On 19 January 1726 Alonso García Cuello authorized María Báez Treviño y Maya’s lengthy and substantive last will and testament.\(^1\) María, one of the wealthiest residents of colonial Monterrey located in northeastern Mexico, boasted an enormous estate valued at a staggering 84,768 pesos. Given her vast wealth, it is understandable why she felt the need to make a last will and testament and order her estate even though she was relatively healthy. A little more than half of testators in colonial Monterrey put off making their wills until they were “sick in bed.” In these cases the notary or city official visited the testator in order to take notes because the testator was too ill to travel. María complained of “some habitual aches,” but she assured her draftsperson and witnesses that she had her “health and full judgment and natural memory without any current sickness.” For legal purposes, it was incumbent upon the testator to demonstrate one’s mental stability in order to proceed with the making of a will. Last wills and testaments from both the common law and civil law traditions required the testator to establish testamentary capacity, or declare oneself of “sound mind and memory.” Establishing testamentary capacity was thus a common but necessary phrase included in the standard outline for colonial Mexican testaments as much as the opening prayer, which begins the will.\(^2\)

In this paper I aim to explore baroque piety in late colonial Monterrey through a case study of María’s will. This paper is part of my dissertation in which I analyze 100 wills from 1700-1810 to determine continuities and discontinuities within baroque Catholicism and the slow

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\(^1\) Alonso García Cuello served as a teniente general, a military leadership position above the general de division but lower than the capitán general, the military leader of the crown’s military. “Archivo Histórico de Monterrey (hereafter AHM), “Testamento de María Báez Treviño,” Prot. 11, f. 350, no. 135.

\(^2\) There were only a few variations concerning the opening prayer, but the larger point is that the will began with an opening prayer to signal its status as a religious document intended to aid the testator on the “path to salvation,” as will put it.
move towards a modern, individualized expression of religion advanced by mid-eighteenth century Bourbon reforms. Baroque Catholicism refers to the highly ritualistic and ostentatious expression of a community-oriented Christianity. Historian Brian Larkin aptly calls baroque Catholicism a “religion of outward gesture and ritual observance” founded on the notion that there were not sharp differences between “a symbol and the thing it symbolized.”\(^3\) The French term “baroque,” possibly originating from the word for “imperfect pearl,”\(^4\) refers to something that is “elaborate” and can be applied to range of aspects spanning the cultural gamut—architecture, music, literature, etc. In the late twentieth century French scholar Michel Vovelle popularized the term in his study of seventeenth-and eighteenth-century wills in Provence.\(^5\) For Vovelle, baroque Catholicism was characterized by a host of rituals that focused on outward piety, such as masses for the dead, elaborate funeral processions, excessive spending on ritual objects, the use of ex-votos and candles, and the belief in a world filled with magical powers.\(^6\) Far from being novel, these rituals have deep roots in medieval Catholicism. Vovelle discovered that these rituals and beliefs were mainstays in the wills of southern France throughout the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth century. Afterwards, they began to taper off due to what he referred to as “dechristianization,” or the process whereby traditional Christian practices were abandoned for secular ones. With the exception of large metropolitan cities like

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\(^3\) An image of a saint, therefore, was the actual saint on earth even though the saint resided in heaven, the abode of God. Brian Larkin, *The Very Nature of God: Baroque Catholicism and Religious Reform in Bourbon Mexico City* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2010), 4, 6.

\(^4\) According to the Real Academia Española, the Spanish term “barroco” possibly derives from the Portuguese term *barroco*, meaning “irregular pearl” and signaling something that is ornate. Another suggestion is that the term comes from a specific scholastic syllogism, giving rise to the idea of something that is elaborate. Real Academia Española, Accessed 26 October 2015 <http://dle.rae.es/?id=59BRieE&o=h>


\(^6\) Ex-votos refer to votive offerings made to a saint in a church, chapel, or shrine. The term derives from the Latin phrase *ex voto susceptible*, or “from the vow made,” referencing the fulfillment of a vow, devotion, or statement of gratitude.
Mexico City and Veracruz, multiple pious bequests remained a fixture in wills throughout the eighteenth century for much of northern New Spain.7

Baroque Catholicism emerged from the Council of Trent’s vindication of late-medieval Catholic practices against the surge of Protestantism. The very religious practices Calvin and the second wave Protestant reformers wailed against—penance, purgatory, the cult of the saints, ostentatious masses, elaborate funerals, feast days, widespread use of religious art for devotional purposes—were vigorously defended by the ecclesiastical elite during council (1545-1563). Entire canons were written to shore up the Catholic Church’s biblical, theological, and historical defense for the aforementioned doctrines and practices.8 The Protestant challenge coupled with internal criticisms of the Church led a discussion on a range of issues from ecclesiastical authority to which books belong in the biblical canon, from the concept of grace and works to the number, function, and substance of the sacraments.9 They vigorously condemned any “superstitious”—always a bad word in early modern Europe regardless of one’s confession—practices and abuses, especially concerning the mass.10 Priests were called upon to abandon

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7 In large cities like Mexico City, Veracruz, and Puebla Pamela Voelk’s Alone Before God: The Religious Origins of Modernity in Mexico (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002) has demonstrated a shift in pious bequests from traditional baroque concerns dealing with the immortal soul and community-oriented ritual to modern, secular concerns dealing with the individual. More recently, Amy Porter, in Their Lives Their Wills: Women in the Borderlands, 1750-1846 (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2015), demonstrates that traditional baroque piety remained fixed throughout the eighteenth century in northeastern Mexico in places like Saltillo and San Esteban de Nueva Tlaxcala.

8 For example, canon 29 pertains to penance and canon 30 to purgatory.

9 One of the most vocal internal critics was the humanist, Erasmus of Rotterdam. Erasmus rejected medieval logic in favor of biblical language study. In particular, he railed against what he perceived as a false piety dependent on props and show. His positive attitude towards marriage and criticisms against traditional piety led some to charge him with being a Lutheran, though Erasmus remained a life-long Catholic. For a summary of Erasmus’s work, see Erika Rummel, Erasmus (New York: Continuum, 2006). Rummel sets out to arrange her work to show Erasmus’s progression on ideas pertaining to literature, education, piety, political thought, biblical scholarship, and theological controversy.

10 There is a long history in western thought that polarizes superstition and religion, the former being crude and the latter being pure. In De natura deorum Cicero distinguished between superstition and religio, or bad and good religion. He even went so far to declare superstition, non religio, tollenda est, or “superstition, not religion, must be abolished.”
“pagan” practices that sought to align the number of masses and candles to any “superstitious worship rather than in true religion.”

The core theological issue in the Catholic-Protestant divide was the idea of “justification by faith.” For Protestants, a Christian is justified by faith alone, hence *sola fide*; for Catholics, one is justified by faith, and true faith merits good works. The practical result of the Catholic understanding was that if one were to fall from a state of grace, justification may be regained through a combination of faith and works, such as “fasts, alms, prayers and other devout exercises of the spiritual life.” The Catholic Church encouraged devotees to participate in religious acts for the spiritual benefit of their souls. María’s will called for 1,000+ masses for her soul and the souls of her family and business associates in addition to other pious directives intended to benefit the community make sense if understood in the context of Catholic doctrine of justification as pronounced at Trent. Ecclesiastical elites in colonial Mexico adhered to the Tridentine pronouncements concerning baroque Catholicism. The Third Mexican Provincial Council (1585) endorsed baroque flashiness and encouraged priests to celebrate the liturgy with “the greatest splendor and ornamentation.”

Ever since the medieval era writers of last wills and testaments followed a basic outline. This basic outline then assumes that wills have two distinct parts, the religious and the legal.
The first half of the will was considered the religious part, which focused on the testator’s immortal soul, whereas the second half of the will was considered the legal part, which provided information about the testator’s assets and bequests. Rather than employing a simple binary, I aim to complicate matters by noting there were “religious” concerns in the so-called legal part and “legal” concerns in the so-called religious part. Even though the first half of a will clearly has religious concerns—invocation, profession of faith, masses, and funeral and burial details—the testator first had to first establish one’s legal standing in society. The testator had to convince the draftsperson of his/her sanity in order to make a will. Whereas the testator offered a statement attesting to his or her sanity in the first person, the draftsperson made a similar statement in the third person about the testator at the conclusion of the will. Additionally, the testator established legitimacy by listing one’s legal parents. Lastly, the testator identified one’s current residency and original homeland. Within the “legal” half of the testament, the testator made pious bequests and ordered the gifting of charitable gifts to benefit the Church and popular religious traditions, signaling one’s religious commitment.

Maria’s will reads like other colonial testaments for the most part, albeit it is longer than most for the many pious bequests and charitable gifts she indicated, totaling 39 distinct clauses compared to a median of nearly 19 clauses per testator. There are, however, some things that stand out. For example, her opening clause ignored references to her parents and two legitimate

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17 In the years 1700-1776, the median number swells to 23.5 clauses compared to 14 clauses for 1777-1810. The data suggests that testaments generally contained fewer clauses as the eighteenth century moved forward and after the establishment of the Diocese of Linares.
sons, who are identified later as her “universal inheritors” in clause 38. Her testament opens by identifying her as the widow of Sargento Mayor Don Pedro Guajardo, a wealthy Monterrey businessman. The expression “que Dios haya” appears in parentheses after his name, indicating “may God have him.” María would have presumably believed that her husband’s immortal soul was either in one of two places after death—in heaven with God and the saints or in purgatory for purification. Since she later requested masses to be said for him, it is clear that she didn’t consider him a saint quite yet. The overwhelming majority of reineros, or residents of colonial Monterrey, would have believed they were destined for purgatory. After commending her soul to God in clause one, she requested burial next to her husband in the chapel of Nuestra Señora de los Dolores located in the parish church. The wealthy often opted to be buried in private chapels. Due to her economic standing and good health, María must have envisioned a future in which she would travel, though it is unclear if these trips were for business or pleasure. She added a statement that in the event she died outside of the city, her executors were asked to move her bones to the chapel in Monterrey one year after she died. Like most reineros, she requested burial in “the habit of St. Francis,” for the “many indulgences that he [St. Francis] offers.”

On the day of the burial she expressed a desire for burial with a mass and a vigil. She requested her body to be present at the funeral mass, where she instructed her executors to give an offering of bread, wine, and wax, the three staple objects for the celebration of the mass. The funeral would take place on the day of her death or the following day, though further details concerning pomp and the funeral were left up to the reasonable discretion (arbitrio prudencial)

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18 According to clause 18, María’s marriage yielded the birth of two legitimate children, Domingo and Joaquin. In clause 31 María claimed a sum total of 37,852 pesos was owed to her. Of this amount, she intended to bequeath approximately 27,691 pesos.
19 The one exception in my sample is Bishop Rafael Jose Verger’s testament. Written just days before his death in 1790, the notary was forced to terminate the session as Verger lay dying on his bed at the palace and chapel dedicated to the Virgin. The complex is better known today as “Obispado.”
of her executors. Later a trend will emerge among testators who request no or moderate funeral pomp. Although testators from colonial Monterrey refrain from describing the funeral pomp and cortege, or procession, in detail, baroque funerals generally included a procession from the deceased’s house to the parish church along with a small group of priests and acolytes. The will of the wealthiest woman in Monterrey looks strikingly similar to that of the poorest of testators in the first three clauses with the exception of her burial in a private chapel. Most testators desired to be buried under the parish church, though the location depended upon one’s socio-economic status within the community. Burial near main altar was most expensive and burial near the entrance was least expensive. However, the main difference between María’s will and that of most reineros can be located in her pious bequests and charitable gifts.

María allotted one-fifth of her estate (clause 33) to pay for her “funeral, pious works, and gifts,” the maximum amount permitted by the Spanish crown. For María, this would have totaled nearly 10,800 pesos, an amount greater than the value of most testators’ entire estates. Why was so much of one’s assets designated for the funeral, pious directives, and gifts? What exactly were these funds designated for? María’s bequests are emblematic of baroque practices and concerns for one’s immortal soul. On the day of her death, María asked for a novenario of high masses followed by two novenarios of low masses with the tolling of church bells. Prayers for the deceased immediately following one’s death were considered to be efficacious. A novenario consisted of nine days of mourning, suffrages (pious works), and devotion

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20 Given the importance placed on pious work, the Spanish crown allowed testators to designate a fifth of one’s estate to pay for pious bequest. The practice can routinely be found in Spanish testaments, too. For an example, see Carlos Eire, *From Madrid to Purgatory*, 169.

21 María’s will requires the “fifth” to be taken from her estate after Domingo’s inheritance and money set aside for the chapel in her house. Considering these two requests amount total a little more than 30,000 pesos, her fifth comes from an amount of 54,000 pesos.

22 High masses were sang and thus more expensive than low masses, which were recited and cheaper to request.
following the death of an individual. Maria requested some 600 masses to benefit her soul and to be said on the altar of Nuestra Señora del Perdón in Mexico City. Maria showed an appreciation for her business associates. At the same altar in Mexico City, she asked for another 300 low masses with alms intended for the “souls of all of those people with whom my said husband and I ever made some deal or traded.” Another 50 masses were to be said on the altar for the souls of her children, though remained unnamed and unidentified at this point in the testament, and deceased servants. She offered a stipend of 4 reales per mass, for a total of 450 pesos, for these masses. She gave two pesos to each beneficiary of the mandatory gifts (mandas forzosas) in addition 50 pesos to the padre president or of the convent missionary father of Nuestra Señora de Gualeguas, a Franciscan mission founded to indoctrinate the Agualeguas indigenous peoples of northeastern Mexico.

From the one-fifth of her estate allocated for the funeral, good works, and gifts, she set aside 1500 pesos to earn interest money to benefit education in Monterrey “in case the Jesuit fathers establish a new college [school] in this city and place an instructor who teaches the first rudiments of reading writing, and grammar to boys and to facilitate this in the poor.”

Up until this time many creoles learned rudimentary language skills in the Franciscan convent. The concern for the poor in testaments can be seen as far back as the medieval age in western Europe, so their appearance in colonial testaments is neither unique nor due to later Bourbon religious

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23 The Greeks and the Romans also had a practice of mourning nine days after the death of a community member. For the Christian origin of the practice, some Catholics appeal to a post-resurrected Christ who commanded his apostles to wait in Jerusalem for nine days for the beginning of the feast of Pentecost. (cf. Acts 1:4). Nine, of course, hints symbolically to the Trinity (3 x 3). For Jerome, in Commentary on Ezekiel 7:24, “the number nine is indicative of suffering and grief.”

24 Eight reales equaled one peso.

reforms in New Spain. In an area with a long history of Franciscan missionary work concern for the poor would have been important. Franciscans also would have been responsible for teaching boys the basic rudiments of reading and the faith for years at their convent, yet María’s testament alluded to the strong possibility that the Jesuits, known for their expertise in preaching, teaching, and training up boys as “soldiers of the pope,” were potentially coming to Monterrey. In another clause María added a gift of 300 pesos to help with supplies for the saying of mass. She dedicated these funds in honor of her devotion to St. Francis Xavier, a Spaniard from Navarre, companion of Loyola, and one of the first Jesuits.

Maria’s wealth allowed her to support a number of religious causes in and around Monterrey. For example, tucked within her will is one of the earliest mentions of Monterrey’s local apparition of the Virgin Mary. María bequeathed a decent sum, 100 pesos, to purchase materials (fabrica) for mass at the chapel of Nuestra Senora del Nogal, or “Our Lady of the Walnut Tree.” María’s will does not specify membership in a confraternity, but the inclusion of charitable gifts or debts to a specific confraternity often signaled membership. She also gave 300 pesos to the image of Jesús Nazareno located in the Franciscan convent. Elite creoles, or descendants of Spanish parents, often owned religious art and used these objects for devotions in their homes. Baroque Catholicism favored divine immanence, or the idea that the sacred imbued an object. María gave some of these to local chapels in the region. To the chapel of Santo Cristo in Saltillo, she bequeathed vestments for the priest to wear during liturgical functions and objects for use during the mass. To the image of Santo Cristo in Tlaxcala de Boca de Leones she

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26 The Bourbon religious reforms encouraged testators to give gifts to the poor and other charitable causes rather than request an exorbitant number of masses for the dead. This longitudinal study seeks to determine changes and continuities concerning pious bequests.

27 Among the vestments and liturgical objects listed were a chasuble, or the vestment that is worn above other garments during liturgical services, a stole, a manipule, or silk or damask worn over the left forearm, a covering for the corporal, or linen cloth used to catch any fallen particles of the host, once the mass finishes, a
bequeathed a “frame with purple silk or another kind of decent satin to adorn the Lord.” María also possessed other religious art and devotional objects. She owned a reliquary of Nuestra Señora covered in silver with a holy water font, four religious paintings, a statue of St. Joseph, an image of infant Jesus, and a golden eagle.

A close reading of María’s will serves as an entryway into the baroque piety of late colonial Monterrey. Colonial wills offer valuable prescriptive information concerning how elite creoles participated in their religious tradition while confronting the reality and nearness of their deaths. Motivated by the prospects of lessening her time in purgatory and becoming one step closer to the beatific vision of God in heaven, María’s wealth afforded her the opportunity to do more postmortem than most could have done. Her will stipulated 19 distinct pious bequests, including 10 charitable gifts. Reineros on average bequeathed around five pious bequests and less than two charitable gifts per testator. Yet the community benefited from these pious bequests and gifts and would eventually come together to mark the transition of María’s earthly life to the intermediate state, purgatory. Baroque piety would face significant challenges from religious reformers trained in Europe and backed by the House of Bourbon from the mid-eighteenth century onward; however, María’s 1726 will predates this move towards a modern expression of Mexican Catholicism. María’s will exemplifies colonial Mexican Catholicism with its emphasis on ostentatious rituals, outward piety, and a community-oriented faith.

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28 The Spanish reads, “baldoquin de damasco morado o de otro género de raso decente para adorno del Señor.”
29 A reliquary was a container used to keep relics. Since she did not designate the beneficiaries of these items, they presumably went to her heirs.
30 To obtain the number of pious bequests per testator, I included pious bequests concerning the funeral and religious activities intended for the benefit of the testator’s soul after the funeral. These types of bequests include masses, charitable gifts to religious institutions, and funeral preferences such as burial in a Franciscan shroud or novena. The median amount of pious bequests per testator was just under 5, indicating that a few testators in my sample contributed many bequests.
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