institute (way of proceeding), such as the Augustinians' labors in education or the Franciscans' urban missions. How an order went about providing services also mattered, and friars sought to convince people that their order's approaches and devotional programs offered the surest path to salvation. So, walking into a mendicant church afforded a specific type of Catholic experience, one shaped by that order's institute and one differentiated from that of any other church in town.

These variations in religion as it was practiced, rather than as it was prescribed, are captured in a series of moving images: a woman pursuing sanctity along a Carmelite model, a group of men passing an afternoon in a store debating orders' methods of confession, a woman scolding a Dominican for his condescending explanation of Mary's birth. Here was the mendicants' influence in action. The messages conveyed in an order's sermons, the images displayed in its churches, and the teachings of its schools informed people's beliefs and guided local religious practice. For the most part, these forms of Catholicism as espoused by the orders and as experienced by the faithful coexisted if not harmoniously then peacefully, but collisions did occur. Run-ins were not simply the result of ideological differences among the orders, although these mattered a great deal, but also of the environment in which they took place. The timing, the combination of orders present, the level of support from influential officials, connections to the laity, and even the proximity of churches to one another factored into how the politics of religion evolved in a particular place. Institutions, ideologies, and local religion were tightly connected.

Mendicants' influence on cities was also felt in other enduring if less immediately personal ways. Churches were tangible signs of a city's status, demonstrating that it was someplace Spanish, Christian, and civilized. Mendicant churches were special points of pride, bringing prestige and identifying the city as an important place, one that was worthy of hosting more than a parish church. To the many residents who took pride in their *patria chica* (little fatherland), orders thus brought more than their services. Mendicants also helped construct urban culture and identity. Their saints often became the city's patrons, honorary residents who watched over and protected the city from their heavenly vantage point. Their festivals, celebrated in repeating annual cycles, marked local time. Images in their churches drew people seeking their miraculous powers. Much of

what identified a location and distinguished it from other cities came from the influence of its religious institutions.

The city as home to the sacred had a long-standing place in Catholic traditions. Perhaps the most famous example is Augustine's *City of God*, an account of human history from Genesis to the Last Judgment told as a tale of two cities. Whereas the City of Man was concerned with worldly things, the City of God was an earthly manifestation of the heavenly city of saints, and its residents were the ones who would be saved. Mendicants, whose work was geared toward the goal of salvation, were crucial to the Spanish colonial version of this history with its alliance of religion and urbanism. These orders, in their many urban roles, shaped what religion looked like in its local contexts. They were among the chief architects and builders of these colonial cities of God.

NARRATIVES AND MENDICANTS

The mendicants' urban story suggests some ways of rethinking traditional narratives of early modern Catholicism and colonial Mexico. First, even conceptually sophisticated histories of the early modern church and religion have had difficulty avoiding old teleologies that assume "medieval" mendicants were supplanted by more "modern" institutions like the Jesuits or a diocesan clergy revitalized after the Council of Trent (1545–1563).⁵ General histories of medieval Europe refer to the birth of mendicant orders and the concurrent rise of the city as defining elements of the thirteenth century, but mendicants have yet to find their place in historical narratives of early modern Europe.⁶ Compare, for example, the centrality of Jesuits and the near absence of mendicants in two recent overviews of early modern Catholicism by R. Po-Chia Hsia and Robert Bireley. Hsia opens with Trent, that "moment of synergy" from which the Jesuits emerged, and concludes with their suppression, an initial blow struck by irreligious forces of change and revolution that would destroy the work of Trent. Bireley argues that over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Catholicism transformed from a religion separate from the world (e.g., housed in monasteries) to one more intimately accessible to the populace. He thus begins his book with "The New Orders," a chapter principally about the Jesuits, in which he argues new orders had a closer relationship with society than the mendicant orders that came before them. In contrast, mendicants' place in these works is on the fringes, providing a few exceptional men at Trent and missionaries to distant lands, but not significant players in the reform that defined the age.⁷ Mendicants' place at the heart of New Spain's urban society dur-

ing the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries suggests that they deserve a more prominent role in histories of early modern Catholicism than they have been given.

This history also suggests some ways to reinterpret chronological markers of New Spain's history. Older historiographies emphasized an early sixteenth-century conquest phase that gave birth to most colonial structures. It was followed by a period of institutional status quo until Bourbon reforms and independence reconfigured society. These two pivot points of the 1570s and mid-eighteenth century thus bookended a long period with little change and only minimal importance.⁸ Few put stock in such interpretations anymore, yet they still seem to apply when mendicants are under discussion. On one chronological end, mendicants brought Christianity to Indians until the late sixteenth century, when the Jesuits replaced these orders in importance and new conflicts arose with diocesan clergy. Robert Ricard ended his influential history of mendicants, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, in 1572 with the arrival of the Jesuits.

It rarely happens in history that one finds a chronological sequence so clearly and naturally delimited. During this period [1523–1572] the conversion of Mexico was almost exclusively entrusted to the three so-called Mendicant Orders. . . . The Jesuits brought a spirit of their own and their own preoccupations. . . . It is therefore not arbitrary . . . to hold that the establishment of the Jesuits in 1572 brings one period to a close and opens another.⁹

Similar interpretations continue to appear even in works with very different historiographical positions. Solange Alberro's *El águila y la cruz*, which tracked the religious origins of creole identity in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century New Spain, examined mendicants' roles in this process until the late sixteenth century. With the arrival of the Jesuits, "the most dynamic and modern order of the age," she abandoned the mendicants, which, she argued, were often seen as overwhelmed by the new challenges of the period.¹⁰

I agree that the years around 1570 were indeed a time of substantial transformations in New Spain, but to see the arrival of the Jesuits as the watershed event of this time attributes a disproportionately important role to them. This was a time of institutional changes more generally, including expanding state bureaucracies, a strengthened diocesan clergy led by more powerful bishops, and new church bodies like the Holy Office of the Inquisition (established 1571). In addition, epidemics ravaged native populations, leading to major demographic, economic, and cultural transformations. At the same time cities were filling with growing populations of creoles (people of European descent born in the Americas) and *castas* (people of mixed racial ancestry) and became home to greater amounts of

wealth. Urban residents sought the services and prestige that came with the establishment of convents, so orders sought to situate themselves in these locations of growing significance. It was this combination of circumstances that attracted Jesuits as well as Mercedarians, Discalced Carmelites, Augustinians, Dominicans, and Observant and Discalced Franciscans to New Spain's cities.

Periodizations that define the midcolonial era as static do not fit mendicants either. The real story of this period was the mendicants' urban prosperity. Rather than hunker down in their doctrinas or sit idle inside their convents, mendicants turned to pastoral work in cities. They expanded to all of New Spain's cities, and the number of friars filling their convents grew substantially. This was also the period when orders were most heavily invested in public debates about forms of religious practice. They and their messages were highly visible. These patterns fit with recent scholarship that has given new attention to a long seventeenth century and the development of baroque religious practices. Baroque practice, focused on "outward gesture and ritual observance," sought to inspire through emotion, not just instruct. Many of its rituals were physical, using the body as a link to Christ and his sufferings; many of its rituals were communal, connecting the faithful to each other as well as to God.¹¹ David Brading described the period from the 1640s to the 1750s as one of spiritual renewal when "post-Tridentine, baroque Catholicism sank deep roots in New Spain"; William Taylor found 1580 to 1620 to be the formative period in the development of shrines and miraculous images; and flourishing forms of popular urban religion appear in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century confraternities and visionaries studied by Nicole von Germeten and Nora Jaffary.¹²

On the other chronological end of conventional periodizations, scholarship has spotlighted the damage done by Bourbon reforms and the mendicants' futile struggles with diocesan clergy, especially in the wake of decrees in 1749 and 1753 that forced mendicants to turn over (secularize) their doctrinas to diocesan clergy.¹³ In addition to demonstrating the effects of lost doctrinas, Nancy Farriss and Luisa Zahino Peñafort have shown how the state during the final decades of colonial rule brought mendicants under closer control through inspections of the orders, powers of appointment, the judicial system, and revocation of ecclesiastical immunity.¹⁴ Although this scholarship has demonstrated conclusively that mid-eighteenth-century state reforms had serious consequences, the focus on doctrinas and the orders' institutional status misses important dimensions of the orders' histories. The mendicants' epoch of prosperity may have come to a close after the 1730s, but their place in cities remained largely intact, and the only urban convent lost

to the reforms was a poor, small house that the Mercedarians willingly relinquished. Some orders also showed signs of recovery or even growth during the century's final decades.

Recent scholarship has added a new dimension to discussions of eighteenth-century reforms' effects on mendicants, tracking, in addition to state efforts, those internal to the church. Beginning in the 1760s, as reformist churchmen attempted to replace what they viewed as overly extravagant and emotional forms of piety with more sedate ones, they disparaged many of the baroque practices that mendicants cultivated, such as elaborate saints' day celebrations, ornate church burials, and the communal devotions of confraternities.¹⁵ Yet orders kept providing these services, and the faithful kept seeking them out. On one level, the contrast between reformers' complaints and mendicants' busy churches indicates bishops' limited ability to regulate regular orders (male orders including mendicants) without the muscle of the state. More broadly, it suggests the limited inroads that their Enlightened Catholicism had made into New Spain during the eighteenth century, lending credence to the conclusions of scholars such as Brian Larkin, Pamela Voekel, and Matthew O'Hara that prelates' calls to modernize religious practice went largely unheeded by their flocks, and baroque forms of Catholicism continued to prevail.¹⁶ Finally, the orders' urban ministries did not create the same sorts of tensions with secular clergy as did their work running doctrinas, and bishops as well as their parish priests frequently welcomed mendicants' contributions. In fact, regular-secular relationships were not always as adversarial as standard accounts suggest.

MENDICANT ORIGINS AND BACKGROUNDS

In order to understand mendicants' place in colonial society, some background on their origins, shared traditions, and operations is needed. Mendicant orders were one of the most notable expressions of a medieval poverty movement that included renewed enthusiasm for modeling religious life on Jesus and the Apostles. Attempts to implement two essential characteristics of this model, ministry to laypersons and the renunciation of worldly goods, resulted in a new form of male religious life. Unlike monastic orders such as the Benedictines and Hieronymites, whose strictly cloistered monks were supposed to lead contemplative lives devoted to prayer, mendicant friars were to work "in the world" as well. They did maintain the monastic tradition of praying the daily office as a community, but outside the convent friars traveled from place to place, going wherever they were needed, preaching, confessing, and minister-

ing to the laity. The decision to follow a life of both contemplation and work in the world, to become, in a phrase the friars borrowed from the gospel of Luke, “both Marthas and Marys,” led them to found their houses in urban locations. Whereas monastic orders built their monasteries in remote locations removed from the sins and temptations of the laity, mendicants established their churches in cities and towns where they could reach greater numbers of people. They would also be able to find sources of financial support. Unlike the wealthy monastic orders, mendicant orders originally eschewed endowments and property ownership. Even though all monks and friars swore the same three vows that included individual poverty, mendicants also adopted a Rule of corporate poverty. Monasteries supported their monks from their properties and income earned through their investments, but mendicant friars, as the name suggests, were supposed to live off alms or their own work. During the mendicants’ first years of existence, there were even debates about whether they could have their own churches, but the ideal of poverty had its practical limits and all but the Franciscans eventually came to own extensive properties beyond their own church buildings.¹⁷

The two orders generally recognized as the first mendicants are the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans) and Order of Preachers (Dominicans). Each had its origins in a person who was celebrated among his contemporaries, and the early histories of these orders are inseparable from the lives of Francis and Dominic. The two orders were established within a few years of each other in the early thirteenth century, and Francis and Dominic, in fact, knew and influenced each other. According to Franciscan tradition, the order began when Francis, a layperson who experienced a spiritual awakening, gathered twelve of his followers and traveled to Rome, where in 1209 Pope Innocent III approved his Rule (a canonically approved collection of precepts that guided life in the order). The order attracted both new members and devotees throughout Europe, establishing a position it held throughout the ensuing centuries as the largest of the mendicant orders. From the beginning, one of the order’s hallmarks was an emphasis on strict poverty. According to Francis, Christ had voluntarily chosen poverty, and so, too, must they if they were to follow his holy example.¹⁸ Francis was not a priest, and initially education and formal preaching were not central to his order’s mission. Instead, by living a model life that included poverty, Franciscans sought to provide the laity with a model for how to live, often referred to as preaching by example. Just how far they were supposed to take their poverty and austerity was already a point of fierce debate during the final years of Francis’s life. The concept of poverty had long been controversial in the church more generally—trying to balance biblical references to

Jesus' poverty in an organization that had acquired great wealth—and intense debates among Franciscans over how to follow the Rule splintered the order. These splits eventually resulted in the creation of the Discalced Franciscans (1517).¹⁹ The Discalced family (*discalced*, meaning “barefoot,” a symbol of poverty) followed a stricter interpretation of the Franciscan Rule than the main or Observant branch, and it was not supposed to accept doctrinas (although it did so in the Philippines), nor were its friars to accept outside offices.

The Dominicans also accepted an ideal of poverty, but they placed more emphasis on formal preaching and education than the Franciscans. The founder, Dominic of Guzmán, had come from a noble Spanish family, was well educated, and, unlike Francis, was ordained a priest. According to Dominican foundation stories, after preaching against the Albigensian heresy in France, he decided to establish an order dedicated to restoring souls to the church, especially through preaching. The order's first Rule was confirmed by Pope Honorius III in 1216; an early constitution noted, “Our order was instituted principally for preaching and for the salvation of souls.”²⁰ Preaching required education, so when friars were not attending offices or working outside the convent, they were supposed to be studying. Dominicans quickly established a reputation as scholars, and Dominican schools of theology were among the most influential of the late medieval church. Generally more concerned with orthodoxy and combating heresy than Franciscans, Dominicans were also closely associated with the establishment and subsequent functioning of different Inquisitions. Despite the differences between the two orders, their early histories were often intertwined. Franciscan views of poverty influenced the development of ideals of poverty in the Dominican order, similar to how the Dominican focus on preaching influenced the growth of this function within the Franciscan order.²¹

Just as Franciscans and Dominicans shared similar origins, Augustinians and Carmelites followed parallel paths to becoming mendicant orders, transforming themselves from eremitical communities and creating new histories for themselves in the process. The Order of the Hermits of Saint Augustine originated in 1256 when Pope Alexander IV merged under a common Rule and constitution the eremitical communities that had been living throughout Italy under variations of the Rule of Saint Augustine. Influenced by Franciscans, Dominicans, and the same trends that produced these orders, the Augustinians—not without great conflict—abandoned their eremitical origins in favor of a combination of contemplative life and active ministries. They expanded rapidly throughout France, Germany, and Spain and engaged in similar ministries as the Franciscans and Dominicans, even if they were never as large as either

order. When the Second Council of Lyons (1274) threatened to extinguish any order founded after 1215, the Augustinians survived thanks to carefully cultivated papal support. Augustinians were some of the strongest advocates for papal power, a position that was politically expedient, certainly, but also part and parcel of the order's developing identity as the heirs of Augustine, a fifth-century bishop and one of the chief formulators of church doctrine. Over the course of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, Augustinians constructed a history of their order that transformed Augustine from the author of a frequently adopted Rule into the order's founder, a figure akin to Francis or Dominic. As sons of Augustine, Augustinians strongly emphasized intellectual life with the goal of making themselves better preachers and teachers in the world. The order's emphasis on education, not just of its members but also of the faithful, was one of its defining characteristics. Finally, Augustinians accentuated communal life, especially singing the daily office as a community, which they viewed as one of their legacies as *the* true heirs to the founder of a monastic Rule.²²

The Carmelites also began as an order of hermits, probably in the early thirteenth century in Cyprus. When the Second Council of Lyons threatened their existence, they developed a history based on their place of origin, locating their founding in the time of the Old Testament prophet Elias.²³ The Carmelites' story as generally told was that Elias, having prophesized aspects of Christ's and Mary's lives, began living with followers as a monastic community on Mount Carmel. In asserting origins prior to the birth of Christ, the Carmelites took a controversial position but could also claim to be the first mendicant order. The order expanded rapidly through western Europe after a mid-thirteenth-century Rule change allowed them to live in urban areas. Since the order already prohibited common property ownership, this revision effectively transformed it into a mendicant order, a status bolstered by papal bulls granting traditional mendicant privileges such as the rights to preach, confess, and bury dead in its cemeteries. It developed an active ministry, and increasingly more of its members were also priests. A papal bull of 1432 allowed the Carmelites to relax their original eremitical Rule, most notably freeing friars from reclusion in their cells and allowing them to move about the convent. A controversial change, the point became an issue in various reform movements, including that of the Discalced Carmelites in the sixteenth century. This movement began among Carmelite nuns led by Teresa of Avila, who sought to revitalize cloistered life by emphasizing daily meditation and mystic practices. Among those who adopted the reform was a Carmelite friar, John of the Cross, who sought to reestablish original elements of his order's eremitic life, particularly the cell, alongside its

active life. John and, especially, Teresa developed popular followings, and the Discalced Carmelites quickly developed into one of the most popular orders, especially in Spanish kingdoms. Even so, the reform was highly contested within the order. To settle the dispute, the pope allowed the Discalced movement to establish its own hierarchy within the order in 1580 and granted full independence in 1591.

The Mercedarians, although also founded in the thirteenth century, did not receive official recognition as a mendicant order until 1725. The order's origins are murky, but according to Mercedarian tradition, Pedro Nolasco, a layman, was collecting alms to ransom Christians captured by Moors when the Virgin Mary simultaneously appeared to him and King Jaime I and instructed them to create the order. From early in its history, it was closely connected to the Aragonese and later Spanish crowns through its support of campaigns against the Moors, with friars serving as chaplains on expeditions or, more important, collecting alms used to redeem captives. This redemptive work was the key element in the order's identity; in addition to the standard three vows, its friars took a distinctive fourth vow: the redemption of captives. Perhaps the defining moment for the order was a late sixteenth-century reform movement through which the Mercedarians consciously reinvented themselves, replacing their nebulous past with a history that reflected new aspirations for the order. By the early seventeenth century, rewritten foundation legends and a series of paintings commissioned from Francisco de Zurbarán stressed the order's mendicant and evangelical character as well as its votive mission of redeeming captives.²⁴ Even before the Mercedarians' official classification as a mendicant order, they saw themselves as mendicants, and because the pope had granted the order all the privileges of the other mendicant orders, it was already functioning as though it were one.

Despite the varied origins of the five orders that eventually came to New Spain, their histories shared some important features. They, or at the least their original branches, were established in the thirteenth century, and they took the same three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. All five orders laid claim to important founding figures, even if they had to rewrite or create new histories to acquire them. In establishing their origins with Elias, the Carmelites gave themselves a distinctive identity, but also a figure that other orders may have been less willing to accept. On the other hand, the Augustinians' patriarch was, as a doctor of the church, universally accepted (even if he might have been interpreted differently), but in some ways, he did not lend as unique an identity as his fellow patriarchs. For example, he did not represent the extreme poverty of Francis; the learned preaching in defense of orthodoxy of Dominic; the redemptions of Nolasco; or even the prophetic controversy of Elias.

By the end of the thirteenth century, all were urban orders with active ministries, even if this meant abandoning eremitic traditions and even if Mercedarians' emphasis on redeeming captives was a form of service different from the pastoral work of the others. Finally, by the late sixteenth century, when they all had established a presence in New Spain, most of their friars were priests whose ministries centered around preaching and the administration of sacraments.

AMERICAN BEGINNINGS:
NEW SPAIN'S PROVINCES AND THEIR FRIARS

A few friars, such as the Mercedarian Bartolomé de Olmedo and the Franciscan Pedro de Gante, were already living and working in New Spain when the first official groups of male religious arrived. Their arrivals were clustered in two groups: the first consisted of Franciscans (1524), Dominicans (1526), and Augustinians (1533); the second, of Discalced Franciscans (1580), Discalced Carmelites (1586), and Mercedarians (1593) as well as their Jesuit rivals (1572). Although the timing of the orders' arrivals affected their status and roles in colonial society, they all faced the same daunting tasks of establishing new institutional structures and attracting enough friars to carry out their work. One of the crucial steps in this process was the creation of new provinces, the administrative units that contained all the convents within a geographic region. Within a few years of the orders' arrivals in New Spain, the Franciscans established five provinces (Mexico, Michoacán, Jalisco, Yucatán, and Zacatecas); the Dominicans, three (Mexico, Oaxaca, and Puebla); the Augustinians, two (Mexico and Michoacán); and the Discalced Carmelites, Discalced Franciscans, and Mercedarians, one each. These provinces were built along the same lines as their European counterparts and, like them, enjoyed a great deal of autonomy. Although mendicant provinces were subject to the order's elected head and council in Spain or Rome, they elected their own officials, and their friars made most of the decisions about how their province was run.

In order to fill these new provinces, they set up novitiates to train new friars. During the first half of the sixteenth century, the majority of friars came from Spain, but by the 1570s, fewer missions of friars, combined with the growth of a creole society, meant increased numbers of American-born aspirants. The process of becoming a friar began with a request to enter the order. The aspirant was supposed to meet the basic requirements of being able bodied, of legitimate birth, and of pure blood (meaning previous generations of his family had been good Christians,

and not, for example, Indians, Jews, or Muslims), and he was supposed to be joining of his own volition. To enter, he would take simple vows (vows that did not incur mortal sin if broken) and begin a probationary period as a novice. A seventeenth-century Franciscan chronicler described this year-long novitiate as a forge that melted down men and made them into friars.²⁵ The novice, under the direction of the master of novices, would be expected to put away his old identity, giving up clothes for the order's habit. He should learn how to follow the rules and observances of the order, participating in the cycle of prayers and imitating the virtues of model friars. He would also be subject to a deeper investigation of his background. If his superiors found his heritage and behavior acceptable, the novice would make his profession into the order. In a ceremony that family and friends would often attend, he would have his head shaved into a tonsure, don a new habit, and swear solemn vows (irrevocable vows that incurred mortal sin if broken) of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Mercedarians would also take their fourth vow to redeem captives.

Even though there is no single archetype for who became friars, some general patterns have emerged.²⁶ Most prospective friars entered the order between the ages of thirteen and fifteen, although it was not uncommon to join later in life, sometimes even after starting another career or after a wife had died. In one case, albeit rare, the beatified Franciscan Sebastián de Aparicio entered the order at age seventy-two after having been married twice. The requirements of pure blood and especially legitimacy were not always enforced; some novices in the Franciscans' Mexico Province had professed even though their petitions for entry were rejected for failing to prove their pure blood. Even so, it was not common practice for Indians, mestizos, and mulattos to join, at least in the case of the Franciscans' Mexico Province. Francisco Morales found that of twelve hundred petitions for entry during the seventeenth century, only about fifty were from men labeled "mestizos" and ten from men labeled "Indians." He also found that most entrants were from families with moderate resources, such as artisans, landowners, merchants, and royal officials who had already provided their sons with basic educations and were now seeking career paths for them. One of the most important factors in an aspirant's admission was his place of birth, and often-intense rivalries between factions of creoles and *peninsulares* (European-born Spaniards) led them to try to fill convents with men of their own backgrounds. A government dominated by peninsulares, for example, might strive to limit the number of creoles allowed in the novitiate.

Friars were divided into those who were priests and those who were not. When friars finished their novitiate, they would profess either as choristers, who would continue their studies toward the priesthood, or

as lay brothers, who would not. Lay brothers performed, or at least oversaw, much of the labor that kept convents and the provinces functioning. They might tend to sick brothers in the infirmary, administer a kitchen that fed scores of friars, or collect alms used to support the province and its charitable aims. Most lay brothers were of lower social standing, but there are also examples of pious friars who chose this route out of humility. Choristers studied Latin, arts, philosophy, and theology until they met the qualifications to obtain the four minor orders and then the major offices of subdeacon and deacon. Only then were they eligible for ordination as priests.²⁷ The time expected to fulfill these requirements was about six years, although exceptional friars might complete the process in only two or three years, and those who were less dedicated might take decades or perhaps never finish. For example, Fr. Manuel Alcalde, a Mercedarian who entered the historical record for having fled his convent in a dispute with his superiors, had been in the order for fourteen years but had completed only the four minor orders.²⁸

Religious life was organized hierarchically, with greater freedoms and privileges accruing to those of higher status. The Carmelite Fr. Juan de la Anunciación explained in a 1689 advice book that priests held a more important place in convent life than lay brothers, comparing their roles:

That of the priests is to sacrifice to God, placing themselves as mediators for the whole world and absolving sins. These things are all very high and very dignified. That of the lay brothers is to work in the kitchen, ask alms, care for the buildings, and serve in exterior parts of the convents. These things are all very low, at least in comparison to those [of priests]. Therefore, it would be folly for these lay brothers to want to be equal with priests and not be inferior to them and to consider themselves as such.²⁹

Priests also had more privileges than novices and choristers, and convents were organized to reflect these distinctions. Choristers typically lived in dormitories, but priests might eventually gain their own cell, which they might equip with nothing more than a rustic bed and table for study or elaborately furnish with expensive woods and silks. Novices were not allowed to leave the convent; choristers were supposed to do so only for special reasons; and priests were allowed to do so within the particular rules of the province, such as before dark and accompanied by another priest. Novices and choristers were supposed to attend the communal prayers offered throughout the day and night, but priests often received dispensations from these responsibilities on the grounds of age or infirmity, or for their preaching, academic, or administrative duties.

Honorific titles and administrative offices could bring additional privileges and further raise the status of priests. They could earn titles such as

lector, *presentado*, or *maestro del orden* after a certain amount of study or service (although this could be reduced for exceptional friars or those who could purchase the title). Especially coveted was the status of *de número* or *de voto*, which gave a limited number of friars in each province the right to vote for the province's administrative offices. Elections were typically held every three years, and friars would assemble from all over the province for three or four days of campaigning, scheming, and often purchasing of offices. At these provincial chapter meetings, the most important elected offices were the provincial (head of the province), *definidores* (members of the definitory, a powerful board that determined provincial policies), and heads of individual convents (depending on the order, called priors, guardians, or commanders). Because these offices could be valuable assets, providing their holders and their families and friends access to wealth and influence, they were of interest to people outside the order. Secular men often attended the proceedings, trying to influence the results, and on more than one occasion the viceroy or his representative attended in order to monitor elections, push his own agenda, and quell the sometimes raucous behavior of the different factions.³⁰

For the most part, the orders' organizations in the Americas resembled those in Europe. The administrative structures of convents and provinces formed the basic building blocks of the order, men followed similar paths to becoming friars, and many of the same distinctions in status marked friars' places in the orders' hierarchies. These American branches were, as creole writers continued to stress throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, equal parts of the same organizations. However, certain elements were characteristic of New Spain. Some convents administered doctrinas, and, even if it was not common, some men of Indian or mestizo backgrounds became friars. Perhaps the most significant difference in the organizational life of the orders in Spain and America was the institutionalization of creole-peninsular rivalries. By the end of the sixteenth century, as increasing numbers of creoles entered the orders, peninsular friars worried about losing their leading role in government. They complained about the creoles' less stringent discipline and expressed fears that creole governance would lead to decay and the orders' ruin.³¹ After years of complaints and petitions, royal decrees established that provinces would follow an *alternativa*, in which creoles and peninsulares alternated holding major offices. The exceptions to this policy were the Carmelites, Mercedarians, and the Franciscans' Mexico Province. The Carmelites and Mercedarians were exempted, and the Franciscan province followed a *ternativa*, in which creoles and peninsulares had to share this rotation of offices with a third group of friars, *hijos de provincia* (sons of the province), who had been born in Spain but entered the order in New

Spain.³² Despite these efforts, peninsulares were never able to wrest back control of American provinces, loosening the direct institutional links of the sixteenth-century missionary phase.

ORGANIZATION

This book covers a great deal of ground: five orders in dozens of cities over more than two centuries. In order to make this broad approach possible, some topics have not been given the attention that they deserve, such as theologies, education of friars, and what was happening in doctrinas, including urban ones. The book says little about orders' political maneuverings, their finances, or how they governed their provinces. Nor does it give close attention to divisions within the orders, such as reform movements, generational conflicts, or creole-peninsular rivalries. In addition, the only orders that have been included are those with mendicant status, which means that other male religious organizations, such as monastic orders, hospital orders, and the Jesuits, are excluded except in specific ways related to mendicant orders.³³ Although enough significant differences between mendicants and monastic and hospital orders make this exclusion easily defensible, eliminating the Jesuits was not so simple, given all that they did share with mendicants. They, too, were highly urban and arrived in New Spain during the period of urban expansion that brought the Discalced Carmelites, Mercedarians, and Discalced Franciscans, and Jesuits were involved in many of the same sorts of activities as mendicants. On the other hand, Jesuits' methods of governing their order were different, and they did not share the same prohibitions on wealth as mendicants. They had a distinct official status; they and many of their contemporaries conceived of the order as something unique, different from mendicant orders. For example, a satire from the eighteenth century described the Jesuits' carefully constructed distinctiveness:

[A priest's] title will not be friar but father; their lay brothers will not be called brothers but coadjutors; they will not attend choir and in the end nothing about them can be confused with the rest of the Religions; neither will they mix with the clergy in processions, burials, and other public functions, and in this way neither will they be friars nor secular clergy, only that which they want: that is to be originals without copy.³⁴

Finally, the Mercedarians have been included despite their not being officially classified as mendicants until the early eighteenth century. They were, however, already mendicants in their own and in many of their

contemporaries' eyes. The pope had granted them all the privileges of a mendicant order, and they functioned like one, even administering doctrinas in Central and South America. In fact, whereas in New Spain to speak of the three mendicant orders meant the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians, to use the same phrase in Guatemala meant Franciscans, Dominicans, and Mercedarians.

The book keeps its focus on the orders' urban houses, which I define according to two criteria. First, they were in settlements with a population concentration of enough size or status to have earned the legal title of a *villa* (a notable town) or *ciudad* (a city), places distinguished from less prestigious ones in part by having a substantial population of Spaniards. Second, the convent did not function primarily as a *doctrina de indios* but served a broader population. This definition includes cities such as Oaxaca, Toluca, and San Luis Potosí where orders administered doctrinas but excludes places like Texcoco (Franciscans) and Yurirapúndaro (Augustinians) that had large Indian populations and supported important convents but functioned primarily as *doctrinas de indios*.³⁵ Such divisions were recognized by contemporaries, and friars referred to the two types as *conventos de españoles* or *lugares de españoles* (convents of Spaniards or places of Spaniards) and *conventos de indios* or *lugares de indios* (convents of Indians or places of Indians). Royal officials also made these distinctions. In 1603 some officials in New Spain questioned a royal gift of vestments and a chalice to the Mercedarians' Puebla and Oaxaca convents. They argued that such support had been granted only to churches in *pueblos de indios* but never to one in a *pueblo de españoles*.³⁶ The distinctions continued to be made even into the eighteenth century, such as when a royal cedula (administrative order) from 1726 ordered the Augustinians not to hold their provincial chapter meetings in convents located in places that were "purely Indian" but in places where Spaniards, mulattos, and mestizos lived and "where the principal justices are also Spaniards."³⁷

I have organized the book topically: Part 1 lays out the orders' evolving status and roles in colonial society, tracking the orders' institutional presence in cities, defining their ways of proceeding, and analyzing their urban functions; Part 2 investigates interactions among the orders and urban residents and depicts some of the competing strands of urban Catholicism as it was lived and practiced.

Chapter 1 establishes the broad patterns of the orders' urban presence in New Spain, addressing the question of how orders whose initial work was done primarily in *doctrinas de indios* became almost exclusively urban communities by the late eighteenth century. I analyze the orders' urbanization through two sets of markers: foundations of convents and numbers of friars. What emerges are clear patterns of growth and retrenchment,

beginning with a major expansion during 1570–1630 followed by a century of growth until new challenges in the 1730s reined in expansions and curtailed populations of friars. Within these general patterns, not all orders fared equally, and how well an order's purposes fit the state's current interests affected its institutional well-being. Through the vicissitudes of two long centuries, and despite the challenges of the late eighteenth century, the orders were, on the whole, larger, stronger, and more deeply entrenched urban institutions in 1800 than they were in 1570.

Chapter 2 turns to the nature of individual orders, introducing them as corporate entities. It demonstrates how they described themselves and their institutes as well as how they presented themselves as families governed by patriarchs, supported by Mary, and linked across time and space through their genealogies. These depictions are crucial for understanding what made, for example, Franciscans or Mercedarians. At the same time, orders also recognized they shared a common bond as mendicants. To better highlight the salient characteristics of this mendicant identity, I compare the orders to other groups of male religious, finding a common identity rooted in shared vows and the balancing of contemplative duties and priestly ministries.

Chapter 3 addresses how the orders' institutes translated into practice. The core of each order's urban functions consisted of the traditional slate of mendicant services: preaching, confessing, celebrating masses, providing devotional opportunities, and praying. Orders' work in these areas changed little during the period, and differences among orders were mostly a matter of emphasis. Outside these areas, orders were more flexible, adapting to their circumstances, such as with the revival of urban missions at the end of the seventeenth century or new roles in education at the end of the eighteenth century. That the orders' urban services remained in demand throughout the colonial period provides a counterpoint to their more difficult institutional histories of the later eighteenth century and helps clarify what the state was trying to curb (the orders' institutional size and wealth) and what it was not (their services). The chapter's final section also suggests some correctives to views of relationships between regular clergy (members of orders) and secular clergy (diocesan clergy). Although these groups wrestled over the right to administer doctrinas, secular clergy typically welcomed friars' contributions to cities, and disputes over urban roles instead centered on bishops' right to oversee the orders' active ministries.

As a consequence of the mendicants' urbanization, cities now had multiple convents, bringing mendicants into closer proximity with each other and providing new opportunities for conflict and cooperation. The chapters in Part 2 use these interactions to examine what forms Catholi-

cism took in colonial urban life, how they varied in practice, and how global issues played out in local contexts. Chapter 4 concentrates on a series of public issues that allied and divided the orders: published accounts of the orders' arrivals in New Spain, celebrations of Mary's Immaculate Conception, Bishop of Puebla Juan de Palafox y Mendoza's campaigns against regular orders, foundations of rival convents, and depictions of the stigmata. Besides revealing fault lines and alliances among the orders, the chapter connects the timing of the most intense public debates, which took place during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, to the orders' institutional vigor. Many of the factors that determined how these relationships played out were local. Chapter 5 turns to Toluca, where during the eighteenth century emboldened Carmelites challenged Franciscan dominance in battles for the laity's spiritual devotion. Zooming in on a particular location reveals how religious institutions shaped local religion and demonstrates some of the ways both local and wider circumstances affected the place of religion and the church in society.

The Conclusion connects the mendicants' story in New Spain to changes in the early modern Catholic Church more generally. Recent works have defined one of its chief characteristics as its expansion outside Europe, especially with the founding of the Jesuits and the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Although studies of missions to places like Africa, China, and Brazil have demonstrated Catholicism's dissemination around the world, places like New Spain, where the church established strong institutions of its own, suggest that the globalization of Catholicism should not be equated with missions. Mendicants and their institutes offer another model for understanding the nature of this transcontinental institution and how it maintained connections and retained coherency across great distances.