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Charity Without Borders: Alms Giving in New Spain for Captives in North Africa

Karen Melvin

During the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries, the plight of Spaniards kidnapped into Muslim slavery in North Africa weighed heavily upon their countrymen's minds, but it was also a matter of concern to residents of the distant Americas who sent alms to pay the captives' ransoms. In fact, by the mid-seventeenth century, alms from New Spain funded the majority of these ransoms. While the appeal of this charitable enterprise to Spaniards who lived in a Mediterranean world where captivity at the hands of Muslim enemies was a palpable fear can be easily understood, why were residents of a far-away continent interested? After all, as rife as the Mediterranean was with piracy and slaving, the Americas were fraught with dangerous perils of their own.

The answers, I argue, can be found in the appeals that alms collectors made in the Americas. Members of the order of Our Lady of Mercy, known as Mercedarians, were the only ones permitted to collect alms for Christian captives in the Americas, and in New Spain, where I focus my investigations, the order devoted much of its resources to this work. Friars employed sermons, images, special publications, and processions in attempts to convince people to care about a charitable project half a world away. Their message, as it turns out, paid surprising little attention to the captives themselves or the dangers that they faced, which stood in contrast to the situation in Spain where captives figured prominently in literature and popular culture. A recently-escaped captive even appears in the quintessential Spanish novel of this era, Miguel de Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, telling of his unlucky capture, his time rowing in the galleys, and his romantic escape with the daughter of a wealthy Moor.¹ In New Spain, Mercedarians instead

accentuated captives' redemptions. They did so as part of a broader message about the need for Catholics everywhere to stand up and defend their Church from a dangerous enemy. This enemy was endangering countless souls, and New Spain's residents could help prevent these losses. Based on the order's success gathering alms for captives, its message seems to have reached sympathetic ears, and support and donations came from wide swaths of society. These high levels of support reveal much about the cultural economy of captivity and redemption, not in the least its global context. What united people in this common cause was a set of shared understandings about what it meant to belong to a Catholic Church whose reach extended around the world.

The Mercedarian Project and its New World Funding

Members of the Mercedarian Order took a sacred oath unique among religious orders to redeem Christian captives. Upon entering the order, friars not only took the standard three monastic vows of poverty, obedience, and chastity but they also swore a fourth vow to work on behalf of captives, exchanging, if needed, their own freedom for that of the captives. Each friar signed a statement agreeing that: "si fuere necessario para la redención de los fieles de Christo, me quedaré dettenido en prendas en poder de los Morros, por libertarlos."² The order's commitment to helping captives existed from its inception in the early thirteenth century. According to Mercedarian tradition, a layman named Pedro Nolasco was collecting alms to help ransom Christians from Muslim captors when the Virgin Mary appeared simultaneously to him and King Jaime of Aragon, instructing them to create the order that was soon officially known as The Royal and Military Order of Our Lady of Mercy, Redemption of Captives.³ The order supported campaigns against Muslims by serving as chaplains in armies and, more importantly,

by collecting alms and traveling to enemy territory to redeem captives. As Christian kings gradually regained control of the peninsula, they rewarded Mercedarians with royal patronage, and the order expanded rapidly in the re-conquered territories. After 1492 and the fall of the last Muslim kingdom in Granada, Mercedarians continued their work, often traveling to North Africa in efforts to free the soldiers, sailors, merchants, travelers, or residents of coastal towns who made up most of the captive population. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the order dramatically increased the number and size of its ransoming expeditions. Whereas expeditions in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries might have carried with them 200,000 *reales* to purchase captives' freedom, those in the 1660s brought up to a million *reales*. In 1769, the order's final redemption in Algiers took with it a record 5,555,704 *reales* and brought home 1450 captives.⁴

One possible explanation for the upsurge in ransoming expeditions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would be response to demand, that is, if the number of Europeans being taken captive was also increasing. Indeed, the number of captives in the four major locales of Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, and Morocco does seem to have increased at the beginning of this period, peaking in the mid-seventeenth century. For example, according to Robert C. Davis, the zenith in Algiers's population of captives came between 1580 and 1680, when most counts ranged from twenty thousand to forty thousand captives. During the following century, however, numbers of captives fell substantially, and Davis estimates populations ranged between two thousand and ten thousand captives.⁵ At first glance, the parallel timing between peak captive populations and the upsurge in expeditions might suggest that the latter took place in response to the former, but continued expansion of ransoming

expeditions in the eighteenth century despite rapidly declining slave populations indicates the importance of other factors as well.

In fact, the upsurge in expeditions had less to do with circumstances in the Mediterranean than with what was happening a transatlantic journey away in the Americas. Here, newfound wealth from trade, agriculture, and especially mining was making many men their fortunes, and the Mercedarians were among those profiting. By the mid-seventeenth century, the amount of alms the American houses were sending to Spain took on new levels of importance. In 1648—about the time the number of captives was peaking—less than one quarter of the alms the order used for redemptions came from the Americas. By the 1660s and through the early eighteenth century, this percentage jumped to about 70 percent.⁶ Friars clearly recognized their dependence on the Americas, and at the end of the seventeenth century, a Mercedarian official informed the crown that the majority of alms that the order had collected in the previous several years had indeed come from the wealthy Americas (Fernández 1988).

The Americas were thus a crucial source of revenues, but it was New Spain in particular that supported the jump in the percentage of total alms that came from the Americas. Before then, Peru had provided more alms than New Spain. As one Mercedarian official in Spain had noted about New Spain, “como es menos abundante de plata...es mucho menos la limosna.”⁷ Mercedarians got off to a slow start there despite the fact that the first friar to set foot in New Spain was a Mercedarian, Fr. Bartolomé de Olmedo. Olmedo arrived as part of the Cortés expedition in 1519 but his untimely death a few years later as well as rivalries among religious orders prevented the Mercedarians from establishing a permanent presence in Mexico City until the 1580s.⁸ The order’s late establishment meant it was largely shut out of work in *doctrinas de indios* or missions, even though it fought hard for royal permission to enter these fields. Over

the following decades the order gradually expanded to other cities in central New Spain, validating its presence through a range of activities, including celebrating masses, preaching, offering confession, and running primary schools.⁹ During the second half of the seventeenth century, New Spain's Mercedarians increasingly pointed to alms collection as the central feature of their work.¹⁰ Indeed, the order's votive mission to redeem captives took on a whole new dimension New Spain. Because New Spain's friars could not be directly involved in the actual ransoming expeditions, they placed more emphasis on alms collection. As the seventeenth-century Mercedarian chronicler Francisco de Pareja explained:

Es cierto que los religiosos mercenarios en estas provincias de las Indias, no llegan á gozar la gloria de ir á tierras de infieles á redimir cautivos, siendo así que lo profesan como principal instituto de la religión...pero siempre tienen el ánimo propio para ir ello y dar la vida si se ofreciere por los cautivos cristianos...y que aunque no van corporalmente...se trabaja con todo cuidado en el recoger limosnas para la redención.”¹¹

The Mercedarians' new emphasis on alms collection coincided with the growth of mining in New Spain. Whereas Peru had once been the world's most important source of silver, by the late seventeenth century, New Spain had surpassed it (Garner, 1988). The connection between Mercedarian alms collection and New Spain's silver mines is clearly visible in the six houses the province founded during the eighteenth century. Five of these foundations—Zacatecas (1702), Querétaro (1734), Celaya (1742), Guanajuato (1752), and Valle de Santiago (1762)—were located in the Bajío region that was home to New Spain's most productive mines. In fact, by the end of the century Guanajuato had become the world's largest silver producer. Moreover, four of the houses established in the Bajío were *hospicios*, which—unlike most of the province's

existing houses which served multiple purposes—provided fewer services, housed fewer friars, and functioned almost exclusively as centers of alms collection. According to the Mercedarian petition to found the *hospicio* in Querétaro, its purpose was to distribute “religiosos para la limosna de los cautivos Cristianos en todo este reyno y se han conocido el aumento considerable... se espera más crecido aumento.”¹² Interestingly, the alms collected in New Spain seem to have been particularly valuable in the ransoming process. Fr. Melchor García Navarro’s account of the Mercedarians’ expedition to Tunis carefully explained that for redemptions there “se ha de procurar conducir la mayor porción que se pueda de moneda mexicana, que es más estimada y apetecida” for its greater weight and purity.¹³ So unlike other coins that were devalued and had to be supplemented, Mexican money went further.

It was this font of wealth from New Spain that made possible the larger and more frequent ransoming expeditions of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although data on alms remitted specifically from New Spain are thin and scattered, the amounts were substantial, and they increased over the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The earliest available figures come from Pareja, whose 1688 history claimed that his province had collected 203,216 pesos since the second year of the province’s existence (probably meaning 1596) and with most of those sums coming in the last twenty years.¹⁴ If we were to try to break down these figures, they would compute to an average of slightly more than 2200 pesos per year, unless we try to account for Pareja’s claim that most money was from the last twenty years.

Conservatively assuming that 100,000, about half of the sum, was collected then, the average for that later span rises to 5000 pesos per year. Alms data available for the mid-eighteenth century come from royal documents listing the amounts deposited in New Spain, but they offer little basis for comparison to the numbers from the mid-seventeenth century. In 1720 the province

remitted 18,700 pesos; in 1738, 38,000 pesos; in 1754, 70,000 pesos; and in 1783, 100,000 pesos.¹⁵ While these figures indicate that Mercedarians were sending back money in larger bundles, without any information on how often they remitted that money, it remains impossible to judge whether or not total remittances were growing. We can make a more useful comparison to Pareja's figures with data from after 1786, when state officials in Mexico City began recording the amount of alms deposited each year. These figures are recorded in Table 1 and range from a low of 6,935 pesos in 1787 to a high of 18,000 in 1792, yielding an average of 14,016 pesos per year. Compared to the 5000-peso estimate from Pareja, these data indicate a nearly three-fold increase in the average annual remittances between the mid-seventeenth century and the late eighteenth century.¹⁶

Table 1: Mercedarian alms remitted from New Spain, 1787-1804

Collection Year	Total (pesos)	Collection Year	Total (pesos)
1787	6,935	1796	15,145
1788	10,960	1797	17,694
1789	13,909	1798	16,899
1790	16,937	1799	12,349
1791	15,547	1800	17,176
1792	18,000	1801	15,036
1793	16,949	1802	11,470
1794	13,365	1803	15,060
1795	15,614	1804	14,197

Source: BNAH Papeles Suelos, Serie 1, legajo 24, documentos 8 and 29; AGI

Indiferente 3055; AGN, Templos y Conventos vol. 163.

The timing of this increase in alms collection closely parallels the expansion of redemptive expeditions to North Africa and serves as the best explanation for that expansion, which begs the question of why New Spain's residents were willing to underwrite this particular activity. The next section addresses this issue by analyzing some of the appeals the

Mercedarians made during the eighteenth century, comparing those in Spain to those in New Spain.

Appeals

The business of ransoming Christian captives was highly publicized from start to finish. In Spain, announcements of ransoming expeditions were made with great fanfare, often done from Madrid with the participation of the royal court. So, too, was the departure of an expedition an event. The 1723 expedition to Algiers left from Madrid with more than a dozen stops on the way to the port of Cartagena, and an account of the trip noted that large crowds gathered at each place and that nobles often sent their coaches to carry the redeemers into the city. It was an expedition's return trip that provided the real spectacle, however. The head of the Mercedarian order gave explicit instructions to the redeemers on a 1702 expedition for how they were to handle their return to Spanish soil. Upon disembarking, they were to process to the port's most important church. The order's standard would herald the captives who followed, each one carrying a rosary and wearing the Mercedarian emblem. At the church, they were to offer prayers of gratitude and sing a *Te Deum*, a hymn sung in thanks to God on a special occasion, in the presence of the town's religious communities and most important officials. The next day the redeemers were to return to the church for a sung mass with one of them giving a sermon on "los trabajos de los misserables cautivos en poder de ynfieles" and "encomendando a los fieles les socorran con sus limosnas." To further move people's hearts, the friars were to gather the captives on the main altar where the entire community could see them. Most of the captives were then to be sent home, preferably with a small donation, but a few were to stay on to assist the order with its fundraising. This was common Mercedarian practice, and ex-captives often

accompanied Mercedarians on their appeals for alms. The redeemers on the 1702 expedition, for instance, were instructed to bring some captives back to Madrid so that the king and his ministers could experience firsthand the order's zeal for its holy ministry and so that people there could see what their alms accomplished.¹⁷ Captives and their tales thus figured prominently in the often extraordinary fanfare that permeated the appeals process in Spain.

People's interest in these events included, but also went beyond, the attraction of the spectacle. Assisting captives was a charitable cause with roots firmly embedded in Iberian social and legal traditions. The *Siete Partidas*, Alonso X's influential thirteenth-century law code, set up rankings and guidelines for distributing charity from one's estate, specifying that Christians held captives by Muslims should receive donors' greatest attention. Also, one of the most common designations for *mandas forzosas* (mandatory gifts) in sixteenth-century wills was Christian captives (Eire 1995, 234-235). Besides general ideas about charity, a strong personal dimension existed for many Spaniards, especially those who lived in coastal towns or who were soldiers or merchants and knew personally someone who had been captured. In fact, many contributions in Spain came from the family and friends of captives and were earmarked specifically for their release. For example, when a Mercedarian expedition left Barcelona for Algiers in 1702, a royal *cédula* granted the redeemers the right to collect additional sums along the way, including in Barcelona, Cádiz, Seville, and the port of Santa María. These sums would be collected "para que sirviese de ayuda para rescatar algunos parientes e amigos y conozios que los Moros habían captibado el año pasado."¹⁸ And so when expeditions returned, people gathered and struggled to get close to the captives as they processed through the streets. According to Fr. Melchor García Navarro, who led the 1723 expedition to Algiers, this intense curiosity arose from a need to see who had been redeemed—was it anyone they knew?—to hear

their stories, and to hug returning family members and friends.¹⁹ All this fanfare, which put captives front and center in order to tug at audiences' heartstrings, was carefully conceived to inspire as much alms giving as possible.

In New Spain, however, there were no such expeditions to announce, depart, or triumphantly return. Residents did not have the same sorts of personal connections to captives nor would ex-captives be present at Mercedarian events. Indeed, commented the seventeenth-century chronicler Pareja, it was rare to see a captive in the Indies. Without these personal connections or the poignant reminders of ex-captives appearing at requests for alms, Pareja observed that friars in New Spain needed to throw extra energy into their work and appeals (Pareja 1882-83, tomo II 642).

These appeals differed from those made in Spain in that captives played far less prominent roles. It was not just an absence of living and breathing captives at events, but the appeals themselves had surprisingly little to say about captives, who appeared more as supporting characters than protagonists, and their sufferings figured, if they figured at all, more as subplots than central storylines. Instead, the Mercedarians focused on the fundamental issue: the salvation of souls. Captives' physical sufferings were but a secondary danger of captivity, overshadowed by the threats to their Christian faith. Moors were perceived as especially dangerous because of their hatred for Christianity and Christians, and what one Mercedarian called "la inhumana esclavitud de los desalmados Turcos" could lead Christian captives to renounce their religion.²⁰ Appeals in New Spain thus underscored the protection Mercedarians provided against Muslim threats to individual captives and their chances for eternal salvation and, even more significantly, to the entire body of the Catholic Church. These were direct attacks on the Catholic Church, and standing up to defend its faithful, wherever they resided,

were the heroic Mercedarians. Supported in their work by Christ and Mary, Mercedarians stood as bulwarks against the Muslim menace. Residents of New Spain could join Christ, Mary, and the Mercedarians in this decisive global battle through their financial contributions. At the same time, these contributions, as charitable acts in the Catholic system of good works, had the potential to help save the souls of the donors themselves. Mercedarians attempted to broadcast these messages as widely as possible, and they figured prominently in many of the order's activities and spaces, including feast days, celebrations, sermons, processions, church art and architecture, and special publications. To look more closely at how Mercedarians in New Spain tried to make their case, the next sections examine two of these areas in greater depth: sermons and processions.

Sermons

Of the Mercedarians' various methods of disseminating their messages, sermons made the most explicit case for the benefits of the Mercedarians' institute of redeeming captives. Sermons provided the opportunity to explain the order's history and purpose and impress an audience with the power wielded by key Mercedarian figures. Sermons demonstrated how Mary, especially in the advocacy most closely associated with the order, Our Lady of Mercy, protected the order and endorsed its purpose. They also argued that the order's founder, Pedro Nolasco (canonized 1628) closely resembled Christ, especially in his role as a redeemer. What they did not discuss, however, were the plights of the captives, instead turning to the reoccurring themes of family, redemption, and charity to remind audiences of the benefits of linking themselves to the Mercedarian mission and, more particularly, why redeeming captives was so imperative to Christians everywhere.²¹

A sermon that brought together these subjects in ways typical of sermons of the eighteenth century was first heard at the Celaya church's 1756 celebration of Our Lady of Mercy. The preacher, Fray Ignacio Rodríguez de Sosa, employed a three-pronged approach that connected his order to Mary, Christ, and ordinary Christians. He opened by invoking what may have been the most common theme in Mercedarian sermons of the time: Mary's role as the author of the Mercedarian religion. She had recognized the plight of captives and so she appeared to Pedro Nolasco, telling him, "a ti me ha embiado mi Hijo a fin de notificarte, que tiene hecho caritativo empeño de que en nombre y gloria mía se funde una Religión con el título de la Merced, ó Misericordia, cuyo instituto y profesión sea redimir cautivos." Members of the order, she instructed Nolasco, were to follow her example of faith, hope and charity by attending to captives, "visitándoles en viva fee, en esperanza de salud, y con verdadera charidad."²² Mary in the advocacy of our Lady of Mercy thus appears as the guiding figure who gave the order its identity and purpose and who imbued it with her virtues. There could be no higher endorsement for the order and its mission of redeeming captives.

Mercedarian preachers continually returned to the theme of family to highlight the importance of this mission. As Rodríguez stressed, Mary's relationship to the Mercedarians was best characterized as a loving mother protective of her "specially-chosen sons."²³ The mother-son relationship was not the only bond forged by Mary's adoption of the Mercedarians, for when they became members of the Holy Family, they gained Christ as a brother.²⁴ Rodríguez expounded on this special bond with Christ, comparing Nolasco to Mary's "first" son and noting that the two brothers shared a role as redeemers. Christ, the original Redeemer, so loved humankind that he shed his blood to free people from eternal punishment for their sins; Nolasco, also motivated by love, shed his blood for captives. A sermon preached in 1762 in the

Mercedarians' San Luis Potosí church offers an example of an in-depth depiction of Nolasco as a redeemer. On one of his ransoming expeditions, he found himself without sufficient funds to redeem all the captives and so, "por amor á los cautivos," he offered himself in their place. His voluntarily captivity allowed the "infidels" to injure him to the point he was near death, making "moneda de su sangre por redimir [los cautivos]." So like Christ in this sacrifice was Nolasco, the sermon concluded, that distinguishing one from the other was difficult.²⁵ These redemptive connections to Christ did not stop with Nolasco but, through him as the order's patriarch, extended to all his Mercedarian sons. Others may redeem captives, Rodríguez boasted, but only Mercedarians were bound by sacred vow and profession to do so. Only they imitated Christ by promising to offer their own lives in exchange for others. "No duden," he told his listeners, that Mercedarians "exponerse á la muerte y dar sus vidas por la salud y libertad de otras almas, en viva imitación y a exemplo de [Cristo]."²⁶

Mercedarians' Marian-approved and Christ-like solution to the plight of captives was a central theme in Mercedarian sermons, but those plights themselves were not. Sermons might include a general reference or two to the captives' unfortunate situations, their heavy chains, or their captors' cruelty, but preachers tended to stay away from bloody and painful details, even in sermons dedicated to the captives' troubles. For example, Br. Gerónimo Morales Sígala dedicated his sermon preached at Our Lady of Mercy's feast day at the Oaxaca cathedral in 1765 to the subject of captivity and redemption, but he did little to engage his listeners' imagination about the harsh realities of captivity. Instead, the most vivid portrayal of the captives' troubles came not in the sermon itself, but in a *parecer* printed as part of the licensing process for getting a sermon published, and even this description was circumscribed. According to the *parecer*'s author, the Franciscan Fr. Pablo Antonio Pérez, captives of the Turks and Moors "que arrojados

en sus masmorras los tenían y continuamente tienen con grillos, y cadenas, entre mil lamentos, hasta que la Santa Familia Redentora los liberta.”²⁷ The sermon’s most vivid accounts were instead reserved for Mercedarian redeemers who offered themselves in place of captives, such as when Morales Sígala described Nolasco’s sufferings during one of his captivities: “las incomodidades más ásperas, los más aservos trabajos, y tribulaciones gravísimas de calabozos oscuros, de fétidas y lóbregas masmorras, de azotes crueles, de continuadas inedias, pesadas cadenas.”²⁸

If preachers were making their best efforts to convince their audiences of the captives’ dire needs then why not utilize more graphic descriptions? Why not appeal to the same imagination that made captive tales like Cervantes’s so popular? Given some depictions of Nolasco’s sufferings or Christ’s sufferings on the cross, preachers obviously did not shy away from explicit portrayals of violence. One possible reason could be the circumstances of the message. After all, these were sermons rather than popular literature, and most were offered in celebrations of either Nolasco’s or Our Lady of Mercy’s feast days when preachers sought to keep the audience focused on topic. But even in formats other than sermons and even when Mary or Nolasco was not the central figure, Mercedarians still gave little consideration to captives themselves. For example, in 1726 a small leaflet with the Mercedarian emblem on its front page was published in Mexico City. Straightforwardly titled *Relacion de la Redempcion, que por las Provincias de Castilla, y Andalucia, del Real, y Militar Orden de Nuestra Señora de la Merced, se ha executado este presente año de 1725 en la Ciudad de Tunes*, it told a tale of grave dangers, nearly insurmountable obstacles, and, most importantly, six heroic Mercedarians. These six friars, arriving in Tunis wet and tired after a difficult sea voyage, immediately began to negotiate the release of captives. After many meetings, they obtained the release of all the

Spanish men and the king's soldiers, but then the redeemers discovered that many women and children remained. Worse, the friars obtained secret reports that many of them were in imminent danger of renouncing their faith. The redeemers knew they must act quickly, but they had no money left. They therefore did what they had vowed to do: to follow the institute that Mary set out for them and offer themselves in place of the captives. The bey, impressed with their proposal, allowed the women and children to go free on the condition that the Mercedarians repay their debt within one year. The redeemers, concluded the tale, gloriously returned with more than three hundred newly released Christians. Even here, in an account geared toward a popular audience and designed to highlight the urgency of the situation, Mercedarian redeemers overshadowed captives. Clearly, format was not the reason why captives played such a minor role in Mercedarians' appeals in New Spain.

Mercedarians paid little heed to captives or the horrors of captivity because these corporeal miseries were ultimately of secondary concern to them. The greatest risks of captivity were not physical suffering or even death, but that captives might die having forsaken Catholicism for Islam. Redeeming captives on earth meant that their souls, hopefully, would later be redeemed in heaven. One of the clearest statements on the primacy of saving souls comes from a 1727 set of instructions on how to observe Nolasco's feast day. According to the guide, people were to remember that Nolasco risked his life and those of his friars "no tanto por redimir de el cautiverio los cuerpos, como por sacar del peligro de la culpa o exasperación á las almas de los cautivos fieles." This saving of souls from the infidel, concluded the passage, was the redeemers' ultimate goal.²⁹ Mercedarian sermons—or popular publications for that matter—therefore sought to keep people's attention focused not on the predicament of captives but on the great prize of their redemptions.

The final prong of the triumvirate of themes in Rodríguez's Celaya sermon, the Mercedarians' connection to the faithful, offers deeper insight into why residents of the Americas might have cared about saving the souls of captives in North Africa. Rodríguez reminded his listeners that friars of his order dedicated themselves to serving ordinary people, giving them a unique relationship with the faithful: "La Religión Mercedaria, todos saben, ... tiene por especial carácter y singular divisa el vínculo del amor del prójimo." Charity was indeed one of the hallmarks of a Mercedarian identity, and just as patriarchs of other religious orders were best known for their poverty (Francis) or preaching (Dominic), Nolasco was most closely associated with charitable works. By making these claims, Rodríguez was, on one level, reminding members of his audience that they had much to gain from being associated with an order that put special emphasis on caring for people like them, especially considering its powerful connections as part of the Holy Family. On another level, Rodríguez was making the case for his listeners to see captives as their neighbors and help them. Thanks to the Mercedarians' dedication, more than one hundred thousand poor Christians had been liberated "de las infernales garras del Sarraceno diabólico," but more souls remained in danger, and Rodríguez implored his audience to see their need as crucial and immediate.³⁰ This theme of helping one's neighbor was further elaborated in a sermon that Fr. Joseph Báez offered at the Valladolid church's 1791 celebration of Nolasco's feast day. Báez insisted that his listeners needed to love their neighbor (*prójimo*) just as God loved them, but this love did not mean a disinterested "caridad estéril" but "una caridad viva, oficiosa, con movimiento, con obras." In other words, Báez was strongly promoting the good works that must, in Catholic belief, accompany faith in order to achieve salvation. Those who followed through on his advice might, Báez suggested, visit those in hospitals or jails, console the distraught, or offer alms for captives.

One's neighbors therefore included unfortunate members of the community who could be helped in person, but they also included unknown, unseen captives from distant lands. Community in this instance was not defined geographically; it was defined through membership in a Catholic Church that made possible the salvation of souls—the captives and their own. And so when Báez asked his audience why they should have compassion for their neighbor, he had a ready answer: because we are all members of the “cuerpo místico de Jesuchristo, que es la Iglesia.”³¹

Processions

Although there were no opportunities in New Spain for processions associated with the departures or returns of ransoming expeditions, processions nonetheless remained important vehicles for communicating with large numbers of people. Processions highlighting issues of captivity and redemption took place as part of annual feast days, especially of Mercedarian saints, and one-time-only special events, such as the dedication of a new church. In 1735, when the Bethlehemites of Mexico City dedicated their new church, Mercedarians helped them celebrate the occasion with an elaborate procession. According to an eighteenth-century diary, an “innumerable concurrencia de todas clases, llevada de la curiosidad de ver la procesión” came to see a spectacle that included dancers, members of several confraternities, and numerous holy images. After the image of Our Lady of Mercy, who held a large golden key symbolizing her role freeing captives, came the entire community of Mercedarian friars. Mixed in with the friars were a large number of boys wearing Mercedarian scapulars and dressed in Moorish clothing “como los recién rescatados cautivos.” They also wore fancy chains around their necks, symbolizing those that captives wore in prison. Finally came the image of Pedro Nolasco, also carrying a large golden key.³² The use of boys to represent captives freed by Mercedarians was

intended as a way to make captives, so rarely seen in New Spain, physically present and thus more real to the audience. It may also have invoked the sorts of personal connections more common in Spain as these boys were members of the community, sometimes the sons of *cofrades* marching in the procession, and many in the audience would have recognized them. Ultimately, however, they were not the procession's main focus. As in sermons, that position was reserved for the redeemers, and the holy images of Mary and Nolasco would have been at the center of people's attention. The images' positions in the procession, protectively flanking the Mercedarians and the boys representing captives, offered a clear statement of their alliance with Mercedarians in this redemptive project. The keys that they held in their hands would have reminded people of their powers of liberation, certainly, but the keys' golden composition also hinted at the role of alms in this process. Give us your alms, these images seemed to say, and we will turn them into tools that will free souls.

By the mid-eighteenth century, the most important processions took place when the Mercedarians turned over the alms they had collected to royal officials in Mexico City. In 1785, the Mexico City *Gazeta* reported the great pomp with which the friars made a delivery of alms:

Los [Reverendos Padres] del convento de Nuestra Señora de la Merced con otros religiosos del orden y algunos seculares vestidos en forma de cautivos, acompañados de los Timbaleros de esta Nueva España y de no poco concurso de ella, condujeron en carros cien mil pesos, que recibidos por los oficiales reales de [Su Magestad].³³

Here was the ultimate triumphant procession: an astounding sum of money guaranteed to turn heads on its own but now accompanied by drummers whose beat drew even more attention to it.

All the eyes tuned to the procession saw the friars with the captives, a living reminder of the good the Mercedarians were going to do with those sums.

This procession of 1785 turned out to be one of the Mercedarians' final great exhibitions of their ability to help free captives. A royal *cédula* dated March 31, 1786 ordered Mercedarians to turn over their alms to royal officials at the end of each year. This new procedure meant that these sums were to await the next fleet in royal coffers and that Mercedarians could no longer hold onto the sums until they had amassed large enough amounts to dazzle the crowds. What happened next reveals just how important contemporaries judged these processions to the alms collection process.

When the Mercedarians made the first of their annual deposits at the end of 1787, they brought a paltry 6,935 pesos—a far cry from their deposit of 100,000 pesos in 1785.³⁴ The Mercedarians made this transfer quietly, without decorating carts, dressing people as captives, hiring drummers, or any other pageantry. According to their officials, they did so because “la cortedad de dicho caudal, y los indispensables gastos que erogarían en la traslación,” and they pointed out that the sum total of what they were remitting amounted to less than the cost of producing the 1785 procession. Even over the next few years as the amounts of the annual remittances increased (see Table 1), the Mercedarians stuck to their more austere regimen. This austerity became a point of contention with royal officials both in Spain and New Spain who began pushing the Mercedarians to reinstate the traditional display. These officials' insistence on maintaining tradition was likely rooted in the belief that processions were an effective way to inspire donations, and one official lamented the loss of “el aparato y solemnidad que en lo antiguo se acostumbraba para conmover a los habitantes de aquel reino al aumento de la limosna.” Debates over how to handle the processions continued for several years, with the

Mercedarians continuing to deliver alms without the accustomed ceremony. The issue was settled when a 1798 *cédula* ordered the Mercedarians to reinstate the pageantry, and officials noted with satisfaction that on January 15, 1800 the Mercedarians deposited a total of 12,349 “con la posible pompa y aparato en demostración de júbilo y satisfacción del Público para conmover el ánimo de los fieles.”

Mercedarian processions and sermons suggest some of the reasons why New Spain’s residents were willing to contribute to a cause that might not, at first glance, seem particularly relevant to their lives. Certainly, as an act of charity, contributing had the potential to better the prospects for their own afterlife; the souls they saved just might include their own. Personal salvation and global redemption were thus intimately linked. Still, there were countless opportunities to support charitable works whose immediate, earthly benefits were more local, and yet people gave to this one. Freeing Christian captives from North Africa carried the relevance it did for reasons bigger than the lives of individuals who lived on distant continents. The focus on redemption and redeemers rather than captives offers the first clue that something more was at stake. Captives were not the only ones endangered: the entire Catholic Church was under attack. Every soul lost weakened the church; every soul gained strengthened it. This battle for souls brought forth a host of heavenly support, including Mary, Christ, and Nolasco. The Church was a body that needed protection from its many enemies, and in this case, the threat came from a particularly dangerous enemy, one the Church had been fighting for centuries. The idea of a Christian body threatened by a Muslim menace was not a foreign concept to the Americas. Spaniards brought with them a dedication to Santiago Matamoros (St. James the Moor Slayer), who, along with his horse, became a popular figure among American populations. Images of Santiago typically showed him with his sword raised in the heat of battle while his

white steed trampled infidels. Since the sixteenth century “Christians and Moors” dramas figured in some Corpus Christi celebrations, representing battles between good and evil, belief and idolatry. Similarly, paintings in New World churches depicted Christians defending their church against Muslim threats, such as one of King Carlos II, sword in hand, protecting the Eucharist from a turbaned Moor.³⁵ In each of these instances, Christians, some extraordinary and others run-of-the-mill Catholics, stood to defend their Church. By participating in the Mercedarian project, by giving just a coin or two, New Spain’s residents could join the fight. In doing so, they identified themselves as members of a community defined by not geography but by allegiance to God and His Church.

Audiences

Just who might have been inspired by a Mercedarian sermon or moved by a procession to donate to the cause is not immediately apparent in the writings of preachers or accounts of processions. But these documents, combined with other sources, offer some intriguing glimpses of the range of people who sought to participate in the Mercedarians’ charitable mission. One set of clues comes from account books that recorded deposits of alms for captives at each convent. I have found three such *Libros de Cautivos* from the late eighteenth century, from Guadalajara, Valladolid (Morelia), and Toluca.³⁶ These were three very different locations: the administrative center home to northern New Spain’s Audiencia (Guadalajara), the prospering but somewhat isolated provincial city (Valladolid), and the medium-sized city closely tied to Mexico City and its economy (Toluca). These were also three different types of houses: the large convent located only two blocks off of the main square (Guadalajara), the convent located on the city’s periphery (Valladolid), and the *hospicio* that offered few services and so had fewer

connections to its community (Toluca). Not surprisingly, the amounts of alms collected in these locations also varied considerably, with the Guadalajara convent's collections surpassing Valladolid's and both convents' dramatically outshining Toluca's. To examine giving patterns in these three locations more carefully, I use data from 1789-1801, a period of time which all three *Libros* overlap (see Table 2).³⁷

Table 2: Alms (in pesos) collected, 1789-1801

	Valladolid	Guadalajara	Toluca	New Spain Province
1789-1792	1974	2190	604	46,393
1792-1795	1453	2347	570	48,314
1795-1798	1312	2255	411	48,453
1898-1801	1786	1599	529	46,424
Total	6525	8391	2114	189,584
Average/year	544	699	176	15,799

Source: BNAH, Colección Manuel Porrúa; AGN, Templos y Conventos, vol. 94, exp. 1; AGN Templos y Conventos, vol. 222, exp. 5

Despite some significant differences among the convents and the amounts they collected, the sources of those funds were remarkably similar for all three houses. First, investments and bequests provided only a small part of alms totals. When convents invested, they typically did so by buying urban properties which they rented for income. The Valladolid convent earned 150 pesos per year from a house it owned, providing roughly a quarter of the convent's alms revenue. Such investment income was unusual, and, in contrast, the Toluca *hospicio* earned 9 ½ pesos each year from a small house and a plot of land while the Guadalajara convent recorded no rental income. Similarly, donations through wills provided minimal support. Between 1789 and 1801, the Valladolid convent recorded a total of 280 pesos from *mandas forsozas* and other bequests (4 percent of its total collections), and the Toluca convent recorded 119 (7 percent of its total collections). The Guadalajara convent collected one to two pesos each month from *mandas*

forsozas (most worth two *reales* each). Without a strong foundation of automatic payments (investment income) or planned gifts (wills and bequests), these three houses were heavily dependent upon people's continuing willingness to donate. Mercedarians, therefore, had good reason to be persistent in their campaigns for support.

The *Libros* indicate that the majority of funds came from three sources: weekly collections, special festivities throughout the year, and syndics appointed in surrounding towns. The largest source of income for the Valladolid and Guadalajara convents were the weekly *demandas* collected by one of the convent's friars. Each week this appointed official, often a lay brother rather than a priest, would circulate through the city seeking alms for captives. From occasional references to his work "de la calle", he may well have done this work on busy plazas or well-traveled street corners as well as in the homes of the city's elites.³⁸ For the 1789 to 1801 period, the Guadalajara convent collected roughly ten pesos per week and the Valladolid convent four pesos per week from *demandas*. Assuming these averages, *demandas* would have made up approximately 60 percent and 40 percent of the convents' total alms, respectively. The Toluca house, perhaps because of its *hospicio* status and marginal standing within the city, did not have a weekly *demandas*, which explains a good part of the gap between its collections and those of the other convents.

After the *demandas*, the most important overall source of alms came from donations made in the order's churches at festivities throughout the year, specifically Holy Week and five special days of absolution. The largest collections typically came on Thursday of Holy Week when people came to fulfill their annual precept of confession and communion, and the churches sponsored special sermons and processions commemorating Christ's Passion. Increased attendance certainly drove up collection totals, but also a factor was the day's focus on a big

Mercedarian theme: Christ's sacrifices for the redemption of humankind. The Guadalajara and Valladolid convents usually collected between thirty and fifty pesos on this day, while Toluca brought in between ten and twenty. Some years the Valladolid convent even broke down how much it received in the church versus the processions in the streets, such as in 1794 when seventeen pesos came in through former and thirteen pesos from the later. The other days with special collections were, like Holy Thursday, days of absolution when people could earn special indulgences by confessing and taking communion in a Mercedarian church. These five feast days—Our Lady of Mercy, Pedro Nolasco, Saint Anthony the Abbot, Mariana de Jesús, and Catherine of Alexandria—brought in widely varying amounts, from less than a peso at a small Toluca event to twenty pesos at one of Guadalajara's more popular celebrations. Together, these collections added up, forming, in the case of Toluca, 22 percent of all alms.

The Mercedarians' final significant source of on-going support came from alms collectors outside the convent's home city. In a few cases, Mercedarian friars did the traveling, such as in 1784 when Padre Fr. Huerta from the Valladolid convent collected twenty-two pesos in Silao or in 1794 when Padre Fr. Dionicio brought fifty-six pesos from the countryside. Parish priests in pueblos occasionally took up collections as well, such as in 1792 when the priest of Aguado sent one peso to Valladolid. Most commonly, the order relied upon syndics, appointed representatives who lived in places where the order did not have a permanent presence. The few syndics listed by name in the *Libros* had the title of *Don*, suggesting that these were men of some social standing. Little information is available on how they brought together their deposits. They might have been allowed to take up collections at local churches, appealed to wealthy acquaintances for donations, or they or someone they hired might also have asked on streets or from door to door, perhaps offering an inexpensive paper image or scapular of Our Lady of

Mercy in exchange for a donation. The Guadalajara convent even relied upon a *syndica*, a nun from the nearby Dominican convent of Santa María de Gracia, who collected alms in the convent's church during Holy Week and on the five Mercedarian days of absolution. Deposits from syndics were not frequent, and their amounts varied considerably. In the case of Toluca, deposits from syndics averaged fourteen pesos. Even so, they were the house's most important source of alms, providing 43 percent of collections and helping justify its founding as a center of alms collection. Deposits from syndics at the Valladolid convent were few and far between—only eight were recorded from 1792 and 1801—but a few were quite large, such as the 103 pesos brought from Patzcuaro in 1800 or the 59 pesos from Zamora in 1799. Aside from the regular contributions of the *syndica* at Santa María de Gracia, such donations in the Guadalajara convent were also infrequent, but they rarely topped twenty pesos.

While each convent relied upon somewhat different mixes of income from weekly collections, special church events, and syndics, these three sources combined to form the financial foundation of Mercedarians' alms collection. Their reliance on these three methods meant that the Mercedarians' messages would have been reaching wide audiences—those who attended Mercedarian churches, the people on the street watching their processions, those passing by an alms collector in the street, and even residents of nearby towns. These audiences would have been composed of people from across social, economic, and racial spectrums. Further evidence that diverse types of people cared enough about the need to redeem Christian captives to do something about it can be seen in giving patterns and people's participation in Mercedarian organizations.

Mercedarians certainly had their wealthy benefactors but giving patterns indicate that large gifts were not the norm, and, in fact, most alms for captives came in small amounts. The

largest individual donation noted in any of the three books came in Toluca where it was cryptically recorded as the alms “that the *Padre Comendador* [the head of the convent] brought *de los Molinos*.” It is unclear whether the donation came from a family named Molinos or from nearby mills (the valley of Toluca was a wheat-growing region), but, even if the latter, the donation probably still originated from one or two large donors. Not only was the amount a suspiciously round number, but the *comendador* would not have been involved otherwise.³⁹ More commonly, when the books recorded deposits of “una limosna” or “de un bienchor”, or “una limosna extrahonrdinaria”, the amounts were half a peso, three pesos, or twelve pesos. Not surprisingly, given the number of large donations, the average size of recorded deposits was small. In Toluca the median deposit between 1789 and 1801 was slightly more than two pesos; in Valladolid it was about six pesos for the period between 1783 and 1786; in Guadalajara it was roughly seven pesos and three reales during the period between 1792 and 1795. Furthermore, most of these gifts—including the weekly *demandas*, collections in churches and at processions, and deposits by syndics—consisted of many smaller gifts from those in attendance. Many of these gifts were probably less than a single *real*.⁴⁰ The picture that emerges from these giving patterns is of a province highly dependent upon small gifts, suggesting that plenty of people were willing, even if barely able, to donate to the cause.

Mercedarian organizations provided additional opportunities for all sorts of people to help Christian captives. One such organization open to people judged as good Christians and Spaniards, were Third Orders. Members of the Mercedarian Third Order signed a short statement at the time of their entry, promising, “vivir según la Regla de Nuestro Padre San Agustín y Constituciones de dicho Orden, donde trabajaré por los cautivos según mis fuerzas y estado.”⁴¹ As part of their commitment, members were supposed to participate in regular

ceremonies at the church, where they would have opportunities to give and where they would be reminded of the importance of their commitment. A sermon offered in 1766 at the foundation of the Mercedarian Third Order in San Luis Potosí offers an instance of one of these inspirational reminders. In language dripping with the heroism of the Mercedarian institute, the preacher lauded the members of the new organization for joining the cause: “te advertiré, que nasiste en la honorrosa cuña del instituto mercenario...; la obra de redimir es la más eroyca, la más grande.” Although the *terceros* would not be directly involved in ransoming expeditions, they did not have to risk life and limb to play an important role. Their alms giving, according to the preacher, was even more valuable: “se acreditan más gloriosos, más agradables a los ojos de Dios por su voluntaria generosidad y visarría que sus primeros hijos [Mercedarian friars].”⁴²

While Third Orders were supposed to be a vehicle for more socially respectable members of society to assist in redeeming captives, such people did not comprise the majority of those who filled Mercedarian churches. Mercedarian houses in New Spain, including the ones in Valladolid and Toluca, tended to be located on peripheries of cities, often in poorer neighborhoods. Because a good part of their clientele probably came from these areas, the majority of those dropping a coin in the collection box would have lacked the resources to make more substantial donations.⁴³ Most of these residents would have been Indians and *castas*, and the Mercedarians do seem to have had close connections to these groups. For example, at least seven Mercedarian churches in New Spain, including the ones in Guadalajara, Valladolid and Toluca, sponsored Afromexican confraternities.⁴⁴ Also, in 1734 the Mercedarian church in Guadalajara dedicated a new chapel to el Santo Cristo del Rescate, which housed a “copia verdadera” of an image of Christ that had been rescued from Muslims in North Africa. The three days of dedication celebrations included a procession with boys dressed as captives and sermons

dedicated to the image, which undoubtedly centered on redemption themes, maybe even on how the Mercedarians had redeemed Christ's image. The primary sponsor of this new chapel was a brotherhood of "pobres negros, indios, mestizos, mulatos, libres, esclavos" whose piety, respect for the sacraments, and penitential processions impressed one eighteenth-century observer.⁴⁵

Conclusions

Walking into any Mercedarian church provided an eyeful of representations of Mercedarians redeeming captives, but the four sides of the Mexico City convent's main patio, which was built in the late seventeenth century, offered an exceptionally instructive message. Each depicted symbols representing a particular theme. One side included symbols of Christ's Passion, such as a ladder and crown of thorns, representing the sacrifices Christ made in order to redeem humankind. A second showed emblems associated with Our Lady of Mercy, such as the moon and a mirror representing Mary's purity. These two sides highlighted, in the same manner that Mercedarian sermons did, the two central figures of Christianity in ways closely connected to the Mercedarians' work: Christ the Redeemer and Mary as the author and protector of Mercedarians and their work. The remaining two sides contained images not usually associated with Catholic churches but closely connected to Mercedarian history and sense of mission. One portrayed images of Muslim faces, and the other depicted instruments of captivity, such as shackles, yokes, and a watchtower that represented Muslims' vigilance over captives (Sánchez Salas 1992, 131-180). Each of these four sides thus fits with how Mercedarians presented their institute. Taken as a whole, however, they reveal an even clearer message about why the order's work was so vital and why residents of New Spain should help. Here, in the grandest patio of the Mercedarians' most important convent in New Spain, Muslims literally faced off against

Christ and Mary; here was depicted the church militant's greatest battle: the battle for people's souls. The patio thus offered a constant reminder, no matter which way one looked, of the heroic contest that the Mercedarians and their supporters, together, were fighting.

Mercedarian appeals for alms in New Spain kept their focus on this conflict, not on its prisoners of war. Captives were, in fact, a peripheral part of the message. Residents of the New World did not need to know captives personally to care about the larger battle, a struggle that was ultimately about neither slavery nor captivity. An especially cruel infidel was making protracted war on Christians and their Church, endangering countless souls and the universal kingdom of God. Here is why sermons reminded people that they all belonged to a spiritual community united through Christ, especially Christ the redeemer, and that it was their duty to help their fellow members of this community, wherever they were in the world. For this reason processions employed drummers and people dressed as captives to call attention to the good alms could do in this fight. Given the stakes, no wonder so many people responded. A battle between Christianity and its alternate but seemingly eternal foes—this was something that members of New Spain's Catholic community, from slaves, through indigenous and casta parishioners, to wealthy Spaniards, could easily understand.

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¹ The captive's tale can be found in chapters 39 through 41 of *Don Quixote*. Cervantes also wrote plays on the subject, *El Trato de Argel (Life in Algiers)* and *Los Baños de Argel (The Prisons of Algiers)*.

² Biblioteca Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Mexico City (BNAH), Colección Manuel Porrúa, "Libro de votos de los Mercedarios," 16; "if it were necessary for the redemption of Christ's faithful, I will remain detained as collateral in the power of Moors, to liberate them."

³ The order's early history is recounted in Broadman (1986). For an account of the order's founding more in line with Mercedarian traditions, see Vázquez (1931-36).

⁴ Friedman (1983, 123-124). The friars rarely brought the full amount in cash, often purchasing

in Spain merchandise such as cloth that they could sell in North Africa for additional profit. See Friedman (1987).

⁵ Davis (2001, 106-108) explains the drop occurred partly as a result of increased pressure from European monarchs and partly from declining demand for slaves to row in ships' galleys with the advent of new sailing vessels. Also see Weiss (2002, 34-37).

⁶ Friedman (1983, 115). Friedman's data on this subject end with a 1702 redemption.

⁷ Fr. Ginés de Melgárez made this statement in 1674, shortly before the major upswing in alms from New Spain. Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid (BNM) MSS 3572 "Informe de lo que se ha de tener en cuenta en la redencion de cautivos" cited in Aparicio (1982, 3).

⁸ The order did establish an early presence in Guatemala, but struggled to found houses within the Audiencia of Mexico. A detailed account of these efforts can be found in León Cázares (2004).

⁹ Aside from the main convent in Mexico City (1593) and a college on its outskirts (1626), the Mercedarians' Mexico Province included houses in Puebla (1598), Oaxaca (1601), Valladolid (1604), Colima (1607), Tacuba (1607), Atlixco (1613), Veracruz (1613), San Luis Potosí (1628), Guadalajara (1629), Aguascalientes (1654), Lagos (1685), Teocaltiche (1692), Zacatecas (1702), Toluca (1731), Querétaro (1734), Celaya (1742), Guanajunto (1752), and Valle de Santiago (1762). The house at Teocaltiche was suppressed as part of a state-mandated inspection in 1779.

¹⁰ See Melvin (2005), especially 64-65 and 86-87.

¹¹ Pareja (1882-83, t. II, 633-634); "It is certain that Mercedarian friars in these provinces of the Indies will not enjoy the glory of going to the lands of the infidels to redeem captives, this being the order's principal institute...but they always have the will to go and offer their lives for the Christian captives...and although they do not go corporally...they work with all caution in alms collection for the redemptions."

¹² Biblioteca del convento de Nuestra Señora de la Merced de México (BCNSM), Miguel Ochoa V., "Documentos mercedarios siglos XVI, XVII, XVIII, y XIX", tomo III, 242-245; "to distribute friars for the alms for Christian captives in all this kingdom, and these alms have seen a considerable increase...[and] an even larger increase is hoped for."

¹³ Navarro (1946, 245-246); "sought to bring as large a portion as they could of Mexican money, that is more esteemed and desired."

se ha de procurar conducir la mayor porción que se pueda de moneda mexicana, que es más estimada y apetecida”

¹⁴ Pareja (1882-83, tomo II, 635). Although the order’s official historians like Pareja were inclined to exaggerate figures, there is some reason to think that Pareja might have been citing his convent’s record books. Certainly he did this on other occasions, and the precise figure he used here combined with his specification that these alms had been gathered since the second year of the province (rather than since its inception) suggest he may have done the same here. Also, the weighting of the collection in the last twenty years of the span fits the timing of the upsurge in New Spain’s silver production as well as the Mercedarian province’s own growth.

¹⁵ Archivo General de las Indias (AGI) Indiferente 3055; BNAH Papeles Suetos, Serie 1, legajo 24, documento 29.

¹⁶ These figures can be found in BNAH Papeles Suetos, Serie 1, legajo 24, documentos 8 and 29 and AGI Indiferente 3055.

¹⁷ AGI, Contratación 5873, no. 10, “Libro de la redempcion que han executado los R.mos Redemptores de las Provincias de Castilla y Andalucia Calcada y Descalça del Real y Militar Horden de Nuestra Señora de la Merced, Redempcion de Cautivos, en la ciudad de Argel, en este presente año de 1702,” 7-7v; “the sufferings of the miserable captives in the power of the infidels” and “entreating the faithful to succor them with their alms.” The order’s Rule and Constitution included more detailed instructions for the precise rituals that were to be followed at each stage, such as what is sung at different points in the ceremonies. See Appendix XV in García Navarro (1946).

¹⁸ The cédula is dated 27 February, 1702. AGI, Contratación 5873, no. 10, “Libro de la redempcion”; “so that they serve to help rescue some relatives, friends, and acquaintances that the Moors have captured in the past year.” Friedman (1987, 95) also discusses contributions from friends and family.

¹⁹ Or, in a less friendly greeting, to steal the small pouches of tobacco that each captive had been given. García Navarro (1946, 128).

²⁰ BNAH, Colección Federico Gómez de Orozco, Leg. 94, “Panal mistico compendio de las grandezas del Celeste, Real, y Militar Orden de Nuestra Señora de la Merced Redempcion de Cautivos Christianos. Por el P. Frai Agustin de Andrade”; “the inhuman slavery of the soulless Turks.”

²¹ The following analysis is based on the approximately fifty Mercedarian sermons from New Spain that I have located, the majority of which come from the second half of the eighteenth century when alms collection was a central feature of the province.

²² Not all versions of this apparition gave Christ such a clear role in the order's foundation as did Rodríguez's. Rodríguez de Sosa (1757, 1-2); "My Son has sent me to you to tell you that he has made a charitable pledge that an Order will be founded in my name and glory with the title of Merced or Misericordia, whose institute and profession shall be to redeem captives"; "visiting them in living faith, in hope of health, and with true charity."

²³ This particular metaphor was also intended to showcase Mary's vigilant watch over her progeny, a theme depicted in one of the most common depictions of Our Lady of Mercy. In these images, Mercedarians and their supporters stood securely, comfortable under the shelter of Mary's ample cloak.

²⁴ By the mid-eighteenth century, the Holy Family had become an especially popular devotion and subject of numerous paintings.

²⁵ Such statements walked a fine line between extolling the virtues of a holy figure and what the Inquisition might have termed scandalous propositions. The crucial distinction was saying that it was difficult to distinguish them, not that they were indistinguishable. BNAH, Colección Manuel Porrúa "Sermon de N. S.to Patriarcha Predicado en S.n Luis Potosi año de 1767"; "money from his blood to redeem [the captives]."

²⁶ Rodríguez (1757, 10); "Do not doubt that Mercedarians run the risk of death and give their lives for the health and liberty of other souls, in living imitation and example of [Christ]."

²⁷ Morales Sígalá (1766, s.f.); "that thrown in their cells they have had and continually have shackles and chains among a thousand laments, until the Holy Redemptive Family redeems them."

²⁸ Morales Sígalá (1766, 11); "the harshest deprivations, the most bitter trials, and the heaviest tribulations of dark dungeons, of fetid, spoiled meals, of cruel whips, of continuous fasts, [and] heavy chains."

²⁹ Dermes (1727); "not so much to redeem their bodies from captivity as to free the souls of faithful captives from the danger of sin or injury." This edition was a reprint and so the novena may well have enjoyed some popularity at the time.

³⁰ Rodríguez (1757, 14); "from the infernal hands of the diabolical Saracen."

³¹ Báez (1791, 2-3, 8-10); “sterile charity”; “a living, inspired charity, with movement, with works”; “the mystical body of Jesus Christ that is the Church”.

³² Cited in Pareja (1882-83, tomo II, Appendix, 53-54); “numerous gathering of all classes, brought by curiosity to see the procession”; “like the recently rescued captives”.

³³ Cited in Pareja (1882-83, tomo II, Appendix, 74); “The Reverend Fathers of the convent of Our Lady of Mercy with other friars of the order and some lay persons dressed in the form of captives, accompanied by drummers of this New Spain and by not a small gathering of people, brought in carts one hundred thousand pesos that were received by the royal officials of His Majesty.”

³⁴ The following discussion is taken from a series of correspondence and copies of royal cédulas found in AGI, Indiferente 3055 and AGN, Templos y Conventos vol. 163. Translations from this section are as follows: “the small size of said amount and the unavoidable expenses that are spent in the transfer” and “the pomp and solemnity that in the past was customary so as to move residents of that realm to increase alms.”

³⁵ Taylor (1994) and Mujica Pinilla (2006, 51-52). A similar theme included paintings of Seville’s 1236 surrender to Saint Ferdinand III.

³⁶ BNAH, Colección Manuel Porrúa, “Libro segundo donde se asientan las limosnas de la Santa Redencion de Cautivos pertenciente del convento de la Santa Cruz del milagro del Sagrado, Real y Militar Orden de Nuestra Señora de la Merced de la Ciudad de Señor San Jose de Toluca”; Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Templos y Conventos, vol. 94, exp, 1 “Libro de cautivos perteneciente al convento de la Merced de Valladolid”; AGN Templos y Conventos, vol. 222, exp. 5, “Libro en que se asientan las limosnas de los Hermanos Cautivos, que se colectan en este convento de Guadalajara.”

³⁷ The *Libros* recorded alms by *trienio*, the three-year administrative cycles during which elected officials held office.

³⁸ For example, see the entry in the Guadalajara book for October 9 and 16, 1794 when no alms were collected: “no se colectó limosnas de la Calle”.

³⁹ That Molinos is capitalized suggests a family name, but inconsistent capitalization throughout the *Libro* leaves the questions open.

⁴⁰ Consider, for example, that so many of the entries included a half or quarter *real* in its total.

⁴¹ Third orders were lay religious brotherhoods similar to confraternities but were supposed to involve a more serious dedication not only to spiritual life but to the particular mendicant order itself. They were founded only in mendicant churches and were intended as a lay counterpart to first orders (friars) and second orders (nuns), and, unlike confraternities, members were only supposed to belong to a single third order. BNAH, Colección Manuel Porrúa, “Libro de recepciones de novicios”; “to live according to the Rule of Our Father Saint Augustine and the Constitutions of said Order, where I will work for the captives according to my abilities and station.”

⁴² BNAH, Colección Manuel Porrúa “Sermon de Nuestra Madre en fiesta de su Tercer Orden fundado en la Ciudad de San Luis Potosi año de 1766”; “it is accredited more glorious, more agreeable to the eyes of God from their voluntary generosity and endorsement than the first sons.” Interestingly, the reason offered for the greater glory of alms giving was that it was done voluntarily rather than by sacred vow, which was how friars’ ransoming was done.

⁴³ The house in Veracruz, for example, was described as “situado en el extremo de la ciudad, en que más abundan los pobres.” BCNSM, Pérez, tomo II, 124-128.

⁴⁴ Documentation is thin and scattered so there may well have been others. The seven convents were: Aguascalientes, Guadalajara, Mexico City (2), Toluca, Valladolid, Veracruz. Celaya may also have sponsored one. For a list of Afro-Mexican confraternities, see the Appendix in von Germeten (2006).

⁴⁵ Pareja (1882-83, v. II, Appendix, 48-49). The source of the quote is listed as “Mota Padilla que escribía en 1742, en el C. 56 n. 7” without any additional information.