Reterritorialized Spirituality: Material Religious Culture in the Border Space of San Fernando Cathedral

Ellen McCracken is Professor of Spanish and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Santa Barbara where she teaches Latin American Literature, U.S. Latino literature, and cultural semiotics. She has written Decoding Women's Magazines: From *Mademoiselle* to *Ms. (St. Martin's, 1993) and* New Latina Narrative: The Femenine Space of Post-modern Ethnicity *(U of Arizona P, 1999), and edited a volume of essays,* Fray Angélico Chávez: Poet, Priest, and Artist *(U of New Mexico P, 2000).*

At the exact geographic center of the borderlands city of San Antonio, Texas, the Americas spill together and traditional spatial, temporal, and cultural borders lose their ability to divide. Here, in San Fernando Cathedral (Fig. 1), one of the oldest continuously functioning cathedrals in the United States,[1] ordinary people live in a dynamically hybrid border space in which they express their spirituality through the concrete and material. The movement of human bodies engaged in various ritual practices through the interior and exterior spaces of the cathedral materially redefines a diasporic community while simultaneously reconfiguring the symbolic material objects enshrined in the sacred site. At the cathedral today, the popular marks the institutional with its strong vernacular expression as the border between official and popular religiosity increasingly erodes.

Historical Borders

Constructed in the years following the arrival of settlers from the Canary Islands in 1731, the first parish church in what is now Texas was originally dedicated to the patroness of the Canary Islands, Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria, to the Virgin of Guadalupe, and to San Fernando, the namesake of a relative of the King of Spain who would later become King Ferdinand VI. In 1755, after the church's completion, the town council met on the feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe, vowing to celebrate the feasts of these three religious figures in perpetuity

(Matovina, "Memories Create a People" 19 and "Development of a Tradition" 25). This early patronal hybridity combining devotion to both Old and New world sacred figures was a forerunner of the mixture of traditions that has characterized worship at the church to varying degrees throughout its history.

During the period of the Texas Republic (1836-1845) and after Mexico's defeat in the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), new settlers of Anglo and German origin began to outnumber the Mexican population of the city. English became the official language of the civic sphere and public education, and priests from Spain and France were appointed to replace the Mexican clergy of the parish for the rest of the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. Despite these changes, the predominantly Mexican parishoners kept a number of popular religious traditions alive to celebrate such feasts as the Virgin of Guadalupe, San Fernando, San Antonio, and Christmas. After the church became a cathedral in 1874, official diocesan celebrations took precedence over popular rituals; the first bishop went so far as to discontinue the celebration of midnight Mass and the adoration of the Christ child on Christmas "because of the intrusion of improper and disorderly persons with the vast throngs of all classes, races, and religions, who poured into the cathedral" (cited in Matovina, "Development of a Tradition" 33). Such a decree attempted to impose a strict border between official and popular forms of religious expression, in great contrast to the attenuation of such a border that characterizes San Fernando today.

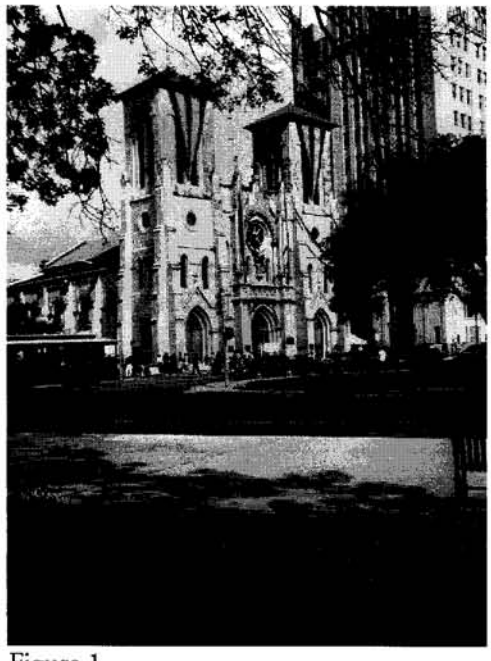

Figure 1

As Timothy Matovina has documented, Mexican rituals again gained predominance in the cathedral with the arrival of a large number of exiles from the Mexican Revolution (1910-17) and the religious persecution of the Calles period of the 1920s. Many of the clergy and religious who emigrated to escape Calles brought strong Mexican religious traditions with them. By the 1930s there was a resurgence of public ritual at the Cathedral—processions through the plaza and streets for the feasts of Cristo Rey, the Virgin of Guadalupe, *posadas*, and First Communions. The exiles integrated symbols of Mexican nationalism into their public religious expression: on December 11, the eve of the feast of Guadalupe, the Procession of Roses took place, followed on December 12 by the Procession of Lights in which torches were decorated with the colors of the Mexican flag. By the 1950s and 1960s, people from other parishes made processions to San Fernando to join in the Guadalupe festivities, with numbers reaching 40,000 people (Matovina, "Development of a Tradition" 34). Transcending the border that had been politically established between the U.S. and Mexico in 1848, the exiles escaping Calles in the 1920s renewed

the hybridity of material religious practice that had flourished in the borderlands in Mexico's colonial period and its first years of independence.

Immigration from Mexico continued in the decades following the Depression, and during the civil wars in Central America of the 1970s and 1980s, these *mexicanos* were joined by exiles from Guatemala and El Salvador who brought with them specific regional forms of Latino popular religiosity. In 1983, a native of San Antonio, Father Virgilio Elizondo, was appointed Rector of the Cathedral, the first pastor of Mexican heritage since the1840s.[2] Elizondo had participated in several key meetings of Church leaders in Latin America after Vatican Council II and worked extensively with Latin American liberation theologians. He earned a Ph.D. in France where he developed an important theory of the theology of *mestizaje*. His extensive writings have established him as the foremost Mexican-American liberation theologian. The charismatic Elizondo worked with the people of the parish for twelve years to recuperate, revitalize, and expand the popular religious traditions of San Fernando. His extensive experience in Latin America and his special understanding of *mestizaje* enabled him to embrace not only his people's Mexican heritage, but also the traditions of Central Americans and other Latino immigrants in San Antonio. The hybrid Latino practices that Elizondo and the people of the cathedral began to develop in the 1980s and 1990s continue today under the leadership of the new rector, Father David García.

Reterritorialized Spirituality

As the sense of connection to a fixed geographic place erodes for diasporic communities and other postmodern subjects, various cultural strategies of reterritorialization renew people's ties to hybrid material representations that embody both the past and the present, the old locale and the new. Spirituality is one strong means of retaining one's humanity in the face of the arbitrariness of postmodern capitalist society, and it is through what might be termed a reterritorialized spirituality that many immigrant communities in the borderlands concretize the spiritual human dimension. Hybrid material culture embodies and enables a re-grounding of the spiritual in a border space such as San Antonio, and the program of revitalizing popular Latino traditions begun by Father Elizondo at San Fernando Cathedral is crucially embedded in the material. Here I will focus on material representations of spirituality within the church, some of the small ritualized practices by which people reconfigure those material objects, and other large-scale performative rituals that spill out of the cathedral into the surrounding city, calling into question the border between the ostensibly discrete categories of the sacred and the secular.[3]

The interior of the cathedral, while functioning as a stable site of public and private spirituality for many generations of people, at the same time functions as an evolving stage in which spirituality is reterritorialized through a variety of rubrics. A number of people kneel or sit facing the main altar in private prayer at various moments throughout the day and evening, positionally signifying reverence and subservience as they both silently and vocally pray or meditate. The heads of some worshippers are bowed and their bodies inclined downward slightly, while others look directly at the large crucifix behind the altar, or raise their arms upward in tribute while

praying. Some recite the rosary or make a private novena to a religious figure. The individual prayers, petitions, and meditations of these worshippers represent private interiorizations of the official material configuration of the cathedral's main altar and crucifix at which they gaze.

In addition to these relatively stationary positions of worship, people move to different locations throughout the church to engage in devotions with particular personal relevance. Some walk behind the altar to the former sanctuary (previously off-limits to most parishioners) to pray before elevated, life-size statues of La Virgen de la Candelaria on the left and San Fernando, Rey de España on the right. These figures, who represent the Spanish holy personages in honor of whom the settlement was established in 1731, embody a temporal and geographic border-crossing through which contemporary Latinos carry on the traditional devotion to the patroness of the Canary Islands and the13th-century saint, who had been canonized in 1671, a few decades before the founding of the church. In the right-hand corner of the church, people pray before a statue of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the *mestiza* figure who links worshipers to their indigenous heritage. During the December celebrations in honor of Guadalupe, the statue is moved to the main sanctuary for the reenactment of the story of her appearance to Juan Diego (Fig. 2). As Father Elizondo points out, this Virgin has a particular personal relevance to the people of San Fernando because of the historical memory of her having "[spoken] to the defeated and humiliated Indians with tenderness and respect... recogniz[ing] their dignity and importance" ("The Sacred in the City" 85).

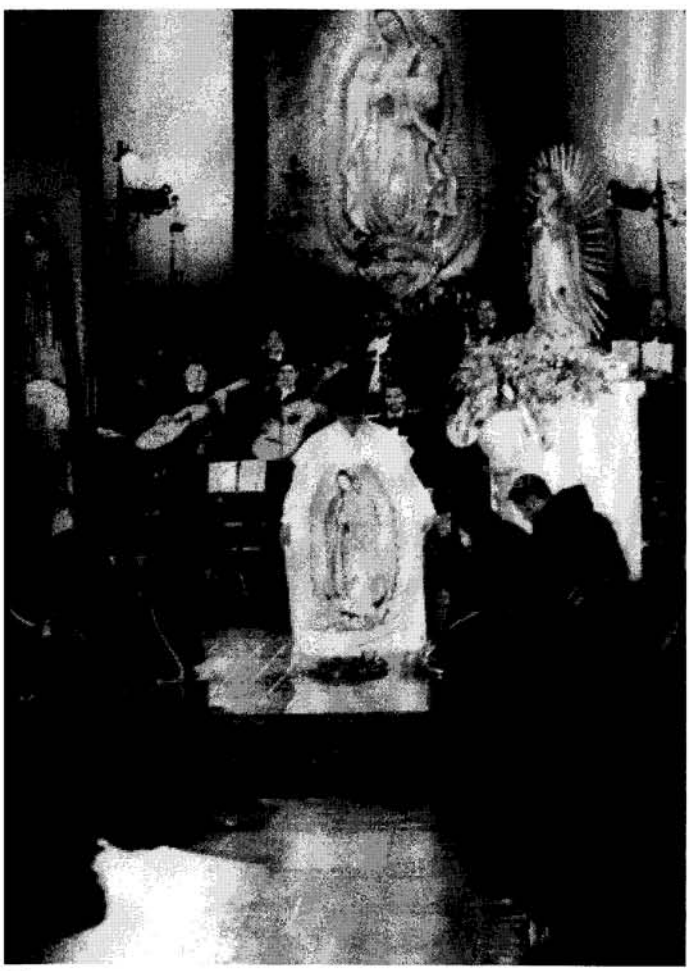

Figure 2

In the rear left corner of the cathedral are statues of three figures to which parish-

ioners have special devotion. Many people light candles and pray before a life-size representation of the Pietà and reach up to touch the foot of the dead Christ whom Mary is holding. As a result, Matovina notes, the foot of the figure of Christ has been worn smooth ("Memories Create a People" 20). People's desire for a material connection to the divine inspires this affectionate ritual gesture, the tactility of which materially reshapes the official visual image. Elizondo suggests that the people of San Fernando feel a special connection to the Madre Dolorosa, suffering at the moment of the death of her son, believing her to be especially understanding of their own suffering ("Conversations with God" 54).

A few feet away on a high niche behind one of the pillars of the cathedral is a statue of San Martín de Porres, the mulatto saint of Perú with whom the people of San Fernando identify, according to Elizondo, because the saint was rejected for his mixed racial heritage.[4] The small statue of San Martín sweeping with a broom has been positioned high above worshippers, and is paid homage to with vases of flowers on the niche and lighted votive candles below (Fig. 3). Although the reasons for this placement of the small statue may be entirely practical, the figure's position symbolically reverses the narrative of San Martín's lesser status in Peruvian society during his life, and offers a consoling utopian solution to the painful life situations of many contemporary petitioners.

In the late 1980s, Father Elizondo noticed that a number of refugees from the civil wars in Central America who had joined the congregation had a special devotion to the Guatemalan representation of Christ, El Cristo Negro de Esquipulas. He obtained a large crucifix of the Black Christ and displayed it to the left of the cathedral entry near the Madre Dolorosa and San Martín de Porres. Very quickly it became a popular shrine at which people still light candles, pray, and display *ex-votos* such as photographs, petitions, *milagritos*, and other mementos (Fig. 4). Private prayers offered in other locations in the church here enter partially or fully into the public sphere, as people give visual and verbal testimony about favors they have received or are requesting. They pin up photographs of their loved ones while offering prayers for them, adding an analogic representation that semiotically parallels the representation of the religious figure to which they are praying. If the material representation of the Black Christ makes the supernatural figure more present to them, the logic perhaps runs, might not a picture make the person for whom they are praying more present to Christ? The material sign left beneath the figure of the Black Christ adds permanence

Figure 3

to their petition, and is viewed perhaps as a more enduring and more specific semiotic amplification of the votive candles that are also present at the shrine.

Figure 4

In a similar vein, worshippers sometimes leave written notes at the feet of the Black Christ, reflecting some of the problems they face in their borderland experience. One petitioner writes:

> I arrived here a year ago with nothing. I still have hardly anything. I know I deserve nothing because I have sinned so much, but I know you love me and will help me. Don't let me lose hope. Help me not to give up.

Another note, written in thanksgiving for relief of a medical problem, reveals the bond the petitioner feels with the suffering nature of this representation of Christ: "You, my suffering Black Christ, understand me." A woman asks for help in finding a man who will at least love her child, even if he does not love her, while an older petitioner poignantly asks for help in obtaining benefits from Medicare officials:

> They try to trick me and I cannot defend myself. I don't even understand what they are saying. Please help them to understand.... I am old and all alone now except for you. (cited in Elizondo, "Conversations" 59)

The photos, messages, and other material objects placed beneath the Black Christ of Esquipulas in the cathedral reterritorialize the large crucifix in the new borderlands setting in San Antonio. They add images of and public narratives about the everyday lives of the evolving Latino community that worships at the cathedral. This stationary visual representation that the clergy provide to aid in people's devotion is dynamically transformed with the hundreds of material representations displayed beneath it. As the *ex-votos* change from month to month, they function as a kind of continually evolving collective autobiography of the people whose deep religious faith brings them to the cathedral. The shrine that the people have created beneath the figure of the Guatemalan Christ becomes a site of public memory in which Mexicans, Central Americans and other Latin American immigrants join others who have lived here for decades to link their common popular religious customs to their collective humanity.

Performative Rituals: The Porous Border Between the Sacred and the Secular

If the religious images within the cathedral take on the vernacular expression

of the people who worship there, popular religiosity also reconfigures the prescribed rituals in which people move through space to publicly display their devotion. While most of the large, heavy statues and shrines must remain at fixed locations inside the church, many of the communal rituals move back and forth between the inside and outside spaces of the cathedral and the surrounding city. In these expressions of reterritorialized spirituality, a number of cultural, temporal, geographic, spatial, and hierarchic borders become increasingly eroded.

The liturgical calendar established by the Roman Catholic Church sets official feast days with various prescribed rituals. Although official changes modernized many of these observances after Vatican Council II (1962-1965), Latino Catholics retained many of their centuries-old traditions, inflecting the official ceremonies with a pre-Tridentine flavor.[5] While prayer rituals such as novenas and litanies, for example, fell out of use in standard church ceremonies after Vatican II, Latinos continued to practice them as part of their deeply rooted spiritual heritage. When immigrants in the U.S. borderlands found themselves in parishes that were unsympathetic to these old traditions, they looked for other churches that encouraged their unique religious expression, or they increased their practice of popular religious rituals in the home.[6]

As we have seen, throughout the nineteenth century Mexicans at San Fernando Church had special rituals to celebrate the feasts of San Antonio, San Fernando, the Virgin of Guadalupe and Christmas, even though priests from Spain and France replaced the Mexican clergy after the Mexican-American War. "Dolorosa" and "Soledad," the names of two streets adjacent to the cathedral, are testimony to the performance of Passion plays during Holy Week earlier in San Antonio's history. Father Elizondo encouraged the revival of these and other popular public rituals after becoming rector of the Cathedral in 1983. Far from being an exercise in collective nostalgia, the recuperation of these traditions situated the participants more fully in the social issues of the present while at the same time connecting them to the cultural traditions of their forebears. A theorist and practitioner of liberation theology, Father Elizondo encouraged this temporal and cultural hybridity in religious rituals as one means of linking issues of social justice to spiritual devotion. Just as figures such as San Martín de Porres and the Black Christ of Esquipulas are visual signifiers of racial injustice throughout history, characters such as Juan Diego in the Guadalupe celebrations, Joseph and Mary in the *posada* processions, and the condemned Christ of the Passion reenactment on Good Friday are visual correlatives of social injustice at the same time that they are spiritual symbols.

As the official liturgical year begins with the Advent season in the four weeks preceding Christmas, Latino Catholics at San Fernando enter an especially busy period of popular religious celebrations that find space within and outside of the cathedral. On December 11 and 12 there is a twenty-four-hour celebration for the feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which is, in Elizondo's words, "the most festive day of the year at San Fernando" ("The Sacred in the City" 85). Elizondo argues that this popular feast is as important to Latinos as is Easter, the key feast of official Catholicism. While belief in the resurrection of Christ is the central tenet of Christianity, Elizondo argues that Latinos feel more connected to another resurrection: that of the

people who the invading armies of the Conquest had killed and humiliated, who were, in effect, brought to life again by the Virgin of Guadalupe. Some of the most talented artists of the community begin the *víspera* celebration with performances of singing and dancing, followed at midnight by the community singing the first *mañanitas*, or birthday song, to the Virgin, carrying on the Mexican tradition of waking a birthday celebrant at dawn with a serenade. The song breaks down the border between the secular and the sacred both in content and by using the popular birthday greeting to show affection for the beloved Virgin.

Shortly before dawn the *mañanitas* are again sung, followed by a sunrise service. Throughout the day of December 12, people bring flowers and sing before the statue of Guadalupe, and in the evening participate in a liturgical service and communal praying of the rosary, led by the children. There are pauses between the decades of the rosary for all the members of the congregation to bring more flowers to the Virgin's shrine. During these celebrations, large images of the Virgin are centrally displayed, and the narrative is reenacted visually, as Juan Diego holds open his *tilma* with the image of the Virgin, from which roses drop. Before the image, figures representing Franciscan priests and the bishop kneel. (Fig. 2.)

A few days after the celebration of the feast of Guadalupe, the people of San Fernando begin a traditional nine-day ritual that attenuates the border between the sacred and the secular. The celebration of *Las Posadas* reenacts the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem as people walk in a procession from house to house in various neighborhoods asking for shelter. Carrying statues of Joseph with Mary on a donkey on a platform on their shoulders, participants walk to various homes asking for shelter. After a series of refusals, they are finally welcomed into the last home and all enjoy a small party. During the nightly processions, people sing traditional songs, sometimes say a decade of the rosary at each house, and recite the innovative "Litany of the Migrants." Here, a pre-Vatican II ritual prayer is recuperated and updated to speak to contemporary issues of social justice affecting Latinos in the U.S. The lines of the litany recount the difficulties and injustices migrants face and the group responds to each: "With Joseph and Mary, pilgrims keep on walking" (cited in Elizondo, "The Sacred in the City" 86). On one of the nine nights a *Gran Posada* is held, and contemporary visual correlatives of the injustices described in the "Litany of the Migrants" become the sites of the reenactment. Beginning at the downtown *mercado*, participants proceed through the historic district, symbolically asking for shelter at various businesses, the Old Governor's Palace, City Hall, and the County Court House. When, as in daily life, they do not find "shelter" in these civic sites, they proceed to San Fernando Cathedral a few blocks away where they are warmly received with a celebration and small gifts for everyone.

Both large- and small-scale performative rituals occur frequently throughout the liturgical year in San Fernando Cathedral and in nearby public spaces. On the last Sunday of January, the Feast of Nuestra Señora de la Candelaria (Our Lady of Candlemas) is celebrated with the blessing of candles and of the Niño Dios (Christ Child) at all Masses. One week before Ash Wednesday, which begins the season of Lent, the people of San Fernando gather for the Burning of the Palms for Ashes; for this ritual

they bring the blessed palms they received a year earlier on Palm Sunday to the church for a ceremony that will materially transform one sacred symbol into another for the solemn opening of the penitential season. The feasts of San Fernando and San Antonio are celebrated May 30 and June 13. Special rituals are held for El Día de los Santos (All Saints' Day) and El Día de los Muertos (All Souls Day or Day of the Dead), November 1 and 2 respectively. An interfaith Thanksgiving service is held in the cathedral with Jewish, Muslim, and Protestant religious leaders from other parts of the city to celebrate the national holiday. During San Antonio's annual festival the last week of April, the cathedral is covered with outdoor lights and festivities take place in front of the church.

Ritual Display in *Semana Santa*

The popular rituals with the widest reach and scope are those of Semana Santa (Holy Week), the week preceding the feast of Easter. While the official Church designates Easter as the most important feast not only of Holy Week but of the entire liturgical year, Latino Catholics, who particularly identify with the suffering Christ, view Good Friday as the central moment of Holy Week. The Latino community of San Fernando has developed an elaborate popular performance through which they visualize and re-live the events of the Passion of Christ. While the well-known events are recounted in lengthy biblical readings within the official church liturgies throughout the week, contemporary Catholics at San Fernando compensate for the shortcomings of entirely verbal narration by creating elaborate dramatic performances that make the events visually meaningful. Not only do worshippers and onlookers see the events reenacted, but the scale and emotion of the performances often envelop them in the action as co-participants.

Throughout its 262-year history, the parish of San Fernando has carried on the tradition of the Passion play introduced by Spanish missionaries to the New World. Although early Christian authorities banned such drama in the fourth century because of perceived pagan traces, in the Middle Ages religious reenactments were reintroduced to teach religion to the illiterate. Dramatic scenes performed in the sanctuary and beneath each station of the cross inside medieval churches eventually moved outside as they became more elaborate (see Gutiérrez-Mier). In recent years at San Fernando, professional actors have been replaced by members of the parish who audition for parts and give of their time for rehearsals beginning in February each year. A priest from Guatemala, Father Roberto Paredes, who worked at San Fernando for two years, wrote an elaborate script in Spanish for the participants to use. Thus, the especially famous Holy Week traditions of Guatemala are joined to those of San Fernando's own two-hundred-year history with modern adaptations, creating a multitemporal hybridity that also transcends the geographic borders of the Americas.[7]

The serialized drama begins on Palm Sunday in the plaza in front of the cathedral with the blessing of the palms and the reenactment of Christ's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The person who has been chosen to represent Christ in the current year's Passion play rides around the plaza on a donkey, while the thousands of people in attendance wave palms and sing Hosannas. Later, as part of the opening procession to begin Mass, parishioners dressed in

period clothing and carrying jugs or baskets of fruit come into the cathedral waving large palm branches.[8] As in many of the popular reconfigurations of official church feasts in San Fernando Cathedral, interior and exterior space flow together and the border between civil society and religion becomes attenuated. Breaking down the perceived separation between religious ritual and everyday life in modern secular society, Father Elizondo links the optic of liberation theology to the Palm Sunday reenactment. He notes that this popular religious ritual held on Main Street and in Main Plaza in front of the cathedral symbolizes the people's "own triumphant entry into the structures of society" ("Mestizo God" 89). Father Elizondo encouraged the people of San Fernando to revive the popular rituals that their forebears practiced not only to give them the sense of belonging and importance, but also to reinforce their perception that religion is intimately connected to their secular lives and to their place in American society.

Four days later, on Holy Thursday, the second installment of the serialized reenactment takes place in conjunction with the special evening Mass commemorating the Last Supper.[9] At San Fernando popular Latino traditions reconfigure the official Catholic liturgy. At the head of the entrance procession are a group of people dressed as the men, women and children of Christ's time. The women carry baskets of bread that will be blessed in the ceremony of *el pan bendito* (Holy Bread).[10] Behind them, the man playing the role of Christ walks in alone, and several women in the congregation reach out to touch him as he passes: the border between representation and reality becomes attenuated. The large sanctuary (the area of the original church) has been transformed into the scene of the cenacle, where the men representing the twelve apostles take their seats facing the congregation with the person playing the role of Christ in the middle. At the end of the procession are Archbishop Flores and the priests who will concelebrate the Mass.

Traditionally, in many Catholic churches the priests celebrating the Holy Thursday Mass wash the feet of some (or even all) of the people in the congregation as part of the official liturgical reenactment and to teach the lesson of service to fellow human beings. In San Fernando Cathedral, to begin the ceremony of the *lavatorio* (cleansing), the archbishop announces that he will wash the feet of half of the disciples and "Jesus will wash the other half." Again, the border between representation and reality is attenuated in the archbishop's diction. Especially open to the tropes of the popular reenactment that restructures the official liturgy, he incorporates elements of the people's dramatic performance into the ceremony and shares the role traditionally reserved for the priest celebrant with the lay man who has been chosen to portray Christ.

Along with the large baskets of *bolillos* (Mexican bread) that are blessed and distributed to members of the community who are unable to attend the services as a symbol of everyone's inclusion in the reenactment of the Last Supper, an additional material symbol focuses the attention of the congregation outside the cathedral to social problems. Donations of canned food are carried to the altar in the Offertory procession to symbolically and literally extend the meal to the poor of San Antonio when the food is later distributed. The border between the interior of the cathedral sanctuary and the surrounding city is transcended.

At the end of Holy Thursday Mass in Catholic churches, a procession usually takes place to transfer extra hosts that have been consecrated in advance for the liturgy on Good Friday to a special altar. In San Fernando, the altar is erected to the right of the main altar, and most members of the congregation leave their seats to walk in the procession. It would be possible for the procession to remain inside the church, proceeding down the center and side aisles to the altar of repose; instead, the ceremony deliberately enters the public space around and in front of the cathedral as one means of breaking down the border between the sacred and the secular, and of giving public testimony to the importance of the feast and ritual. The people march with lighted candles chanting the repeated response, "Caminemos con Jesús," [Let us walk with Jesus], behind those dressed as the people of Jerusalem and the archbishop who carries the hosts under a canopy. After proceeding around Main Plaza and around the block, participants encounter a living tableau before they reenter the cathedral: the man playing Christ is kneeling in the garden to the left of the cathedral praying out loud as he reenacts the biblical narrative about the Garden of Gethsemane.

When the procession reenters the church, the archbishop deposits the hosts on the altar of repose where people pray individually for several more hours. Meanwhile, the congregation is invited outside to see the next scene of the popular reenactment that continues in the side garden. The border between reality and the simulacrum that reenacts the agony of Christ in the garden seems to dissolve because the earlier action seen by the passing procession has continued while the people finish

Figure 5

the official liturgy inside the cathedral. Now, people dressed as Roman soldiers come to the garden to arrest the actor representing Christ, and a violent scene takes place between them and those portraying the disciples. With dialogue entirely in Spanish and the crowd loudly participating, this functions as the first scene of the large-scale Passion play that will be reenacted in the city streets the following morning.[11] After Christ is taken away, many people return to the cathedral to pray at the altar of repose.

While the Palm Sunday and Holy Thursday reenactments move back and forth from the Church to the adjacent plaza, the Passion play on Good Friday is fully anchored in secular space, beginning several blocks away in the heart of the old town *mercado*. The comfortable distinction between civic and religious space that exists on most other days of the year disappears as ritual time replaces chronological time for two hours on Friday morning. Thousands of people gather in the *mercado* to watch and participate in the reenactment of the biblical narrative. Ordinary people become actors portraying Christ, Pontius Pilate, King Herod, Roman centurions, the two thieves, Simon of Cyrene, Veronica, Mary, and the people of Jerusalem (Fig. 5). The public walks alongside the performance through the *mercado*, into the city streets Dolorosa and Soledad, and finally to the plaza in front of the cathedral, where the crucifixion itself is reenacted. Along the route, the performers stop to reenact the intervening Stations of the Cross between the initial condemnation of Christ and the crucifixion. Because of the superb performances of the actors, some in the audience are drawn into the action to the point of tears, and others reach out to try to help the actor portraying Christ who drags a 150-pound cross, cries out as he is scourged, and is covered in blood by the time the actors in the performance ritually "nail" him to the cross. But by virtue of walking and stopping along the play's route as the scenes of the Passion are reenacted, the 20,000 observers become participants; merely by watching they play the role of the people of Jerusalem who witnessed the events recounted in the biblical narrative.[12]

During the reenactment, several representatives of official religion become participants: religious leaders of various faiths from across the city open the reenactment with prayers and biblical readings; the archbishop plays the role of Simon of Cyrene by carrying the cross for part of the way; and Father Elizondo directs some of the actors as they proceed. But this is predominantly people's street theatre rather than official religious reenactment. Father Elizondo and the Archbishop wear albs and retain their personal identities as members of the clergy while participating in the dramatic reenactment, but they play simple roles like everyone else in the performance. Elizondo, for example, assumes the role of an acolyte or assistant as he holds up the microphone for the figure of Christ to be heard uttering the last words on the cross (Fig. 6). When Archbishop Flores carries the 12-foot, 150-pound cross, a hierarchical transposition occurs. In most of the ceremonies at which he officiates in the cathedral throughout the year, his elaborate sartorial presence semiotically signifies his official authority and power; in this instance, he becomes a strong corporeal signifier of the disempowered, of suffering and humanness. He is semiotically transformed from an elegant, symbolic Christ-figure in the cathedral to the concrete signifier that perspires

in the heat and labors as he carries the heavy cross on the public street.

Some may argue that the institutional Church opens a small space in which alternative popular practices may unfold, all the while maintaining control. The large-scale popular participation in the event and the level of emotion visible suggests that much more than a slightly expanded, accepted liturgy is occurring. The thousands of participants are breaking temporal, cultural, hierarchical, and social borders as they continue practicing this form of Good Friday devotions year after year. Their handmade costumes and props (common hubcaps for the shields of the centurions, a locally made cross for the Christ figure to carry) and their unabashed emotional participation in the reenactment make it their own event in which they find fulfillment and pride. These climactic scenes of the Passion reenactment are a large-scale, enveloping reterritorialization of the official biblical narrative and liturgical celebration that spills out into the secular spaces of the city, temporarily taking them over. While these large-scale public demonstrations do not involve overt political protest, they constitute a re-taking of the city streets with an ethnic popular presence and impart a sense of empowerment to those who participate.

The previous evening, several men of the parish had rearranged the sanctuary-stage for the inside devotions of Good Friday afternoon and evening; they placed an immense crucifix specially designed for Passion devotions in the sanctuary, covering the bottom with brown paper to visually represent Mount Calvary. The following day, members of the congregation climb up to venerate the large crucifix during and after the church liturgy that follows the Passion play. In this ceremony, five priests process down the main aisle with graven faces and

Figure 6

lie prostrate on the floor for a few moments before the altar. In the official liturgy for the afternoon devotion, the priests give individual sermons with thoughts on the last words of Christ. Departing from the usual liturgical practice, a dancer presents a visual rendition of one of the last words, with a look of anguish on her face comparable to that on the face of the actor portraying Mary during the Passion play. Another layperson presents a *declamación* as a public meditation on one of the last words. And a television announcer uses her professional skills to read several passages from the Bible during the liturgy.

Later in the evening, people return to the cathedral for the *Pésame* (Condolence) and *Santo Entierro* (Holy Burrial) service. Hybrid cultural traditions from Spain, the Arab world, and Latin America come together as the reenactment of the Passion narrative continues. Upon entering the church at sundown, people are given flowers and white candles and see that except for a red-draped platform in front of the cross, the scene in the sanctuary remains unchanged from the afternoon. The procession begins with new characters in the reenactment slowly walking down the aisle. Behind a red-draped crucifix, a woman proceeds to a stark drumbeat; she is dressed as a Spanish *gitana* (gypsy) in a black gown, a mantilla, and a high comb reminiscent of the citywide Holy Week rituals in Sevilla, Spain.[13] She sings a gypsy chant in Spanish, noting that she will share the sorrow of the mother of Christ, *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad* (Our Lady of Solitude). Behind her walk three men of Jerusalem carrying a ladder and ropes. Next come *las tres Marías* (The Three Marys), carrying on white satin pillows the medieval *Arma Christi*, the instruments of the passion: nails, a whip, and a crown of thorns. Other men follow, dressed in black, wearing the high-pointed, cone-shaped hoods (*capirotes*) and masks of the *penitentes* in the Sevilla Holy Week processions. Carefully, the men who carried the ladder climb up to ritually remove the body of Christ from the large crucifix, while the gypsy women sing mournful chants: "Why, oh why did I drive the nails through your hands?" Father Elizondo traveled to Mexico to purchase the specially articulated crucifix with a removable body and hinged arms, like those used frequently in Holy Week reenactments in Spain and Latin America.

After the body has been lowered and laid on the red-draped platform, a burial procession begins in which the people in the congregation march with lighted candles behind the statue of *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad* and the image of Christ around the main plaza, accompanied by beating drums and the chants of a litany. Again, the reenactment, with its striking visual symbols, deliberately enters the secular space of the city to publicly announce the importance it attaches to itself and the events it commemorates. As it breaks down the border between the secular and the sacred, it similarly erodes historical, temporal, cultural and geographic divisions by combining elements from Moorish, Spanish, and Latin American traditions that are part of the historical memory of the people of San Fernando.

The body is laid to rest in the sanctuary when the procession returns. A group of women in black dresses and mantillas with tender expressions on their faces anoint the figure with oils, cover it with a white burial cloth, and scatter herbs and dried flowers from the previous year's ceremony over the cloth. Everyone in the cathedral then walks individually to the front to

present *ofrendas floreles* (offerings of flowers); each person places a single flower on top of the body, some bending to kiss the face of the Christ figure, as they would do to a loved one at a funeral. Various men and women carry entire bouquets of flowers to the altar for the ceremony. Some touch the dress of the nearby statue of La Soledad and bless themselves. Ultimately, the entire statue of Christ is covered in a mound of colorful flowers, with only the face visible. The ritual transformation of death into "la pascua florida," the Spanish term for Easter, is visually enacted in this expression of grief and tribute.

After a scripture reading by a woman and a sermon by the priest, the *Pésame* section of the service begins in which people offer their condolences to the Virgin. A dance and song are performed before the statue of *La Soledad*, which has been dressed in a long purple gown with a black shawl and mantilla; accompanied by a guitar, the singer kneels before the statue singing, "Aquí estoy contigo" [I am here with you]. There follow a series of *testimonios* by various lay people who look toward the statue of the virgin while telling their stories to her, offering their *pésames*; it is as if the people in the church are merely a secondary audience and the public oral narrative is in fact uttered to *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad*. In the 1998 ceremony, the auxiliary bishop was so moved by the testimonies that he himself decided during the ceremony to present his own—the story of burying his father one week earlier. The usual practice of the clergy leading liturgies and sometimes encouraging lay people to participate is reversed here, as the laity instead drew the bishop into the ceremony.

A group of Spanish-costumed dancers perform a sad, moving dance to liturgical music before the figure of Christ entombed in flowers. To end the ceremony, *las tres Marías* in mantillas hold the instruments of the Passion on white satin cushions as members of the congregation file up to kiss the crown of thorns, the nails and the whip. Some also venerate the buried Christ figure once again before leaving for the night. With the end of the reenactments of the most important day of Holy Week for Latinos, Good Friday, the events of Semana Santa are all but finished. One final dramatic scene will be reenacted at the Easter Vigil Mass Saturday evening in which the official liturgical rituals of the Church predominate. After the lights are turned off, the Paschal candle is ceremoniously lit, everyone lights a small white candle from the flame, lengthy readings from the Old Testament are finished and several women and children run down the main aisle of the church shouting in Spanish that Christ is risen. The lights of the cathedral are suddenly turned on, joyful music is played and, after the excitement subsides, the traditional Mass continues.

Merging popular traditions that have been practiced for centuries in Spain and Latin America, the people of San Fernando Cathedral reconfigure the official liturgies prescribed by the Church for Holy Week observations. The rigors of modern life in a large urban city in the United States do not permit the elaborate week-long reenactments and public processions that occur throughout Latin America and Spain, especially Sevilla, during Holy Week. However, Latinos in San Antonio reterritorialize their ethnic religious traditions in the secular and sacred spaces in and around the cathedral that lies at the center of the city. With the encouragement of progressive clergy such as Fathers Elizondo and García,

they rebalance the emphasis traditionally given the various liturgical celebrations of Holy Week. In what is perhaps a holdover of the medieval preoccupation with death which the Spaniards brought to the New World at the time of the Conquest, the re-enactment of the Passion and death of Christ are the most elaborate spatially and temporally. In this revised scenario, the feasts of Palm Sunday and Holy Thursday serve as rising action to central drama of the lengthy ritual displays and reenactments of Good Friday, and the Holy Saturday Easter Vigil functions as falling action. In these special ritualized moments that are both out of the ordinary yet strongly imbued with elements of the ordinary, most participants see a continuum of popular and official religion, rather than a dichotomy between the two. The border between official and popular religiosity becomes porous, as do the separations between secular and sacred space, the material and the spiritual, and the present and the past.

Nonetheless, as Linda Hutcheon has noted with respect to the border erosion of postmodern art, divisions and separations do not disappear even as they are transcended (37). Secular and sacred space retain their distinct material presences before, during, and after popular religious expression calls them into question. It is precisely the distinction between the two realms that gives the event or practice its special character and salience. There is a sense of empowerment when ethnic religious ritual takes over the downtown streets of San Antonio, when a procession with the statue of *Nuestra Señora de la Soledad* deliberately leaves the church and proudly displays itself amid the busy secular life of the city, or when the pre-Nativity reenactment of the *posada* ritually revisits civil sites that seem inhospitable to Latinos in everyday life. Archbishop Flores retains his hierarchical identity while engaging in the humbling activity of carrying the heavy cross. The instruments of the Passion do not lose their ancient historical ritual presence when they are integrated into this twentieth-century religious observance. The powerful, material objects and rituals reconfigured by Latino Catholics in San Fernando Cathedral do not erase all of the border tensions, social problems, or suffering of this diasporic community, but reterritorialize its presence in the U.S. as a vibrant, self-assured people of faith and action.

Notes

[1] The weekly Sunday bulletin of the parish terms San Fernando Cathedral "The Oldest Cathedral Sanctuary in the United States: Founded in 1731." The original church was built from 1738 to 1750, and the walls of that church form the sanctuary of the present cathedral. Quite similarly, the adobe chapel of La Conquistadora in the St. Francis Cathedral in Santa Fe, New Mexico, was constructed in 1717. It was formally named a cathedral (the site of the bishop's throne or "cathedra,") with the arrival of Bishop Lamy in August 1851. The church of San Fernando was named a cathedral in 1874. See Chávez, 1, 21, and 45; and Matovina, "Development of a Tradition," 52.

[2] Elizondo was appointed Rector by Archbishop Patrick Flores who in 1970 became the first Mexican-American bishop in the United States. Appointed Archbishop in 1979, Flores is the only Mexican-American in the country currently holding this office.

[3] For a key study of a wide variety of material objects in popular use within American Christianity, see McDannell. For an analysis of the interaction between viewer and image at work in some of the key sacred objects of devotion in San Fernando Cathedral, see Morgan, 50-54.

[4] For an excellent study of San Martín de Porres through the optics of semiotics, subaltern studies theory, and narratology, see García-Rivera.

[5] That is, the milieu and religious traditions widely practiced before the Council of Trent (1545-1563). For a discussion of some of these traditions, see Swanson, and Espín, 148-74.

[6] See, for example, the remembrances of Mary Helen Ponce in her autobiography *Hoyt Street*. She notes that even before Vatican II, Mexican immigrants in her community in Pacoima, California in the 1940s traveled to the church at La Placita in downtown Los Angeles or to the shrine of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos in Sunland to carry on popular religious rituals when their own priest discouraged them from engaging in their popular traditions.

[7] For a contextualizing of the San Antonio Holy Week ceremonies see Rourke. Goizueta (32-37) analyzes the popular Latino rituals practiced during the Tridium in San Fernando Cathedral. For a description of the elaborate Holy Week ceremonies in Guatemala, see Williams.

[8] See www.sfcathedral.org for pictures of Holy Week rituals in the Cathedral, and the excellent video *Soul of the City: Alma Del Pueblo*. Prod. Adán Medrano, Mexican-American Cultural Center, San Antonio. Videotape. 1996. (A website with images and audio from the videotape may be found at: www.jmcommunications.com/movies/soul.)

[9] Many of the details I describe here are based on my participation in the Holy Week rituals at San Fernando in April 1998, thanks to the generous invitation of Father Virgilio Elizondo and Timothy Matovina and the support of the Lilly Endowment. Twenty scholars took part in the "San Fernando Holy Week Conference, 1998" to observe and analyze this important example of Latino popular religiosity.

[10] Elizondo notes that parish societies such as the Guadalupanas and the St. Vincent de Paul Society work with high school students to distribute the bread after it is blessed to the sick and others who are unable to attend the service. See *Christianity and Culture* 187.

[11] While, strictly speaking, the reenactments of Palm Sunday and the Last Supper might be said to be the first scenes of the Passion Play, they function in fact as a prelude to the dominant performance of Holy Week on Good Friday. The act performed in the side garden as people re-enter and leave the church again at the end of the Holy Thursday service is different from the preceding episodes and signals the official beginning of the street drama that will take place the following morning. In scale, spectacle, and dynamism, it foregrounds itself as part of the Passion Play rather than as the final element of the Holy Thursday liturgy.

[12] For an important record of another Passion Play in which local people played roles and carried hand-carved statues in procession to reenact the events, see Steele.

[13] For stunning visual images and a detailed analysis of the Sevilla processions, see Gómez Lara and Barrientos.

Works Cited

Chávez, Fray Angélico. *The Santa Fe Cathedral of St. Francis of Assisi*. Santa Fe, NM: Archdiocese of Santa Fe, 1995.

Elizondo, Virgilio P. *Christianity and Culture*. San Antonio: Mexican American Cultural Center Bookstore, 1975.

———. "Conversations with God." *San Fernando Cathedral: Soul of the City*. By Virgilio P. Elizondo and Timothy M. Matovina. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998. 53-67.

———. "Mestizo God," draft typescript, Sept. 1996.

———. "The Sacred in the City." *San Fernando Cathedral: Soul of the City*, 81-97.

Espín, Orlando O. "Popular Catholicism among Latinos." *Hispanic Catholic Culture in the U.S.* Ed. Jay P. Dolan and Allan Figueroa Deck. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1994. 308-59.

García-Rivera, Alex. *St. Martín de Porres: The "Little Stories" and the Semiotics of Culture*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995.

Goizueta, Roberto S. *Caminemos Con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995.

Gómez Lara, Manuel J. and Jorge Jiménez Barrientos. *Guía de Semana Santa en Sevilla*. Sevilla: Tabapress, 1992.

Gutiérrez-Mier, John. "In Christ's Footsteps: Thousands Turn Out for Passion Play." *San Antonio Express-News* 19 April 2000. http://www.mysanantonio.com.

Hutcheon, Linda. *The Politics of Postmodernism.* New York: Routledge, 1989.

Matovina, Timothy M. "Development of a Tradition." *San Fernando Cathedral: Soul of the City.* By Virgilio P. Elizondo and Timothy M. Matovina. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998, 25-41.

———. "Memories Create a People," in *San Fernando Cathedral: Soul of the City*, 17-22.

McDannell, Colleen. *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America.* New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1995.

Morgan, David. *Visual Piety: A History and Theory of Popular Religious Images.* Berkeley: U of California P, 1998.

Ponce, Mary Helen. *Hoyt Street.* Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1993.

Rourke, Mary. "A Return to Ritual," *Los Angeles Times* 28 Mar. 1997, E-1+.

Steele, Thomas J., ed. and trans. *Holy Week in Tomé: A New Mexico Passion Play.* Santa Fe, NM: The Sunstone Press, 1976.

Swanson, R. N. *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215-c. 1515.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995

Williams, Bette Kay. "Guatemala's Awesome Holy Week." *St. Anthony Messenger* Apr. 2000: 24-29.