

# Family Names in the Augustinian Order

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WHILE I WAS EXAMINING SOME MANUSCRIPTS from Mexican sources, there came to my hands for study a series of documents dealing with the Congress or *Capitulo General* of Bethlehemites, a meeting scheduled for Mexico City in 1799, and one at which all Bethlehemites were to be represented, either in attendance or by proxy. The documents included lists, making it possible to reconstruct a complete roster of the Bethlehemites in the New World, or at least in Spanish America, at that time.<sup>1</sup>

A glance at the names immediately showed a high incidence of saints' names or names connected with the basic aspects of the Christian Religion, such as the Nativity, the Conception, and the Cross. Although conventional family names were conspicuous by their absence, there were two, namely Antonio de Atocha and José de Monserrate.

A few further inquiries led to some generalizations that attempt to explain this change in names.

For a biblical precept we may resort to the case of the rich, young ruler who asked for advice and was told by Jesus to divest himself of his worldly goods. Then He gave His disciples the admonition as follows:

There is no man that hath left house or parents or brethren or wife or children for the Kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in the present time and in the world to come life everlasting. Luke 18:29-30.

In this precept we can easily see an authority if we seek one, for renouncing family ties upon entering the religious life. What better way of renouncing family ties than by changing the paternal name?

*The Catholic Encyclopedia*, p. 675, article on Names:

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<sup>1</sup> C. E. Castañeda and J. A. Dabbs. *Independent Mexico in Documents*. Editorial Jus, Mexico, 1954.

In the eighth century the two Englishmen Winfirth and Willibald going on different occasions to Rome, received from the reigning Pontiff, along with a new commission to preach, the names respectively of Boniface and Clement.

So again Emma of Normandy when she married King Ethelred in 1002 took the name Aelfgifu; while of course the reception of a new name upon entering a religious order is almost universal even in our own day.

*Encyclopedia Cattolica*, VIII, 1918:

The abandonment of the ordinary name and the assumption of a new one with a sacred character appears especially in the change of status to express the new condition of life and the spiritual and social orientation of the individual.

The article goes on to refer to the Pharaohs who, on accession to the throne, changed their names to that of the gods they considered their protectors. It also refers to a primitive principle, represented by the term *Nomina sunt omina*, a subject that deserves more elaborate treatment as the science of onomatology develops. Then the article goes on to say:

And also in present times those who join a religious order change their names to signify the new orientation of their life.

To test these statements and see how they apply in practice, we need the names taken by members of the various orders, along in each case with the names of the parents and place of birth. While it is possible to gather a large number of names of religious from documentary sources, usually there is insufficient information for a comparative study.

The one type of work which would be of greatest help is the *Libro de Profesiones*. This book is the register kept in each convent or monastery and which each new member of an order signs at the conclusion of the ceremonies admitting him into the order. There is only one copy, the original; and so far as I know, none have been printed. The only *Libro de Profesiones* that I have found is that of the Augustinian Convent in Mexico City, dating from its foundation in 1536. This book has fortunately survived and is available in the University of Texas Library. In this book each new member wrote his simple statement in which he said in effect "I Brother . . . , legitimate son of . . . and his legal wife . . . , citizens of . . . , make my profession to live by the rules of St. Augustine, etc.," and there follow the necessary statements of religious conviction and the religious vows, then the place and date, with signature, witnessed

by two or three other members of the order. In this work the writing varies enormously, some very elaborate, with decorated margin in colored ink, some a very simple statement with no garishment. All are signed except a few rare cases where the neophyte was unable to write. Some are in Latin, but the great majority are in Spanish. Most important for us, they furnish the material for a comparative study of the names used.

The 843 names in the book, dating from 1536 to 1650, have been examined and statistical lists prepared. The results are very different from the list of Bethlehemites, very different from what the general authorities would lead us to anticipate.

Of the 843 names, we have the following ratios:

Took Holy Names,	112	(or 13.7%)
Kept Family Names,	469	(or 55.6%)
Took Mother's Name,	114	(or 14%)
Took Name of a Place,	30	(or 4%)
Miscellaneous,	94	(or 11.5%)
Not included (illegible or foundlings)	24	
	843	

Far from conforming to what we have found in standard authorities, the friar who entered the Augustinian Order in the sixteenth century, at least in the Spanish realm, had four choices: He could keep his family name as a layman would; he could use the paternal name of his mother, giving up that of his father; he could use the name of a place with which he felt closely associated, or he could adopt a religious name.

There is no reason to think that those who kept their paternal names were less pious than others; on the contrary the list has several examples that have become famous in Mexico for piety and selfless devotion to the Church. Since the majority, 55.6% of the new friars, did this, there could have been no prejudice or stigma attached by the other members — a social stigma would certainly have led to close conformity. In fact, it was almost the normal thing to do.<sup>2</sup>

For those who adopted the mother's name, dropping that of the father, it is easy to speculate, but there is no surviving indication

<sup>2</sup> For example, José, son of Luis de Olivares and Magdalena Salgado, citizens of Mexico, took the name José de Olivares. This is the same name that he would probably have used if he had not entered the Order.

for any ideas or patterns. However, it should be mentioned that the use of the maternal patronymic in preference to that of the father has not been unusual by any means in recent centuries,<sup>3</sup> and these 114 cases should be considered together with the preceding group.<sup>4</sup>

For those who took the name of a place, forsaking that of the parents, it is easy to read into their decision the idea of abandoning the things of this world for the religious life; but for this purpose the use of a place-name seems to be only a half-measure. Besides, a number of other Spaniards who came to the New World adopted their birthplace as part of their name, and it often came to be a family name. This practice was therefore open to the layman and the religious alike. Apparently, however, the layman who took a place-name for his own in the sixteenth century did so because he had no family name as such and because permission to sail to the New World was restricted to persons from particular areas. The lack of a family name could not usually apply to the case of the Augustinian friars because only legitimate children were ordinarily eligible for the order. The use of the place-name, therefore, must be attributed to a renunciation of the family name.<sup>5</sup> Of the 30 who used a place-name, all but two chose what seems to have been their birthplace.<sup>6</sup>

About 13.7% of the friars took the name of some religious concept, principally saints' names. A few figures may help show the distribution:

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<sup>3</sup> For example, the 16th century founder of Spanish Asunción (Paraguay) had the name Martínez de Irala, but he referred to himself, and others referred to him as Irala, not his father's name. The idea seems to be that the less common name was used — Irala being a much less frequent term than Martínez.

<sup>4</sup> Examples of this type: Juan, son of Juan Gómez and Magdalena Gutiérrez, citizens of Mexico, took the name Juan Gutiérrez, June 12, 1640. Another: Nicolás, son of Gabriel Sáez de Babrena and of Ana Maria de León y Santiago, 12 June 1640 took the name Nicolás de Santiago, thus pursuing the maternal line because as a layman he normally would have been Nicolás Sáez or Nicolás Sáez de León.

<sup>5</sup> For example, Marcos, son of Gonzalo Sánchez and Catalina de Escobar, citizens of Badajoz, on Feb. 4, 1644 took the name of Marcos de Badajoz. As a layman he would probably have called himself Marcos Sánchez or Marcos Sánchez de Escobar.

<sup>6</sup> Examples: Miguel, son of Juan de Villa Pérez and Juana Gómez, citizens of Peñafiel, took the name Miguel de Peñafiel. The two extra names, Melchor de Monterrey and Bartolomé de Lisboa, may have been born in those two cities, but their parents are shown as citizens of Mexico and Orique.

San Nicolás	13	Santa Lucía	1
San Agustín	7	San Pedro	1
San Guillermo	7	San Cibrián	1
San Pablo	5	San Gabriel	1
Santa María	5	San Gregorio	1
San Miguel	4	San Martín	1
Santiago	3	Santo Domingo	1
San Juan	3	San Gerónimo	1
San José	3	San Alberto	1
San Diego	2	San Andrés	1
Santa Catalina	2	Santa Clara	1
		TOTAL	<u>65</u>

Other religious concepts used to replace the family name were as follows:

Concepción	11	Cruz	3
Reyes	6	Anunciación	2
Magdalena	5	Visitación	2
Paz	5	Ángeles	2
Asunción	4	Jesús María	1
Jesús	3	Asención	1
Veracruz	3	Evangelista	1
Bautista	3		

Since these are the names we are led by authoritative statements to anticipate in a majority of cases, they have been given a more detailed study. In exploring for patterns, several possibilities were studied:

1. Perhaps the friar took the name of the saint on whose day he was born. Checking this possibility would require records showing dates of birth, something very rare. This possibility is also rendered unlikely because in later medieval times parents tended to call children by the name of the saint on whose day they were born. This might account for the first name or given name, but less likely for the religious name assumed. Such duplications as Luis de San Luis or Pablo de San Pablo do not occur. This premise is also rendered unlikely by the small number of saints' names used, 23 in all.

2. The possibility also exists that the friar tended to take the name of the saint on whose day he professed. The names have been checked against *The Book of Saints*<sup>7</sup> and of the 65 who renounced

<sup>7</sup> *The Book of Saints, a dictionary of Servants of God Canonized by the Catholic Church ... compiled by the Benedictine Monks of St. Augustine's Abbey, Ramsgate.* New York, MacMillan, 1947. 4th Ed.

the family name in favor of a saint's name, 10 or 15% used the name of the saint on whose day the profession was signed.<sup>8</sup> This number is too small to indicate a trend, tradition, or custom. It may very well represent pure coincidence.

3. Turning to the other holy names, we find just enough conformity to prove the variety. Three friars took the name Juan Baptista, one of them on June 26, 1543, which is in the octave of John the Baptist, but the other two friars, who took the same name, did so on October 31, 1566 and September 5, 1631.

Juan de la Anunciación professed on March 25, 1556, the feast of the Annunciation, but Baltasar de la Anunciación five years earlier, professed on October 15. Hernando de la Concepción professed on December 13, 1553, which is in the octave of the Immaculate Conception. But ten other friars also took the name of Concepción on days such as January 11, February 9, April 9, April 15, May 26, June 27, August 24, and September 7, December 8, and one (1556) illegible.

4. Another suggestion, and one which cannot be proved yet, is that the name was suggested by the Prior, by friends, or relatives, or came to the friar through some personal experience previous to his profession.

The one remaining group or miscellaneous section, has 94 names. Each probably has its own story and interesting ones, at that, but few will ever be recovered. The most general division that can be made is that of the friar who took a family name different from that of his parents. For example, Luis, whose paternal line was Saavedra and whose maternal line was Cadena, and who was evidently born in Mexico City, took the name Guzmán. In many of the others the friar took a name that could very well be either a family name or a place-name. In such cases, rather than guess, the names have been left in this class.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The ten: Juan de San Guillermo (St. William of Maleval, Feb. 11), Diego de San Guillermo (St. William of Cufitella, April 7), Pablo de San Guillermo (St. William Gnoffi, April 16), Diego de San José (Joseph of Persia, April 22), Luis de San Agosto (St. Augustine of Nicomedia, May 7), Isidio de San José (St. Joseph the Hymnographer, June 10), Sebastián de Santa María (Mary, mother of John, June 29), Luis de San Agustín, (St. Augustine, November 5), Pedro de Santa Catalina (St. Catherine of Alexandria, November 25), and Juan de San Agustín (St. Augustine M., December 18).

<sup>9</sup> For example, Cristóbal, son of Cristóbal Sánchez and Isabel Hernández, both citizens of Santa Lalla, took the name Cristóbal de la Fuente.

To explain these names we need much information we probably will never gather, but now and then we can find parallel cases to help out. For example, by turning to the Franciscan Order, we can find an enlightening case in that of the first bishop of Mexico. Toribio seems to have begun life in Benavente, Zamora Province, Spain, about the turn of the sixteenth century as Toribio Paredes, presumably the paternal name. When he entered the Franciscan Order, he changed his name to Toribio de Benavente, for which his biographer, Father Borgia Steck comments:

As was then and later customary among certain groups of religious, he probably dropped his surname when he joined the Franciscan Order, substituting the name of his birthplace.<sup>10</sup>

However, there was a close friendship between Fray Toribio and Don Antonio Pimentel, the sixth Count of Benavente, and I believe we should leave it an open question whether he adopted the place-name of his birth, or the family name of his benefactor, the Count. Adopting the family name of a benefactor would explain most of the cases so far classed as miscellaneous.

Returning to the story of the Franciscan missionary, we find in Mendieta's History, an account of an experience in Tlaxcala:

Mendieta tells us that during one of the interviews which the friars held with the friendly Tlaxcala Indians, one of these was so impressed by the lowly appearance and demeanor of the barefoot and poorly-clad strangers that he kept on muttering to himself 'Motolinía! Motolinía!' Hearing this word repeated so often and in such a tone of sympathy, one of the friars became curious and, turning to one of the Spanish soldiers, he asked what the word meant. 'It means *poor one*, Father, or *poor ones*,' the soldier explained. 'Very well,' the friar replied, 'this is the first word I know in this language and, that I may not forget it, it will from now on be my name.' Mendieta adds that 'from then on he abandoned the name of Benavente and called himself Motolinía.' Henceforth he was to be neither the Toribio Paredes nor the Toribio de Benavente of former days. Toribio he would remain, indeed; but it would be Toribio and *Poor One*, Toribio de Motolinía, entirely devoted as a follower of the Poor Man of Assisi to the conversion of the Aztecs.<sup>11</sup>

Even in the sixteenth century it is doubtful that a friar was able to change his name often with such ease, and no doubt most of

<sup>10</sup> Borgia Steck, *Motolinía's History of the Indians of New Spain*, (Academy of American Franciscan History, Washington, 1951), p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

them continued permanently with the name used at their profession. And while there may have been some variation between orders and between generations, we will have to look not at a set program or regular trends, but a wide variety of free choice. The actual choice must have lain with the individual, and must have reflected local custom, local popularity, literary figures, folklore, and fashion. The regularity of the use of religious names hypothesized by the *Catholic Encyclopedia* apparently was either based on the impression caused by an observation of the changes that did take place, rather than on a percentage or statistical study, or else members of the Augustinian Order did not follow the general practice.



*Land of our Fathers.* — Under this title an interesting and decorative map has been prepared by Lottie and Moshe Davis, illustrated by Charles Harper. The map is based upon the occurrence of Biblical (Old Testament) names, fifty-seven in all, each being appropriately illustrated. Accompanying the map is a brochure, serving as a guide to the map and offering additional information. (Published by Associated American Artists, Inc, 711 Fifth Avenue, New York 22, N.Y.)