

Violence Against Sacred Images in Everyday Life in New Spain

Edelmira Ramírez Leyva

Department of Humanities. Area: History and Culture in Mexico.
Metropolitan Autonomous University (UAM)-Azcapotzalco. Mexico

ABSTRACT: During the colonial era, the Catholic Church fostered an intense relationship with sacred images in sacred sites and in private life as part of its evangelization strategy. Sacred images became widespread in New Spain (now Mexico), and clear rules on how to treat said images were established, leading to strong relationships with them, diverse imaginaries about their power, and desecration under specific circumstances. Cases in the archives of the Tribunal of the Holy Office of New Spain's Inquisition show some individuals would commit acts of desecration to sacred images during outbursts of emotion when unable to control their desires or discontent. This article aims to analyze key cases of desecration from the archives, representative of a society where the Catholic religion was the dominant ideology with clear rules on the treatment of images.

Keywords: *Desecration, Violence against sacred images, Daily life, Family violence, Viceroyalty of New Spain, 18th century*

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the traditions that the Catholic Church has defended since its inception was the veneration of sacred images, which was formally stipulated at the Second Council of Nicaea in 787 and ratified by the Council of Trent.

From the beginning of the Spanish Conquest, in the 16th century, the Catholic Church chose to use sacred images as a tool to teach the concepts of Christian doctrine to the original population; in the following centuries, after a successful evangelization, images were used to preserve faith among parishioners "without ignoring the danger of an ever-possible resurgence of the idolatrous practices of paganism" (Pope John Paul II, 2004, p. 4). Theologians of the Catholic Church recognized the advantages of using sacred images to teach religious concepts. For example, Gregorio Magno spoke of the didactic use of paintings in sacred buildings, explaining that: images in churches [...] were useful for the illiterate "to read on the walls what they were incapable of reading in books," and stressed that this contemplation should lead to the adoration of the "one and omnipotent Holy Trinity." (Gregorio Magno, n.d., cited by Pope John Paul II, 2004, p. 6)

On the other hand, in the 16th century, the Council of Trent ratified the provisions of Nicaea II, and it was precisely the recommendations of the Council that prevailed in New Spain from the 16th century. So, legislatively, the use of sacred images in New Spain was an imperative that the Church fully adhered to. Thus, the temples were decorated with the recommended sacred images, and an intense relationship with them was fostered in the population, both in sacred sites and in private life as a result of the strategy of evangelization and dissemination of Catholicism.

Over time, in the privacy of everyday life, individuals came to establish very particular bonds with sacred images, in such a way that, at certain times, devotees transgressed their very sacredness.

The aim of this analysis is to show how relationships with sacred images in everyday life in New Spain generated countless acts, not only of devotion but of violence against sacred images. While the violent acts may seem unusual for the historical moment, they were recorded by the Inquisition.

The research question is: Why would religious individuals desecrate sacred images despite the Catholic Church's rulings on how to treat them?

The study will be limited to reviewing specific cases of desecration that took place in the 18th century, when the Catholic religion was already fully established in New Spain.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Materials

To illustrate these aspects of everyday violence, we will review complaints received by New Spain's Holy Office of the Inquisition. In most cases, there's not enough information to fully understand the reasons behind acts of desecration because most of them were reported by third parties, i.e., through witnesses or hearsay. The records show incomplete fragments and many cases never recorded questioning of those accused.

For the most part, what remains of these cases is the description of the desecration as told by witnesses or accusers.

The accused individuals belonged to different social strata and were dedicated to performing various jobs or trades, so it can be deduced that desecration was a common phenomenon during the Spanish Viceroyalty.

2.2 Method

To conduct this study, key concepts on relationships between people and objects will be considered, following Bruce Bégout's perspective, outlined in his book *La découverte du quotidien* (2018). He states that "Every ordinary object contains a conventional life that is automatically evoked upon its perception and operation; it multiplies the I's that use it and give it a meaning" (p. 311).

Moreover, he explains that the everyday object becomes a receptacle for people's beliefs, because:

The familiar object is always more than the chemical precipitate of our beliefs; it goes beyond the realm of positions taken about it and imposes on us an objectified subjectivity that we have not experienced ourselves, but which we are now allowed to see and understand in the grasp of its expressiveness, in the use of its function (p.301).

However, according to Bégout (2018), objects do not only contain our beliefs, since "we must recognize that the world of objects extends our personality beyond our experiences and ideas" (p. 311) and it also presents subjectivity because, "in a certain way, the object is just as subjective as the subject that constituted it, since it is precisely both its reflection and the one who, in turn, constitutes it in perception and action" (p. 314).

In addition, according to Bégout (2018), the objects with which we interact daily also guarantee us an ordinary sense of experience. Nevertheless, as we will see later, there are times when certain events can eliminate that guarantee.

We also consider Serge Tisseron's (2018) ideas about the various relationships that human beings maintain with objects, which he exposes in his book *The Spirit of Things*. Tisseron expresses how the familiarity that we have with objects exists because "we entrust them with a part of our own humanity" (p. 151).

Tisseron (2018) describes the complexity of the connections we establish with objects, pointing out their relevant mediating role. According to him, everyday objects go from passivity, inertia, and submission to playing more complex roles when they are humanized and, from that moment on, they can have very diverse connections with people who treat objects as containers, companions, or repositories of mixed emotions, leading to an infinity of possible roles for objects in relationship with people. The cases reviewed for this article illustrate this.

Tisseron (2018) also considers relevant the concept of *reversibility*. In this regard, he states:

Taking into account these multiple facets of our relationship with objects forces us to contemplate in all cases their *potential reversibility*. Depending on the perspective we have of the object and the way we interact with it, any object can be used for what it was designed, become a door that protects our 'mind closets', or become a support for the symbolic representation of our world experiences. (p. 202)

In short, for Tisseron, objects are constituted as a support of the psychological, symbolic, and social life of individuals.

III. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Cases Studied

The everyday reasons that led to the desecration of sacred images were diverse, such as family conflicts, or anomalous personal relationships established with images. We will analyze a few cases.

To organize them, we gathered cases that illustrate the reasons behind desecration, as reported by the files consulted.

3.2. Desecration and Marriage

3.2.1. Ignacio Barroso

We explore some examples of desecration related to marital problems. First is the case of Ignacio Barroso, a Spanish man based in Guadalajara, whose case details that:

While sitting on a wicker chair and fighting with his wife (she) gave a rude response, so as he stood up to hit her, he trampled by accident the image of [Mother Mary] which was on the floor next to another chair, leading to his wife to throw herself at it: "You savage, you have trampled my Lady!" and as he noticed she was going at him, he, enraged, picked up the image and hit his wife with it, breaking the frame and scratching the canvas. (1750, f.17)

Barroso (1750) explained in his statement that he did it by accident, not out of spite, for he would have used whatever was on his way to hit her as fast as possible. He also explained why he threw an image of Christ, which he was using as his "witness" that he hadn't done any of the wrongdoings his wife was accusing him of (the source of the fight), but that she said "don't you dare use Our Lord to protect yourself" (f.17), which made him so angry that "he said to himself, 'there's no God that is valid for us' and threw the image of Christ to the floor" (f. 17).

After that, he describes his actions of repentance for desecrating the image of Mother Mary and for his unruly behavior:

He lifted the image [...] saying ‘Lord, may your Majesty forgive me, and this woman,’ and did not finish the clause (sic), which made him so emotional that he then left for the Cloister and there he ran into the priest Cecilio Antonio Caro and told him what had happened while kneeling, and the priest comforted him and said ‘Our Lord would forgive him, because he had not done it with contempt,’ and instructed him to let go of his grief. (fs.17-18)

Barroso’s wife, Doña Rosa de Lira, also stated that her husband did not act out of contempt for the images, but “that he was blind with anger for her behavior and injured her, [as] he has already declared and described before the Commissioner” (1750, f. 18).

The complaint ended with a severe rebuke to the couple by the Holy Tribunal, warning Barroso that if he trampled the images again he would be punished; and his wife, Doña Rosa de Lira, was reprimanded for the “inconsiderate anger of having shouted and announced that her husband was a heretic and a blasphemer, giving her the obligation of satisfying and restoring her husband’s reputation by the most prudent means in the town where she’d caused the scandal” (1750, f.18r).

Here we can see the image’s desecration was not intentional. It simply happened because the image was right in the middle of the couple and was merely treated as something to grab during the fight. In other words, the sacred image’s original function was completely subverted. Angry and having lost any emotional restraints, Barroso saw the image as a tool to unleash his anger when provoked by his wife. As Gubern (1996) states, “Visual perception is a cognitive and emotional phenomenon at the same time” (p. 14). Barroso, at the height of his anger, did not perceive the sacred image for what it is; he only saw an object to use against his wife out of rage.

This case exemplifies the reversibility Tisseron describes (2018, p. 205): the image went from being sacred to being an object of momentary emotional discharge, and once the emotion passed, it returned to its sacred status, but after the fact, it led to repentance on the actor.

The husband’s actions and the Holy Office’s decision also illustrate aspects of marital life and women’s position in the colonial era of New Spain. Women were the targets of violence, while the authorities of a completely patriarchal society endorsed it. However, it is noteworthy that this woman, of Spanish descent, did not allow her husband’s abuse and defended herself physically, set boundaries, spread the word around the town about his husband, and accused him before the Inquisitorial Commissioner of hitting her, even if the institution supported her husband in the end. As Escobedo (n.d.) states:

Family organization, marriage, and relationships in society at that time were patriarchal and manifested, at the micro level, the displays of power coming from the State; in other words, family policy and state policy were in harmony with one another. (p.4)

Women had two alternatives: 1) adhering to the legal and moral parameters and accepting the aggression without protest or 2) reacting against violence by protesting or resisting. This means some women chose to behave in ways that challenged male supremacy. Those who resisted or protested were the ones who questioned patriarchal authority, which sometimes led them to pay a very high price, even with their lives, for their transgression. (Escobedo, n.d., p. 5)

3.2.2 Joseph de Aguilar

For violence against sacred images due to marital problems, Joseph de Aguilar was also accused before the Inquisition. He was of Spanish descent, lived with his wife in a unit next to the headquarters of Mexico City’s military, and was a member of the Militia Regiment. In 1770 it was reported to the Inquisition that:

Simply because his wife didn’t get up quickly for something he asked for [the accuser can’t remember what] while she was breastfeeding her baby, he started beating her up; the accuser tried to calm him down, but he got on top of a platform with a Holy Crucifix with the figure of Christ carved in wood (it was on a table, for it was going to be hanged since the couple had just moved in), and the accuser saw the man had destroyed the effigy; she picked up the sculpture’s arm, and another woman called Juana Flores, sister of Aguilar’s wife [picked up] the head and other fragments after Joseph de Aguilar had trampled the Crucifix. The accuser also saw him remove his Rosary from his neck as he insulted the Rosary and God while using expletive. (f. 239r. Mexico, Inquisition Branch, vol. 1097, exp. 10, fs.238-241r)

Other accusers described Aguilar as a choleric man who would hit his wife repeatedly, but when the wife, Rosalía Flores, was interrogated, she tried to protect her husband, claiming she couldn’t remember what had happened and even going so far as to blame herself for everything, and stating she had often say, in moments of anger: “Dog, don’t you see that you threw the Holy Christ” (1770, exp. 11, f. 241r).

In this case, the same emotional pattern of extreme anger out of marital conflict emerges; Aguilar’s reaction is of such intensity and duration that his anger doesn’t go away after hitting his wife, but it continues as he climbs on a platform and starts attacking the Crucifix, which he had destroyed in a rage attack and trampled it, as well as his rosary, until calming down. Camilo Ruales (2015) makes a noteworthy observation about the relationship

between emotion and movement: “Emotion, linked to movement, leads people to certain actions; an emotion can’t be defined as a reaction, a state, a cause or an effect, but rather as part of the meaning we assign to the world around us” (p. 150).

Moreover, Aguilar’s action against the sacred object exemplifies what Tisseron (2018) says about humans’ connection with objects:

The object is not only *touched by the eyes*[...] but also manipulated and transformed in such a way that it is at the center of a dynamic in which the physical transformations that the subject imposes on it are the support of (the person’s) psychic transformations. (p. 165)

In the case of Aguilar, the manipulation of the sacred object that is desecrated and torn apart is a physical transformation that is the result of such an extreme emotional explosion that it completely erases any semblance of religious devotion and everything that sacred images represent. This can also be observed in how the sculpture’s role changed for Aguilar, exemplifying the way Tisseron (2018) speaks of the different roles that images fulfill for individuals in their interactions with them.

But Aguilar’s violent outrage against the image of Christ, as a religious person immersed in a wholly religious society, reminds us of the question that W.J.T. Mitchell poses in his book *What do pictures want?* (2005). What was so particular about this sacred image to make it the object of such an act of desecration on Aguilar’s part? Perhaps he remembered the acts of violence committed against Christ during the crucifixion, which along with Aguilar’s extreme rage and emotional intensity led him to perceive the object of devotion as an object of emotional discharge instead of something sacred. In any case, it is striking that he would do this against the most powerful and sacred symbol in his religion.

This case illustrates too the daily lives of married people in New Spain, where intimacy was limited, not only due to cohabitation, with other family members actively intervening in the marriage, but also out of the normalcy of violence against women, so much so that Aguilar’s wife tried to protect him from the Inquisition, even if she would probably be attacked by her husband again. However, in this regard, it should be remembered that male marital violence was accepted in New Spain:

In colonial society, the exercise of male authority in a couple’s relationship, whether they were married or not, implied that the man could treat his partner violently if the motive was “reasonable”, that is, if the woman behaved “badly”, the man was free to punish her “moderately but effectively.” That “moderate” and “effective” punishment, of course, could be highly violent, including beatings. In this way, violence against women, within the aforementioned parameters, was conceived as a “legitimate” prerogative by patriarchal norms. (Escobedo, n.d., p. 4)

3.2.3 Jerónimo Xaltomani

Another example is that of Jerónimo Xaltomani, who desecrated a sculpture of Christ hoping it would solve a problem. His wife had abandoned him and fled with another man. Xaltomani was a mestizo, a resident of Cholula del Barrio de Jesús Nazareno, and a weaver by trade.

A witness, Antonia Nicolasa Xicala, a neighbor of the same city and neighborhood as the accused said, when called by the Inquisition, that:

Jerónimo Xaltomani—after his wife had run away with another man—in a fit of anger, rage, and great distress, picked a figure of Christ and tied him by the feet, covered his face, and took him to a manger, and [...] a nephew of his, José Antonio Xicala [...] informed the accuser that Jerónimo Xaltomani took off his rosary so that the Devil wouldn’t be afraid of visiting him and telling him where his wife was. That’s all [the witness] had heard. (1739, f. 44r)

Jerónimo Xaltomani shows how his wife’s action of abandoning him generates a strong emotional reaction of anger. To recover his wife, Xaltomani performed actions linked to beliefs related to elements of popular religiosity coming from the Catholic Church narratives regarding the power of Jesus Christ, the Virgin, and the Saints. To perform his ritual, Jerónimo Xaltomani chose a sculpture of Jesus Christ, considered the most powerful image of Christianity, but the ritual he performed to make his wish come true was not a devotional request in and of itself, but a violent demand; he didn’t pray, he acted upon Christ’s representation on the sculpture and attacked him, punished him to solve his problems. In other words, Xaltomani set aside the sacred and canonically established function of the sculpture to use it as an object with a different function. As Bégout (2018) describes:

Beyond its immediate and functional use as part of a repertoire, the object takes part in actions that it doesn’t necessarily have engrained in its simple form, opening up a potential for new uses and future habits that exceed the typical horizon of expectation. Habituation thus consists in this constitution of the reciprocal association of object and subject, where the optimal stage is a natural, unquestioned familiarity, but which is always surrounded by a field of open, recursive possibilities.

Jerónimo Xaltomani clearly used a sacred object for a ritual, endowing it with an aura of absolute power. The status of the sacred object was changed. It was no longer a powerful object of typical devotion, but a magical one, endowed with the power to transform Xaltomani’s new reality, which he couldn’t bear: his wife’s

departure. Xaltomani made this change by desecrating the sculpture and verbally making his demands: to bring his wife back. Moreover, the desecration included the permanent punishment of tying the sculpture's feet and face and placing it on a manger until his wish was granted.

Xaltomani certainly expected a miracle, a highly common belief among Catholic devotees. As Taylor (2016) explains, "the power of miracles over imagination was based on sacred objects, particularly images of Christ and Mother Mary, and the halo of time usually enhanced its treasure of wonders"(cited by Connaughton 2018, p. 46).

Regarding adulterous women in the colonial era or in the 18th century, Macías Moya (2023) explains: When women abandoned or ran away from their homes, authorities were alerted, and they would seek them. Women were forced to return to their homes unless the atrocities they had suffered were so evident that the judges would decide to deposit them in the house of a relative or in an institution. Civil authorities, let alone ecclesiastical authorities, never intended to grant a divorce to conflictive marriages; however, problems between spouses often exceeded any intention of maintaining the bonds of marriage, especially if adultery was involved. (p. 189)

Adultery was highly punishable at the time, both by civil and ecclesiastical authorities.

The sin/crime of adultery was heavily objected to by both authorities since it broke the fidelity of marriage when one of the spouses had sexual intercourse with another person; thus, it was a serious attack on the family and the moral and social order. For this reason, the intervention of ecclesiastical authorities—which observed the married lives of their parishioners—and civil authorities—which handled the civil and criminal consequences—was everpresent in cases of adultery. (Macías Moya 2023, p. 189)

Cases of women leaving their husbands weren't unusual at the time. The files of the Inquisition show similar cases. However, as Villafuerte (2022) explains, the absence of women disrupted the daily lives of families:

The absence of women may seem less serious [than men's], but for less affluent sectors it was a serious problem, because the amount of work carried out by women, which allowed other members of the family to work and thrive, was interrupted abruptly. (p. 14)

Thus, we can better understand Xaltomani's anger. In a patriarchal society, his wife was abandoning him and running away with another man, but she was also abandoning all the work she performed at home for his benefit.

It is worth mentioning that his wife's departure was a result of Xaltomani's character and behavior: in the Inquisition's file, the Commissioner of the Holy Office describes him as an exasperated man, "drunk, at least with anger, for which more audiences are requested, to see if he calms down and apologizes for 'his deplorable acts of desecration'" (1739, f.50).

The reaction of the Inquisition to Xaltomani's acts is noteworthy, considering that, as Taylor (2016) describes, until the end of the Viceregal era, there was a widespread culture of tolerance—sometimes even encouragement—of popular beliefs and practices when it came to miracles in New Spain. This condescension endured despite a growing vigilance over shrines and miracles in the 18th century and increasingly harsher criticism from ecclesiastic and civil officials. (Taylor, 2016, cited by Connaughton, p. 60)

Moreover, the records do not offer any more information about Xaltomani's marriage, and most witnesses accusing him were his relatives.

3.3 Truth or Fiction: Desecration Because of Adultery

3.3.1 Don Manuel Cervantes

Another instance of desecration of images out of anger is the case of Don Manuel Cervantes, accused by Antonio Artiaga, a neighbor and member of the militia, before the Manila Inquisition, which was part of New Spain's jurisdiction. As the file reports, on April 7, 1787:

In the house of a Pangasinense married to Rita [the witness can't recall the last name, another Pangasinense], he saw Don Manuel de Cervantes had fought with his brother and had picked up a knife and went to the house's altar, where he stabbed a figure of Christ [crucified] in the chest, begging for justice. He then picked up the crucifix, took off Christ's arms, and tore the figure from the cross, which made the witness run to alert the landlady, and separate Don Manuel from the figure. [...] Cervantes was speaking to the figure as if it were a fellow man, attacking it and cursing it. The accuser brought forth the crucifix, which shows the sign of the stabbing and torn arms. (AGN, 1718, f. 354)

According to Artiaga's statement, Don Manuel Cervantes had humanized the sculpture of Christ, demanding justice. If the account were true, this interaction would be an example of what Tisseron (2018) categorizes as the "tendency to peripheralize the psychic life," warning that objects "are not only extensions of our motor or sensory organs, but are, fundamentally, extensions of our mind. This way, the organ is not extended to an object, but the desires attached to it" (p. 198).

However, as we said, "if the account were true," that would be the case, for this was the version provided by the witness (AGN, 1718, F.359r), but the Inquisition concluded that Artiaga and the accused's wife

were conspiring against Don Manuel, so much so that Don Manuel himself (AGN, 1718, f.360) claimed his wife had given him poison before the accusation.

The remarkable thing about this case is how Artigas and Don Manuel's wife invented a whole story of desecration against Christ, where the protagonist is the husband of the woman who had some kind of relationship with Artigas and, for some reason, both wanted to get rid of Don Manuel, either by poisoning him or accusing him before the Inquisition so that he could be arrested.

The story concocted by Artigas and Don Manuel's wife shows that the cases of desecration and sacred images were common, known by society and the Holy Office, so much so that the accusers thought their story was believable enough for the Inquisition, showing just how aware people in Manila were of these situations.

This case also illustrates the marital problems that were generated in everyday life in the 18th century in Manila, like those of New Spain, since as Oswald Sales (2023) states:

The reproduction of the ideal Hispanic woman in Manila is a clear expression of the American model of organization brought to the Philippines that, in general, is of Mexican origin, although with substantial regional modifications, since it was intended to establish in the city of Manila a kingdom like those that had been created in the West Indies. (p. 2)

3.4 Desecration Due to Addiction

3.4.1 Francisco Ibáñez

The files also include cases of self-accusation, such as the one of Francisco Ibáñez, a native of Jalapa, of Spanish descent. A soldier and bachelor who committed several crimes, including the desecration of sacred images for his lack of money.

The prosecution was benevolent to him, perhaps because he came forth through his confessor, Juan Solís, who had convinced him to speak to the Inquisition.

Juan Solís (AGN, 1762), declared before the Commissioner of the Holy Office that Francisco Ibáñez, Spanish—born in Jalapa, where he resided, single, and soldier by profession—had made some mistakes. The first was a pact with the devil to get money.

The second was slapping a Divine Crucifix and a painting of the Holy Mary out of resentment and anger for not having money. Even though he didn't say anything, the fact itself externalizes his mistake (sic) and no one saw him. The third and final error resulting from his misery was believing there was no God and living as an atheist for eight days. (vol. 1052, file 5, f. 43r)

The lack of money he needed to gamble led to the errors and the desecration of the crucifix and the image of the Holy Mary.

The Confessor concluded his statement before the Commissioner with the following words:

These are the three mistakes or heresies [...] incurred and which I have been given the power to expose and manifest to your honor in the terms I have stated. He has shown great repentance and, despite his guilt and errors, has shown great willingness to make amends, and I've instructed him quite a few medicinal penances of prayer, acts of faith, hope, and charity [prostration on the ground, kissing it, praying the Creed on his knees, confessing, and communications on all particularities of Our Lord and the Virgin, abstinence particularly from gambling, and other penances assigned for the gravity of his faults]. (AGNM, vol. 1762, f. 43r)

The fact he confessed and agreed to accuse himself before the Inquisition, and show obedience, indicates the level of repentance, guilt, and awareness of crimes committed in terms of respect owed to images. Ibáñez was willing to expose his actions, fully aware that he would be punished or subjected to acts of penance by the Inquisition, which treated him with some benevolence, perhaps because it was a case of self-accusation or by the intervention of his confessor.

Meanwhile, Ibáñez's case of addiction to gambling is not surprising. Extreme addiction to it was common in New Spain from the early days of the colony, despite the various laws created to prevent it. As Lozano (1991) explains:

The natural inclination of Spaniards, Creoles, Indians, and mestizos spread to all sorts of games, especially to those based on luck, which were practiced across all social strata, leading, according to authorities, to the separation and ruin of many illustrious families and fostering idleness and the less rigid customs among those who played. (p. 157)

In this regard, specialists (Sola, Rubio & Rodríguez, 2013) point out that “context has a fundamental value insofar as it can lead to the testing and development of compulsive behavior” (p. 153).

Therefore, Francisco Ibáñez's addiction was common in the times he lived in, and there must have been many others with the same problem. The way he acted was a psychological mechanism of his behavior, which, explained in modern terms, was a gambling addiction due to emotional dysregulation. But also, due to cognitive obfuscation and high levels of impulsiveness (common among people with this addiction), he forgot his religious beliefs regarding the sacred images of Christ and the Virgin. Manero and Zafra (2020) explain the topic of addiction and impulsivity:

Addiction is considered a brain disease because changes in the structure and functioning of the brain lead to a loss of behavioral control [...] Increased impulsivity and compulsivity in addictive processes are the result of changes in the cerebral cortex and a reduced ability to regulate behavior.

And clearly, the unrestrained impulsivity of Ibáñez led him to the desecration and other crimes he committed in his altered, uncontrollable emotional state, which is to be expected, as Porot (1971) explains: “It is an imperative desire, abruptly rising in some subjects, leading them to commit certain unfounded, sometimes brutal or dangerous acts” (as cited by Franco 2017, p. 9).

For a moment, Ibáñez changed his perception of sacred objects. While out of control, and in need of money for gambling, he forgot the sacredness of the object, but after the emotionally charged moment, he returned to the usual relationship of devotion and reverence with the object. This case illustrates Bégout’s (2018) statement:

For every human artefact (whether it is a tool, a work of art, or an institution, following the three Husserlian categories of “objects invested with spirit”), there is a passive background of dispositions, potentialities, sedimentations, and implicit expectations that allow us to speak of an unconscious of the object. (p. 3)

3.5. From Sacred Object to Family Object

3.5.1.1 José Giral

Some cases show that the cause behind acts of desecration could be so trivial that it speaks of the relationships people established with sacred images in the privacy of their homes. The sacred image of Christ, imbued with supernatural power, is seen as a giver or as something to solve problems, both big and small. This final example relates to a “small” problem. José Giral, Catalan, between the ages of 22 and 23, single, scribe at the Notary, was accused before the Holy Office because:

One day, while expecting to receive a cloak, he spoke to a (figure of Christ) on top of his bed and said, “[...] Holy Christ of the Demons, if I don’t receive my cloak, I’ll make you pay,” and putting his hand to the sword pricked (the figure), making the Holy image fall to the ground, breaking one of (the figure’s) arms. (AGN, 1783, f. 103)

Apparently, he had done this before. Another accuser, Francisco Feyjo, declared to the Holy Office, “The image of Our Lord Christ crucified [on the head of Giral’s bed] had the right arm broken, was missing one of the three powers as well as the toes” (AGN, 1783, p. 97-97r).

In this case, the sacred image’s function is dual: it is an image of worship and an object of use or tool, but not completely desacralized, for in the transit from an object of worship to a tool, Giral was fully aware of whom he was interacting with. Giral simply humanized Christ and treated him with excessive familiarity, establishing, based on the accusations found, a relationship of constant violence where he demanded, by desecrating the figure, a solution to irrelevant situations not worthy of the power of Christ. And the way Giral treated the image, and his expectations, are a far cry from what the Catholic church prescribed for the usage of sacred images.

This case illustrates what can happen after daily interactions, or “quotidian frequenting,” as described by Bégout (2018):

Thanks to this quotidian frequenting, every object becomes the blueprint of people’s functional and bodily projections. In their design or use, they are not granted with only one particular meaning, i.e., an instrumental purpose, but also with a whole variable spectrum of symbolic, cultural and affective values, which pass either through conscious intentions or through usual activities. (p. 306)

Moreover, it is noteworthy that this case is complex. Some of the accusers believed José Giral was Jewish, in which case the desecration would have another connotation since the actions of Jewish people against sacred images of the Catholic Church were the reason cases of desecration began to be categorized in New Spain (under the term “conculcación” in Spanish). However, some witnesses deny the statements of the accusers and of other witnesses, which led the Holy Office Commissioners to keep the case open and ask for further research on José Giral.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we can observe that the 18th century in New Spain was a time of anomalous relationships with sacred images, outside of what was established by the Council of Trent and the precepts of the Catholic Church.

The intimate relationships that people developed with sacred images (which the Catholic church distributed, presented, and narrated so insistently) led to a wide variety of personal ways to perceive them and interact with them. These relationships would go from pure devotion to various forms of alienation such as the ones presented here. Many of them were linked to extreme emotional reactions including outbursts of anger, frustration, resentment, and hatred, in which loss of emotional control due to various everyday circumstances would alter the perception of sacred images.

In other cases, violent acts against images were linked to demands and complaints derived from personality traits, temperament, beliefs, context, and expectations.

The hierarchical perception of power attributed to divine beings represented in the images, as taught by the church, played an important role in the imagination of desecrators, to the extent that some devotees believed those images could solve any problem, big or small, or even produce miracles.

Moreover, though we saw individual cases of desecration—to which the Holy Office reacted with tolerance and benevolence—the number of accusations indicates they were symptomatic of a highly religious society, which should be analyzed to understand what was happening in everyday life in that society.

This historical moment shows the consolidation of sacred images in society and the wide variety of relationships produced among devotees in their private lives. This wasn't exclusive to the times. Violent relationships with sacred images have continued to this day, only with differences among individuals and the contexts in which they live and act.

Not to mention that there's plenty of information on violence against profane images, though most of those cases are related to political and ideological issues.

It seems this phenomenon will continue, perhaps with increased violence and many new forms of interaction with images in a world that is increasingly invaded by them, with digital images at the front. Private, intimate relationships with images will undoubtedly also mark new types of relationships between people if such relationships are not displaced by connections with images in many cases unless the prevailing global and structural political conditions change.

REFERENCES

- [1] AGNM. Ramo Inquisición (1770). Contra Joseph de Aguilar, español clarineta (sic) del Regimiento de milicias de esta Corte. Por conculcador de imágenes, vol. 1097, exp. 10, fs. 238-241r.
- [2] AGNM. Ramo Inquisición (1776). [Denuncia contra Don Manuel Cervantes por conculcación de imágenes], vol. 1247, exp. 19, fs. 353-361.
- [3] AGNM. Ramo Inquisición (1783). El Señor Fiscal del Santo Oficio contra Don José Giral, vol. 1243, exp. 9, fs. 96-120.
- [4] AGNM. Ramo Inquisición (1762). Contra Francisco Ibáñez ordinario de Jalapa soldado de Veracruz, soltero. Se denunció voluntariamente por medio de su confesor. Por ultrajes a imágenes por haber invocado al Demonio y por [herético], vol. 1052, exp. 5, fs. 41-44.
- [5] AGNM. Ramo Inquisición Xaltomani, Jerónimo (1739). El Señor Inquisidor Fiscal contra Jerónimo de Saltomani mestizo vecino de Cholula. Por haber maltratado a un crucifijo, tirado el Rosario, vol. 880, pp.42-50.
- [6] AGNM. Ramo Inquisición (1750). “[El Señor Fiscal de este Oficio contra D. Ignacio Barroso. por haber], vol 947, exp. 3, fs. ?-20.
- [7] Bégout, Bruce (2018). *La découverte du quotidien*. Pluriel. Connaughton, Brian (2018). Milagros: ansiados, celebrados, vigilados y cuestionados. De Nueva España a México, siglos XVI al XIX. *Signos históricos*, 20(40), 42-107. Epub 03 AUG 2020. Retrieved January 30, 2022, from http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S1665-44202018000200042&lng=en&tl.
- [8] De Sola, Gutiérrez, José; Rubio Valladolid, Gabriel & Rodríguez de Fonseca, Fernando (2013). La impulsividad: ¿Antesala de las adicciones comportamentales? *Health and Addictions. Salud y drogas*, 13 (2), 145-155. Instituto de Investigación de Drogodependencias Alicante. ISSN 1578-5319 ISSNe 1988-205x.
- [9] Escobedo Martínez, Juan Francisco (n.d.). Violencia conyugal en la sociedad novohispana. UACEM.
- [10] Franco Fernández, María Dolores (2017). Actualización conceptual de los trastornos del control de los impulsos María José Moreno, Rafael Lillo, Julio Antonio Guija (eds). *Los trastornos del control de los impulsos y las psicopatías*. Madrid, Fundación Española de Psiquiatría y Salud Mental, 9-29.
- [11] García Peña, Lidia (2017). La privatización de la violencia conyugal en la Ciudad | de México entre los siglos XVIII y XX: polémicas del liberalismo. *Intersticios sociales*, (14), 181-205. Retrieved January 30, 2022, from http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2007-49642017000200181&lng=es&tlng=es. Intersticios.
- [12] Gubern, Román (1996). *Del bisonte a la realidad virtual. La escena y el laberinto*. Anagrama. https://kupdf.net/download/del-bisonte-a-la-realidad-virtual_5afc8dd6e2b6f52526be4c1c_pdf.
- [13] Lozano Armendares, Teresa (1991). Los juegos de azar, ¿una pasión novohispana? Legislación sobre juegos prohibidos en Nueva España, siglo XVIII Teresa Lozano Armendares. *Estudios de Historia Novohispana*; 11 (011). <https://repositorio.unam.mx/contenidos/31061>.
- [14] Macías Moya, Norma Aidé (2023). Miradas sobre el adulterio femenino y el divorcio eclesiástico en cuatro casos de estudio. Nueva Galicia, finales del siglo XVIII. *Huarte de San Juan. Geografía e Historia*, (30), 181-202, SSN: 2341-0809, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.48035/rhsj-gh.30.9>.

- [15] Manero, Augusto & Zafra, Alberto (2020). Adicciones, ¿impulsividad o compulsividad? *Ivane Salud*. Blog <https://www.ivanesalud.com/adicciones-impulsividad-o-compulsividad/>.
- [16] Mitchell, W.J.T. (2020). *¿Qué quieren las imágenes? Una crítica de la cultura visual*. Trans. Isabel Mellén. Sans Solei (1st ed., 2005).
- [17] Pope John Paul II (2004). *Carta Apostólica. Duodecimum Saeculum del Sumo Pontífice Juan Pablo II a los Obispos de la Iglesia Católica al Cumplirse el XII Centenario del II Concilio de Nicea*. La Santa Sede, Dicastero per la Comunicazione, Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- [18] Ruales Tobón, Camilo Fernando (2015). Las emociones y la dación de sentido en los objetos de uso. *Revista Kepes*, 12 (11), 139-162. http://kepes.ucaldas.edu.co/downloads/Revista11_8.pdf.
- [19] Sales-Colín Kortajarena, Ostwald (2023). La reproducción del ideal de la mujer hispana en Filipinas a través de los conventos y colegios femeninos: imágenes, actitudes y conductas de género en el siglo XVII. *Letras Históricas* (28), 1-34. ISSN: 2448-8372, Ostwald Sales-Colín Kortajarena <https://doi.org/10.31836/lh.28.7368>.
- [20] Tisseron, Serge (2018). *El espíritu de las cosas. Descubre el significado oculto de los objetos que te rodean*(Sharly A. Ramírez B., translator). Paidós. <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/839/83929573007.pdf>. "[[[[[
- [21] Villafuerte García, Lourdes (2021) El papel masculino el femenino en la comunidad doméstica del siglo XVIII. *Antropología. Revista Interdisciplinaria del INAH*.ISSN 26835069. <https://revistas.inah.gob.mx/index.php/antropologia/article/view/18254/19650>.