“Just Rules” for a “Religiosity of Simple People”: Devotional Literature and Inquisitorial Trials in Cartagena de Indias (17th–18th Centuries)

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1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to establish a dialogue between the archive of an Inquisition tribunal and the works written, published, translated, abridged, and selected by jurists and theologians in order to explain how to prosecute the different cases, and how to practise the “true” Christian doctrine in daily life. Understanding the activities of the Inquisitorial court is not restricted, then, to what is written in the court’s proceedings, nor are the proceedings themselves strictly limited to references to the tribunal. Rather, I shall show that such proceedings must necessarily be associated to other sources useful for the court’s everyday work. In particular, I shall take into account some leaflets [*cartillas*] and “small pieces” [*obritas*] which describe the methods used for instructing people and how “remedies were searched” for the “minor heresies” dealt with at the court.

The daily work at this court was not characterised exclusively by prosecutions against the “major heresies” of the Muslim, Jewish or Protestant populations. Rather, it mainly aimed at the practices of people who, in the 17th century of this cosmopolitan Caribbean port, constituted a variegated aggregate of “superstitious” Christians.¹ Based on a detailed analysis of the court’s proceedings and reports [*relaciones*], of the available letters exchanged and the books consulted, we see that the court members needed handbooks and “small pieces” [*obritas*] to expound in a short, compiled way and in plain language how “true devotions” should be practised without lapsing into the risks of superficial approaches and religious vices.

1 The Inquisitorial court of Cartagena de Indias had jurisdiction over the New Kingdom of Granada (including the dioceses of Santa Fe de Bogotá, Cartagena, Santa Marta, Panamá, Popayán, Santa Fe de Antioquia, Cáceres, Venezuela, Isla Margarita) as well as over the *Audiencia* de Santo Domingo (Santo Domingo, Trinidad, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and Santiago de Cuba), see AHN, Inquisición, L.282, 329 fols., fol. 51v.

The purpose of this chapter is, then, to examine the sources used at the Inquisitorial court of the trading port of Cartagena de Indias, with the aim of exploring how their officials tried to encourage and spread pious norms and behaviours among a great number of people charged for their "excesses", "vices", and "offenses". To this end, they used short "leaflets for prosecuting" [*cartillas para procesar*] and also resorted to educational handbooks to instil the practice of licit devotions. In these documents we can observe how the judges and their consultants endeavoured to rectify a series of practices deemed "erroneous" by giving "simple and useful" instructions to "redress" the Christian cult as it was practised in wide portions of the local society. Starting from a brief overview about the kind of "superstitious" practices labelled as "minor" causes or errors, resulting from "ignorance", "trickery" [*embuste*], or "fraud" [*fraude*], we shall try to elucidate the type of moral-theological knowledge adduced by these judges and the remedies they proposed. The changes introduced into prayers and sacred words during the proceedings themselves are very interesting, as well as their direct relation with circulating devotional books, which were one of the instruments chosen to give instruction about oral religious practices. Devotional literature offered practical indications as to how to recite prayers, comply with *novenas*, follow the mass and perform actions involving holy water in domestic premises. It also prescribed how customary usages should be included in the calendar of Christian holidays and the commemoration of the saints. The use of devotional books had the purpose of changing superstitious excesses into pious oral practices. Within a wide range of such books, we will describe the characteristics of those deemed most "effective" and "healthiest" in the context of the Caribbean district.

In what follows, I will analyse the inquisitorial prosecution of minor causes, the forms of regulating sacred prayers and the importance of the devotional books, as a theological and moral response to the practices judged by this tribunal in Cartagena de Indias.

2 The Inquisitional Prosecution of *causas leves* ("minor heresies")

Under the common label of "*causas leves*", a whole series of cases are listed, including different people prosecuted for "superstitious practices" and "fortune telling" who might have committed "errors in matters of faith" because either they worshipped God in a false way or they performed worship correctly but to false gods. In the theological-legal tradition, such "errors" ("heresies" properly or not) constituted a false way of approaching the Catholic doctrine, and deserved to be condemned because they involved an open or indirect offense

to the true God. From the 16th century onwards, we dispose of a corpus of texts² (treatises, lectures, disquisitions, epitomes, handbooks, allegations, and “small pieces”) dealing with the reprobation of superstitions, which shed light on the subtle and changing borders that delimited different types of “heresies” and “false ways” [*falsas vías*]. From 1510 to 1688 such questions as the “order of causalities”, the actions of evil, their effects, the subject’s will, the different types of pacts, the parties involved, damages, and possible benefits were intensely discussed, as well as the penalties, correctives, and licit ways of struggling against deviations.³ Circulating texts emphasised the importance of differentiating “authentic” “sorcerers” and “warlocks” from people who only appeared as such. The presence of the Devil and the source of evil had to be verified; ignorance and errors that might still be amended should also be identified. This debate became more and more complex confronted as it was with American realities, and with the fact that people of different origins – Africans, indigenous people, *mestizos*, and Europeans – were slowly understanding and embracing the expanding Christian practices.

One of the practical difficulties laid in distinguishing “minor” from “major” heresies (*errores leves* from *errores graves*, where this last category qualified the properly called “heresies”), a distinction that entailed complex theological questions discussed in learned texts. Hence, some authors emphasised the need to explain these subject matters in the form of handbooks for the judges involved, and in a more accessible language, sometimes written in Spanish. When they presented their “small pieces” to their Spanish speaking readers, early theologians justified their work by referring to the confusion derived from the great number of similar works in circulation:

2 Some of the most important sources were the following, arranged in chronological order: Arles y Andosilla, *Tractatus exquisitissimus de Superstitionibus*; Grillandi, *Tractatus de hereticis et sortilegiis*; Castañega, *Tratado de las supersticiones y hechizarias y de la posibilidad y remedio dellas*; Ciruelo, *Reprobación de las supersticiones y hechizarias*; Olmos, *Tratado de Hechicerías y sortilegios*; Vitoria, *De Magica*; Malvetius, *Tractatus de Sortibus*; Pererius, *Adversus fallaces et superstitiosas artes, id est, de magia, de observatione somniorum, et de divinatione astrologica*; Del Río, *Disquisitionum magicarum*; Suárez, *De superstitione*; Torreblanca Villalpando, *Epitome Delictorum, Sive De Magia, In Qua Aperta Vel Occulta Invocatio Daemonis intervenit*; Ruiz de Alarcón, *Tratado de las supersticiones y costumbres gentilizas que hoy viven entre los indios naturales de esta Nueva España*; Navarro, *Tribunal de supersticion ladina*; Nieremberg, *Ocultia Filosofía*; Blasco Lanuza, *Patronicio de angeles y combate de demonios*; Caldera de Heredia, *Tribunal Medicum Magicum et Politicum*; Noydens, *Práctica de exorcistas, y ministros de la Iglesia*.

3 For an analysis of literature against superstitions, see Campagne, *Homo catholicus, homo superstitiosus*.

[...] en el presente tratado se ponen mas expresamente y de otra arte. Los puntos que me parece que son necesarias [...] para quitar dudas y escrúpulos de muchos coraçones incrédulos destas cosas, por muy vivos y sotiles fundamentos y razones muy artizadas y teologales [f. 5r] [...] y en lengua Castellana, porque a todos se pueda comunicar y cada uno sea mas familiar.

Suplicote amantissimo lector, que no con sola una vez que leas lo dexes leydo, que tornándolo muchas vezes a mirar, siempre hallaras que notas, y quanto mejor entendieres la materia tanto mas lo preciaras e ponderaras muchos puntos que son dignos de ser notados. [f. 6r] [...] mas agora no esta bien seca la primera tinta del borrador quando ya esta en poder del impresor.⁴

Doctrina muy verdadera a católica sacadas de las entrañas de la más sana filosofía y teología, que por muy ciertas y claras razones arguye reprobando muchas maneras de vanas supersticiones y hechicerías, que en estos tiempos andan muy públicas en nuestra España por la negligencia y descuido de los señores prelados y de los jueces ansi eclesiásticos como seglares; a los cuales va dirigida esta obrecilla.⁵

For the judges entrusted with these matters, doctrine itself was as profuse as casuistry, so that the "sensible reader" of such works sometimes required additional tools in order to dispense justice in the trials. However, in the case of major difficulties or doubts to discern different kinds of heresies in matters of faith, consultation with one or two theologians knowledgeable in such questions was also necessary.⁶ These consultants were appointed to qualify the reported offense from the doctrina point of view, and to establish whether the accusation was pertinent, from the very moment in which the defendant was arrested until the final sentence was passed.

However, for the jurisdiction assigned to the court of Cartagena, the presence, advice, and opinion of knowledgeable theologians was not easy to obtain. From the correspondence between the district's bishops and inquisitors, and the Supreme Council of the Inquisition [the *Suprema*] in Madrid, it is

4 Castañega, *Tratado de las supersticiones y hechizarias y de la posibilidad y remedio dellas*, ed. Muro Abad, fols. 5–6.

5 Ciruelo, *Reprobación de las supersticiones y hechizarias*, fol. 6r.

6 They were required to set an example by teaching theology over twelve years, even though this requirement might be dispensed with. See Murillo Velarde, *Curso de derecho canónico hispano e indiano*, vol. 1, eds. Carillo Cázares, Pérez Ramírez and Méndez Hernández, lib. 1, tit. 14, num. 232.

evident that doctors in theology qualified to advise the local Inquisition court were not frequent among the Caribbean clergy.⁷ Most inquisitors were born in Spain and held a degree in law from Spanish universities; they often had pursued an ecclesiastical or civil career and had experience in other Inquisition courts. Prosecutors, who were graduate lawyers or held a bachelor's in law, and were in charge of promoting trials by making the necessary inquiries and pronouncing the indictment, learnt their profession by practicing with the inquisitors; the same holds true for most local commissaries of the Inquisition [*comisarios*] and people otherwise connected with the court.⁸

Both the theologians who acted as qualifiers [*calificadores*] and the inquisitors themselves were responsible for distinguishing heresies, offenses, and reprehensible practices in matters of faith. According to the doctrine, the entire People of God was liable to partake in such practices, from the most learned to the most simple and uncultivated person. The criteria used by inquisitors should discern whether the denounced practices involved communication with the Devil or some knowledge of his arts and sciences, or if they were mere “deceptions” [*engaños*], “fraud” [*frauds*], and “trickeries” [*embustes*], derived from various kinds of ignorance,⁹ as most cases in Cartagena proved to be.

Specifically, the court had to deal with cases of domestic altars and devotions paid to saints which, added to sacred objects, amulets, indigenous plants, holy water, and unknown words, were used to obtain results “out of proportion”, such as finding missing people or objects, knowing what was unknown, distancing some people or bringing them together, and also healing diseases. According to the doctrine, all such practices might be classified as offenses or false paths in the adoration of the true God; however, they were mainly

7 Medina, *La imprenta en Bogotá y la Inquisición en Cartagena de Indias*, 406–407, Ceballos Gómez, “Entre el Rey y el Papa. La Inquisición: trayectoria de una institución plurisecular”, 16.

8 Secretary of the Secret [*secretario del secreto*], attorneys of the Royal Fiscal Office [*abogados del fisco*] and defence attorneys, prosecuting attorney [*procurador*], notaries of the Secret [*notarios del secreto*], notaries of the sequestered goods [*notarios de secuestros*], general administrator of the tribunal's goods and assets [*receptor general*], accountant [*contador*], messenger [*nuncio*], doorman [*portero*], chief jailer [*alcaide de cárceles*], chief constable [*alguacil mayor*], various constables [*alguaciles*], interpreters, and jailers.

9 Nevertheless, there were several kinds of ignorance: invincible ignorance – liable to accusation – and conquerable ignorance, which included, in its turn, subtle gradations: unforgivable ignorance [*ignorancia crasa*], negligent ignorance [*ignorancia supina*], and ignorance of the law, depending on the defendant's will, knowledge, condition, and the age from which the law considered the subject was liable. See Murillo Velarde, *Curso de derecho canónico hispano e indiano*, vol. 1, eds. Carillo Cázares, Pérez Ramírez and Méndez Hernández, lib. 1, tit. 2, num. 35.

sanctioned as "minor causes" or very slight deviations [*causas leves y levísimas*]. In order to understand why they were judged in this way, we should understand firstly the kind of knowledge and the juridical, theological, and moral rationale expressed in the corresponding dossiers. In this case, we should consider not only that few proceedings were fully recorded and detailed, but also that the vast majority of the causes were very succinctly reported to the *Suprema*, and that in other cases, no sentence was passed or no formal charge was recorded. These "minor causes" for superstition are characterised, even during the preliminary investigation, by the insistence on the "acknowledgement of errors" and "repentance": defendants were told that they could "save their souls" if they replaced their "wrongful" prayers and practices with those admitted by the Church.

In the corresponding records, then, it seems that the emphasis was not on the punishment but rather on repeating these hearings until the defendants repented and showed interest in amending their behaviour, whatever the descriptions of heretical practices might have been. For example, once a group of slaves and women were interrogated, their confession was recorded stressing that they had been "deceived by the devil", "undeceived by the confessor", or that the whole matter was the result of "their own deception".

A distinction between two "false paths" may be found in the documents analysed: the first false path is associated with a bad, deliberate, deception; the second one is associated with a fiction or weakness, away from matters of faith, and most causes were classified as such. The binary thought characteristic of the age tried to distinguish between good, allowed deceptions – like the so-called "ability to ward off trickeries and injustice"¹⁰ – whereas "bad deception" might be mischief itself or a fraud [*dolo*], which involved the intention and will to deceive.¹¹ Therefore, judges had to investigate the will, the gullibility, or the conviction surrounding the effectiveness of the means used to attain certain ends, both in the case of the defendants and in the case of witnesses.

10 Murillo Velarde, *Curso de derecho canónico hispano e indiano*, vol. 2, eds. Carillo Cázares, Pérez Ramírez and Méndez Hernández, lib. 2, tit. 14, num. 107.

11 Murillo Velarde, *Curso de derecho canónico hispano e indiano*, vol. 2, eds. Carillo Cázares, Pérez Ramírez and Méndez Hernández, lib. 2, tit. 14, num. 107: "Agimus ergo in praesenti de dolo malo, qui est calliditas, fallacia, vel machinatio ad circumveniendum, fallendum, vel dicipiendum alterum adhibita cum aliud simulatur aliud que agitur [...] De dolo malo calliditas committitur tacendo, vel disimulando, fallacia, mentiendo: machinatio fit arte verborum. [...] Dolus ergo provenit ex alterius malitia: in quod differet ab errore & ignorantia; quae quidem naturaliter contingunt; item dolus committitur ex intentione dicipiendi, in quo à culpa differet, quae aperte & sine tale animo committitur".

A series of rather short causes were dealt with by resorting to the legal definition of “trickery” [*embuste*]. Although they neither implied errors in matters of faith nor did they evidence deals with the devil, they were dangerous because the defendants involved were “superstitious tricksters” who harmed the community by suggesting false ways to find lost objects and become rich. They thus propagated false paths which did not lead to the salvation of their souls, although they did not deserve a close investigation (by consultants), to the extent that this step might be omitted. Among the procedural peculiarities of the American courts highlighted in the literature, we should mention the fact that a previous authorisation of the *Suprema* to pass a sentence was no longer needed for certain trials.¹² The votes of theological advisors were all equivalent, and local commissaries of the Inquisition [*comisarios*] took on the task of collecting evidence in their districts, ratifying the witnesses through local honest people. Thus, from the mid-17th century onwards, causes labelled as major sins declined, and the number of disqualified and suspended trials increased as well as venial or slight sins involving trickeries, fraud, insanity, a weakness derived from disease, lack of a purpose or volition, even the improbable involvement of the devil, and ignorance of the doctrine. All this required a complex and open argumentation plus the deployment of the theologians’ moral virtues in order to correct the intimate beliefs of the Christian community.

Even though the number of *causas graves* diminished, we cannot assume from this fact that the tribunal was falling into decline: we should take into account its uninterrupted activity on other causes until well into the 18th century. In such causes, the Tribunal of the Holy Office retained its *raison d’être*: the internal redressing of Christians considering, however, that there was not much guilt among the weak, the ignorant, and the sick, so that the court tried to alleviate them by disqualifying, suspending, absolving, and quickly putting an end to their trials. Although the sentence brought an end to the question in need of solving, it was not the only way to address the problem. The process of redressing itself occurred in the course of confession and repentance, which might lead to another kind of remedy that did not require the final closure of the case through a sentence.

It is instructive to highlight these circumstances as they constituted the approach followed in legal proceedings when no further theological reasons were found to label “harmless practices” as heresies. In this respect, the basic tenet of scholasticism should be recalled: every heresy implies an error, but the

12 Maqueda Abreu, *Estado, Iglesia e Inquisición en Indias: un permanente conflicto*, 71; Pérez Villanueva and Escandell Bonet (eds.), *Historia de la Inquisición en España y América*, vol. 2, 652.

converse is false: not every error implies a heresy, unless it is a matter of faith.¹³ Thus, at the tribunal of Cartagena there seemed to be decreasingly fewer offenders sentenced for heretical practices, and increasingly more who needed instruction¹⁴ and reconciliation.¹⁵

The questions, answers, and formulas provided in the "leaflets for prosecuting" [*cartillas para procesar*] issued by the tribunal of Cartagena were strictly followed.¹⁶ The first penalty for all minor suspects was the *abjuratio de levi*, which implied that the defendant explicitly confessed his guilt by swearing on the Gospel that he loathed the offense committed and promised not to relapse. Thus, reconciliation with the true religion was sought.¹⁷ Such a procedure meant that prosecution came to an end because the offender had achieved an agreement as to the fault committed, had repented, and had been pardoned, so that his relationship with God and the community was restored.

However, following the instructions contained in the leaflet could also implied omitting the details of each case, silencing rather than recording, correcting discreetly, and performing smaller *autos particulares* (small celebrations) at the tribunal's chapel, as well as giving instruction on true devotions. Therefore, some women were confined in convents, hospitals, or respectable houses, with the prescription that they should attend mass until its end, recite the entire rosary, pay devotion to the saints and observe their holidays. Having reached this point, it is necessary to complement our reading of court proceedings with the "minor" religious literature barely mentioned in the prosecutions; these texts meant to support procedures and aimed at "restoring" and "redressing" the practices of these subjects by making them learn and repeat prayers, spiritual exercises, novenas, canticles, and signs befitting the "true" Christian.

This type of literature – which also had a practical purpose – was issued in an abridged format, not anymore in Latin but in Spanish, and was written in

13 Soto, *Relección del maestro fray Domingo de Soto, acerca de la herejía*, ed. Sánchez-Lauro Pérez, 52, fol. 204v, quotes St. Augustine's proposition: "Omnis haeresis est error, non tamen viceversa omnis error es haeresis, nisi sit circa materiam fidei".

14 In the case of people prosecuted by the Inquisition of Lima, René Millar highlights the efforts made by the tribunal to this end, because the court itself carried out indoctrination activities parallel to those of ecclesiastical institutions. Millar Carvacho, *Inquisición y sociedad en el virreinato peruano*.

15 Álvarez Alonso, *La Inquisición en Cartagena de Indias durante el siglo XVII*, 293 even refers to cases of women who were reconciled a second and a third time.

16 BNC, RM 98.

17 BNC, RM 98, fols. 27v–28v; Murillo Velarde, *Curso de derecho canónico hispano e indiano*, vol. 4, eds. Carillo Cázares, Pérez Ramírez and Méndez Hernández, lib. 5, tit. 34, num. 304.

plain language. The table of contents was brief, and occasional illustrations were included. All these publications had already passed the necessary process of qualification. Inquisitorial consultants told devotees that, besides their internal conviction, they were to avoid excesses, vices, or superficial attitudes in their religious practices. It is rather surprising, therefore, to discover the interest of the Inquisition in regulating oral practices, clearing doubts about the content of prayers, and establishing the legitimate forms of devotion to the saints and various patrons. The authorities tried to spread “effective tools for struggling against superstitions” in the form of “directories on piety” [*directorios de piedad*], compendia, letters, handbooks, exercises for penance, and the repentance processes themselves.

3 Regulating Sacred Formulas

From the first hearing, an oath was required from the defendant and the witnesses: that they will tell the truth, describe their genealogy and life history, and demonstrate their knowledge about doctrine. Therefore, both the Cartagena leaflets and the prosecuting instructions indicated that the judges had to pay attention to the way in which the accused made the sign of the cross, and to find out about the following questions: whether they had good knowledge of prayers; whether they recited them quickly and by heart (in Latin or in Romance); whether they repeated them correctly or committed mistakes; where and how the defendant was baptised; whether they were confirmed, whether they took communion, and if they have studied some science.¹⁸ In the different causes under study, and whatever the cultural differences between the people interrogated, a common trait of the information gained is the use of prayers to mediators in order to solve everyday problems. The manipulation of the supernatural was a common, everyday practice among the prosecuted Christians, derived from the continuous exchange of religious knowledge among them. Far from being an abstract question, in the cases explored, this attitude is reflected in various practices, such as the use of prayers and Christian sacred objects to heal diseases, locate people and objects, induce attraction between people, and alter the weather.

In a corpus of different kinds of documents from 1612 to 1791,¹⁹ 188 cases were found that reveal the use of a series of sacred formulas, the way in

18 García, *Orden que comunmente se guarda en el santo oficio de la inquisicion*, 29; BNC, RG 6981; BNC, RM 98, fol. 5v.

19 Including complete trials, the copies of which were sent to the Council of the *Suprema* at Madrid between 1612 and 1760 (AHN, Inquisición, 1620, 1621, 1623); four books

which redressing was sought, and the inclusion of such formulas as Christian practices. Among the prayers most frequently recorded, which had a greater number of versions in the Cartagena district, we may list prayers to St. Martha [*Santa Marta*],²⁰ St. Clare [*Santa Clara*], St. Helena [*Santa Elena*], St. Cyprian [*San Cebrián*], St. Erasmus [*San Erasmo*],²¹ St. Mark [*San Marcos*],²² St. Sylvester [*San Silvestre*], the Souls [*las Ánimas*],²³ the Lonely Soul [*el Ánima sola*],²⁴ the Blessed St. John [*San Juan Bendito*],²⁵ St. Christopher [*San Cristóbal*], the Holy Lady of Bethlehem [*Santísima Señora de Belén*], and the Lord of the Street [*el Señor de la Calle*],²⁶ as well as prayers to the Star,²⁷ the Sun, to the *cigarrón*, to oranges,²⁸ and many others that do not have a specific name²⁹ so that in the proceedings they were frequently referred to as spells, incantations, implorations or invocations.³⁰ All of them are present in the sources; they were either

recording *causas de fe* which served as regular summary reports for the Council, dated between 1614 and 1698 (AHN, Inquisición, L.1020; AHN, Inquisición, L.1021; AHN, Inquisición, L.1022; AHN, Inquisición, L.1023). Among the other books and documents belonging to this tribunal, the following should be mentioned: records about the visits of Martin del Real and Pedro Medina Rico between 1643 and 1651 (AHN, Inquisición, 1600, 1601, 1602, 1603); books that contain the letters exchanged between the Council and the Cartagena tribunal between 1610 and 1695 (AHN, Inquisición, L.1008–1019); books bound in calf leather [*libros de becerro*] where the confiscation, inventories, and the public auction of goods were recorded; and books containing the doctrine, decrees, questions, and Instructions; plus a whole series of archive materials about trials on jurisdictional questions, genealogies, and proofs.

20 AHN, Inquisición, L.1022, fol. 498r, also transcribed in Álvarez Alonso, *La Inquisición en Cartagena de Indias durante el siglo XVII*, 202; AHN, Inquisición, L.1022, fol. 54v, fol. 70r. Quezada Ramírez, "Santa Marta en la tradición popular", 228 distinguishes the pleading originated in France from the Mexican one which, from 1622 onwards, makes a distinction between a Good and a Bad St. Martha [*Santa Marta, la Buena y la Mala*]. Ramírez' paper collects a series of variations of these prayers. The versions recorded in Cartagena are, in their turn, variations of the Bad St. Martha.

21 AHN, Inquisición, L.1022, fol. 78r.

22 AHN, Inquisición, L.1020, fol. 27v.

23 AHN, Inquisición, L.1022, fol. 498r, transcribed in Álvarez Alonso, *La Inquisición en Cartagena de Indias durante el siglo XVII*, 202.

24 AHN, Inquisición, 1620, exp. 1, fol. 5v.

25 AHN, Inquisición, L.1023, fol. 66r.

26 AHN, Inquisición, 1620, exp. 1, fol. 28r.

27 AHN, Inquisición, 1620, exp. 1, fols. 2v, 27r, 60r; AHN, Inquisición, L.1022, fol. 79v.

28 AHN, Inquisición, L.1020, fols. 28v, 52r.

29 AHN, Inquisición, L.1022, fols. 69r, 235r; AHN, Inquisición, L.1023, fols. 43r, 243r, 353r; AHN, Inquisición, L.1021, fol. 442r; AHN, Inquisición, 1620, exp. 1, fol. 29v.

30 With regard to the Inquisition Tribunal of México, Campos Moreno (2001) has collected and analysed these magic formulas. He emphasises that neither the judges nor the accused people had a clear idea of the difference between a prayer [*oración*], an incantation [*ensalmo*], and a spell [*conjuro*], although some distinctions may be detected by

mentioned in descriptions of performed practices, or summarised and fragmented as propositions to be qualified by expert theologians. Some of them were identified by “words used in the Consecration of the Mass”,³¹ others were considered as “incomprehensible prayers”.³² Missing words and the “spells” that the defendant and the witnesses did not remember, or which were not recorded in the proceedings were, in their turn, replaced by or completed with authorised contents, thus generating new prayers and new purposes. Indeed, throughout the entirety of trials under study, we rarely find complete formulas reproduced “exactly as they were pronounced”.³³ Instead, we could identify a series of fragments belonging to different versions, where the memory lapses of the accused and of the witnesses replace one another and overlap.

Therefore, the act itself of recording such oral practices caused the prayers to be rewritten and transformed. In order that the theological advisor might qualify the prayers,³⁴ a new unified version of them was written, sometimes emphasising the heretical character³⁵ of the formulas,³⁶ or – in most cases – merely informing that no qualification had been possible or needed because

considering the form and the purpose of the invocation: “En las oraciones y los ensalmos el invocante tiene una actitud más sumisa y rogativa que en los conjuros, actitud que se ve reflejada en el modo de cómo se invoca a las divinidades y como se hace la petición. [...] En los ensalmos, el invocante señala que sólo con la intervención de la divinidad invocada se podrá realizar la curación. [...] En los conjuros, en cambio, invocación y petición adquieren un carácter imperativo” Campos Moreno, *Oraciones, ensalmos y conjuros mágicos del archivo inquisitorial de la Nueva España, 1600–1630*, 34.

31 AHN, Inquisición, L.1022, fol. 34r.

32 AHN, Inquisición, L.1020, fol. 15r.

33 AHN, Inquisición, 1620, exp. 1, fols. 60r–61r.

34 AHN, Inquisición, 1620, exp. 1, fol. 27r. “Los dichos padres aviendo visto la oración conformes dixerón que es sortilegio que sapit heresim manifeste y lo firmaron Hernando Nuñez [rector de la compañía de Jesús], Fray Bartolomé del Toro [de la orden de Santo Domingo], fray Lucas Ramirez [de la de San Francisco], Antonio Agustín [padre de la compañía de Jesús] Fray Sebastian de Chumillas [guardián del convento de San Diego]” AHN, Inquisición, 1620, exp. 1, fols. 27v, 28r, 28v, 29r, 29v.

35 The use of the formula “sapit heresim manifeste” in the quotation above refers to: “Forma sententie inmurationis cum signo hostie rotunde contra persona aliquam, que de et cum corpore Christi sortilegium aut maleficium aloquod perpetravit”; see Hansen, *Quellen und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Hexenwahns und der Hexenverfolgung im Mittelalter*, 54.

36 “Al comparar estas dos versiones de la oración, se hace evidente la necesidad inquisitorial de reducir el poder de la oración al distorsionar su contenido pasando de una fuerza de influencia sobre la movilidad y proximidad ajenas a un ejercicio de animalización [que ladre como perro, rebuzne como asno o cante como gallo] que confirmara el pacto con el demonio en términos demonológicos”. Díaz Burgos, *Fisuras inquisitoriales, voces femininas y hechicería en Cartagena de Indias*, 217.

the analysed material contained examples of venerated prayers to saints recognised by the Church.

Such prayers and formulas were, nevertheless, problematic when they were associated with additional practices and ingredients that placed them into a new context as regards their religious use. This change was one of the main causes that required not only prosecution, but also qualification and re-dressing. For example, some of these prayers were combined with the use of holy water, which was taken from the churches to domestic premises with various purposes: to be sprinkled on people and things,³⁷ to be administered as a medicine, mixed with the holy palm and "eggshells from Asunción",³⁸ to be transformed into scented water and sprayed on fishnets in order to bring about a rich catch.³⁹ Similarly, the candles and crosses "taken from a church which had a tabernacle",⁴⁰ were thought to have special effects in everyday domestic situations where healing and communication with the supernatural was involved.

Although most prayers and the worship of certain representations of saints and virgins were already known in Europe, as well as their combination with water, candles, and crosses, one of the American peculiarities was their extended use with indigenous herbs. Among the plants most frequently mentioned in the proceedings are the *haya* or coca, the *bassa*,⁴¹ herbs from the lowlands,⁴² those coming from the indigenous village of Tolú, *guaco* plants, other herbs used by Afro-American people of the Mandinga nation,⁴³ herbs growing in house yards, and many others that Indians had taught Christians to chew in combination with their prayers. The Inquisition especially tried to discover their hallucinatory or therapeutic effects, and to find for them equivalent European or American names,⁴⁴ assimilating them to coca, which served ritual and religious purposes and also had healing effects. White and mulatto women and Afro-American people used to pray and chew these herbs, which caused a

37 AHN, Inquisición, L.1022, fol. 54v.

38 AHN, Inquisición, L.1021, fol. 409r, see Álvarez Alonso, *La Inquisición en Cartagena de Indias durante el siglo XVII*, 203–204.

39 AHN, Inquisición, L.1022, fol. 510r.

40 AHN, Inquisición, L.1022, fol. 64r.

41 AHN, Inquisición, L.1022, fol. 170r.

42 AHN, Inquisición, L.1022, fol. 150v; "tierra caliente" meaning "tierras bajas".

43 AHN, Inquisición, L.1021, fol. 176.

44 "la vio mascar a indios y blancos y vender en la plaza [... hasta el consejo quiso averiguar] qué manera se tiene por supersticiosa y efectos que obra, y a que hierba corresponde en los Reinos de España", AHN, Inquisición, L.1023, fol. 219v, quoted in Álvarez Alonso, *La Inquisición en Cartagena de Indias durante el siglo XVII*, 204.

heavy slumber; they were also spit on hands,⁴⁵ applied to the body,⁴⁶ sprinkled on handkerchiefs, and drunk in infusions.⁴⁷

The most widely circulated prayers consisted of simple rhythmic and repetitive structures,⁴⁸ which were easy to learn, use, and spread among Christians. Besides these texts so highly appreciated in practice, additional images and pictures in “parchment or coarse paper” [*papelón*] circulated in a “seasoned” [*aderezada*] way among the defendants.⁴⁹

Although in the Iberian peninsula and in other parts of Europe, treatises on astrology, alchemy, and magic, as well as collections of spells, incantations, and magic practices circulated and were condemned by the Inquisition,⁵⁰ their usage, presence, and application in American territories is unknown. However, we do know how prayers circulated through novenas, the saints’ epitomes, and devotional books⁵¹ – of a portable size and low cost – which explained how and where prayers should be used: they prescribed the correct way of reciting them, at which hours of the day, and that they should observe the calendar of the saints.⁵² Inquisitorial proceedings dealt with the use of religious prayers and were also concerned with diffusion of Christian practices, as may be seen in handbooks for priests – so that they might properly perform exorcisms – in

45 “[El Hayo] es el principal y cuasi inseparable medio, misturada con otros ingredientes y aplicada al fuego, escupida en las manos para (por las rayas o caracteres que en ellas deja) decir que vienen en conocimiento de lo que consultan y desean saber por este medio, [...] tan frecuentado en la ciudad de Santa Fe y sus circunvecinas y en la de Popayán y su provincia, que no sólo corre entre personas de ínfima calidad, sino es que toca en algunas de mayores obligaciones”. Medina, *La imprenta en Bogotá y la Inquisición en Cartagena de Indias*, 340.

46 AHN, Inquisición, 1620, exp. 1, fol. 6v.

47 AHN, Inquisición, L.1022, fols. 171v–172r.

48 Such as composing anaphoras, epiphoras, parallel constructions, repetitions, and homophone cadences, which are studied in Campos Moreno, *Oraciones, ensalmos y conjuros mágicos del archivo inquisitorial de la Nueva España, 1600–1630*, 38–41.

49 AHN, Inquisición, 1620, exp. 1, fols. 49, 56.

50 Historiography refers permanently to the Key of Solomon [*la Clavícula de Salomón*], the book of Saint Cyprian [*libro de San Cipriano*], the Treasury of prayers and miracles of the Holy Cross at Caravaca [*Tesoro de milagros, oraciones de la cruz de Caravaca*], and the Red Dragon [*el Dragón rojo*].

51 This becomes evident in the listings that include 762 religious and devotional titles; see Álvarez Santaló, “Adoctrinamiento y devoción en las bibliotecas sevillanas del siglo XVIII”, 22, 28, 31–32.

52 Pedro Guibovich comments that, being small and of low cost, devotional books were “an attractive source of income for booksellers”. Book sales in Hispano-America prove that the belief in the magic power of prayers was widespread in the population. Guibovich Pérez, “Piedad popular y Contrarreforma: los devocionarios en el virreinato del Perú”, 225.

the enthusiastic recommendation of *novenas* and relics to heal sick people, or in the transmission of formulas to resolve conflicting relationships.

Among healing practices, a flexible and narrow line dividing accepted pious practices from those censored as superstitious, can be discerned. Such is the case of a whole series of treatments prescribed for various complaints and diseases; these activities should always be preceded by "pious practices: litanies, psalms, recitations of the liturgy",⁵³ and devout invocations to the Virgin, the Holy Trinity, the Most Blessed Sacrament, the saints, and the sign of the cross in order that healing might be achieved. For the tribunal of Cartagena, some everyday practices aroused special suspicions: medicines for conception,⁵⁴ pregnancies, births, and miscarriages,⁵⁵ as well as practices carried out by Afro-American slaves⁵⁶ to cure people affected by the evil eye,⁵⁷ snake bites, ulcers,⁵⁸ toothaches, haemorrhages, contusions, fevers, and tertian fevers [*malarias*].⁵⁹ In these procedures, the use of Christian symbols played the same role of other remedies in traditional cures – such as herbs, bark, and honey – which were applied until the element symbolising the disease was finally expelled through the wound or through the mouth.⁶⁰ In the trials, reference is made to some priests who recommended the use of amulets,⁶¹ to surgeons that cured with holy water, to pious slaves who recovered their health when they commended themselves to a certain image, and also to monks who used indigenous purgatives.

Prayers were also a part of divinatory practices, such as the procedure called the "suerte del huevo" (test of the egg), where the prayer to St. John plus Three

53 Such as headaches, stomach swelling, chronic fatigue, insomnia, sexual impotence, dizziness, anxiety, etc., see Aspell de Yanzi Ferreira, "El Tribunal de la Inquisición en América. Los comisarios del Santo Oficio en Córdoba del Tucumán en el siglo XVIII", 275.

54 Lux Martelo, *Las mujeres de Cartagena de Indias en el Siglo XVII*, 132–133.

55 AHN, Inquisición, L.1022, fols. 509v–510r.

56 Among the main experts in these healings, mention should be made of the following Afro-American people: Francisco and Antonio Mandinga, Pedro Congo, Lorenzo García, Domingo López, Juan de Salcedo.

57 Domingo de la Ascensión cured more than thirty people from the "evil eye" by invoking Jesus, the Virgin and the Eucharist; see Álvarez Alonso, *La Inquisición en Cartagena de Indias durante el siglo XVII*, 204.

58 Lorenzo García used this method to cure an Afro-American woman whose name was Paulita, by applying basil and honey to the sore and making the sign of the cross over it; see Álvarez Alonso, *La Inquisición en Cartagena de Indias durante el siglo XVII*, 204.

59 Ceballos Gómez, *Quyen tal haze que tal pague: Sociedad y prácticas mágicas en el Nuevo Reino de Granada*, 201–202.

60 AHN, Inquisición, L.1021, fols. 176, 304r; AHN, Inquisición, L.1023, fol. 353r.

61 AHN, Inquisición, 1620, exp. 1, fols. 15v–16r.

Creeds recited at certain specific days and hours, contributed to determine the interpretation given to an egg which had been immersed in water. The aspect of the egg determined an affirmative or negative answer to questions about future events, such as the arrival of galleons, the location of missing people, and future weddings.⁶²

The Inquisition tried to eliminate the use of sacred prayers for such “vain goals” by imposing spiritual penances, during which the accused people had to repent from the use they had made of prayers and images. Assuming the “attitude of a penitent”, they should take part during the next years in pilgrimages to sanctuaries and processions, reciting the Rosary with correctness,⁶³ regularly and orderly, besides attending the mass regularly, confessing, fasting, and mortifying themselves through humiliation.⁶⁴ This procedure sought to transform “slightly superstitious” customs into pious practices toward the saints, devotions, holidays, and other advisable usages – hence, the importance of teaching the correct prayers to the representations accepted by the Church, using the accurate words and the prescribed rhythm, and repeating them the prescribed number of times, as indicated in devotional books. Another aim was to restrict the uses of holy water and the sign of the cross, and also, to spread among the population the custom of saying the grace before meals, and many other “effective instruments to struggle against superstition”.⁶⁵

4 Concluding Remarks. Devotional Books as a Juridical, Theological and Moral Response

Within all this literature against superstition, one of the subjects of the greatest concern for theologians was that anyone might use and manipulate the words (prayers) and religious objects meant for God.⁶⁶ However, the uninterrupted series of trials for superstition shows differing stances and stages along these two centuries: we find repression among the first 17th-century inquisitors, but also, in proceedings about cures in the 18th century, the acceptance

62 AHN, Inquisición, L.1023, fol. 66r–66v.

63 AHN, Inquisición, L.1021, fol. 396v.

64 Álvarez Alonso, *La Inquisición en Cartagena de Indias durante el siglo XVII*, 192, 216.

65 Campagne, *Homo catholicus, homo superstitiosus*, 428, presents a comparative table of three treatises against superstition and the “rituals that may licitly replace baroque Catholicism”.

66 Such as the use of sacred and consecrated objects (holy water, candles, prayers, holy oil, consecrated wine, religious images and relics).

of new uses for prayers, as well as a consequent change of attitude towards religious devotions, contexts, and experiences that were progressively considered harmless for Christianity. Far from being considered the isolated practices of a few Christians, the effectiveness of some patronages, and their presence in domestic, everyday circumstances paved the way to their inclusion into the Christian way of life of the various types of Christians living in the Inquisitorial district of Cartagena de Indias.

Although superstition was defined in the 16th century as an aggregate of practices characterised by excess and an improper way of worshipping the true God, the rectifications and redresses introduced throughout the 17th and 18th centuries meant that those "excesses" were reassessed as another kind of religiosity – one that was considered useful and "healthy" for spreading the Christian way of life among the wider population. It was an activity carried out by religious orders and the secular clergy through the promotion of brotherhoods, the devotion paid to images, religious holidays, and a whole series of pious deeds and daily exercises. Thus, the notion of religiosity began to include doctrine and also the various ways in which religion was lived; it no longer emphasised "errors", "falseness" or the "people's ignorance" but rather the inclusion and the "sedimentation of the official religion"⁶⁷ among the various people that were adopting Christianity. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, theology as a knowledge specialised in interpreting Christian truths and dogmas had the difficult task of distinguishing between learned devotion and its own progressive differentiation from baroque expressions and manifestations, which gave occasion to the ambiguities and flaws of a different communication with the supernatural. Therefore, in this period of a progressive distancing movement between the "religion of the learned" and the "religiosities of the simple", some very useful books were published about the way of "redressing the devotion of Christian people",⁶⁸ as well as directories on piety which accepted different ways of living religion stressing that the limits between these ways and superstitions were rather blurred. Indeed, the role of pious laywomen [*beatas*] as participant witnesses of superstitions proved that those limiting borders were quite narrow; these cases illustrate how much judges and theologians "feared popular piety".⁶⁹

67 "La religiosidad popular no se constituye con los restos de una ignorancia secular del pueblo, sino en el proceso también secular de asentamiento de la religión oficial". García García, "El contexto de la religiosidad popular", 29.

68 Muratori, *La devoción arreglada del christiano*, ed. Perez Pastor.

69 Such is the case of the pious laywomen Francisca Hernández – see Giles (ed.), *Mujeres en la Inquisición*, 99 and Carlota de Esquivel, see Díaz Burgos, *Fisuras inquisitoriales, voces femininas y hechicería en Cartagena de Indias*, 130–131.

Such need to transform “superstitious” practices was also a challenge for theological thought, which had understood how useful it was to express the Christian doctrine in simple devotional works in order to promote pious practices. Devotional books were a form of explaining and impressing the doctrine by means of simple oral practices. It should not come as a surprise, then, that the most widely circulated devotional books in America were written by eminent European theologians and jurists. For example, in the 18th century, copies of the different editions of Muratori’s handbook translated into Castilian⁷⁰ were catalogued in several private and convent libraries. In the prologue, the translator stresses the usefulness of the book:

[...] [el pueblo español] carecía hasta ahora de un Libro, que en breve compilase, y diese las mas justas reglas, para conducirse en su devoción. Ninguna Nación (y se puede decir con verdad) tiene Autores mas insignes, y piadosos, y que con mayor pureza hayan guiado a las almas devotas por el seguro camino espiritual.⁷¹

As Muratori’s translator suggested, among such an abundant supply of devotional books and the fast appearance of new publications, “small pieces” were needed to explain how to distinguish between “superficial”, “vain devotions” or those having “a substance of superstition”, from “true” devotions aimed at instructing.⁷² However, the translator warns that the new edition differs from the original in so far as he omitted clauses that only learned theologians might understand, as well as debates “designed for another Nation” and prayers in Latin, so that the book might be more useful for a wider readership, thus accommodated to new contexts, although faithful to the “sound original doctrine”.

70 “Compuso esta Obrita en el año 1747, y en el mismo la imprimió en Venecia, donde se reimprimió en los siguientes de 748, y 752: en Florencia, y Trento en 1749, y dos veces en Nápoles, aunque con la data de Trento en 1750. Se tradujo al Aleman en 1753, y al Latin en 1760. La traducción Espanola se ha hecho por la impresion de Venecia de 1748”. Nota del traductor Miguel Perez Pastor en: Muratori, *La devoción arreglada del christiano*, ed. Perez Pastor, 2.

71 Muratori, *La devoción arreglada del christiano*, ed. Perez Pastor, 5.

72 “Mi asunto primario en esta Obrita es dar a entender en que consiste justamente la verdadera, y solida devocion, distinguiendola de las devociones superficiales, y apuntando ligeramente otras, que tienen apariencia, o tal vez la substancia de supersticion”. Author’s Prologue, Muratori, *La devoción arreglada del christiano*, ed. Perez Pastor, 20–21.

En el capítulo 2 se ha omitido una cláusula, que aunque contiene doctrina sumamente sana, podía al parecer de algunos Teólogos, entenderse mal por el que no estuviese mas que medianamente instruido en la Teología; y por evitar aun este leve tropiezo, pareció medio fácil el omitirla.⁷³

No tiene duda que hay grande distancia entre traducir una Misa para sola instrucción de los ignorantes, y el querer que el Sacrificio se celebre en vulgar, o afirmar, que celebrar la Misa en lengua que entendiese el Pueblo, sería más útil que la santa práctica de la Iglesia. [...] En prueba de esta diferencia han sido aprobadas, y tenidas por útiles las traducciones de la Misa.⁷⁴

Devotional books translated and continuously republished were one of the instruments developed by “wise theologians” to instruct “ignorant” people and “train them in the genuine Christian devotion”. By the 17th and 18th centuries, however, the task of “regulating devotion” entailed a series of premises about the ideas of “religiosity” and “popular devotion”. Learned theologians succeeded in differentiating the way in which they themselves understood the doctrine and the way in which it was most usefully transmitted to and practiced by other Christians who barely had any theological education. Thus, learned devotion would be practised by a small elite of wise men, whereas popular religiosities and devotions – which did not belong exclusively to the “lower” sectors or certain *castas* – would be practised by common people. As evidenced in inquisitorial trials, Spanish, Creole, and *mestizo* elites also took part in such practices, as well as some members of the religious orders and the secular clergy. Beyond their individual condition and trade, all of them had common “moral flaws”, and their relation to the supernatural had peculiar external and internal characteristics suitable for their everyday needs, which were impossible to detach from ambiguous notions about disease, healing, affinities, and the future. All these practices implied great challenges, and the devotional literature was in keeping with the moral-theological and juridical updating demanded by the changing local circumstances.

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73 Muratori, *La devoción arreglada del christiano*, ed. Perez Pastor, 7.

74 Muratori, *La devoción arreglada del christiano*, ed. Perez Pastor, 9.

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