

**THE REPRESENTATION OF NOVOHISPANIC SANCTITY IN LA VIDA DE
GERÓNIMO DE FIGUEROA**

**A REPRESENTAÇÃO DA SANTIDADE NOVOHISPÂNICA EM LA VIDA DE
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Abstract: This article studies *Vida Admirable y Muerte Dichosa del Religioso Padre Gerónimo de Figueroa Profeso de la Compañía de Jesús En la Provincia de Nueva España: Misionero De Cuarenta años entre los Indios Tarahumaras, y Tepehuanes de la Sierra Madre y después Rector del Colegio Máximo y Prepósito de la casa Profesa de México* (1689) written by Francisco de Florencia. The study is focused on the relationship between hagiographical writing and the configuration of a Novohispanic identity. It studies how in this hagiography the divine and the profane are intertwined to construe the Novohispanic context and Figueroa's sanctity.

Keywords: Novohispanic hagiography, Gerónimo de Figueroa, New Spain, Francisco de Florencia, Jesuits

Resumen: Este artículo estudia *Vida Admirable y Muerte Dichosa del Religioso Padre Gerónimo de Figueroa Profeso de la Compañía de Jesús En la Provincia de Nueva España: Misionero De Cuarenta años entre los Indios Tarahumaras, y Tepehuanes de la Sierra Madre y después Rector del Colegio Máximo y Prepósito de la casa Profesa de México* (1689) escrito por Francisco de Florencia. El estudio se centra en la relación entre la escritura hagiográfica y la configuración de una identidad novohispana. Estudia cómo en esta hagiografía se entrelazan lo divino y lo profano para construir el contexto novohispano y la santidad de Figueroa.

Palabras clave: hagiografía novohispana, Gerónimo de Figueroa, Nueva España, Francisco de Florencia, jesuitas

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Resumo: Este artigo estuda a *Vida Admirável e Feliz Morte do Religioso Padre Gerónimo de Figueroa Professo da Companhia de Jesus na Província da Nova Espanha: Missionário de 40 anos entre os índios Tarahumara e Tepehuanes da Sierra Madre e depois Reitor do Colegio Máximo e Prepósito de la casa Profesa de México* (1689) escrito por Francisco de Florencia. O estudo centra-se na relação entre a escrita hagiográfica e a configuração de uma identidade da Nova Espanha. Estuda como nesta hagiografia o divino e o profano se entrelaçam para construir o contexto da Nova Espanha e a santidade de Figueroa.

Palavras-chave: Hagiografia da Nova Espanha, Gerónimo de Figueroa, Nova Espanha, Francisco de Florencia, Jesuítas

Introduction

This paper studies the little-known hagiography titled *Vida Admirable y Muerte Dichosa del Religioso Padre Gerónimo de Figueroa Profeso de la Compañía de Jesús En la Provincia de Nueva España: Misionero De Cuarenta años entre los Indios Tarahumaras, y Tepehuanes de la Sierra Madre y después Rector del Colegio Máximo y Prepósito de la casa Profesa de México* (1689)². The author of this book is Francisco de Florencia, the first Jesuit born in what we today called the United States of America. He also wrote a history of the Jesuit province of Mexico, several hagiographies and books about the Madonnas of *Guadalupe* and *Los Remedios* (TAIANO, 2020, p. 12). Figueroa was Professor of philosophy and theology at the *Colegio Máximo de México*. He was sent as procurator of the province to Rome and Madrid in 1668 and then returned to the Mexican capital, where he died in 1695. His books are significant to understanding the importance that the work of Jesuit missionaries and the Marian devotion had in colonial Mexico and its lasting effect on the history, faith, identity, and culture of this country. *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa* provides an unusual insight into the relationship between the Early Modern conception of Sanctity and the complex relationship between faith, regional identity, and politics. It was published in Mexico in the printing house of the widow of Juan de Ribera, with the appropriate civil and ecclesiastics licenses, but without the printing privilege. This hagiography *ab initio* states that Figueroa was born in Mexico in 1604. It describes the protagonist's childhood and defines him as a *sanctus puer*; relates his religious vocation as a student in the Colegio de Tepetzotlán; his life as a missionary in the northern part of New Spain (1631); his importance as the founder of the town

² I had the opportunity to read its *editio princeps* at the New York Public Library (Rare Books Collection).

of San Felipe (1641); his outstanding role as *visitador* or inspector of the Jesuit missions of Sinaloa and Sonora (1641); his involvement as a preacher and as a scholar in Mexico and Oaxaca. Finally, the book concludes with his blissful death and the fulfillment of his cosmic destiny. Gerónimo de Figueroa managed to constitute a single body with God, typical of the just man who died in *osculo domini* (1686). The book consists of 21 chapters, marked in the manuscript with Roman numerals and 87 paragraphs numbered using Arabic numerals.

In this article, I will focus on the relationship between hagiographical writing and the configuration of a Novohispanic identity. This hagiography reveals that Novohispanic individuals like Francisco de Florencia and Gerónimo de Figueroa played an important role in the local and imperial order and the propagation of the Christian Faith. Figueroa is represented as a humble and merciful priest who portrays Christ to everyone through the beauty and faithfulness of his daily life and his peaceful death. This *santo criollo* has a personal relationship with God and Mexico, he conducts a strong prayer life and shows compassion and empathy toward the Tarahumara and Tepehuanes indigenous with an interest in serving them. Francisco de Florencia, on his part, puts together the functions of the hagiographer and the historian. He created a factual mixture that appears as a form of religious, social, and cultural negotiation between New Spain and Spain.

In this book, the divine and the profane are intertwined to construe the Novohispanic context and Figueroa's sanctity. For these reasons, my research takes as its starting point the conception that *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa* deserves to integrate the *corpus* of those books that—according to Antonio Rubial García—show a sort of controversial sanctity (RUBIAL GARCÍA, 2015, p. 11-87)³. It reveals relevant issues about the social condition of the Novohispanic individual in the macrocosm of the Spanish Monarchy and the microcosm of the viceroyalty of New Spain. This *Vida* is part of the hagiographies produced on the Hispanic American soil during the seventeenth century. It enables us to address a wide range of religious, economic, cultural, and social aspects within the ultramarine space controlled by the Habsburgs. The text makes clear the significance that the integration or exclusion of criollos in the different religious orders had for the

³ In his book *La santidad controvertida: Hagiografía y conciencia criolla alrededor de los venerables no canonizados de Nueva España*, Antonio Rubial García studies several Novohispanic hagiographies that are part of the failed attempts of canonization of Mexican priests. Rubial García does not focus on the reasons that prevented their canonization but studies the culture and society that considered those individuals as saints and heroes.

empire. Figueroa's sanctity makes this *criollo* an *optimus civis*, whose wisdom and faith make him the ideal person to transmit the Spanish-Catholic tradition in New Spain.

1 Gerónimo de Figueroa: a Novohispanic Miracle

Before I proceed with my remarks, I would like to highlight some information about Gerónimo de Figueroa. He was a Novohispanic who played an important role in the evangelization of the indigenous from Chihuahua and the large territory of the Sierra Madre Occidental. He studied in the *Colegio de Tepotzotlán* and taught Latin in the *Colegio de Oaxaca*. Shortly after he was ordained as a priest, he was sent to the missions in the northern part of the viceroyalty in 1631. In 1639 went to the mission of Tepehuanes. In 1641 founded the town of *San Felipe* and was *visitador oficial* or major superior of the missions of Sinaloa and Sonora (TAIANO, 2020, p. 8-26). He returned to Mexico at an advanced age and died—as mentioned in his hagiography—due to an act of medical malpractice (TAIANO, 2020, p. 48). Although Figueroa is a missionary poorly studied, his manuscripts *Gramática y diccionario de la lengua tepehuana* and *Gramática y diccionario de la lengua tarahumara y Arte y copioso vocabulario de las lenguas tepehuana y tarahumara* awoke interest in the field of missionary linguistics and lexicography (TAIANO, 2020, p. 27). His texts are mentioned in *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa*, they constitute part of the evidence on which Francisco de Florencia builds Figueroa's reputation (TAIANO, 2020, p. 27). Supplementarily, his sanctity is built around his place of birth, his education, his incorporation into the Society of Jesus, his linguistic skills, his great charisma, and his spirit of sacrifice. Simultaneously, throughout the hagiography, the author includes conceptual elements and topics of medieval hagiographies. More to the point, Francisco de Florencia nourishes his text by taking as bibliographical sources several textual models that include biblical texts, hagiographies, and treatises on preaching and devotion. At the same time, he includes eye-witness testimonies of Figueroa's life. Finally, he includes elements related to the Novohispanic context. Among the medieval sources, Florencia gives relevance to the motifs of the *sanctus puer*, the orphanhood, the long struggle against Satan, the revelations, the exorcisms, and the death in *osculo domine*. Regarding the testimonial evidence, Florencia inserts anecdotes and miracles to prove Figueroa's holiness. Concerning the Novohispanic backdrop, one point that deserves to be highlighted is the fact that Figueroa's place of birth plays a central role in this hagiography. The text stresses that this exemplary *criollo* was

born in Mexico in 1604 and died in the same city in 1686⁴. The Novohispanic capital acquires sacred characteristics supporting the encomiastic tradition of the *laudes civitatum* (CALDARINI, 1985, p. 7). Indeed, the capital of the viceroyalty is *mirabile* because it elicits admiration due to its *miracula*, one of them is —of course— Gerónimo de Figueroa.

NACIÓ EL PADRE GERÓNIMO DE FIGUEROA en la Imperial Ciudad de México a primeros de mayo o fines de abril del año de 1604” no sería razón quitar a México la gloria de ser su madre, pues el buen hijo es corona de su padre y gloria de su madre, según el espíritu santo (FLORENCIA, 2020, p. 15)⁵.

In *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa*, thaumaturgy plays an important role. His prodigies are subordinated to his sanctity, which is manifested through his chastity, his charity, his temperance, his suffering, and his life of prayer.

Sucedióle aquel caso memorable, que vio toda la iglesia de la Casa Profesa el día de San Joseph, por la tarde el año de 1682, empezando el predicador el sermón a un numeroso concurso de lo más florido de México, sobrevino aquel horroroso temblor que hasta hoy sola su memoria aterra y asombra. Estaba ya armado el monumento [...] cuyas columnas inferiores sobre que estriban los demás cuerpos superiores y media naranja, saliéndose con la moción grande de la tierra, las espigas de las bases inclinaron con temeroso crujido toda su máquina hacia la parte de la iglesia, que más tupida estaba de gente, en particular de mujeres y niños. Levantose el alarido confuso: *Que se cae el monumento*, y empezando a atropellarse unas personas sobre otras, todo era confusión, [...] Aquí el Padre Gerónimo de Figueroa [...] se puso en pie enfrente de él y con ademán de quien lo tenía con la mano derecha dijo a voces: *No ha de caer, ténganlo los ángeles*. Él lo dijo y ellos sin duda lo tuvieron [...] (FLORENCIA, 2020, p. 63)⁶.

Furthermore, *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa* applies the values of the Hispanic Monarchy to recreate *ex novo* an identity that highlights the importance of New Spain from a religious perspective. Francisco de Florencia recalls the close linkage between the *ars vivendi* and life *in*

⁴ Some theses state that he was born in Toluca in 1605 and died in Mexico in 1683 (Taiano, 2020: 12-26).

⁵ Father Gerónimo de Figueroa was born in the Imperial City of Mexico at the beginning of May or the end of April in the year 1604. It would not be a reason to take away from Mexico the glory of being his mother, because the good son is the crown of his father and the glory of his mother, according to the holy spirit (FLORENCIA, 2020, p. 15).

⁶ That memorable case happened to him and was seen by the entire church of the Professed House on the day of Saint Joseph, in the afternoon of the year 1682, when the preacher began the sermon to a numerous contest of the most Mexican upper crust came that horrible tremor that until today its memory terrifies and amazes. The monument was already assembled [...] whose lower columns on which rest the other upper bodies and half an orange, leaving with the great movement of the earth, the spikes of the bases tilted with fearful creaking all its machine towards the part of the church, which was overcrowded, particularly with women and children. A confused howl rose: The monument is falling, and some people began to run over others, everything was confusion, [...] Here Father Geronimo de Figueroa [...] stood up in front of it and with the gesture of having it with his right hand he cried out: It must not fall, let the angels keep it. He said it and they undoubtedly held it, so that it wouldn't fall [...] (FLORENCIA, 2020, p. 63).

Domino and the *ars moriendi* and the topic of *in Domino moriuntur*. Figueroa's Life and death are constituent parts of a Jesuit example of devotion that shows us how to obtain heavenly glory. In fact, *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa* is not only a hagiography but also a sort of treatise of the perfect Jesuit. Figueroa is a protagonist who incarnates the fusion of the philosopher, the missionary, and the preacher.

VIDA
ADMIRABLE, Y MUERTE
Dichosa del religioso Padre
GERONIMO DE FIGUEROA
Profeso de la Compañía de Jesús
En la Provincia de Nueva
España
MISIONERO DE
Cuarenta años entre los Indios
Taraumanes, y Tepehuanes de la
Sierra Madre y después Rector
del colegio Máximo y Prepósito
de la casa Profesa de
México
IHS
CON LICENCIA DE LOS SUPERIORES
En México por Doña María de Benavides, Viuda de Juan de
Ribera en el Empedradillo, Año de 1689⁷

A detail that does not go unnoticed in the frontispiece is the absence of the author's name. This omission should be understood as an editorial manipulation. In fact, in other paratextual elements, Francisco de Florencia recognizes his authorship. Additionally, the censors Fernando de Valtierra professed priest of the Society of Jesus, and Francisco Antonio Ortiz, prefect of the congregation, attribute the authorship to Francisco de Florencia. Furthermore, Ortiz asserts that Florencia is a sacred historiographer. The censor considers that the book is a mirror, a sort of *speculum sacerdotum* that makes Figueroa the ideal and admirable model of the perfect Christian:

he visto con mucho gusto la vida del venerable padre Gerónimo de Figueroa, escrita por el padre Francisco de Florencia, prefecto de estudios mayores en nuestro Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo [...] y a la verdad de esta vida es [...] es un espejo en quien

⁷ ADMIRABLE/ LIFE, AND Blissful DEATH/ of the religious Father GERONIMO DE FIGUEROA/ Professed of the Society of Jesus/ in the province of New Spain/ MISSIONARY OF Forty years among the Indians Taraumanes, and Tepehuanes from the Sierra Madre and later Rector of the Colegio Máximo and Prepósito or spiritual adviser of the Professed House of Mexico/ IHS/LICENSED BY SUPERIORS/In Mexico by Doña María de Benavides, Widow of Juan de Ribera in the Empedradillo, the year of 1689.

todos deben mirarse para componerse, y más cuando nos lo pone delante de los ojos este historiador sagrado (2020, p. 7)⁸.

2 From the sanctus puer to the evangelizer

In *Vida Admirable y Muerte Dichosa del Religioso Padre Gerónimo de Figueroa*, the frontier between the divine and the human is unclear. It seems that the earthly aspects are transformed by a sort of alchemic experience that enables the fulfillment of Figueroa's mission: his orphanhood, the obstacles for being admitted to the Dominican order, the abuse of power by local authorities and the primitive state of some indigenous turn him into a spiritual person. They are the stage he needs to become stronger in spirit.

The death of his parents, his grandmother, and his benefactor make solitude a dominant motif in the first pages of this hagiography. Orphanhood triggers Figueroa's sanctity. He fills his affective emptiness with spirituality. In conjunction, he encounters people who mark his life and his spiritual pathway. They empower him to behave in constructive ways that lead to love, compassion, understanding, and acceptance. Among them, his educators encourage him to flourish and integrate his beliefs and practices into a life of coherence, conviction, serenity, and integrity. His integrity is also related to the education received because his mentors helped him to follow his vocation and to accept his condition of *electus*. Gerónimo de Figueroa learned in his young years the main *Studia humanitatis*, which helped him to understand—in adulthood—the *Scientia Dei*. As such, in this hagiography education is seen as a sort of initiation that prepares Figueroa for the priesthood:

Habiéndolo criado sus padres con mucho cuidado, y dándole maestros de leer y escribir, con esperanzas fundadas en su natural dócil de aplicarlo a la iglesia, murieron ellos y él, quedando debajo de la tutela de unos tíos suyos, prosiguió en las buenas muestras de su doctrina, e inclinación a toda virtud, la cual movió a sus tutores a que lo enviasen a México a la casa de una abuela suya. [...] aprovechó mucho en la virtud con sus consejos y sus ejemplos. Estudió la gramática y retórica en nuestros estudios de San Pedro y San Pablo, y en ellos gozó de aquellos celebrados maestros de latinidad, el Venerable Padre Bernardino de Llanos, el Santo Padre Pedro Mercado, el humilde padre Francisco Ramírez y otros semejantes, que no menos ilustraron el Colegio de San Pedro y San Pablo, enseñando a los niños los primeros principios de la devoción y virtud, y los primeros rudimentos de la gramática [...] los superiores dogmas de la filosofía y teología. Fue muy amado de sus maestros, por su rara aplicación y habilidad, por lo que entre todos sobresalía

⁸ I have seen with great pleasure the life of the venerable Father Gerónimo de Figueroa, written by Father Francisco de Florencia, prefect of major studies in our Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo [...] and the truth of this life [...] is a mirror in which everyone must look at themselves to compose themselves, and even more so when this sacred historian puts it before our eyes (2020: 7).

en el estudio y en la devoción, siendo el primero a la misa del rosario, a la congregación y a los demás ejercicios piadosos (2020, p. 17)⁹.

In this way, hagiography merges religion and reason. It introduces philosophical and theological elements in Figueroa's process of sanctity. In this text, intellect plays a significant role. The Augustinian considerations about the relationship *ratio-fide* seem to be crucial in *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa* (FERRI, 1998, p. 121-156). The text suggests that Christianity allows the building of rational discourse about God (GARCÍA BAZÁN, 2002, p. 251-268). In addition, the hagiography adheres to the Anselmian-Thomist's conceptions about the interaction between intellect and faith: reason helps to discover the roads of faith (SELLÉS, 2002, p. 105-124). Their dialogical relation leads to appraising Figueroa's prophetic predictions as divine expressions, which contribute to edifying the faith in Christ. They form part of the *modus communicandi* between Gerónimo de Figueroa and God. Accordingly, Francisco de Florencia makes it clear that Figueroa's revelations are *in nomine Domine*.

Las predicciones al parecer proféticas, que comunicó el señor tan abundantemente a este siervo fiel suyo, son tales y tantas, que por ellas se puede ladear, por lo menos, con los hombres de la compañía más ilustrados de ellas (2020, p. 85)¹⁰.

So important as the relationship intellect-faith is the presence of spiritual and material benefactors. They represent altruism, goodness, and charity. Among them, the priest Francisco Calderón¹¹ personifies the image of the pedagogue who inspires respect but —simultaneously— admires his pupil. There is an absolute correspondence of knowledge and spirituality between him and Figueroa. As a matter of fact, it is ostensible that the author applies Loyola's paradigm of education to represent the relationship master-disciple.

⁹ His parents had raised him with great care and gave him teachers to read and write, with hopes based on his docile nature of routing him to the church, they died and he, remaining under the tutelage of some of his uncles, continued in the good signs of his doctrine, and inclination to all virtue, which moved his tutors to send him to Mexico to the house of his grandmother. [...] he learned of her advice and her examples. He studied grammar and rhetoric in our classes of San Pedro and San Pablo, and in them, he enjoyed those celebrated teachers of Latinity, the Venerable Father Bernardino de Llanos, the Holy Father Pedro Mercado, the humble father Francisco Ramírez, and others like them, who did not less enlightened the college of San Pedro and San Pablo, teaching children the first principles of devotion and virtue, and the first rudiments of grammar [...], the superior dogmas of philosophy and theology. He was much loved by his teachers, for his uncommon application and ability, for which he excelled among all in study and devotion, being the first to the mass of the rosary, to the congregation, and the other pious exercises (2020, p. 17).

¹⁰ The ostensibly prophetic predictions, which the lord communicated so abundantly to this faithful servant of his, are such and so many that for them he can rub shoulders, at least, with the most enlightened men of the company (2020, p. 85).

¹¹ He was his Professor of Philosophy. He had —according to Francisco de Florencia— the foresight to see how Figueroa's virtues were transcendental.

con aprobación de sus maestros el año, que entonces era indispensable, de retórica y entró a oír el curso de filosofía al padre Francisco Calderón, bien conocido en la provincia por sus letras y magisterio de espíritu. El cual, desde luego, captó y observó la virtud y habilidad de nuestro Gerónimo y tuvo muy a su cuidado promoverlo en ambas: alentándolo con algunos actos literarios, así públicos como domésticos, de que salió siempre con lucimiento, procurando desempeñar la buena opinión de su maestro con su estudio, para que a todos contase que merecía sus favores y que tenían mucho de justicia, aunque los celebraba como elecciones de mera gracia (2020, p. 19)¹².

Francisco de Oliñano, the confessor, also plays the role of mentor and benefactor in this hagiography. He is the one who suggests Figueroa make the spiritual exercises to find his spiritual path. Taking as a reference *Direttorio ascetico-mistico para los Confesores de ciudades, villas y aldeas* de Bernardino Castelvetero, one can draw the conclusion that Oliñano applied the Jesuit protocol to be used with those individuals who have been called by God to be educators and educated, to be apostles and communicators of faith:

Era este padre [Oliñano] gran siervo de Dios [...] le respondió entrase en ejercicios [...] Obedeció Gerónimo, tuvo en el colegio de San Pedro y San Pablo unos ejercicios de ocho días con mucha devoción y recogimiento [...]. Dio cuenta a su confesor, le comunicó su resolución con el padre Francisco Calderón, su maestro, y ambos aprobaron su vocación y con esperanzas de buen logro lo llevaron al padre Nicolás de Arnaya, que era provincial, el cual, con tan buenos padrinos y más con las noticias [...] de las diligencias que había hecho para calificar su vocación, lo recibió en la Compañía el año de 1622, a 29 del mes de abril de 18 a 20 años de edad, para mucha gloria de Dios y honra de esta provincia (2020, p. 21)¹³.

Moreover, Francisco de Florencia emphasizes that Gerónimo de Figueroa had the grace of obedience that allows a Jesuit to serve joyfully and effectively. Accordingly —throughout the book— obedience, sacrifice and observance are very present. At the same time, the hagiography tries to demonstrate that Figueroa was actively involved in the spiritual development of the

¹² With the approval of his professors of Rhetoric, which was then mandatory, he began to listen to the philosophy course of Father Francisco Calderón, well known in the province for his letters and teaching spirit. He, of course, captured and observed the virtue and ability of our Geronimo and was very careful to promote him: encouraging him with some literary acts, both public and domestic, that he always came out with brilliance, trying to play the good opinion of his mentor with his study, so that he would tell everyone that he deserved his favors and that they had a lot of justice, although he celebrated them as elections of mere grace (2020, p. 19).

¹³ This father [Oliñano] was a great servant of God [...] he replied that he should practice [spiritual] exercises [...] Geronimo obeyed, he had eight days of exercises with great devotion and recollection at the San Pedro y San Pablo school [...]. He informed his confessor, communicated his resolution to Father Francisco Calderón, his mentor, and both approved his vocation and with hopes of success took him to Father Nicolás de Arnaya, who was provincial, who, with such good godparents and more with the news [...] of his diligence he had done to qualify his vocation, he received him in the Company in the year 1622, on April 29, from 18 to 20 years of age to the glory of God and honor of this province (2020, p. 21).

indigenous and the young seminarians due to his *charisma*. Gerónimo de Figueroa follows his *kletos* and becomes an *eklektos*. He is —according to Francisco de Florencia— the apostle of the Tarahumaras (2020, p. 47) since he learned their linguistic codes to transmit the gospel. In fact, in *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa*, the indigenous languages are not considered primitive or barbaric. The book appears to support the arguments advocating that those languages could express the tenets of Christianity. Therefore, learning them was a divine gift that allowed evangelization:

Que viesen delante de Dios si las lenguas que había ya aprendido [tarahumara y tepehuana] [...] pudiendo emplearse en catequizar gentiles y en instruir cristianos, sería bien que no se malograsen con daño espiritual de tantas almas [...]. Que él había venido a misiones [...] para representar su necesidad [...]. Que estaba pronto a hacer lo que la obediencia determinase delante de Dios (2020, p. 27)¹⁴.

Unquestionably, Francisco de Florencia included Gerónimo de Figueroa within the group of evangelizers who consolidated the indigenous descriptive linguistics.¹⁵ He suggests that Figueroa was one of the first *criollos* who used the Uto-Aztecan languages to propagate Christianity¹⁶. He emphasizes that according to Gabriel del Villar —one of the testimonies who provided information to Francisco de Florencia—Gerónimo de Figueroa wrote a series of grammar books, confessionals and treatises on Christianity in Tarahumara and Tepehuano languages. In other words, Villar stated that Gerónimo de Figueroa paved the way for other priests who needed to communicate with these indigenous. His testimony not only pays homage to Figueroa's sanctity but also to his intellectual capacities:

Y porque para esto es importantísima la pericia de las lenguas propias, se dio el padre del todo a las dos de aquellos países, que son la tepehuana y tarahumara [...] Aprovechó tanto en uno y otro idioma, que para ayudar en adelante a los futuros ministros y que tuviesen comodidad de aprender dichas lenguas [...] con todas las reglas y dialectos de una y otra.

¹⁴ That they see before God if the languages that he had already learned [Tarahumara and Tepehuana] [...] and was able to use in catechizing gentiles and instructing Christians [...] He had come on missions [...] to represent their needs [...] He was ready to do what obedience determined before God (2020, p. 27).

¹⁵ These missionaries applied a method of data collection based on the graphic representation of the languages and a morphological-phonological- lexicographical analysis like the one that —centuries later— was used by the supporters of descriptive linguistics.

¹⁶ In fact, *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa* suggests that Figueroa's linguistic skills were so important as those of Alfonso de Molina, who wrote the *Diccionario y vocabulario náhuatl*; Francisco Ximénez who wrote *Arte de la lengua mexicana y Vocabulario de la lengua mexicana*; Alonso Rangel, who wrote *Gramática otomí*; Andrés de Olmos, who wrote *Arte y vocabulario en lengua mexicana y Gramática en lenguas totonaca y huasteca*; Arnaldo de Bassacio, who wrote *Traducción náhuatl de epístolas y evangelios*; Maturino Gilberti, who wrote *Vocabulario en lengua Michoacana y Cartilla en lengua tarasca*; Juan de Córdoba, who wrote *Arte y vocabulario de la lengua zapoteca*; Francisco de Alvarado, who wrote *Diccionario de la lengua mixteca*; Juan de Rivas, who wrote *Doctrina Cristiana en lengua Mexicana*, Antonio del Rincón, who wrote *Gramática Novohispana*; among others.

Compuso un vocabulario de verbos y nombres muy copioso, al modo de Antonio de Nebrija, con las voces castellana primero y la tarahumara y tepehuana correspondientes. Luego con las palabras tepehuanas y tarahumaras y después las castellanas que les responden. Dispuso confesionarios y tratados de doctrina cristiana, suficientes para que por ellos los sacerdotes principiantes pudiesen oír los indios de confesión, preguntándoles por ellos sus pecados, que estaban especificados en sus preguntas [...] Y el padre Gabriel del Villar, que fue compañero y sucesor suyo en la misión, testificó en los apuntamientos, que dio para esta vida el año pasado de 1688: *Que hasta entonces duraban y servían a los padres nuevos para poder administrar por ellos*. De suerte, que podemos decir con verdad, que el padre Gerónimo de Figueroa está hasta hoy enseñando las lenguas de aquella región, ayudando a confesar a aquellos indios, enseñándolos y catequizándolos por medio de los misioneros que se valen de sus provechosos trabajos (2020, p. 36)¹⁷.

The hagiography shows that Figueroa's mission results from a series of converging factors that allowed to perpetuate the image of Figueroa as a missionary, linguist, prophet, and exorcist. In addition, the text emphasizes that Figueroa was persecuted by human and supernatural adversaries who wanted to become an obstacle to fulfilling his mission of service. His terrestrial enemies (corrupted authorities, rebellious indigenous) and his ultraterrestrial opponents show the efforts of the devil to push Figueroa away from God. Gerónimo de Figueroa is portrayed as someone who had to battle Satan and his emissaries his whole life.

In fact, among his terrestrial foes, there is one who is very controversial: The governor of Nueva Vizcaya, who might be the polemical José García Salcedo (TAIANO, 2020, p. 35). Figueroa and this governor had an ethical, moral, and spiritual contention, because the second one brutally murdered a riotous indigenous, after promising him a pardon. The hagiography denounces his misuse of power by emphasizing the fact that his cruelty and falsehood tarnished Spain's reputation.

Y el dicho gobernador con ánimo doblado le respondió que lo llamase de donde estaba con los otros que se habían también retirado, empeñándose su palabra en nombre del rey, y la ley de caballero que lo perdonaría, y que no le haría mal ninguno, y que haría un

¹⁷ And because of this, the expertise of the indigenous languages is extremely important, the father also did everything he could to learn both of those peoples, who are the Tepehuana and Tarahumara [...] He used both in order to help future ministers to have the easiness of learning these languages [...] with all the rules and dialects of one and the other. He composed a very copious vocabulary of verbs and names, in the manner of Antonio de Nebrija, with the Castilian voices first and the corresponding Tarahumara and Tepehuana. Then with the Tepehuana and Tarahumara words and then the Castilian ones that answer them. He arranged confessionals, and treatises on Christian doctrine, enough so that through them the beginning priests could hear the Indians' confession, asking them about their sins, which were specified in their questions [...] And Father Gabriel del Villar, who was a companion and successor in the mission, testified in his notes, which he gave for this hagiography last year of 1688 that *until then they lasted and served to the new fathers to be able to administer through them*. Luckily, we can say with truth that Father Gerónimo de Figueroa is still teaching the languages of that region, helping those Indians to confess, teaching and catechizing them through the missionaries who make use of his profitable work (2020, p. 36).

servicio grande a su majestad quietando con su venida aquellas naciones, de que daría cuenta al señor virrey y al rey nuestro señor para que agradeciese a la Compañía y al padre tan buena obra. Creyolo el padre y en teniéndola en ella, volvió a requerir al gobernador con la palabra real que le había dado. Respondió por escrito, ratificándola y firmó de su nombre la carta de seguridad. Con ella le envió el cacique con carta suya y el cumplimiento de su palabra fue prenderlo luego, y condenarlo a muerte; y a buen librar lo sentenció a moler metales en una mina cargado de prisiones, donde a los tres meses acabó del trabajo, y mal tratamiento su vida. Y escribiéndole el padre lo mal que lo había hecho, y reconveníndole la palabra real a que había faltado, le respondió que era un viejo impertinente, caduco y loco, que él sabía lo que había hecho, y el padre no entendía lo que pedía (2020, p. 91)¹⁸.

With this kind of denunciation, Francisco de Florencia abandons for a moment his role as hagiographer and becomes a chronicler that reveals the injustice of civilian authorities who distort the mission of evangelization. The author stresses the difference between the arrogant behavior of the governor and the philanthropic nature of Figueroa. The difference between them reflects the two sides of Spain in New Spain. The priest represents Spanish greatness while the governor represents the negative part of the empire. At the same time, this contrast highlights Figueroa's role as an evangelizer. He is a living example of the religious conquest that characterized Catholicism since medieval times. This is particularly noticeable in the speech he pronounced when he left the mission. His emotive and eloquent farewell words show that he took a paternalistic role among the Tarahumaras and Tepehuanes:

Los capitanes, gobernadores y príncipes de la nación tarahumara y tepehuana que a él [pueblo de san Francisco Javier] habían concurrido a celebrar la fiesta del glorioso apóstol de la India, despidiéndose de ellos con recíproca ternura les habló así: *Yo hijos míos, voy a México, después de cuarenta años, que ha que vivo y converso entre vosotros, donde acabara mis días muy alegre por el amor que siempre os he tenido; pero juzgo delante del señor, que desde allá os he de asistir más y mejor que acá, negociando con su majestad y con el padre general, con el padre provincial y señor virrey, que en lugar de este viejo y ya impedido con los muchos años, os envíe misioneros mozos y fuertes de ánimo y de salud, alentados que acaben con lo que yo he comenzado y se pongan fin glorioso a la total conversión de la nación [...] Quedaos hijos con Dios, que yo me voy, pero no os*

¹⁸ And the mentioned two-faced governor replied that he should call him from where he was with the others who had also withdrawn, pledging his word in the name of the king, and the law of cavalry that he would forgive him, and that he would do him no harm, and that he would do to his majesty a great service by quieting those nations with his coming, that he would give an account to the viceroy and our lord the king so that they would thank the Company and the father for such good work. The father believed him, he returned to request the governor with the royal word that he had given him. He responded in writing, ratifying it, and signed the security letter in his name. With it, he sent a letter to the cacique, but the fulfillment of his word consisted in arresting and condemning him to death; and to good riddance, he sentenced him to grind metals in a mine full of prisons, where after three months he finished his job and badly treated his life. And when the father wrote to reproach him how badly he had done and admonished him the real word that he had failed, he replied that the priest was an impertinent old man, outdated and crazy, that he knew what he had done, and the father did not understand what he was asking (2020, p. 91).

dejo, porque os llevo a todos en mi corazón. ¡Permaneced en la fe y en el amor a vuestros padres, que, en el cielo, espero, nos veremos! (2020, p. 49)¹⁹.

Without demonizing the indigenous but exteriorizing an ethnocentric-European/*criollo* point of view. Francisco de Florencia shows them as instinctively materialist. Therefore, they needed a spiritual guide like the *criollo* Figueroa who knew how to satisfy their material and spiritual needs. Body and soul were two aspects of the same divine reality in Figueroa's missions:

Porque los recién convertidos [los indios], por su rudeza y falta de cultura, más les entra la fe por la boca que por los oídos. Esto es: son materiales, que las felicidades y bienaventuranza del alma en la otra vida, se les hacen inteligibles con la hartura y abundancia [...]

Sabía muy bien el padre Figueroa que, a los carnales y materiales tarahumaras, criados entre picachos como fieras, y poco menos que brutos, se les había de hablar en la lengua, que entendían, para que entendiesen lo que no alcanzaban. Y así por metáforas de lo que más estimaban, que era la comida, les explicaba y daba a entender las verdades eternas, que son el pasto y las delicias del alma. Y dándoles de bien comer les decía que mejores comidas y más gustosas les había de dar el señor Dios todopoderoso, si aprendían el catecismo y sabían las oraciones; si se bautizaban (2020, p. 46)²⁰.

In fact, to ensure the spiritual development of those indigenous who “on one hand, want and desire to be baptized, and, on the other, do not want to leave their *rancheria*” [“por una parte, quieren y piden el bautismo, y, por otra, no quieren dejar sus rancherías”] (2020, p. 32), Gerónimo de Figueroa sacrificed his existence and lived in difficult conditions to propagate his evangelizing message. The hagiography stresses that he carried out —according to the mentality of the time— one of the most important miracles of Christianity: religious conversion (LEONE, 2010, p. 13-19).

¹⁹ The captains, governors, and princes of the Tarahumara and Tepehuana nation who had come to him [San Francisco Javier's people] to celebrate the feast of the glorious apostle of India, bidding farewell to them with reciprocal tenderness, spoke to them thus: *I, my children, am going to Mexico, after forty years, where I have lived and talked among you, where I will end my days very happy because of the love I have always had for you; but I judge before the lord, that from there I will assist you more and better than here, negotiating with his majesty and with the father general, with the provincial father and viceroy, who instead of this old man and already impeded by many years, send you missionaries young and strong in spirit and health, encouraged to finish what I have started and put a glorious end to the total conversion of the nation [...]* Stay children with God, I am leaving, but do not leave because I carry you all in my heart. Remain in faith and in love for your parents, who, I hope, will see you in heaven! (2020, p. 49).

²⁰ Because the recently converted [the Indians], due to their rudeness and lack of culture, understand faith more through their mouths than through their ears. That is: they are material, and the happiness and beatitude of the soul in the other life become intelligible to them with the replenishment and abundance [...]

Father Figueroa knew very well that the carnal and material Tarahumaras, who were raised among picachos like beasts, and little less than brutes, had to be spoken to in the language they understood so that they would understand what they could not. And so, by metaphors of what they valued the most, which was food, he explained and made them understand the eternal truths, which are the grass and the delights of the soul. And giving them good food, he told them that the Lord Almighty God would give them better and tastier meals if they learned the catechism and knew the prayers; if they were baptized (2020, p. 46).

Therefore, his evangelization has a supernatural dimension. It allowed him to create a new society —based on divine love— with the “barbarian” Tarahumaras and Tepehuanes.

Lo cierto es que el padre Figueroa no hubiera podido contrastar tantos montes de dificultades, como rompió en la conversión y reducción de los gentiles tarahumaras y tepehuano, sino armando con este escudo de una fe invencible. No hubiera atropellado tantos riesgos de la vida entre unos bárbaros inhumanos y carniceros [...] los cuales amansó y sacó de las breñas y los picachos, y trajo a vida política, a morar como hombres en los pueblos que de ellos fundó [...] (2020, p. 65)²¹.

Besides the place of racism typical of the Early-Modern thought and marked Francisco de Florencia’s writing, in this paragraph —and *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa* in general— the protagonist uses materialism to erect the indigenous’ Catholicism. In fact, the notion of edification is of crucial importance in the book. It has an architectural and—simultaneously— devotional sense. Gerónimo de Figueroa founded villages and built the spirituality of Tarahumaras and Tepehuanes:

Y para que tuviesen más permanencia y asiento, sacó muchas acequias, que regando las tierras, que caían debajo de ella, les aseguraban buenas cosechas de maíz y otras semillas que son todo su sustento. Y los indios en teniendo la comida segura, están subordinados al Padre y acuden a la doctrina cristiana. Edificó tres iglesias, una en cada pueblo. Alhajolas de lo que había menester para los ministerios y adornos sagrados. Sembró para las iglesias algunos pedazos de tierra, y en estas siembras le ayudó nuestro señor, de manera que no solo cogió para su sustento y el de sus feligreses, sino que le sobró para hacer de sus frutos muchos dineros, con que adornó sus iglesias y proveyó sus casas, y aún las ajenas. Y de lo que sobraba obtuvo licencia de nuestro padre general para hacer varias limosnas (2020, p. 43)²².

This religious-moral edification is —of course— linked to the system of Jesuit Reductions in Chihuahua, which are represented in an idealized manner. They are shown as places of *eleemosyna* (Swift, 2001: 25-36). Francisco de Florencia insists on the fact that Gerónimo de

²¹ The truth is that Father Figueroa would not have been able to contrast so many mountains of difficulties, as he did in the conversion and reduction of the gentile Tarahumara and Tepehuano, if not by arming himself with this shield of invincible faith. He would not have run over so many risks of life among some inhuman barbarians and butchers [...] which he tamed and removed from the thickets and peaks, and brought to political life, to dwell as men in the towns he founded [...] (2020, p. 65).

²² And so that they would have more permanence and settlement, he dug out many ditches, which by watering the lands that fell below it, ensure good harvests of corn and other seeds that are all their sustenance. And the Indians, by having safe food, are subordinated to the father and go to the Christian doctrine. He built three churches, one in each town. Decorated them with what they needed for the ministries and sacred adornments. He sowed some pieces of land for the churches, and our Lord helped him with these sowings so that he not only took for his livelihood and that of his parishioners but also had leftover to make a lot of money from its fruits, with which he adorned his churches. and provided for their homes, and even those of others. And from what he had leftover he obtained permission from our father general to do various alms (2020, p. 43).

Figueroa was “charitable with all, that it seems he measured kindness” [“caritativo tan igualmente con todos, que parece que medía la benignidad”] (2020, p. 22). In *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa* the *caritas* produces the *salus animarum*.

3 The fulfillment of Figueroa’s cosmic destiny

An aspect that seems to have Christic echoes is the presence of Satan in the hagiography. The archfiend is represented as a spirit that takes different forms. Some of them adhere to Christian iconography (aggressive dogs, lions, monsters, etcetera) and others are inherent to New Spain (attractive indigenous women). Satan was his most powerful and oppressive enemy, but Gerónimo de Figueroa did not succumb to temptations (2020, p. 97)²³. He put away worldly possessions and his carnal desires showing a spirit of temperance, purity, piety, and holiness (2020, p. 69). He kept his chastity and made his body a temple of the spirit of God. He multiplied his mortification of the flesh, fasts, and his zeal in the service of God and the community of the flesh. *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa* uses the Christian conception that considers human flesh to be intrinsically evil, a prison for the soul. Therefore, Gerónimo de Figueroa practiced penance to prevent sin and, at the same time, remember the painful earthly life. He inflicted pain on himself to practice a sort of *imitatio Christi*. In this way, he followed the example of Bernardo di Chiaravalle, Francis of Assisi, Catherine of Siena, or Francis de Sales, who considered that self-punishment transformed his physical and spiritual state:

La mortificación y penitencia [...] certifican que jamás dejó la disciplina y el cilicio en ellas; que tenía salpicadas de sangre las paredes de su aposento del uso continuo y riguroso de ellas, y que una vez, con ocasión de mudarle la cama, se halló debajo del colchón una disciplina toda ensangrentada y dos cilicios, uno de hierro y otro de cerdas, muy usados y llenos de sangre, indicio de que a las incomodidades y trabajo de misiones añadía como salsa de ellos la rigurosa penitencia (2020, p. 81)²⁴.

²³ It is not fortuitous that Francisco de Florencia uses the expression “castidad virginal” [virginal chastity]. This is an obvious reference to Francis of Sales’ ideal of chastity. For more information, see Antonio SÁNCHEZ RECHE, *La vocación en San Francisco de Sales*. Universidad de Navarra, 1989, p. 45-56.

²⁴ The mortification and penance [...] certify that he never left the discipline and the cilice; that the walls of his room were splattered with blood from the continuous and rigorous use of them, and that once, on the occasion of changing his bed, a bloody discipline was found under the mattress and two hair shirts, one made of iron and the other of bristles, very used and full of blood, an indication that to the inconveniences and work of missions he added rigorous penance as their sauce (2020, p. 81).

Furthermore, his continuous support and his struggle against Satan led him to directly face him. In fact, *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa* revives the war Satan-exorcist to demonstrate that Figueroa had the power to conquer evil and sin:

Díjosele el compañero con admiración y el padre le respondió: vamos padre, que este mal espíritu es el que anda en esto, y caminó así, confiado en la providencia de Dios, y protección de su soberana madre, que habían de poder más para guardarlo, que el Demonio para perderlo. El cual parece que intentaba que espantándosele la mula con la cincha en banda, que le iba acotando las piernas, lo despeñase en alguna barranca. [...] se entró el Demonio en el cuerpo de su mula, que era muy mansa, por estorbar el bien de aquel enfermo que pedía la confesión y no habiendo modo pasa ensillarla, fueron los sirvientes a decírselo al padre, el cual conociendo quien causaba aquello, fue a la mula y con imperio mandó al enemigo que saliese de ella. Obedeció y la mula volvió a su muchedumbre, admirándose los indios de lo uno y de lo otro, que no sabían de donde procedía (2020, p. 103)²⁵.

This power to conquer evil and sin is made manifest through his death, which is described as the fulfillment of his cosmic destiny. In the book, the passing of Gerónimo de Figueroa is transfigured because he decided to follow Christ's example of sacrificial love. The last hours of his life were marked by a sense of beauty and lightness. It is the end of his suffering, his definitive encounter with Christ after living an existence of *caritas*. Gerónimo de Figueroa merged with the divine love. He is the incarnation of the *in domino moriuntur* who lived *in Domino* and died *in osculo domini*:

Hasta aquí todo ha sido padecer sed, hambres, fatigas, trabajos, necesidades. Ahora tendré verdadera hartura, verdaderos gozos, verdadero descanso, cuando corrida la cortina de la mortalidad, aparezca la gloria, que la esperanza me ha prometido. Ahora se inundará mi alma en el torrente de tus deleites. ¡Oh dichosas fatigas que tal premio merecieron! (2020, p. 68)²⁶.

Conclusions

²⁵ The companion told him with admiration and the father replied: come on father, that this evil spirit is the one that is heading this, and he walked, trusting in the providence of God, and the protection of his sovereign mother, both had more power to protect him than the Demon to spoil him. It seems that he was trying to frighten off the mule with the band girth, which was limiting his legs, to throw him off a cliff into some ravine. [...] the Devil entered the body of his mule, which was very meek, to hinder the good of that patient who was asking for confession and there was no way to saddle her, the servants went to tell the father, who knows who caused that, he went to the mule and commanded the enemy to get out of it. He obeyed and the mule returned to the crowd, with the admiration of the indigenous who did not know where it came from (2020, p. 103).

²⁶ Heretofore everything has been suffering from thirst, hunger, fatigue, work, and needs. Now I will have true fullness, true joys, true rest, when the curtain of mortality is drawn, the glory that hope has promised me will appear. Now my soul will be flooded in the torrent of your delights. ¡Oh, happy fatigues that such a prize deserved! (2020, p. 68).

In sum, after analyzing different aspects of this hagiography, it might be concluded that *Vida Admirable y Muerte Dichosa del Religioso Padre Gerónimo de Figueroa Profeso de la Compañía de Jesús En la Provincia de Nueva España: Misionero De Cuarenta años entre los Indios Tarahumaras, y Tepehuanes de la Sierra Madre y después Rector del Colegio Máximo y Prepósito de la casa Profesa de México* (1689) is an important text within the *corpus* of hagiographies produced in New Spain in the seventeenth century. Its contents allow to think about the fact that the Novohispanic individual was aware of his importance within the viceregal space and within the Universal Monarchy. Gerónimo de Figueroa represents a creole saint and an *optimus civis*, whose wisdom and faith make him eminently qualified to propagate the Catholic tradition in the Novohispanic missions.

Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa allows understanding the Jesuit missions' *modus operandi* in New Spain: the author highlights the importance of knowing the indigenous languages, promotes the distribution of the *eleemosyna*, the edification of churches in the different *rancherías* to carry out the evangelical mission. According to Francisco de Florencia, they are part of the divine plan that started when Gerónimo de Figueroa was a *sanctus puer*.

This hagiography describes Figueroa's spiritual journey as part of the Mexican *miracula* because he merges reason and faith in a metaphysical instance that makes him a mediator between the divine and the human. At the same time, Francisco de Florencia at times abandons his hagiographical rhetoric and denounces the injustice being perpetrated in New Spain by the civil authorities. In fact, the corrupted authorities allow him to demonstrate that there were two sides of the monarchy: the philanthropic (represented by Figueroa) and the tyrannical (represented by civil authorities). According to Francisco de Florencia, the Spanish Monarchy was not the cause of the indigenous unrest, but those who were governing the most remote areas without considering the imperial-religious mission of Spain.

Although written under the protocol of the medieval hagiographies, *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa* is an integral part of a constituent element of a specific territorial place: New Spain. In this book, there are elements that indicate the existence of a Novohispanic civic pride. Figueroa's monastic, missionaries, and intellectual virtues are exalted as models of the Novohispanic citizen and the good Christian. The text projects Figueroa within the Novohispanic historical and social context of the seventeenth century. *Vida de Gerónimo de Figueroa* shows the need for a valuation

of the Novohispanic individual to the well-being of the empire. This hagiography is a sort of hagiographic legitimation of his role as a propagator of the pair *sacerdotium-imperium*.

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