The Novena to St. Boniface of Tarsus: 
A Pastoral Program for Addressing Sexual Addiction in Colonial Mexico 
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During the eighteenth century a priest in Mexico City wrote a novena to the once renowned St. Boniface of Tarsus to assist Christians trapped in sexual immorality. This saint was chosen in particular because of the sinful life that preceded his spectacular repentance and martyrdom. Unfortunately, the decline in devotion to St. Boniface has been accompanied by a misinterpretation of the novena by some modern readers who see it as focused exclusively on homosexuality. While the Mexican priest took a hard line against the sexual sins of his day, his novena reflects psychological insight and pastoral sensitivity that are consistent with contemporary approaches to addiction and therefore remain quite relevant.

During the eighteenth century, the “Very Noble and Loyal City of Mexico” was the most important metropolitan center in all of the Americas. Among its many impressive buildings, the city boasted the newly renovated vice-regal palace and the grandest cathedral in the hemisphere, both facing the largest plaza in Latin America, the Zocolo. It was also home to nine colleges, including the prestigious Jesuit College of San Ildefonso, and the first university in North America, with twenty-six academic chairs. The 1790 census recorded a population of 131,000, three times larger than that of Philadelphia, the largest city in British North America. However, in spite of the presence of eighty-seven churches, twenty-nine monasteries, and twenty-two convents, the city also faced all the urban social problems common to the age, including vagrancy, public drunkenness, and crime. And at least one clergyman recognized an even deeper moral problem infecting many inhabitants of the metropolis. Although the vocabulary of addiction was unknown at this time, the symptoms described by Father José Manuel García del Valle y Araujo and the program for recovery that he proposed are very familiar in our own day.

García del Valle was a diocesan priest in Mexico during the early eighteenth century. As a young man he attended the Tridentine Seminary in Puebla and was ordained a priest sometime before 1708. Later in his career, he held various ecclesiastical posts in Mexico City. In 1729 he was the
senior chaplain at the Hospital of the Immaculate Conception and Jesus of Nazareth, founded by Hernan Cortes in 1524. In 1742 he was chaplain for the nuns at the Hieronymite convent of San Lorenzo de México (founded 1598). Around that same time he also served as Synodal Examiner for the archdiocese, indicating official recognition of his learning and orthodoxy. Happily, the relatively light duties of these sinecures left the priest time for spiritual writing, and his numerous books of devotional meditations and novenas were reprinted in Mexico, Guatemala, Cuba, and the Philippines well into the next century.

A novena is a para-liturgical devotion consisting of nine days of private or public vernacular prayers. The custom of nine days of preparation for special feasts began in the early Middle Ages, and novenas of prayer for special graces existed before the year 1000. These latter devotions multiplied during the seventeenth century and were “immensely popular among Catholic believers in eighteen- and nineteenth-century Mexico.” Although almost a thousand novena titles have been identified from this period, this probably represents only a fraction of the number actually published. No doubt novenas flourished because they were known to produce results, both spiritual and material. As the 1913 Catholic Encyclopedia explained, the novena is a kind of prayer “which includes in it, so to speak, as a pledge of being heard, confidence and perseverance, two most important qualities of efficacious prayer.” Or as Flannery O’Connor observed, “The virtue of novenas is that they keep you at it for nine consecutive days and the human attention being what it is, this is a long time.”

It was within the context of one of his novenas that García del Valle identified “indecent vice” as the moral plague afflicting Mexican society. In particular, he explained, this nine-day devotion to the fourth-century Christian martyr, St. Boniface of Tarsus, was written to combat “the chronic vice of inhuman intercourse” and to obtain from God “the deliverance of those poor individuals” trapped in this sin. He was inspired to promote this devotion because through his ministry in the confessional he had witnessed, thanks to the intercession of this saint, “miraculous conversions, even of many souls for whom, considering their entanglements and habits, the freedom that they sought was morally impossible.” In fact, it is exactly this loss of personal freedom which identifies the sexual misbehavior involved as an “addiction” in modern parlance.

Although no specific acts are specified, the sexual nature of the sin targeted by this novena is clear from the vivid language the author employed. As the novena explains, before his own conversion Boniface himself “burned with the fires of lust” and was “ensnared in the sad chains of impurity” But having escaped, though God’s grace, he was now able to
assist “those unfortunate souls, miserable slaves, who find themselves tied with the devil’s chains in the labyrinth of indecent love.”\textsuperscript{15} Therefore his intercession should be sought for those “whom the devil has marked with the seal of unchastity,” those who “drink the bitter cup of impurity, whose false sweetness ends in the gall of condemnation.”\textsuperscript{16} Again, the frequent use of terms like “chains,” “slavery,” “prison,” and “vile servitude” all point to the compulsive nature of this behavior.

At the same time, the use of the expression “inhuman intercourse,” and in some later editions, “inhuman vice,” point to a very precise understanding of the psychological and moral aspects of the aforementioned malady. Because we are rational creatures, the first principle distinguishing human acts from the instinctual behavior of brute beasts is the operation of free will. According to the principles of Catholic moral theology, “\textit{actus humanus ille solus dicitur qui procedit a deliberata hominis voluntate}.”\textsuperscript{17} (“Human acts are only those which proceed from the deliberate act of man’s will.”). Indeed, “not all acts which proceed from a man are to be called human.”\textsuperscript{18} According to St. Thomas, truly human acts are characterized by knowledge, free will, and freedom. Hence, the absence of these qualities renders such acts “inhuman” by definition.\textsuperscript{19}

It should not be surprising that such technical terminology is misunderstood in our own day. So it appears that some casual readers stumbling across the novena to St. Boniface have imagined that the use of the word “inhuman” in this context must be understood as a synonym for “unnatural,” implying homosexuality. In fact, because they are not ordered to the natural end (i.e., purpose) of sexual intercourse, moral theology does define masturbation, homosexual acts, and bestiality as unnatural sins (“\textit{contra naturam}”).\textsuperscript{20} Hence, in colonial Mexico homosexual behavior was always called the “\textit{pecado nefando contra natura}” (“nefarious sin against nature”) rather than “inhuman vice.”\textsuperscript{21} Nevertheless, some homosexual activists have used the eighteenth-century novena to St. Boniface as evidence of early attempts to “pray away the gay,” seeing it as just one more proof of the Church’s unenlightened attitudes toward homosexuals.

Because of this error in translation, the “Novena that in Charity we ought to make to the Glorious Martyr Saint Boniface” has become part of a very different kind of martyrology. In particular, this misunderstanding is reflected in the work of Len Evans, a self-styled chronicler of homosexual history and one-time member of the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian History Project.\textsuperscript{22} After thirty years of collecting information “from standard works” and “scattered references,” in 1996 he published an online version of his “Gay Chronicles from the Beginning of Time to the End of World War II.”\textsuperscript{23} The Mexican novena was included as an entry for 1732.
and described as “prayer addressed to St. Boniface to intercede with God
to rid the homosexual of his ‘dishonorable vice.’” Since Evans’s catalog
of crimes against homosexuals has spread to other similarly-themed web-
sites, the long-forgotten Father García del Valle may have achieved an
undeserved posthumous infamy. Adding even more spice to the priest’s bi-
ography, the hospital where he served as chaplain was also misrepresented
as “founded by Cortes for the treatment of syphilis.” However, although
there was a hospital in Mexico City for care of syphilis, this was the
Hospital of the Love of God, founded by Bishop Juan de Zumárraga in
1541, not the 1524 foundation by Cortes.24

Perhaps, before our modern age, references to the sin “that dare not
speak its name” were necessarily oblique. And like addictive heterosexual
behavior, the “nefarious sin” might also be considered “inhuman” as well
as “unnatural” to the extent that it is compulsive. But if those addicted to
homosexual acts were included in the company of sinners encouraged to
have recourse to St. Boniface, there is no evidence of hostility or intoler-
ance toward them or any other sinners, whom the author calls “these broth-
ers of mine.” Rather, García del Valle’s pastoral sensitivity is evident in the
measures he took to remove even the hint of stigma from those participat-
ating in the devotion. “Even if you do not need it for yourself,” he wrote, “in
certainty you ought and should pray to God for your poor brothers, that are
in similar misery [as Boniface once was] and at risk of losing God for all
eternity.”25 Participation in the novena, then, should not be interpreted as
public admission of sin, but rather a sign of fraternal compassion.26

On the other hand, the life of the saint himself indicates that the focus
of the novena was not homosexuality. It was explicitly directed toward
those who could identify with St. Boniface because “for many years” he
had suffered from the same “miserable disease” as they. He was “the most
special advocate for such a lamentable misfortune” because he was “once
so miserable and weak.”27 But in his case, the “disgusting quagmire of
such an infamous vice” in which he was trapped was not homosexuality,
but the “dishonorable love” for a woman named Aglae, with whom he car-
rried on an illicit affair for many years. Because Boniface and Aglae were
living in sin, it is probable that concubinage was a special target of the no-
vena. The practice of cohabitation was frequent in colonial Mexico, where
immigrants from Spain encountered unfamiliar indigenous, African, and
mixed-race populations. In this complex social hierarchy, it was harder to
regularize illicit unions across racial or class lines, another point of identi-
fication with the relationship between Boniface, a slave, and his elite mis-
tress.28 Mexican anticlericals advocating civil marriage even claimed that
immorality was more common among the lower classes because of the

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high cost of church weddings. Prostitution was also a problem in Mexico City, where almost 30 percent of the population was unmarried. In any event, the moral paralysis and loss of freedom produced by illicit relationships (“inhumana conversacion”) of whatever kind or duration could all be encompassed by this novena. Because of his experience of vice and repentance, both the example of Boniface and his powerful intercession were harnessed to help other men in similar situations find repentance and freedom.

Although Boniface was martyred around A.D. 300, the oldest extant version of his story comes from the early seventh century. According to this tradition, he was the steward of a wealthy Roman woman, Aglae, who was given over to luxurious living and lavish parties. Although he was known for his kindness to guests and generosity toward the poor, Boniface was a confirmed drunkard and fornicator, “a friend of everything that the Lord God detests.” After many years of living in sin, the grace of God touched Aglae, perhaps already a nominal Christian, and she convinced Boniface that they should do penance for their sinful lifestyle. Later, when she heard reports of the terrible persecution of Christians in the East, she instructed Boniface to travel there to retrieve some of the martyrs’ relics, hoping to benefit from their powerful intercession. As he departed, Boniface actually joked that if his quest was unsuccessful, he would send back his own body as a relic instead, but was reproached by Aglae for suggesting that such a debauched person as himself could ever qualify as a martyr.

Soon after arriving in Tarsus in Cilicia, Boniface witnessed the public torture of twenty Christians. Deeply moved by the sight, he hurried to console the dying martyrs, and loudly shouted out “Great is the God of the Christians!” Dragged before the governor, Boniface was asked his name, to which he only replied, “a Christian.” He was then condemned to various gruesome tortures. His flesh was torn with iron hooks, sharpened reeds were driven under his fingernails, molten lead was poured into his mouth, and he was cast into a cauldron of boiling pitch, which exploded when he made the sign of the cross over it, burning his persecutors instead. Because he refused to denounce Christ, Boniface was finally condemned to death, and according to one account, when his head was cut off blood and milk flowed from the wound as a sign to unbelievers. After some time, Aglae’s servants who had accompanied Boniface to Tarsus retrieved his head and mutilated body and returned them to his mistress in Rome, who built a chapel on the Latin Way to house them. She also dedicated the remaining thirteen years of her life to prayer and penance there, after distributing all her worldly goods to the poor. The Cilician monks who recorded the Acts of the martyr in the early seventh century reported that up to their
own time demons were being expelled and all manner of infirmities cured through the intercession of St. Boniface at this shrine. The earliest physical evidence of the cult of St. Boniface in Rome is the church built in his honor on the Aventine by Pope Boniface III around 600. Apparently his relics were also transferred at this time, since the saint’s head and body were identified there during renovations to the building in 1603, after which one of his arms was taken to Carcaixent in Valencia, Spain. On the other hand, the fact that five popes bore his name before 625 suggests that the saint was already well known. His feast day was added to the Roman calendar (May 14) around the year 650, during the pontificate of Martin I. The more famous St. Boniface, Bishop and Martyr, with whom our saint is often confused, was given his name by Pope Gregory II in honor of the earlier martyr when he commissioned the English monk Winfrith as apostle to the Germans on May 15, 719. In 972 Pope Benedict VII transferred the church of St. Boniface to the Greek metropolitan, Sergius of Damascus, who had fled to Rome to escape Muslim persecution. Here he founded a monastery for Greek and Latin monks, who lived side by side under their respective rules until the Great Schism in 1054. The Greek monks of this period also introduced the cult of St. Alexius to Rome and Pope Honorius added his name to the church’s dedication in 1217. Today, the Basilica of SS. (Santi) Bonifacio e Alessio on the Aventine is the titular church of Cardinal Eusebio Oscar Scheid, retired Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro.

The story of St. Boniface was well known during the Middle Ages through the *Golden Legend* by Jacobus de Voragine, completed around 1260. Interest in him was revived in the seventeenth century as a consequence of the scholarly research into the lives of the saints undertaken by the Jesuit Bollandists. The documents concerning St. Boniface were included in their definitive *Acta Sanctorum*, which became the basis for a number of pious meditations on his life. For example, the Jesuit Jean Croiset (1656–1738), one of the spiritual directors of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque, wrote a book of meditations for each day in the sanctoral calendar. His meditations for May 14 presented St. Boniface as a model of repentance for “the worldly, dissolute, carnal and impious.” Another French Jesuit, Jean Etienne Grosez (1642–1718), also included St. Boniface in his *Le Journal des Saints* (1670), pointing out that although he was given over to sin, his generosity to the poor was the source of the grace for his conversion. Therefore, those who “have been guilty of sins against purity” were advised to imitate the saint by a tender charity to the poor and severe penance. Since Spanish editions of these works were published almost immediately after their appearance in French, it is probable that
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these meditations helped inspire the novena by Father García del Valle in Mexico in the early eighteenth century.

Later in the eighteenth century, the English priest Alban Butler (1710–1773) included the story of St. Boniface in his monumental Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints. And the example of St. Boniface continued to inspire writers throughout the nineteenth century. The Benedictine abbot, Prosper Guéranger (1837–1875), reflected upon St. Boniface, whose martyrdom made “atonement for the sinful pleasures in which he had indulged,” in his classic work on the Liturgical Year. The Austrian Jesuit, Francis Xavier Weninger (1805–1888), who preached thousands of sermons in his missions across the United States, also included a meditation on Boniface in his Lives of the Saints (1876):

Boniface and Aglae, two great sinners who had long lived a life of vice and shame, were thoroughly converted to God: both became Saints, and Boniface even a martyr. It is true that the conversion of a man who has long lived in sin, especially unchastity, is considered by the Holy Fathers as a miracle which happens but seldom. Yet the All-Merciful worked such a miracle on Boniface and Aglae, as He had done on some others, that no sinner should have cause to despair on account of his sins, though he may have committed them almost numberless times and have remained for years in them.

On the other hand, during the twentieth century, the legend of St. Boniface came under increased scrutiny. Along with the miraculous details of his story, the three hundred-year gap between the saint’s death and the first evidence of his cult raised suspicions among modern scholars of hagiography. Thus the Belgian Bollandist, Hippolyte Delehaye, S.J. (1859–1941), in his 1905 Legends of the Saints declared the martyrdom of St. Boniface to be no more than pious fiction. In this critical atmosphere, St. Boniface of Tarsus was among the many saints whose feast days were eliminated in the calendar revisions promulgated by Pope Paul VI in 1969. Officially, the rationale for their deletion was that “only those [feast days] should be extended to the universal Church which commemorate saints who are truly of universal significance.” At the same time, the need for a solid historical basis for the cult of saints had already been recognized in the 1917 Code of Canon Law. According to Canon 2104, “in the case of the canonization of a martyr, the question is whether his martyrdom is absolutely certain and whether it is known for sure that signs or miracles occurred.” In the absence of such evidence, undocumented saints were quietly transferred to a less prominent category of devotion.
contrary to a popular misunderstanding, none of these saints were officially “de-canonized.” In fact, their names remain untouched in the Roman Martyrology, one of the official liturgical books of the Church. The May 14 Commemoration of St. Boniface is also restored in the celebration of the Extraordinary Form according to the 1962 missal.\(^{54}\) And since the Orthodox have avoided the Western tendency to revisionist hagiography, the Holy Martyr Boniface remains prominent in the calendars of the Eastern Churches, where his feast is celebrated, along with that of Aglae the Righteous, on December 19.\(^{55}\) Because of his pre-conversion reputation as a drunkard, among the Orthodox St. Boniface is particularly invoked for deliverance from alcoholism.\(^{56}\)

In colonial Mexico, however, there were no misgivings about the deeds of St. Boniface or his intercessory power. It might even be said that had St. Boniface not existed it would have been necessary to invent him. Although many saints had sinful backgrounds, few provided such a clear example of conversion after such a long period of indulgence in illicit vice. At the same time, St. Boniface’s dramatic death as a martyr also made him a most powerful intercessor. Of course, St. Mary Magdalene has always been seen as a model of penitence, and Fr. García del Valle’s first publication was a novena in her honor printed in 1708.\(^{57}\) But here the focus was on her love of Christ with little reference to her previous life. The identification of St. Boniface with conversion is also evident in another devotion published in Mexico by a different author. Rather than a novena, this was an exercise for the 14th of each month asking for St. Boniface’s intercession for true repentance and the avoidance of future mortal sin. Significantly, it also calls upon the saint to “shut the mouths of those scandalous ones who use impure speech and obscene works in their continual brawling and indecent songs.” Rather, St. Boniface should “open their mouths to make a good confession and make them realize the sin of scandal that they commit.”\(^{58}\)

Fr. García del Valle’s novena is unique in its presentation of St. Boniface as a masculine mediator for those trapped in the habit of sexual sin and the meditations for each day provide a chronological reflection on significant moments in his life.\(^{59}\) Thus, the prayers of the first day recall his previous condition “ensnared in the sad chains of impurity,” and asks his help for those likewise “cast in the mud of dishonorable love.” The prayers of the next three days recount Boniface’s repentance and the early premonition of his death, imploring his intercession for those poor souls “that the devil holds in the dungeons of indecent love.” On the fifth day, Boniface is shown comforting the martyrs of Tarsus and he is asked to appeal to Jesus, who likewise suffered mistreatment at the hands of the authorities,
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for the freedom of those bound “with the devil’s chains.” On the following two days Boniface’s own tortures are recalled, which, joined with the sufferings of Christ, will obtain redemption for those “whom the devil has marked with the seal of unchastity.” Finally, the novena culminates with the glorious death and beatitude of the martyr. Now in heaven, he is implored to “shed on us the dew of your benefits, freeing us from the ugliness of sensuality so that we may rejoice with you eternally in heaven.”

A recurring theme in these prayers is a concern for those who have not yet realized the mortal danger of their situation and have so far “closed their ears to the calls of the Divine Shepherd.” Repeatedly, St. Boniface is asked to intercede with Jesus, not only for the one making the novena, but also “for those Christians, that without fear of the strict accounting that is expected of them, drink the bitter chalice of impurity,” that they may “know the gravity of their faults.” Thus the martyr is asked to unite his sufferings with the sword that pierced the hearts of Jesus and Mary on the Via Dolorosa, that they might become “the two-edged sword that separates and severs the deeply rooted relationships of worldly lovers and at the same time pierces their unrepentant hearts.” As the novena makes clear, the movement from sin to repentance to healing and freedom, as exemplified in the life of St. Boniface, must begin with recognition of one’s moral condition. This probably explains the dramatic images of bondage to sin that Fr. García del Valle employed. As Flannery O’Connor once explained, defending the grotesque characters of her fiction, “To the hard of hearing you shout, and for the almost blind you draw large and startling figures.”

As the language of the novena makes clear, impurity and illicit relationships can become a form of bondage from which a sinner cannot expect to escape unaided. As already noted, Fr. García del Valle himself recognized that “considering their habits and entanglements,” for many “the freedom they sought” was “morally impossible” without divine assistance. Yet rather than a cause of despair, such a realization is fundamental to most modern programs of recovery. As one of the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) explained, “Our admissions of personal powerlessness finally turn out to be firm bedrock upon which happy and purposeful lives may be built.” Numerous Twelve-Step programs, including those addressing so-called “sex and love” addictions, begin with the statement: “We admitted we were powerless—that our lives had become unmanageable.” Clearly something of this same spiritual principle or psychological dynamic is implicit in the St. Boniface novena.

Likewise, the second and third steps of every twelve-step recovery program are also reflected in the novena. Where the modern addict must come to believe “that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to
sanity,” the clients of St. Boniface were also convinced that God could and would rescue them from their “vile servitude” through the merits of Christ and the intercession of this “strong champion of sorrowful sinners.” To inculcate this confidence, Fr. García del Valle had first assured his reader that he had already seen “miraculous conversions” of those who entrusted themselves to the patronage of the “beloved martyr St. Boniface.” At the same time, the conversion of St. Boniface himself was incontrovertible proof of God’s power to transform even the most hardened sinner. In fact, the very existence of this “special advocate” demonstrated that God “leaves neither time nor place in which He does not pour out abundantly the helps and means” needed for the salvation of souls. Inspired by this confidence, the votary begins each day of the novena by acknowledging God as “my Creator, my Conserver and Redeemer” and ends by entrusting himself to the infinite love of God. This, in effect, replicates the movement of the Third Step, where those in recovery “made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.”

Of course, the acts of the fourth and fifth steps of modern recovery programs are already familiar to practicing Catholics and were an essential part of eighteenth-century piety as well. Step four requires “a searching and fearless moral inventory” and in step five the alcoholic or addict “admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.” It goes without saying that a thorough examination of conscience and a sincere confession were the expected outcomes of the novena to St. Boniface. In particular, on day eight the penitent asks the martyr to intercede “for those miserable sinners, corrupted with the filthy leprosy of impure transgressions,” that they may be “healed by confession and penance.”

The founders of AA insisted that with the first five steps they were “building an arch through which we shall walk a free man at last.” In the remaining seven steps the person in recovery makes amends for past mistakes and addresses more fundamental character defects. This is a comprehensive program for spiritual growth that goes beyond the scope of Fr. García del Valle’s novena. Nevertheless, those transformed by the novena were also expected to make “amendment for their sins” as well as showing “true sorrow.” Furthermore, “once recovered” through the patronage of St. Boniface, they were to “guard the pearl of chastity according to their state in life” and “walk in the grace of God on the road of perfection.” For this, the ordinary teachings of the Catholic Church would suffice, perhaps supplemented by the other spiritual works penned by Fr. García del Valle.

Today, the pious priest José Manuel García del Valle is forgotten, except on websites dedicated to an alternative “gay history.” The story of St.
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Boniface is likewise unfamiliar to most of the Catholic faithful. Yet the issues addressed in the eighteenth-century novena to the saint are very much with us, and Fr. García del Valle’s pastoral approach to addiction is still valid today. First, his novena reflects the perennial wisdom of the Church’s understanding of the human person. While highlighting the consequences of personal responsibility, it also recognizes the problem of individual weakness and the difficulty of change. Yet the promise of grace, reflected in every prayer of the novena, provides an alternative to the fatalism of personal failure. Indeed, the legend of St. Boniface indicates that the need for a heroic model of successful repentance from an immoral lifestyle was felt even in the early seventh century when the story was first written down. Above all, the novena itself reminds us that no one is alone in their moral or spiritual struggle. After all, St. Boniface himself is another instance of that fellowship described by St. Paul when he declared (after listing the kind of sinners excluded from heaven) “and such were some of you!”

At the same time, Fr. García del Valle’s request that all Christians embrace this novena not only serves to preserve anonymity: it also highlights the ideal of a caring community, which intercedes for its members entrapped in sin. Surely these insights would be valuable for any course of therapy or program of recovery today. Perhaps one day a renewed “hermeneutic of continuity” will allow us to reconnect with this shared experience and recover the therapeutic tools already imbedded in our own tradition.

Notes

1. The Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico was founded in 1551. The Colegio de San Ildefonso was founded in 1588 and closed during the expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767. A description of the colonial city and its buildings is found in Seán Galvin, ed. and trans., A Description of the Kingdom of New Spain by Sr. Dn. Pero Alonso O’Croley, 1774 (San Francisco: John Howell Books, 1972), 29–31.


3. The title page to his novena to St. Mary Magdalene, first published in 1708 in Puebla de los Ángeles, identifies him as “El Br. D[on]. Joseph Manuel García [sic] del Valle y Araujo, Presbytero, Colegial de este Apostolico Colegio de N.G.P. Sr. S. Pedro, de esta Ciudad.” El Br. D. Joseph Manuel García del Valle y Araujo, Novena en glorias de la amante arrepentida Santa María Magdalena, Para alcanzar de Dios Nró Sr. reforma de una mala vida, aumento de virtudes y una feliz muerte (repr., Puebla, Mexico: Col. Garito, 1814). (Reprinted in Mexico in 1744 and 1796, in Guatemala in 1776, and in Manila, the Philippines, in 1868,
1888 [in Tagalog], and 1894). The Tridentine Seminary, Colegio de San Pedro, was founded in 1643 by Archbishop Juan de Palafox for boys of the diocese between the ages of 11 and 18. In García del Valle’s published works, his title is given as “el Lic.” (licenciado = having a bachelor’s degree) or “Br.” (bachillerato). His signature also appears on the inside cover of a rare book printed in Madrid in 1678 (Itinerario historial que debe guardar el hombre para caminar al cielo . . . , by Padre Alonso de Andrade, S.J.) as “Bach. José Manuel del Valle y Araujo, México, 1718.” See “Itinerario historial que debe guardar el hombre para caminar al cielo” (Abe Books, http://www.abebooks.com/servlet/BookDetailsPL?bi=9533010423&searchurl=an%3DAlonso%2Bde%2BAndrade%26amp%3BBs i%3D60%26amp%3Bx%3D67%26amp%3By%3D6 (accessed October 17, 2013).


5. The title page of his meditations on the Blessed Sacrament identifies him as “Capellan del Convento de Religiosas de San Lorenzo, Examindor Synodal de este Arzobispado.” El Lic. D. Joseph Manuel del Valle, y Araujo, Trono espirtual, Mystico altar, que fabrica la Alma al mayor bien de los bienes Jesu Christo Sacramentado, En los ocho dias de su Solemne Octava (repr., Mexico City: Viuda de Joseph Bernardo de Hogal, 1746). (Reprinted in 1760, 1762, 1767, 1773, 1784, 1789, 1794, 1804, 1808, 1825, 1831, and 1852). The title of his position reflects the fact that such “examiners” are chosen by their diocesan synod. Their duties include the examination of candidates for holy orders and of priests to be approved for hearing confessions and preaching.


9. About 970 have been identified in the Bernardo Mendel Collection of the Lilly Library at Indiana University in Bloomington (96 percent Mexican) and another 870 from the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas (88 percent Guatemalan). Pichilingue, “Los Santos de las Novenas,” http://222.colonialarts.com/pages/detail/324 (accessed November 3, 2013).
12. All references to the novena refer to my translation of the 1817 reprint. The original contains no pagination. José Manuel del Valle y Araujo, Novena que en caridad debemos hacer al Glorioso Martir San Bonifacio, eficaz para alcanzar de Dios la separacion de aquellos pobres, que por su miseria estan en pecado mortal de inhumano vicio (repr., Mexico City: [Jáuregui,] 1817), passim. Other editions have also been identified: Novena . . . de inhumano vicio (Mexico City: Imprenta del C. Alejandro Valdés, 1833), Novena . . . de inhonesto vicio (Mexico City: Imprenta de Arizpe, 1808), Novena . . . de inhonesto vicio (Mexico City: Imprenta del C. Alejandro Valdés, 1808), Novena . . . de inhonesto vicio (Mexico City: D. Felipe Zuñiga y Ontiveros, 1781). The original 1732 edition has not been found.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
18. Technically, these would be acts of a man, but not of a “human,” since they do not reflect the factors which make a man truly human. J. S. Hickey, O.Cist., Summula Philosophiae Scholasticae, vol. 3, Theodicaea et Ethica (Dublin: M. H. Gill & Sons, 1928), 244.
19. The author wishes to thank Fr. Lambert Greenan, O.P., for his assistance with the distinctions of moral theology.
22. Now known as the “Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Historical Society,” this organization maintains an archive of over 500 collections of personal papers related to homosexual history. The papers of Len Evans (1943–2003) are housed there and are frequently cited by historians working in this field. Evans’s goal was to assemble “the known historical facts about homosexuality in an easily accessible format, to make those facts available to the widest possible audience.” Evans explained that he did not include citations for references in his chronology because “that would have turned this into a drudgery that I have neither the time, energy, or inclination to pursue.” “Introduction to Gay Chronicles,” http://web.archive.org/web/20091027111655/http://geocities.com/gueroperro/Chron-Intro-page.htm. Biographical information may be found by searching Evans’s name in “About Our Collections,” GLBT Historical Society, http://www.glbthistory.org/research/index.html (accessed October 17, 2013).

24. There were seven hospitals in Mexico City during the eighteenth century, including Cortés’s second foundation, the San Lazaro Hospital for lepers (1524, re-founded in 1572 and 1721) and the San Hipólito Hospital (1569), the first psychiatric facility in the hemisphere. For the history of the Hospital del Amor de Dios, see Marco Antonio Villa Juárez, “El Hospital Real del Amor de Dios,” http://www.wikimexico.com/wps/portal/wm/wikimexico/periodos/mexico-virreinal/nueva-espana/vida-cotidiana/El-hospital-real-del-amor-de-dios (accessed October 17, 2013).


26. A sign of official approval of the novena is the indulgence of eighty days to “all and whatsoever persons” every time they prayed the novena granted by the Archbishop of Mexico in 1777. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. This seems to have also been a factor in the relationship of St. Augustine and his concubine, which he described in his Confessions. In Book 6 he explained that he broke off this relationship in order to marry. However, during his two-year engagement he took another mistress, being “more a slave of lust than a true lover of marriage.” Saint Augustine, Confessions, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (New York: Penguin, 1961), 131.

29. See Silvia Marina Arrom, The Women of Mexico City, 1790-1857 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985), 112–13; and Patricia Seed, To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts Over Marriage Choice, 1574–1821 (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 27, 72–74, 146. Arrom notes that the nineteenth-century liberal José María Luis Mora attributed the prevalence of concubinage to the prohibitive cost of weddings. Arrom, The Women of Mexico City, 314n26. Seed, however, states that “because living in a sexual union outside marriage was a mortal sin, and because these longstanding unions offered little prospect of such reformation and termination, the church sometimes performed such marriages for what was called ‘the service of God’—that is, to rescue the man’s immortal soul from eternal damnation.” Seed, To Love, Honor, and Obey, 74.

30. [García] del Valle, Novena que en caridad, passim.

31. Boniface is supposed to have been martyred during the reign of Diocletian; the date is variously given as between 290 and 307. “The Gesta Bonifatii, which exist in both Greek and Latin versions, were probably written in Rome during the first half of the seventh century by Cilician monks living in the monastery of St. Anatasios at Aquas Salvias.” Andrew J. Ekonomou, Byzantine Rome and the Greek Popes: Eastern Influences on Rome and the Papacy from Gregory the Great to Zacharias, A.D. 590–752 (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2007), 281n98. The first Latin translation of the Passio Bonifatii mart. Tarsi is from the

32. Passio Bonifatii Romani, 311.
33. This detail appears only in the Martyrium Sancti, 342.
34. Passio Bonifatii Romani, 323.

37. Pope Boniface I (r. 418–422), Pope Boniface II (r. 530–532), Pope Boniface III (r. 607), Pope Boniface IV (r. 608–615) and Pope Boniface V (r. 619–625). Ekonomou, Byzantine Rome, 281n98.
38. Ibid., 254.
40. Engels, “The West European Alexius Legend,” 98–99. The monastery itself became an important missionary center and was the base for St. Adalbert of Prague’s mission to the Slavs in 993.
43. Jacobus de Voragine, Legenda aurea (Dresden: Librarie Arnoldiana, 1846), 316–18.


50. “The account here given, abbreviated from Alban Butler, was published by him, apparently without the least misgiving, as a narrative derived from the authentic acts of the martyr. Delehaye, and other modern authorities, pronounce the story to be no more than a pious fiction. The ‘acts’ are to be found in the *Acta Sanctorum*, May, vol. iii. See further Duchesne, *Mélanges d’Archéologie*, 1890, 2–10, and the *Nuovo Bulletino di archeologia crist.*, vol. vi (1900), 205–234. The story was very popular in the Middle Ages and gave rise to much folklore; on which consult Bächtold-Stäubli, *Handwörterbuch des deut. Aberglaubens*, vol. i, 1475 seq.” Butler, 306.


53. The Church also recognizes “equipollent evidence” in authorizing the veneration of saints. “Equipollent evidence (*aequi* = “equal”; *pollere* = “to be strong”) is evidence of martyrdom of a non-documentary nature that can be admitted when documentary evidence is lacking. By longstanding tradition, equipollent evidence in the case of a martyr means *proof of a cult going back at least one hundred years* prior to the opening of the martyr’s cause. This proof is usually liturgical (local feasts, records of homilies in praise of martyrs, hymns) and sometimes architectural (shrines, art, etc.).” See “Roman Frescoes and the English Martyrs,” Unam Sanctam Catholicam, http://www.unamsanctamcatholicam.com/history/historia-ecclesiae/79-history/374-roman-frescoes-and-the-english-martyrs.html (accessed October 17, 2013).

54. “Grant, we beseech Thee, O almighty God, that we who keep the solemn festival of blessed Boniface, Thy Martyr, may be helped by his intercession with Thee. Through our Lord”; “Collect for the Commemoration of St. Boniface, Martyr” (May 14), *The Roman Catholic Daily Missal 1962* (Kansas City, Mo.:
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Angelus Press), 1208. There was also a lengthy account of the life of St. Boniface in Matins for May 14 in the Divine Office before the readings were reduced from nine to three in 1955.


59. Although the daily prayers are addressed to St. Boniface, the focus of the devotion is eminently Christocentric. After a reference to an event of the saint’s life, he is asked to offer to God some comparable aspect of the sufferings of Christ, on whose merits the graces implored depend.

60. [García] del Valle, Novena que en caridad, passim.

61. Ibid.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid. Obviously, breaking a long romantic relationship could be painful. Thus St. Augustine described his separation from his mistress as “a blow which crushed my heart to bleeding, because I loved her dearly.” St. Augustine, Confessions, 131.


65. [García] del Valle, Novena que en caridad, passim.


68. Ibid.

69. [García] del Valle, Novena que en caridad, passim.

70. Alcoholics Anonymous, 59.

71. Ibid. “Those of us belonging to a religious denomination which requires confession must, and of course, will want to go to the properly appointed authority whose duty it is to receive it.” [Bill W.], Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 74.

72. [García] del Valle, Novena que en caridad, passim.

73. [Bill W.], Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, 75.

74. [García] del Valle, Novena que en caridad, passim.

75. 1 Corinthians 6:11.
APPENDIX

THE NOVENA OF ST. BONIFACE

Translated by David A. Gilbert
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Novena That in Charity We Ought to Make to the Glorious Martyr Saint Boniface, Effective for obtaining from God the deliverance of those poor individuals, who for their misery are in the mortal sin of inhuman vice.

Composed by José Manuel del Valle y Araujo,
Priest of this Archdiocese

MEXICO: 1817.

In the office on the corner of Tacuba and St. Dominic.

Reason for this Novena

God so desires the salvation of souls that He leaves neither time nor place in which He does not pour out abundantly the helps and means in order to achieve it. And since the chronic vice of inhuman intercourse is one of the main impediments to our salvation, (which for our wretchedness is so frequent that hell is full), in recent times God has placed the unconquered martyr Saint Boniface (because he suffered from this miserable disease for many years) as the most special advocate for such a lamentable misfortune. For which I assure you, my reader, that in many years hearing confessions, I have seen miraculous conversions, even of many souls for whom, considering their entanglements and habits, the freedom they sought was morally impossible, unless they availed themselves of the patronage of this glorious penitent. Because of which, even if you do not need it for yourself, you ought and should, in charity, pray to God for your poor brothers, that, in similar misery, are at risk of losing God for all eternity. Therefore this Novena is commencing on the 6th day of May, and will finish on the 14th day, in which the Church celebrates the happy martyrdom of this glorious saint: although you can also make it at any other time of the year.
Addressing Sexual Addiction in Colonial Mexico

**Act of Contrition**

Lord and God of mercies, God by nature and Man for my healing, from whom so many times I have turned away my face, only to see the terrifying asps of my sins, deaf to Your call, blind to Your wounds, and without gratitude. I regret with all my heart having offended You with such enormous faults and bold offenses and for having wasted my life in a place of such bitterness. I know that there is not hell sufficient, although it lasts forever, for me to pay for my infinite faults, repenting of which I ask a thousand pardons through Your infinite mercy, through Your five wounds, and through the merits and sorrows of Your afflicted Mother, my Lady. With Your grace and Your help, I firmly intend to amend myself. Have mercy, my God, have mercy.

**Prayer for Every Day**

Lord most high and tremendous Majesty, that with love alone created the beauty of Your heaven with its nine choirs of spiritual inhabitants, and the beautiful machine of the world with all species of living things. I worship and adore You infinitely, and confess that You are my God, my Creator, my Conserver and Redeemer. And I offer You, as the work of Your own hand, all angels and men; in order that, seeing in each one the image of Your own majesty, You may be glorified in them all: and principally in Your glorious martyr Saint Boniface, who after having burned in the fires of lust (better to say of hell), with Your help was purified in the fire of charity like pure gold. And I ask You, through Your most precious blood, the remedy for those wretched ones who find themselves in a bad state; in order that seeing the infinite price that they cost You, You might give them help and raise them up with Your blessed hand and hear the supplications that Your beloved martyr Saint Boniface makes in Your presence for those poor ones, and by Your mercy, free me from such misery. Amen. Here pray the Chaplet of the Five Wounds or make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

**First Day**

Courageous martyr of God, glorious Boniface: if once so miserable and weak, you saw yourself ensnared in the sad chains of impurity, you knew how to obtain the aids which the liberal hand of Omnipotence gave you in order to come out of the disgusting quagmire of such an infamous vice. Prostrate at your feet I beg you to offer to the eternal Father the ardent desires, loving steps, and fervent preaching of His only begotten Son for those wretched ones who, cast in the mud of dishonorable love, have
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closed their ears to the calls of the Divine Shepherd; and free us from such pestilent harm, Amen. *The Stations of the Cross, etc.*

**Second Day**

Admirable penitent martyr of Jesus Christ, Boniface, who having received the divine call, resolved to seek God by the road of repentance, with alms, fasting and mortifications, even leaving the house of your perdition, humbly I beseech you to offer with us to the Holy Trinity, the holy abstinence, long fasts, and continual prayer of Christ our life, with the total poverty and labor of His childhood, for those poor souls, forgetful of such mercies, that the devil holds in the dungeons of indecent love: that they may enjoy the divine light by your intercession. Amen. *The Stations of the Cross, etc.*

**Third Day**

O repentant preacher of Divine Mercy, that in the midst of the barbarity of the tyrants, and the wicked mob of unbelievers, was the holy herald of the faith of Jesus Christ, by whose preaching five hundred and fifty of them were converted: I humbly beg you to offer to the Undivided Trinity those sighs of so much pain and those tears shed by our divine teacher Jesus, lifted up on the cross, for the salvation of man; for all my brothers that find themselves in the misfortune of a dangerous situation, that recovered they may guard the pearl of chastity according to their state in life. *The Stations of the Cross, or Chaplet of the Five Wounds.*

**Fourth Day**

Oh most holy Boniface, previously a dead and barren seed because of guilt, afterwards an upright tree of sanctity, you bore admirable fruit, even to the one that had been the scandal of your conscience; thus you merited to see yourself already on the throne of the holy martyrs: deign to offer to God, Three and One, in the thurible of your heart, that most fervent prayer and copious sweat of blood that the innocent lamb Jesus shed in the garden, with those acts of infinite value with which He resigned Himself to the will of His Father, for those poor souls that possess an unclean spirit; in order that repentant they send to God in sorrowful acts of true contrition, like smoke, the fragrant prayer of their penance. Amen. *The Stations of the Cross, or Chaplet of the Five Wounds.*

**Fifth Day**

O wonderful repentant Boniface! Saint so perfect in penance, that even at the beginning of your conversion, as a true soldier, on first arriving you
strengthened twenty martyrs who at the stake suffered horrible torments; in such a manner, that inspired by your valiant cries, they showered the plaza of the city of Tarsus with the torrents of their blood: I humbly beg that through those poured-out choirs of martyrs, and your ardent zeal, you offer before the throne of God those ropes and chains, with which the blessed hands of our Jesus were bound, and the shame that He suffered from tribunal to tribunal, for those unfortunate souls, miserable slaves, that find themselves tied with the devil’s chains in the labyrinth of indecent love; so that freed with your patronage, they may walk in the grace of God on the road of perfection. Amen. The Stations of the Cross, or Chaplet of the Five Wounds.

Sixth Day

O illustrious martyr of Jesus Christ, that suffered being thrown headlong into a huge caldron of boiling pitch, as much fleeing the fire of lust as for uniting yourself to the fire of divine love: I beg you to offer the pains that you suffered in such torment along with the unthinkable pain that my Lord Jesus Christ had from the excessive blow of that cruel slap that knocked him down to the earth, with all the heaven of an Incarnate God, for those brothers of mine who the devil has marked with the seal of unchastity; that freed from such vile servitude, they may raise their eyes to where true liberty is, that is the homeland of glory. Amen. The Stations of the Cross, or Chaplet of the Five Wounds.

Seventh Day

O generous captain of those that renounce the transitory pleasures of this life, who, to better follow the banner of the Crucified, allowed your sacred body be torn in insufferable pain with nails and claws of iron: I beg you to offer these same torments, united to the excruciating pain that our Jesus suffered at the sad moment of His meeting with His afflicted mother, my sorrowful Queen, in order that this tender interchange between those two pure lovers may be, by your intercession, the two-edged sword that separates and severs the deeply rooted relationships of worldly lovers and at the same time pierces their unrepentant hearts with a true sorrow and amendment of their sins, in order to die in grace. Amen. The Stations of the Cross, or Chaplet of the Five Wounds.

Eighth Day

O most holy youth and strong leader of sorrowful sinners! Brother Boniface, that having made a living sacrifice of yourself on the altar of a public
marketplace, sacrificed to God [by a martyrdom of beheading] your valiant spirit, confessing the true faith, not only with your lips, but also with a new mouth that the tyrant made in your throat, the rising plumes of blood serving you as tongue: I beseech you to offer from the throne on which you find yourself in glory, that death and your glorious confession, united with those five rubies, that on the wood of the cross the tyrant made of the five precious wounds of my beloved Jesus, for those miserable sinners, corrupted with the filthy leprosy of impure transgressions, that they may leave the sores of such grievous sickness; so that healed by confession and penance, they may be participants of the fruit of redemption unto their salvation. Amen. The Stations of the Cross, or Chaplet of the Five Wounds.

Ninth Day

Finally, since you find yourself, O blessed Boniface, with the prize of your virtues on that sovereign throne, overflowing in such sweetness, enjoying God Three and One; since you have such closeness to the Infinite Abyss of Mercy, give to us your devotees the reward of such happiness as you possess: and offer in our name to the Undivided Trinity the abundant plentitude of that divine balsam of the precious blood of Jesus Christ, in the chalice of gold of the pure heart of our great and sorrowful Queen MARY, for those Christians, that without fear of the strict accounting that is expected of them, drink the bitter chalice of impurity, whose false sweetness ends in the gall of condemnation, breeding naked demons, just as that of your Divine Teacher, received in the Holy Sacrament, produces fresh lilies for your eternal joy; grant them to know the gravity of their faults, the pains of hell, and the certainty of death and shed on us all the dew of your benefits, freeing us from the ugliness of sensuality that we may enjoy you eternally in glory. Amen. The Stations of the Cross, or Chaplet of the Five Wounds.

Prayer for Every Day

Most high Father of mercies, whose inexhaustible treasures Your only begotten Son purchased for us by His death: place those divine eyes (before seeing our guilt) on the most holy altar of Mount Calvary. See there the most holy victim who offered Himself on that gibbet and You will see the innocent lamb between anguish and affliction, celebrating that Holy Mass of a passion so sorrowful, just to take away the most justified anger that my sins have caused You. Notice, my God, that infinite love, with which loving You as His Father, He begs You to pardon me. See those tears, not only for the pain that He suffered, but for the tenderness with which He loves us, shed by His eyes; better to say by two heavens, that with the copious showers of those pearls irrigate the dry soil of my ingratitude.
Look, loving Father, at that innocent dove of His most holy Mother, that pierced with so many swords, as many as were the pains of the Son, if not to say how many were, but will be the sins of the world; may the depths of the compassion of the Son and the Mother, which in such a sorrowful spectacle were knocking at the doors of Your mercy, move You to pity: I humbly offer to You this great abundance of infinite merits. And I offer You at the same time in the hearts of JESUS AND MARY that charity with which, loving us from all eternity, You gave us the Only Begotten of Your Understanding; and also the infinite love with which Your most holy Son was made man, shed His blood and accepted death; along with the ineffable charity with which the Holy Spirit worked the incarnation of that same Word, and which He shed and continually sheds over all Christians; with all the most excellent merits of the Queen of heaven, and the ineffable love with which You are loved and she loves us miserable sinners, along with the vast sea of so much blood which so many martyrs have shed; in order that, forgetting our ingratitude, You do not deny us Your efficacious assistance: so that helped by Your grace we may live as sons of such a Father, as brothers of Your only begotten Son, and as orphans protected by the kindness of most holy Mary, until we enjoy You in eternal glory. Amen. Every day, after the Stations or the Chaplet of the Wounds, two Salves to the most Holy Virgin.

LAUS DEO

The Excellent and illustrious Rev. Dr. D. Alonso Nuñez de Haro y Peralta, Archbishop of this holy Metropolitan Church, conceded eighty days of indulgence to all and whatsoever persons, for each time that they pray devoutly the Novena to the glorious martyr Saint Boniface; asking God for the exaltation of our holy Catholic faith, the extirpation of heresies, peace and concord among Christian princes, victory over the infidels and heretics, and the other necessities of the Church, as confirmed in his decree of February 28, 1777.