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IN MEMORIAM: *Fr. Francisco Morales Valerio*

Francisco Morales Valerio was one of the leading scholars of early colonial Mexico and of the Franciscan order. Morales was born on 09/26/1937, in Pozos, Guanajuato. His family moved to Mexico City when he was still very young, and thereafter, he considered himself a *chilango* (a native of the Federal District, specifically the Tepito neighborhood). His was a large family, with at least a dozen brothers and sisters. From an early age, he was attracted to the Franciscan order, whose friars were always supportive and helpful for him, a small boy in a large city. His Franciscan identity was manifest very early. He took the Franciscan habit when he was only 16 years old, made his first profession in the order the next year, and made his solemn profession in the order when he was 21 years old. His ordination as a priest occurred when he was 26 years old.

He studied philosophy at the provincial college in Calpan (Puebla) and theology at Roger Bacon College in San Antonio, Texas. After having made his vows of profession in the Franciscan order, the Provincia Franciscana del Santo Evangelio de México (Franciscan Province of the Holy Gospel) sent him to the United States to continue his graduate training at the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC, where he received both his master's and doctoral degrees in history, the latter being conferred in 1971. During his graduate studies at Catholic University, he lived in the residence of the Academy of American Franciscan History in Potomac, Maryland. He was a member of the Academy from 1972 to 1987 and was the vice-director from 1981 to 1984. He served in various roles on the editorial board of *The Americas*, most recently, as a long-term senior editor on the Advisory Board. While in residence at the Academy, he worked as an assistant editor and collaborated with the Editor of the journal, Fr. Antonine Tibesar.

During his years in Washington, Morales became well connected with officials in the Mexican embassy. One of his colleagues noted that Fr. Francisco became something like a spiritual advisor to embassy officials. In addition, as the Hispanic population began to increase in the District of Columbia, mostly Central American refugees in those days, Morales worked closely with Franciscan priests who ministered to the Hispanic groups. Within the Franciscan house in

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Potomac, on the campus of the Catholic University of America, and within the larger society of the Washington, DC, region, Morales emerged as an important spiritual and intellectual figure. Although English was his second language (he was already in his teens when he began its study), his communication skills in both Spanish and English were exceptional.

Beyond these gifts, Morales was an insightful and talented scholar. His doctoral dissertation was published by the Academy in 1973 as *The Ethnic and Social Background of the Franciscan Friars in Seventeenth-Century Mexico*.[1] His work, along with other prosopographical studies of the era, such as James Lockhart's *Spanish Peru, 1532–1560* (1968),[2] inspired a generation of social historians of early Latin America, myself included. Morales next turned his analytical gaze to the period of Mexican Independence and wrote *Clero y Política en México, 1767–1834* in 1975 as part of the popular SepSetentas series.[3] The Academy of American Franciscan History underwent reorganization in the 1980s, and eventually, the house in Potomac, Maryland, was sold. During this period of transition, Morales returned to Mexico and reincorporated himself into the Provincia Franciscana del Santo Evangelio de México. Upon his return to Mexico, his brothers elected him to the ruling council of the province, the definitorium. The friars of the order clearly recognized the many skills that Fr. Francisco had for the betterment of the order. In 1988, at the General Chapter Meeting of the Franciscan order, Fr. Morales was appointed to the faculty of the Pontificia Università Antonianum in Rome. At the subsequent General Chapter meeting, he was appointed to the faculty of the Collegium Sancti Bonaventurae in Grottaferrata as a scholar in residence. In 1994, Morales returned to Mexico to resume his duties within the Provincia Franciscana del Santo Evangelio de México.

Upon his return to Mexico, Morales plunged into parochial work as a dedicated pastor. He also continued his life as a prolific writer and scholar. In the 1970s, he published the first installment of a guide to the works in the Fondo Franciscano of the library of the Museo Nacional de Antropología e Historia, *Inventario del Fondo Franciscano del Museo de Antropología e Historia* (1978)[4] (the second volume was published in 2008). He edited a collection of essays regarding the history of the Franciscan order in the New World, which was published by the

1. I acknowledge the assistance of Pilar Máynez, Margarita Menegus, Robert Schwaller, and James Riley in crafting this memoriam.

Francisco Morales, *The Ethnic and Social Background of the Franciscan Friars in Seventeenth-Century Mexico* (Washington, DC: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1973).

2. James Lockhart, *Spanish Peru, 1532–1560* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968).

3. Francisco Morales, *Clero y política en México, 1767–1834* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educacción Pública,1975).

4. Francisco Morales, *Inventario del Fondo Franciscano del Museo de Antropología e Historia* (Washington, DC: Academy of American Franciscan History,1978).

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Academy: *Franciscan Presence in the Americas: Essays on the Activities of the Franciscan Friars in the Americas, 1492–1900* (1983).[5] A total of 10 years later, he edited a similar collection of essays from a conference on the quincentenary of the Columbus voyage: *Franciscanos en América: quinientos años de presencia evangelizadora* (1993).[6] In addition to these works, Morales published scores of articles in scholarly journals, including two in *The Americas* in 1998 and 2008. A personal favorite of mine is a presentation that he made in 1999 at a celebration of the quincentenary of the birth of Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún, held at the Newberry Library in Chicago. The paper was an examination of the theological principles in Sahagún's *Coloquios de los doce*.[7] It was and continues to be an impressive study of the theological underpinnings of one of Sahagún's lesser-known works. It also manifested how easily Fr. Francisco moved among the worlds of theology, evangelization, history, and even Nahuatl.

While a dedicated scholar and parish priest, Fr. Francisco was also a friar in the Franciscan order. Upon his definitive return to Mexico, he served again on the definitorium of the Provincia Franciscana del Santo Evangelio de México and was elected Father Provincial by the friars (from 2008 to 2014). As Father Provincial, Fr. Francisco began the work of the second part of his career: founding the Biblioteca Franciscana (the Franciscan Library) in Cholula, Puebla. He convinced Franciscan institutions throughout the Provincia Franciscana del Santo Evangelio de México to donate their rare books to the research library. He drove thousands of miles across nine states in central Mexico to collect materials. The library now contains more than 24,000 volumes. To renovate the Convento de San Gabriel, which suffered from decades of neglect, Francisco forged an unprecedented collaboration with Universidad de las Puebla (UDLAP) in Cholula and received support from a wide range of corporations and foundations, including Volkswagen and the World Monuments Fund. The result is a beautiful, state-of-the-art research facility that has become an important part not only of UDLAP but also of the Cholula community in general. Along with the Franciscan Library, Morales developed a center to encourage the study of the humanities that was named after a leading friar of the sixteenth century: the Centro de Estudios Franciscanos en Humanidades Fray Bernardino de Sahagún.

5. Francisco Morales, ed. *Franciscan Presence in the Americas: Essays on the Activities of the Franciscan Friars in the Americas, 1492–1900* (Potomac, MD: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1983).

6. Francisco Morales, ed. *Franciscan Presence in the Americas: Essays on the Activities of the Franciscan Friars in the Americas, 1492–1900* (Mexico City: Academy of American Franciscan History, 1983).

7. Francisco Morales, "Theological Framework of the Doctrinal Content from the *Coloquios* by Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún," in *Sahagún at Five Hundred*, ed. John F. Schwaller (Berkeley, CA: Academy of American Franciscan History,2003), 31–58.

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I knew Fr. Francisco for most of my professional career. Following my appointment as director of the Academy of American Franciscan History, we became close friends. He participated in several of the conferences that the Academy presented over the years, several of which he directed, and then edited the papers that resulted from those conferences. He welcomed visiting scholars to the friary in Coyoacan, where the provincial headquarters was located, and, of course, to the Biblioteca Franciscana in Cholula, where he resided following his terms as Father Provincial. In 2017, the Puebla region was struck by a powerful earthquake, as happens regularly in the region. The Iglesia de San Pedro and Convento de San Gabriel suffered significant damage. One of the towers of the complex fell into the office where Fr. Francisco usually worked. He quipped that it was a good thing that he had been away from his desk on that particular day.

Fr. Francisco actively promoted scholarship and helped to organize an important number of conferences on Franciscan topics and other issues of historical importance. As noted among his publications, he participated in commemorations of the quincentenary of the Columbus voyage to the New World, the 500th anniversary of the birth of Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún, a regular meeting in mid-May to recognize the arrival of the first Franciscans to Mexico, and other colloquia and symposia. In Mexico, Morales also renewed his contacts with leading scholars, such as Dr. Miguel León Portilla, and became active in the various research groups in the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). In particular, he took great interest in the project to produce a new translation and paleography of Sahagún's *Florentine Codex*, based in the Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas of UNAM. He hosted symposia in Cholula on Sahagún and other topics related to Franciscan history. In the last few years, Morales became involved in the study of Fray Pedro de Gante, in association with the recognition of the friar's arrival in Mexico in 1523. A formal celebration occurred in the Iglesia de San Francisco in downtown Mexico City. Morales offered to assist in the publication of the papers presented in conjunction with the commemoration. Assisting him in many of these activities in his last years was Dr. Pilar Máynez of the Facultad de Estudios Superiores—Acatlan of UNAM.

His return to Mexico also allowed Fr. Francisco to reconnect with his biological family, as well as with his brothers in the Franciscan order. He reveled in being near his brothers and sisters and especially celebrating the accomplishments of his nieces and nephews. He loved his family dearly, as did he love his brothers of the Franciscan order.

While my son, Dr. Robert Schwaller, was engaged in his dissertation research in Mexico, on weekends, he lived at our family home in Cuernavaca. During the workweek, Francisco invited Rob to stay with the friars in Coyoacan. One

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Sunday evening, Rob went back to Mexico City and arrived at the friary after dinner. After dropping his things in the guest room, accessible from its own entrance, he entered the common room. The friars were all seated on a couch with their backs to him, seemingly watching the summer Confederations Cup soccer tournament in which Mexico was playing. Upon entering the room, Rob saw that two men were standing with guns aimed at him and the friars. The gunmen then proceeded to steal all the cash from the friars, and from Rob. It seems that the men had hidden in the adjoining church after the evening service, tried to open the poor box in the sanctuary, and then entered the friary via the sacristy after accosting the celebrant and sacristan. Since the church doors had been locked after the service, only the doors to the friary were open. At gunpoint, they forced Rob and the sacristan to try and break into the alms boxes in the sanctuary. When that proved futile, because the boxes had been designed to prevent such efforts, the robbers left. Rob and the friars were very shaken by the experience. Fr. Francisco noted that it was OK, since the men obviously needed the money more than the friars did. One of the brothers gave Rob some money to tide him through the week. The friar said, "I don't need this money, but my family sends it to me anyway." The Franciscans are a mendicant order, which means that they only receive donations from the faithful. They avoid commerce, and some friars refuse to touch money. The irony is that, had the robbers merely asked, the friars would have given them money, food, and clothing since that is the Rule of the Order.

In the last years of his life, Fr. Francisco suffered from kidney failure that required regular dialysis. His Facebook page evidenced the decline that set in over the years. He went from an active friar in the midst of life to a frail, quiet friar enjoying the presence of colleagues and family. His health took a turn in 2024, when he required dialysis three times a week, each session of which was followed by a period of intense activity, and then by a noticeable decline. Finally, in the fall of 2024, he suffered a significant loss of energy, which led to his death on 12/23/2024, passing to join his Franciscan brothers.

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