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Cover Image
"Snow Covers Santa Barbara Mountains"
Credit: February 25, 2023. *Edhat: Santa Barbara*

Letter from the Editors

The Spring 2023 edition of the *Undergraduate Journal of History* is now available, and our team is thrilled to share it with readers. We take pride in offering a platform for undergraduate students to showcase their historical research and encourage open discussions, intellectual debates, and curiosity. Our gratitude goes to the six authors who contributed to this volume and to the faculty and graduate student peer reviewers who made it possible. This latest issue covers various periods and diverse topics to illuminate lesser-known stories and provide fresh historical perspectives. Our undergraduate editors extend a warm welcome to both new and returning readers.

We start this issue with Olivia Bauer's article on Queen Elizabeth I and an examination of her diplomatic relationships with the leaders of the Sa'adian Sultanate of Morocco, the Ottoman Empire, and Safavid Persia, which allowed her to establish trading companies and expand Britain's empire. While the history of English foreign policy towards the Islamic world has often been associated with exploitative enterprises and violent warfare, the author argues that Elizabeth I's relationships with Muslim rulers were founded on diplomatic and peaceful means and explored the politics, gender, and religious factors that contributed to this diplomatic success.

Adrian Hammer's article, “Manufacturing Murder,” provides a nuanced examination of the evolution of mass murder methods from 1933 to 1945, emphasizing the need for a deeper understanding of what happened, why it happened, and who it happened to, all to prevent such tragedies from occurring in the future. Hammer discussed the significance of memorializing the severity of such atrocity. “The linear teaching of the history of Nazi Germany and the Holocaust,” Hammer writes, “fails to fully capture the extent of the crimes committed and the deranged mindset of those responsible.”

Victoria Korotchenko's essay explores the role of children during the French Revolution and how they actively participated in the events of the time, including joining mobs, petitioning legislators, and fighting in wars. Korotchenko writes that, while most scholarship focuses on the perspectives of grown men and women who participated in the French Revolution, "the sweeping changes, violence, and warfare impacted those who had no choice but to grow up during this tumultuous decade." This essay highlights children's curiosity and active nature during this unstable time.

Alyssa Medin's article deciphering Sor Juana as a "proto-feminist figure" in history. Medin examines three questions related to Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz's work: whether her work was published without her consent, was submissive or subversive, and if it can be considered "proto-feminist theology." Medin categorizes Sor Juana's contributions to theology into three areas: a promotion of intellectual pursuits

for women theologians, an aesthetic theological claim, and a pneumatological argument for deepening personal relationships with God through the Spirit.

O'Gorman's work focuses on the Christian religion and military upheavals in late medieval Europe. He argues that losing Christian positions in the Middle East after the Fall of Acre in 1290 led military orders to reevaluate their identities. Many returned to their non-militaristic origins or expanded their crusading ideals into new regions. By comparing the founding stories and rules of military orders with their actions after 1290, Gorman demonstrated how the rules of military orders, including the Teutonic and Hospitaller Orders, also emphasized their hospital care in addition to their military actions.

Susan Samardjian retrospects upon how the post-war Vietnamese regime under communism in 1975 faced setbacks that disrupted both the nation's stability and that of neighboring countries concludes our issue. Samardjian argued these setbacks contributed to an already deteriorating economy and formed the communist leaders to reevaluate their attitude toward their neighbors. In response, the communist government implemented domestic and foreign policy reforms to encourage bilateral trade with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and eventually normalized relations with the US, which had imposed sanctions on Vietnam, leading to economic investment opportunities.

Table of Contents

Volume 3, Number 1

(Spring 2023)

Articles

Beauty, Intellect, and Pneumatological Liberation: Reconsidering Sor Juana as a Proto-Feminist Theologian

Alyssa Medin[1]

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1648-1695) was a nun educated in the scriptures, never married, and lived in modern-day Mexico during Inquisition-era Spanish colonial rule. In her autobiographical work, "La Respuesta a Sor Philotea," Sor Juana describes her life as an intellectual who was overlooked for her accomplishments yet admired for her beauty.[2] Her poetry, *comedias*, music, and letters reflected her philosophy of aesthetic appreciation and her devotion to Catholicism. However, she gave away her entire library and stopped writing in 1694 for historically contested reasons, providing fodder for the research of modern scholars. George H. Tavard, one of the first Catholic theologians to bring women's issues to the Church, describes the life of Sor Juana post-Respuesta:

> In 1693, she got rid of her books, musical and scientific instruments, ridding herself of the ability to increase her knowledge, her lifelong passion renounced. The next year, she writes lines in her own blood dedicating herself to "'believe and defend' the immaculate conception," a vow which she repeated twice more throughout the year before dedicating herself to aiding her religious sisters who had fallen sick with the plague, then dying of the disease herself.[3]

This curious event begs the question of what motivated a writer to sacrifice their life's work? Specifically, looking at the context outlined above, what would make a woman in the Baroque Era of colonized New Spain sacrifice her lifelong passion? While there has been debate over the purpose of the end of her career, I will argue alongside Tavard that her work's proto-feminist theological aims and clashes with the Church authority ultimately caused her writing of "La Respuesta" and her renunciation of intellectualism. However, the crux of my argument will be its expanded scope: I will argue that her religious and secular works were primarily informed by her status as a proto-feminist theologian and reveal her identity as a theologian interested in the aesthetic quality of religious inquiry and spirituality.

I will argue through the course of this paper that in her letter to Sor Philotea, Sor Juana makes herself into a martyr for the cause of women's theological education: through the rhetorical devices she employs in her last work, "La Respuesta," she establishes her legacy as a proto-feminist theologian from New Spain. My argument proceeds by first presenting historiography to delineate the context of her

[1] Alyssa Medin is a student at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota studying philosophy, political science and French. She is originally from Boston, MA and her research shares a common theme of justice/injustice in theory and practice.

[2] Juana Inès de la Cruz, "La Respuesta a Sor Filotea de la Cruz" in *Poems, Protest and a Dream*, trans. Margaret Sayers Peden (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 11.

[3] George H. Tavard, *Juana Ines de La Cruz and the Theology of Beauty: The First Mexican Theology* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), p. 183.

time. I then discuss the current literature to show her legacy as a proto-feminist theologian. Finally, I closely analyze the primary literature to support my thesis that her works are proto-feminist and support aesthetic theological claims.

Historical Context

Geographical Influence

In order to effectively place Sor Juana in her historical context, I will expand upon two key intersections in her identity: her geographical situation and her status as a woman in the seventeenth century. First, it is important to recognize her status as a nun in Inquisitionary New Spain, which was geographically separated from Spain's cultural and social influence. Despite this geographic isolation, Spanish political and religious thought was deliberately promoted in New Spain, in what political philosopher Leopoldo Zea called the "double enclosure": "Spain imposes on America a political and social enclosure and the Catholic church a mental enclosure."[4] Thus, the shared intellectual milieu between Spain and New Spain influenced the emerging scholarship, allowing Madrid to situate itself as a literary epicenter extending her influence beyond continental discourse. The strong literary influence from Spain allowed Madrid to become a "social, spatial, intra-historical, and literary" focal point.[5] Richard Greenleaf explains the effects of this, wherein the Inquisitionary government's aim of promoting religious syncretism with the mother country allowed Madrid to capitalize on their immense literary influence.[6] With this context in mind, it is significant that Sor Juana's first volume of works was published not in New Spain but in Madrid in 1689: the success of the "double enclosure" project as a force of literary and ideological power centralization in Madrid is apparent. Moreover, her decision to publish in continental Spain reveals her inability to publish secular prose in the highly skeptical hyper-religious milieu of New Spain mid-Inquisition.[7]

Moreover, the capacity for intellectuals to enter continental Spanish discourse provided a means of acquiring cultural capital.[8] Yet, as a result of this invitation, the Baroque period sparked anti-oppressive sentiments in New Spain: "Lezama Lima has spoken of the Spanish American Baroque as the

[4] Leapoldo Zea, *América como Conciencia,* (México: Cuadernos Americanos, 1953), p. 74.
[5] Carlos Gutierrez, "The Challenges of Freedom: Social Reflexivity in the Seventeenth-Century Spanish Literary Field," in *Hispanic Baroques: Reading Cultures in Context* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), p. 149.
[6] Richard E. Greenleaf, "The Mexican Inquisition and the Indians: Sources for the Ethnohistorian," *The Americas* 34, no. 3 (January 1978): p. 336.
[7] Dorothy Schons, "Some Obscure Points in the Life of Sor Juana Inés de La Cruz," in *Feminist Perspectives on Sor Juana Inès de la Cruz,* ed. Stephanie Merrim (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), p. 49.
[8] See Gutierrez, "The Challenges of Freedom," p. 143, when he notes, "If such cultural capital was recognized by the members of the power field, that could mean, perhaps, an indefinite patronage, an appointment at Court or some other symbolic recognition."

art of 'counter-Conquest' and as an urban and intellectual phenomenon close to the spirit of the Enlightenment—a frame for new *"formas de vida y de curiosidad*."[9] Thus, an unintended consequence of cross-continental discourse was the promulgation of ideals of liberty and counter-oppression, which will ultimately be seen in Sor Juana's works through her proto-feminist writings— arguing for the right of women to read and interpret the Bible.

Womanhood in New Spain

The dimension of womanhood as it pertains to the new *formas de vida y de curiosidad* within the double enclosure of New Spain can be seen as integral to Sor Juana's experience as a writer. Women were confined to personal piety through prayer and spirituality, and this personal dedication to God was much more common and socially permissible than an intellectual entrance into the Church through theology, considering the lack of interaction with scripture allowed for women.[10] Paola Marin confirms this patriarchal religiosity: "[Women] were also seen as more prone to demonic influences due to their weaker biological condition, a conception based on Aristotle and, later, St. Thomas. Therefore, especially after the Council of Trent, they were forbidden from preaching and discussing theological matters."[11] I will show how Sor Juana's context as a woman in this time unequivocally influenced her major theological writings, such as the *Carta Atenagórica* and "La Respuesta." Women in Inquisitionary Spain were expected to live pious lives, with piety being determined by the male standards and interpretations of scripture. While it is out of the scope of this paper to discuss the copious investigations into indigenous practices seen as "magic" and, thus, satanic, it is clear that the reigning authorities of the Church and State acted upon their fear and mistrust towards women specifically.[12]

I argue that the parameters of piety for a woman in her time had a two-fold influence: it influenced her decision to end her writing career by donating her library, *and* it informed the content

[9] "Ways of life and types of curiosity."
Nicholas Spadaccini and Luis Martin-Estudillo, "Introduction: The Baroque and the Cultures of Crisis, " in *Hispanic Baroques: Reading Cultures in Context* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), p. xiii.

[10] Asuncion Lavrin, "Unlike Sor Juana? The Model Nun in the Religious Literature of Colonial Mexico," in *Feminist Perspectives on Sor Juana Inès de la Cruz,* ed. Stephanie Merrim (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), p. 65. It is important to note that cloistered life as a nun was a very effective way to receive the liberty to become educated and write or learn about a variety of subjects as a woman in this era.

[11] Paola Marin, "Freedom and Containment in Colonial Theology: Sor Juana's Carta Atenagorica," in *Hispanic Baroques: Reading Cultures in Context* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), p. 208.

[12] See Linda Curcio-Nagy, "Rosa de Escalante's Private Party," in *Women in the Inquisition* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 255, for a more detailed discussion of the perceived threat of the use of magic and the treatment of women engaging in indigenous practices in New Spain.

of her œuvre to the extent that she integrates traditionally "female" mystical and literary elements and mediums into her aesthetic insights.

Literature Review

In order to review Sor Juana's place in the history of feminism, I consider whether her work can be qualified as proto-feminist theology or if it simply had loosely feminist-resembling sentiments. In response to this question, I will first lay out the definition of proto-feminism before determining the consensus in the existing literature. Nancy Calvert-Koyzis defines proto-feminism as referencing "those who anticipated certain modern feminist political arguments, yet lived in a time when the term 'feminist' was unknown."[13] This simple definition provides an intuitive basis for understanding proto-feminism as preemptive critiques that would be revisited throughout the development of feminist thought.

Regarding proto-feminist theology, Calvert-Koyzis explains, "Women in different countries and eras interpreted biblical texts in ways that argued for the equality and emancipation of women. These voices calling for liberation were often unknown by subsequent generations of feminist interpreters."[14] Labeling and qualifying proto-feminist theology necessitates an understanding of feminist theology as a distinct method of Biblical interpretation informed by the liberating aims of feminism. As discussed at length by Catherine Keller:

> We might all agree that feminist theology has from birth confronted a dual dynamic of obstruction, a redoubled density of impossibility. Our task shared but transcended the standard feminist critique of the andromorphic norms for participation in every area of public discourse... we were talking back not just to one more academic -ology, dusty in its patriarchy. We were mouthing off to the gatekeepers of the Logos, revealed Son of the Father.[15]

Whereas feminism decenters the patriarchal institutions and socialization in daily life, feminist theology seeks to decenter androcentrism[16] in the spiritual and religious spheres of academia and personal life. She points not only to the fact that the discipline of theology has, since its inception, been restricted to the male voice and eyes but also to the importance of correcting theology when it is distorted by male bias since religious misinterpretation is at stake. This principle of correction, a foundation of feminist theology, can be traced in Sor Juana's works as inextricably linked to her subversive texts. Existing literature supports this thesis, with Marin claiming that Sor Juana's *Carta Atenagórica* is subversive

[13] Nancy Calvert-Koyzis and Heather E. Weir, "Assessing Their Place in History: Female Biblical Interpreters as Protofeminists," in *Strangely Familiar: Protofeminist Interpretations of Patriarchal Biblical Texts* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature), p. 2.
[14] Calvert-Koyzis and Weir, "Assessing Their Place in History," p. 3.
[15] Catherine Keller, "The Apophasis of Gender: A Fourfold Unsaying of Feminist Theology," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 4 (December 2008), p. 907.
[16] Androcentrism is the practice of centering male voices, thought, ideas, and concerns.

because it critiques the colonial condition, which was integral to personal and religious spheres of life.[17] Sor Juana mirrors feminist theologians through her indirect responses to the colonial and sexist society, exacerbated by her tensions with the Church, providing a basis for her authorship to show her "voice for liberation."

Literature affirming Sor Juana's positionality as a proto-feminist theologian provides two main insights into her contribution to support this claim: one is her positive contribution, and the other is the negative space she inhabits as a "female theologian" in a time when women were constrained to personal piety rather than exegetical contribution. Her "positive contribution" indicates an *addition*, whereas her "negative contribution" is an intentional invisibility or *lack of* contribution to a particular conversation or space.

First, Merrim discusses her positive contribution as a deconstructive and subversive force against the patriarchal authority of the Church. Merrim interprets Sor Juana's mirroring of typical women's literature of the time as a push against the status quo and a call to action:

> The 'sin razon' (unreason) and 'no se que' (I know not what), and the mystical quest for ultimate knowledge found in other women's writings are all called into service here, perhaps ironically, to testify to Sor Juana's innocence and conformity to God's will... the *Respuesta* both implicitly counters and explicitly avails itself of the forms of church women's writing, with the end of asserting a woman's rights to participate in the *male intellectual order.*"[18]

Merrim claims that Sor Juana calls upon the traditionally "female" writing strategies and claims to lack knowledge as a part of her writing, ultimately advocating for women to participate in the Church in the "traditionally masculine" sense— through evaluating scripture for themselves.

One negative contribution that aligns Sor Juana with the later feminist traditions is her practice of renouncing authorship. In her *Carta atenagórica*, Sor Juana denies her contribution to her theological exegesis, putting the blame or recognition on the Holy Spirit itself, which has been seen in the literature as a rebellion against the way women of the time interacted with God solely through personal experience:

> The *Crisis of a Sermon*–which is the original title she gave to the *Carta atenagórica*–is a rhetorical armor completely removed from experiential matters. It is an astounding display of hermeneutic devices that Sor Juana justifies by stating "*no lo digo yo, lo dicen las Santas Escrituras*" (it is not me, it is the Holy Scriptures that say so). She asserts that she is only an instrument in God's hands.[19]

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[17] Marin, "Freedom and Containment in Colonial Theology," pp. 205-206.
[18] Stephanie Merrim, "Towards a Feminist Reading of Sor Juana Ines de La Cruz: Past, Present, and Future Directions in Sor Juana Criticism," in *Feminist Perspectives on Sor Juana Inès de la Cruz* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), p. 27. Emphasis added.
[19] Marin, "Freedom and Containment in Colonial Theology," p. 209.

Scholars, including Marin, have claimed that in renouncing her contributions, she makes herself a martyr to her proto-feminist theological cause and thus has a powerful influence on the reclamation of the Bible for women.

Another way she negatively contributes to her society is through apophasis,[20] an intentional practice during which one raises awareness of an issue through silence. Julie Bokser views Sor Juana through her apophasis in *Sor Juana's Rhetoric of Silence*, asserting that Sor Juana's "Respuesta" leads to her martyrdom, as substantiated by the end of her career: "Ultimately, *La Respuesta* led to Sor Juana's political downfall, marked by a formal confession of sins, a rejection of humane studies, and the dispersal of her library."[21] The operative word for historical analysis of this claim here is *led* – if the letter did, in fact, *cause* the end of her career, her use of apophasis reflects a deep disdain for the patriarchal, colonial Church rule of her time. Her martyrdom, encapsulated by her downfall as described by Bokser, is henceforth a substantiation of her works as utilizing apophasis as a negative contribution.

The previous conception of martyrdom is not the only interpretation of Sor Juana's negative contribution. Ambiguity over the end of her career leaves scholars in question regarding her success as a proto-feminist theologian. For example, Stephanie Merrim presents Sor Juana as a figure submissive to her historical context by drawing on her establishment as a martyr through how her career ends. Merrim states, "In its end, attributable less to her own weakness of character than to the *force of patriarchal structures,* Sor Juana's life story descends into martyrdom, deviating from the straight path of feminist illumination and feminine modes."[22] In this reading of her decision to give up writing, her martyrdom is equated with a defeat in the face of the patriarchy. Since Sor Juana submitted to the oppressive forces that constantly pushed her to stop writing, she is denounced in some academic circles— even today.

The negative space she inhabits is ultimately an argument both "for" and "against" her status as a proto-feminist theologian. On the one hand, she is seen as a martyr for her cause of female biblical interpretation, and on the other, she is seen as submissive to the patriarchal norms of her society. This distinction is critical to understanding the mixed reaction among academics concerning the proto-feminist theologian label. However, one must question Sor Juana's martyrdom, looking at what factors led Sor Juana to sacrifice her passion for writing and whether or not this is actually a defeat. I will argue in my analysis of her "Respuesta" that Sor Juana became a martyr to the proto-feminist idea that women should be able to read and interpret the scriptures, which was novel and admirable. Thus, Merrim's ideas

[20] Apophasis, a type of negative contribution, is the raising of an issue by not mentioning it. Apophasis allows for those who are critical yet rest within a discipline to auto-deconstruct, such as Sor Juana in her context as part of, yet critical towards, the Church and its authority. For further information, see Keller "The Apophasis of Gender," pp. 905–933.
[21] Julie A. Bokser, "Sor Juana's Rhetoric of Silence," *Rhetoric Review* 25, no. 1 (2006), p. 7.
[22] Merrim, "Towards a Feminist Reading of Sor Juana Inès de la Cruz," p. 30. Emphasis added.

directly oppose thinkers who draw on the influence of Sor Juana's apophasis and integration of typically female writing methods.

In the most recent scholarship, a turn in the literature has allowed Sor Juana's work to be evaluated for its theological insights rather than simply evaluated as "feminist or not." I view this turn as an affirmation of her position as a proto-feminist theologian and a helpful development toward analyzing the work she once presented to a deaf audience. The two main contributions discussed in these new analyses are her phenomenological insights and her aesthetic theology. María Pilar Aquino discusses the disproportionate attention paid to the theological discourse of Spirit and other mystical components at the hands of colonial, oppressive, patriarchal forces. In Westernized society, aesthetics were at odds with "content," which theologically decentered the importance of beauty in God. As a result, the aesthetic and pneumatological doctrinal aspects of hermeneutical exegesis were sidelined by the influence of other doctrines seen as more concrete, such as soteriology.[23] According to thinkers like Aquino, who evaluate Sor Juana in terms of her circumstance, her theological discourse was anti-patriarchal and subversive, thus fitting into the proto-feminist theologian label. Her emphasis on concrete realities[24] can be seen most concretely through her contributions to theological aestheticism—the subdiscipline concerned with how God manifests through beauty and knowledge.[25]

In conclusion, current scholarship definitively leans towards labeling Sor Juana as a proto-feminist theologian. However, the lack of scholarly attention to her work from a feminist theological lens indicates a gap in the literature, failing to appreciate her contributions fully. Much more research needs to be done to evaluate all of her works, secular and theological, using theological aestheticism, so we may fully appreciate her contributions as a proto-feminist theologian who emphasized an area that was forgotten by the Church Fathers of her time.

Analysis

The Road to Martyrdom

In understanding her work as proto-feminist, we must first look to the context in which her religious work was published: it was intertwined with an increasingly tense relationship between Sor Juana and the Church's authority figures. Under Francisco de Aguiar y Seijas, the archbishop of Mexico during the end of her life, Sor Juana suffered from his staunch beliefs in the unholiness of creativity and secular poetry. Dorothy Schons comments on her secular comedy-writing: "That Juana wrote *comedias* and

[23] María Pilar Aquino, "The Collective 'Dis-Covery' of Our Own Power: Latina American Feminist Theology," in Isasi-Díaz and Segovia, *Hispanic-Latino Philosophy*, pp. 241-242.

[24] See Marin, "Freedom and Containment in Colonial Theology," p. 218, which discusses Sor Juana as "indirectly [challenging] those primarily concerned with theological entelechy rather than concrete realities."

[25] See Tavard, *Juana Inès de las Cruz and the Theology of Beauty*," for a lengthy analysis of Sor Juana's work as a relic of early aesthetic theology.

even published them must have been a crime in his eyes. In Mexico, during his administration, no *comedias* and almost no secular verse were finding their way into print."[26] Suspicion by Spanish colonial authorities impacted Sor Juana's ability to express herself within or outside the confines of her convent. While Francisco de Aguiar y Seijas disliked her secular works, she detested her religious works, as seen through the involuntary publication of her critique of a sermon, her *Carta atenagórica.*[27]

The Bishop of Puebla published her theological critique, the *Carta atenagórica,* without her consent. However, the reason for his publication is disputed as either a part of a mounting dispute between Sor Juana and church authorities or a display of appreciation for a writer he admired. In the introduction to *Poems, Protest, and a Dream,* Ilan Stavans notes that the Bishop of Puebla asked her to write the letter and published it with his own money.[28] The Church Fathers abhorred the work, and Stavans claims that following the critique, the Bishop of Puebla changed direction and appended his letter to the end of the publication, encouraging her to "abandon the careless roads of reason."[29] It seems there is ambiguity as to the extent to which this Bishop supported Sor Juana, influenced and pressured by the Church to condemn her work, or if he was genuinely against it.

In any case, the primary text addressed to Sor Juana from "Sor Filotea" (the Bishop of Puebla) reveals the harsh backlash she received from the Church as a woman who worshiped and analyzed the Bible outside of private piety. The Bishop of Puebla refers to Sor Juana as the "woman who is the pride of her sex," evoking Christ in his first page to establish a reverence for her that will ultimately be revealed as irony: "I, at least, have *admired* the wittiness of your conceits, the cleverness of your proofs, and the living clarity with which the theme is persuasively argued... Even Christ's, when he was wont to utter the highest mysteries veiled in parables, was not considered admirable by the secular world."[30] In speaking of Sor Juana in conjunction with speaking of Christ, her martyrdom is foreshadowed. The Bishop subtly explains that while he admires the work, his religiosity makes him a gratuitous reader. Moreover, as this is appended to her theological critique, he continues to critique the (proto-feminist) lens with which she writes, as it manifests through her "subject matter": "My judgement is not such a harsh censor that I find anything wrong with your poetry... but I wish you would imitate them [Santa Teresa, Saint Gregory Nazianzus] both in terms of the prosody and the choice of subject matter."[31] Much like any trace of mysticism or aestheticism in religion in this cultural context, her aesthetic appeals

[26] Schons, "Some Obscure Points in the Life of Sor Juana In és de La Cruz," p. 48.
[27] Tavard, *Juana Ines de La Cruz and the Theology of Beauty: The First Mexican Theology*, p. 7.
[28] Ilan Stavans, introduction to *Poems, Protest and a Dream: Selected Writings*, trans. Margaret Sayers Pedan. (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. xiv.
[29] Stavans, introduction to *Poems, Protest and a Dream*, p. xiv.
[30] Fr. Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz, "Letter by Sor Filotea de la Cruz," trans. William Little (Santa Fe: Santa Fe College, 2008), p. 1.
[31] De Santa Cruz, "Letter by Sor Filotea de la Cruz," p.2

were seen as inappropriate and an unworthy pursuit or subject matter in the eyes of the Church authorities.

Ironically, he writes to Sor Juana, encouraging her to "sometimes [read] the book of Jesus Christ."[32] Considering her positionality as a cloistered nun, it is hard to believe that this reference to picking up the book was an attempt to convert her. Rather, this was an attempt to alter her interpretation of the Word. He clarifies, "St. Paul says that women should not teach, but he does not order women not to study [in] order to learn."[33] He then presents a reading of the changing of Sarai's name to Sara as an indication of her learning "Fear and domination."[34] Thus, he briefly takes on the role of teacher, asking her to change her perspective on scripture and submit to the Church's established order and interpretations.

With this information in hand, a historian must look to the overwhelming evidence that there was influence from the colonial, religious (male) figureheads which led her to stop writing, laying the foundation for her martyrdom to her most fundamental principle: Women should have the freedom to be intellectuals— reading, interpreting, and teaching the Bible in their own right and with their own agency.

Reading Subversive Proto-Feminism in Sor Juana's Works

In her last courtly poem, she says, "And *a Dios*, this is no more than / to show you the cloth; / if you do not like the piece, / do not untie the parcel."[35] As I will explore further, her work can be seen as an attempt to uncover the culture, religion, politics, and anthropology covered through colonial patriarchal Catholicism. Sor Juana contributed to the development of aesthetic theology, which was emergent from her identity as a whole— considering her as a woman, a writer, and a theologian living under colonial rule. However, this "parcel" was not ready to be untied in the climate of her time. In order to evaluate her contributions, I will look primarily at her work in "La Respuesta."

In "La Respuesta," the rhetorical devices that Sor Juana uses, including a satirical rejection of her skills and abilities placed alongside an explicit knowledge of theology, create a subversive text that gives irony to the existing misconceptions about women's ability. Ultimately, she uses this subversion to argue for women to interpret the Bible. Sor Juana says in response to the letter from "Sor Filotea,"

> What capacity of reason have I? What application? What resources? What rudimentary knowledge of such matters beyond that of the most superficial scholarly degrees? Leave these matters to those who understand them; I wish no quarrel with the Holy Office, for I am

[32] De Santa Cruz, "Letter by Sor Filotea de la Cruz," p. 2.
[33] De Santa Cruz, "Letter by Sor Filotea de la Cruz," p. 2.
[34] De Santa Cruz, "Letter by Sor Filotea de la Cruz," p. 2.
[35] Tavard, *Juana Ines de La Cruz and the Theology of Beauty: The First Mexican Theology,* p. 182.

> ignorant, and I tremble that I may express some proposition that will cause offense or twice the true meaning of some scripture.[36]

In response to her *Carta Atenagórica* of theological exegesis, this citation ironically states that she does not have the same capacity of reason and thus cannot adequately evaluate scripture. This directly responds to the Bishop's call for her to submit to the predetermined interpretations of the Church. However, by evaluating the scriptures in this letter and the *Carta,* she effectively inserts herself into the male intellectual order, which she claims she cannot enter. As she enters this religious, intellectual order, Sor Juana can be seen as a proto-feminist theologian, catalyzing the inevitable structural destruction while claiming that she was unworthy of making meaningful contributions. As Sor Juana cites herself, "*Rare is he who will concede genius."*[37]

In addition to her satirical self-deprecation, Sor Juana's letter utilizes references to Jesus' crucifixion that signify her descent into martyrdom for her proto-feminist theological beliefs. She says, "a head that is a storehouse of wisdom can expect nothing but a crown of thorns."[38] This reference, especially when considered alongside the context of her response to the growing contentions with the Church, shows that she sincerely believed her cause to be wise and noble. Here, she also reclaims the parallel between her work and Jesus', which is present in the letter from Sor Filotea. While the *Carta Atenagórica* may or may not have been published with negative intentions, the controversy truly reflects the patriarchal intellectual order under which Sor Juana was metaphorically crucified.

Primary to her contributions as a proto-feminist theologian is her work in "La Respuesta" to defend women's right to theological education. At the time, women, including Sor Juana, were discouraged from reading and interpreting the Bible, as shown by the Council of Trent forbade the translations of Latin to Spanish during the Inquisitorial period, wherein women were not taught Latin. In her "Respuesta," she turns to entertain a question raised by Doctor Arce– a question that elucidates her historical conditions and her goal to subvert the status quo: *"Is it permissible for women to dedicate themselves to the study of the Holy Scriptures, and to their interpretation?*"[39] Evoking this question in her text was a critical turn towards challenging the established order of the church, which excluded the female eye from scriptural analysis and depended on their obedience, the "fear and domination" encouraged in the Letter from Sor Filotea. These conditions of preventing women from learning about the Bible must be the underlying reason for which Sor Juana says, "For what objection can there be that an older woman, learned in letters and in sacred conversation and customs, have in her charge the education of young girls?"[40] The importance of interpretation and women's theological study as a whole

[36] De La Cruz, "Respuesta," p. 11.
[37] De La Cruz, "Respuesta," p. 33.
[38] De La Cruz, "Respuesta," p. 35
[39] De La Cruz, "Respuesta," p. 47. Emphasis added.
[40] De La Cruz, "Respuesta," p. 55

would be the eventual upheaval of female theological movements in the future, and Sor Juana was one of the first to commit to its necessity. Once women are encouraged to interpret the Bible, the traditionally centered scriptures are put into question; the practices of oppression and silence would no longer be justified simply as scripture, as scriptural references to egalitarian principles happen to flood the Bible but were scarcely called upon before. As a Baroque writer, Sor Juana understood the value of intellect, as it was central to her aesthetic and theological considerations. Intellect was beautiful and thus merited divine attention. So, she calls for women to be able to interpret the Bible, asking in effect for the upheaval of the patriarchal dominance of the Catholic Church.

Beauty & Intellect

In addition to her proto-feminist theological assertion that women should be allowed to interpret the Bible, we must also evaluate Sor Juana beyond this claim. Sor Juana's influence was not constricted to her work in her explicitly theological writings nor to her controversial claim that women should interpret the Bible. Sor Juana's influence extends to her own hermeneutical contributions, which merit further discussion.

I argue that her contributions to theological aestheticism, as raised primarily by Tavard, further position Sor Juana as a proto-feminist theologian because these contributions are clearly emergent from her positionality as a cloistered woman in society. In order to make this claim, I draw on the established information on the historical realities of power dynamics in Inquisitionary New Spain. In synthesizing the existing literature with the history of the colonial era, historians can understand the acute influence of power dynamics and oppression in women's lives, as well as the specific marginalization of hermeneutical claims such as the influence of Spirit and any mystical elements during this period. In bringing light to theological aestheticism, I argue that Sor Juana had a specific contribution that fits perfectly within the framework of the Spanish Baroque but was overshadowed by her controversy as a female writer.

One major misconception of the time that led, in part, to the rejection of her contributions to aestheticism was the distinction between her secular and religious writings. At the time, secular writings were seen as having a negative influence on the piety of society. They thus were taken as a detriment to a writer's portfolio, especially for theologians.

Her secular works were wrongly hyper-analyzed in their reception, focusing on the romantic interests described rather than the blatantly religious and aesthetic appeal. However, we can see that the themes of beauty and intellect are present in her secular works, a clear connection within her oeuvre: for example, she says, "with luck, love lends us beauty– not the right to keep it."[41] Throughout her works

[41] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, "Have You Lost Your Mind, Alcino?" in *Sor Juana's Love Poems,* trans. Jaime Manrique and Joan Larkin (Chapel Hill: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), p. 51.

of supposedly secular poetry, she shows reverence for the importance of aestheticism in her descriptive language and calls to the divine aspects of beauty: one example is her poem, "On the Death of the Most Excellent Señora the Marquise of Mancera," where she writes lines such as "her light was never meant / to blazon this wretched valley," a loose reference to the fall of man and the light and beauty in humanity.[42] In the same poem, she alludes to the reunion of soul and body after Judgment Day:

> Laura, split in two beautiful halves:
> Immortal soul, glad spirit,
> why tear yourself from such lovely flesh?
> Why banish such a soul?
>
> Now it dawns on me
> you're suffering this cruel divorce
> for the joy of meeting again
> on the last day, married for all time.[43]

These excerpts briefly show that, in her era, her works were misinterpreted. Her intentions and exegesis as a theologian were aesthetic, and the division between her secular and religious works was blurred or nonexistent. Her project had a dual nature and function, ultimately laying a foundation for understanding the relationship between the individual and God as an aesthetic and a spiritual one.

As has been established, her position within theological aestheticism led her to view God as manifesting through the Divinely guided power of knowledge, love, and beauty. Hence, when she discusses knowledge, love, and beauty, she sees her work as part of a divinely guided mission for knowledge: she says, "O World, why do you wish to persecute me? / How do I offend you, when I intend / only to fix beauty in my intellect, / and never my intellect fix on beauty?"[44] As a woman whose work was often perceived in context with her beauty and various theories about her love life, she wished for others to see that knowledge is a divinely inspired experience and that it corresponds to an aesthetic quality of the human soul that is, in fact, a gift from God. There is no true separation between secular and non-secular under this conception, as Spirit ties these factors together in pneumatological interpretations of an aesthetic mode of being. Hence, her theology, poetry, prose, composition, and playwriting are all divine in that it shares this aesthetic quality. Looking at the concrete nature of Catholic doctrine of the time, it is understandable that this was misunderstood, and her work was

[42] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, "On the Death of the Most Excellent Senora the Marquise of Mancera," in *Sor Juana's Love Poems*, trans. Jaime Manrique and Joan Larkin (Chapel Hill: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), p. 71.
[43] De la Cruz, "On the Death of the Most Excellent Senora the Marquise of Mancera," p. 73.
[44] Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, "Sonnet 146," in *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz: Selected Works,* trans. Edith Grossman (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2014), p. 171.

positioned in a dualistic nature. However, within modern conceptions of pneumatic and aesthetic doctrine, we can re-evaluate her works under this non-dualistic lens. In this understanding, her love for knowledge and beauty stems from her theological conceptions, which merge her works into a theological aestheticism that was less than appreciated at the time. As Tavard radically expanded upon, her belief in the influence of the Holy Spirit and the emotive relationship between God and humanity are integral, as expressed through her aestheticism: "Artistic activity is therefore always a graced participation in the divine act of creation. Aesthetic theory and reflection are always meditations on the divine attribute of beauty."[45] This is a starting point for understanding her mission. However, her position as a contributor to aesthetic theology has yet to be applied in depth to her originally "secular" works, as they have been bifurcated from those "religious" works since their original reception.

Conclusion

While current literature has come to slowly recognize Sor Juana's prevalence as a proto-feminist theologian, a martyr to the cause of women's interpretation of the Bible, the extent to which her complete collection of works is viewed through the theological lens is limited in scope to her few explicitly theological works. Hence, a gap in the literature leaves room for re-evaluating her entire collection as aesthetic, theological products that emerged from her historical reality. Everything about Sor Juana's life can be seen as theology, as we look at her response to the patriarchal historical era and her life work of implementing theological aestheticism in her secular and non-secular works. Sor Juana is an integral figure in the realm of proto-feminist theology, as she turned her struggles into a life of practicing theology instead of solely intellectualizing it through creeds and regulation. The constraints of her time period led to the ostracization of her works due to their mystical and pneumatic qualities, which led to the burial of her theological contributions. Her position as a proto-feminist theologian has been established in the modern conception, but her theological positions have yet to be thoroughly analyzed and understood.

The first step in reclaiming Sor Juana's contributions is understanding that she wrote aesthetic theology as a response to the hyper-analytical Catholic doctrine of her time. With this information in hand, her works can be viewed as a response to oppression, as a counterweight to the Catholic church, and as diverse mediums to communicate aesthetic theology. Henceforth, religious aestheticism can be seen as parallel to liberation theologies and feminist theologies, with the example of Sor Juana serving to show that a turn to the appreciation of beauty and knowledge can liberate women from the constraints that they lived in during a time when they were limited to practicing religion more than studying it.

As a result of the emphasis on piety and practicing religion, mysticism and religious aestheticism emerged within the female population of Christians during the Inquisition. These mystical ideas,

[45] Tavard, *Juana Ines de La Cruz and the Theology of Beauty: The First Mexican Theology*, p. 200.

pneumatological in nature, emphasizing the Holy Spirit and divine beauty, were marginalized and seen as demonic. However, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz wrote within the mystic, aesthetic theology style for a secular crowd. When her work became directly theological, she was criticized by Church figureheads and, eventually, forced to stop writing. However, the legacy of her contributions requires reclamation, as it represents the female response to intellectual and theological oppression. Religious aestheticism calls us to question the influence and interconnection of the Holy Spirit, beauty, and knowledge in our daily lives and practice. Quite literally, Sor Juana brought beauty out of her circumstances — a theological contribution worth her martyrdom.