

GODDESS OF THE AMERICAS:  
THE RISE OF THE VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE

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## ABSTRACT

The primary assumption of this paper is this: “Guadalupe still remains the most powerful religious and national symbol in Mexico today.”<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this thesis paper is not to prove the assumption. Rather, it to answer this question: How did the Virgin of Guadalupe become the national and religious figurehead of Mexico? In order to answer this question, this paper briefly investigates Aztec life before the Conquest and Hernán Cortés’ conquest of Mexico and the ensuing decade (1521-1531). This paper evaluates the current assumptions about the Virgin’s rise to power and over whom she exerted the most influence. Finally, this paper examines closely the extant sources that are contemporary to her apparition (1531) and the sources of scholars and religious leaders in the ensuing centuries. This thesis aims to historically examine several facets which have subsequently led to the rise of the Virgin of Guadalupe and her absolute dominance in the Mexican psyche today. Finally, this thesis will provide a few applications for the Lutheran evangelist who wishes to reach out to a Guadalupan devotee.

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<sup>1</sup> Stafford Poole. *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol (1531-1797)*. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1995), 224.

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## **Introduction**

When the weary traveler finally arrives to the concrete courtyard of the *Basilica de Santa María de Guadalupe* in Mexico City, something distinguishes it from any other Marian shrine on the planet. Neither the ornate chapels nor the immaculately kept gardens draw the enormous volume of annual visitors from all over the world. One thing distinguishes this shrine from the rest: a 500-year-old smock, encased in glass, hanging thirty feet in the air in front of three moving walkways.<sup>2</sup> The smock alone is nothing—the image emblazoned upon it is everything. On that old piece of rough, brown cloth is the original image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Her image draws over six million faithful from every corner of Mexico and from around the world during her two-day feast alone.<sup>3</sup> Who is the Virgin of Guadalupe, and how did she reach god-like status in Mexico and throughout the world?

### *Thesis question*

The drive of this thesis is to answer the following question: How did the Virgin of Guadalupe grow into Mexico's national and religious icon? In order to answer this question, this essay first sets up the historical context that preceded her appearance. Second, it retells an abridged version of the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe's apparitions. Third, it traces the historical spread of her veneration throughout Mexico, beginning with a brief examination of pre-Hispanic goddess cults and ending with the Mexican Revolution of 1810. Lastly, it presents conclusions for Lutherans who seek to understand a major part of Mexican Catholicism.

## **Setting the Historical Context**

In March of 1519, Spanish *conquistador* Hernán Cortés landed at the island of Cozumel, near the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula. His arrival marked the beginning of Catholicism to Mexico, and his violent conquest marked a crucial shift in global culture: “In just two years, the Spanish successfully obliterated 3,000 years of Mesoamerican civilization.”<sup>4</sup>

When Cortés and his party soon arrived to the heart of the Aztec empire, Tenochtitlan, Emperor Moctezuma welcomed the Spaniards into his city with these words: “We have known

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<sup>2</sup> Go to *Appendix 1* to see the image.

<sup>3</sup> Jaime Septien, “6.1 Million Pilgrims Visit Guadalupe Shrine,” *Zenit.org*, December 14, 2009, <http://www.zenit.org/en/articles/6-1-million-pilgrims-visit-guadalupe-shrine> (accessed November 21, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Norman Bancroft Hunt. *Gods and Myths of the Aztecs: The History and Development of Mexican Culture*. (New York: Regency House Publishing Limited, 1996), 104.

for a long time, from the chronicles of our forefathers, that neither I, nor those who inhabit this country, are descendants from the aborigines of it, but from strangers who came to it from very distant parts.”<sup>5</sup> Cortés set out to explore the city, which he deemed impressive. However, the Aztec idols and practice of human sacrifice disturbed him to such an extent, that in dramatic fashion he smashed all the idols he found in the side towers of *Templo Mayor* (Tenochtitlan’s principle temple), and replaced them with statues of Mary and other saints. These actions “grieved Montezuma and the natives not a little.”<sup>6</sup> This initial encounter between Catholic Spaniards and pagan Aztecs demonstrated how the latter were first exposed to Catholic images, particularly images of Mary. Of further importance are Cortés’ self-aggrandizing words concerning his own missionary efforts in his second letter to Charles V. Even if he wrote a modicum of truth, his words reveal some of the earliest conversion attempts of the Aztecs:

I made them understand by the interpreters how deceived they were in putting their hope in idols, made of unclean things by their own hands, and I told them that they should know there was but one God, the Universal Lord of all, who had created the heavens, and earth, and all things else, and them, and us, who was without beginning, and immortal; that they should adore, and believe in him, and not in any creature, or thing. I told them all I knew of these matters, so as to win them from their idolatries, and bring them to a knowledge of God, our Lord; and all of them, especially Montezuma, answered that they had already told me they were not natives of this country, and that it was a long time since their forefathers had come to it, therefore they might err in some points of their belief, as it was so long since they left their native land, whilst I, who had recently arrived, should know better than they what they should believe, and hold; and if I would tell them, and explain to them, they would do what I told them, as being for the best.<sup>7</sup>

However, after his patience ran out with the Natives’ apparent lack of enthusiasm for the Catholic faith, Cortés turned to more violent methods: “There are many who will never mend themselves until great and severe punishment is inflicted upon them.”<sup>8</sup> Cortés’ early conversion techniques were simple: substitute good images for bad images and threaten the pagans into

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<sup>5</sup> Hernán Cortés. *Letters of Cortes, the Five Letters of Relation from Fernando, Cortés to the Emp. Charles V.* Translated and edited by Francis Augustus Macnutt with a Biographical Introduction, and Notes Compiled from Original Sources (vol. 1 of 2). (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), 234.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 261.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 307.

reverent submission. His evangelism methods echoed his military methods—he subjugated, enslaved, burned alive, and butchered countless Natives during his conquest of Mexico.<sup>9</sup>

In view of Cortés’ brutal treatment of the Natives, why do nearly 100 million Mexicans—85% of the country’s population—call themselves Catholics today?<sup>10</sup> Some scholars have tried to give credit to the Dominican and Franciscan missionaries and the ecclesiastical priests. They suggest these church workers knew the Natives would be hesitant to worship a white, bearded god who looked like their conquerors. Therefore, the Spanish missionaries substituted the image of an angry God for the image of a caring mother. Is this theory valid? Is the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe’s image responsible for converting Aztecs and other tribes to the Catholic faith?

### **The Story of Guadalupe (1531)**

In order to answer the preceding questions, an investigation of one of the earliest written accounts of the apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe is necessary. What follows is not a personal interpretation of the story; rather, it is condensed version of the story of how the Virgin appeared in Mexico according to the *Nican mopohua*, which is regarded as the authoritative source by the Catholic Church in Mexico.<sup>11</sup>

Ten years after Mexico City was conquered, and after swords had been laid aside, there was a blossoming of truth in the true God. The year was 1531, a Saturday in early December, and an Aztec named Juan Diego from Tlatelolco made his weekly trek to Mexico City to learn about God. When he came to a hill named Tepeyac, he suddenly heard the beautiful singing of birds. He was so struck with awe at their singing, he asked himself, “Could it be that I be worthy? [...] Is it that I am dreaming?”<sup>12</sup> Then the birds’ song stopped, and he heard a voice that called to him, “Juanito, Juan Dieguito!” When he reached the top of the hill he saw a woman.

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<sup>9</sup> To read more about the details of the story of the conquest, see *Appendix 2—Cortés, Moctezuma, and Quetzalcoatl*.

<sup>10</sup> Ross Toro, “The World’s Catholic Population (Infographic),” *Livescience.com*, February 19, 2013, <http://www.livescience.com/27244-the-world-s-catholic-population-infographic.html> (accessed November 20, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> “Insigne Y Nacional Basílica de Santa María de Guadalupe,” *Basilica.mxv.mx*, <http://basilica.mxv.mx/web1/-apariciones/Relato/Ingles.html>, (accessed November 20, 2015). This is the official website for the Basílica of Guadalupe. Here, the *Nican mopohua* is presented as the authoritative apparition account.

<sup>12</sup> Luis Lasso de la Vega, “*Nican mopohua* [English],” *Descendantofgods.tripod.com*, <http://descendantofgods.tripod.com/tonantzintocihuapillatocatzin/id2.html> (accessed November 20, 2015). Translation into English from Nahuatl by Fr. Martinus Cawley of de la Vega’s 1649 account.

Her clothes flashed in the light and radiated an emerald hue. She asked Juan Diego where he was going. When he informed her that he was going to learn about divine things with the priest, she presented him with a request: “How truly I wish it, how greatly I desire it, that here they should erect me my temple!”<sup>13</sup> The reason she gave for her request was so that all people of all kinds in the land would have her as their compassionate mother, raise their voices to her, and trust in her. She promised to repay him if he could convince the archbishop of Mexico build her a temple. So he went on his way to Mexico City, to the palace of Bishop Don Fray Juan de Zumárraga. But after Juan Diego had finished recounting his story of this miraculous apparition and the lady’s request, Zumárraga sent him away, ignoring the request for a temple.

When Juan reached the hill at Tepeyac, he found the lady waiting there for him. He expressed to her his sadness and told her the bishop had doubted whether the temple request had come from her or from his own mind. Juan Diego lamented that he was poor and not rich and thus more credible. The Virgin assured him that she had not chosen a wealthy person but him—a poor Aztec peasant—to carry out her mission. Again, she instructed him to tell the bishop that she, the Ever Virgin Saint Mary, Mother of God, was commissioning him.<sup>14</sup> Juan Diego consented once again to try to carry out her wishes.

The next day, Sunday, Juan headed out to the church in Mexico City. He went straight to the archbishop’s palace after mass and begged him with tears and groans to build a temple for the Virgin. But the archbishop still refused to believe him. He demanded a sign from Juan as proof the heavenly lady herself had sent him. Upon hearing these words, a dejected Juan Diego left and set out toward Tepeyac. However, this time the archbishop sent men to follow the Aztec peasant to see where he was going. The spies pursued him but lost track of him at Tepeyac.

On Monday, Juan found his uncle, Juan Bernardino, was at the point of dying of illness. Juan Bernardino sent his nephew to the priest to ask him to prepare him to die. So on Tuesday, December 12, Juan Diego headed for Mexico City. He decided to avoid the Virgin at Tepeyac and go directly to the priest to make sure his uncle would be able to give his last confession before he died. Yet despite his best efforts to evade the Virgin, she appeared in front of him as he circumnavigated Tepeyac. He felt so guilty, he lay down before her and confessed why he had

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

tried to avoid her. He beseeched her to forgive him and allow him to continue on his quest, promising he would return the next day to listen to her. She answered compassionately, saying, “For am I not here, I, your mother? Are you not in the cool of my shadow? In the breeziness of my shade [...] Is there anything else for you to need?”<sup>15</sup> Hearing these words, Juan asked her to reinstate him as her delegate to the archbishop. Pleased with Juan’s request, she sent him to the top of the hill to gather flowers and bring them down to her. He went up the hill, where there December frost, prickles and brambles normally covered the ground. But instead of finding thorns, he found Castilian garden flowers. Quickly he gathered them up in his mantle and brought them to the Virgin, where she inspected them and rearranged them in his cloak. Then she told him the flowers would prove to the archbishop that she was the one who sent Juan.

But when he arrived at Archbishop Zumárraga’s palace, the latter refused to see him and the guards began to bully him, trying to see what he was carrying in his mantle. When they tried to grab the flowers for themselves, they could not, because the flowers seemed to be embroidered onto his clothing. Finally, the bishop called him in. Juan told the bishop everything that had happened that morning, about the third apparition and the fact that he had found beautiful Castilian flowers where brambles normally grew. When he opened his mantle, the flowers fell to the floor and suddenly on his smock where he had carried the flowers an image appeared, emblazoned on the fabric—it was Mary, the Mother of God.

Immediately, the bishop and those present wept and knelt at the sight of the image. Saddened that he had refused to believe Juan Diego, the archbishop took the mantle to his oratory and promised to build the temple at once. He and others accompanied Juan Diego as they rushed to his uncle’s home, where they found him healed. Juan’s uncle told them the Virgin had visited him, too, at the exact same time she had appeared to Juan Diego on the hill that day. Within weeks, the church was built, and “the whole city, one and all, was astir and was visiting and marveling at her sacred image, doing it homage and making prayers before it. Greatly did they marvel at how divinely miraculously it had appeared, for it had not been any earthbound mortal who had painted that sacred representation.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. These words are etched in Spanish into the principle basilica at the *Basilica de Guadalupe* in Mexico City.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.



### *The Resulting Great Conversion*

At the end of the *Nican mopohua*, the author writes the story of her apparition drew “the whole city” up the hill. Several authors and scholars have taken the *Nican mopohua*’s claim at face value and have decided the Aztecs were drawn up the hill for two reasons. First, they wanted to see the things they had heard about, namely, the beauty of the image on the mantle. Second, they wanted to see if this image which miraculously appeared could itself work miracles.

First, the Aztecs were drawn to this image. The woman in the image was like nothing the Natives had ever seen in their dealings with Catholicism. Her face was not like those of their captors; rather, she was *mestiza*. Her mantle was a bright turquoise, the color of Aztec royalty and of the god *Ometéotl*. White stars were scattered across her garment—fulfillment of ancient Mesoamerican prophecy that a comet would bring the end of their civilization. The black band around her waist was an Aztec symbol for pregnancy. As it was in the exact center of her the image, over her navel, it suggested the child she carried was at the center of the universe. The angelic creature underneath her showed her importance, as a heavenly creature carrying her pointed “to her own heavenly origins.”<sup>17</sup> The Virgin hid the sun, but it did not destroy it, and she stood on a black moon—both were deities to the Natives. Therefore, the lady did not destroy their old gods, but validated them and “transcended and reinterpreted them.”<sup>18</sup> The Aztecs had seen Cortés smash their gods in their temples and ban their rituals. Spanish priests recorded the dispirited Aztec leaders as saying,

What are we to do then,  
We who are small men and mortals;  
If we die, let us die;  
If we perish, let us perish;  
The truth is that the gods also died.<sup>19</sup>

Yet now, in the Virgin of Guadalupe’s image, the Aztecs saw a divine image that validated their beliefs.<sup>20</sup> Aztecs flocked to the image to find divine validation of their belittled culture.

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<sup>17</sup> Maxwell E. Johnson. *The Virgin of Guadalupe: Theological Reflections of an Anglo-Lutheran Liturgist*. (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 31.

<sup>18</sup> Johnson, 30.

<sup>19</sup> Miguel León-Portilla. *El Reverso de la Conquista*. (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1993), 25.

<sup>20</sup> Under Cortés, when the priests forbade the Natives from sacrificing children to prompt the gods to give more rain, they thought the world would end. The world did not end despite their lack of sacrifice, which not only

Yet they also paid homage to the image because of the miracles it seemed to produce. News about her appearance to and miraculous healing of Juan Bernardino had spread throughout the city. It seemed the Virgin did not need to be physically present to perform miracles—her image emblazoned on Juan Diego’s smock also could perform miracles. On December 26, 1531, just two weeks after she had appeared to Juan Diego for the third time, Bishop Zumárraga led a procession up Tepeyac to the recently completed chapel he had built for the Virgin of Guadalupe. The procession was elaborate and joyous until an errant arrow pierced the neck of a Chichimec Native dancer. He was either dead or almost dead when his fellow Natives laid him before the image of Guadalupe and they begged her to save him. Immediately, according to Spaniard historian Florencia, the Chichimec man got up and walked away, showing “no sign of wound or scar.”<sup>21</sup> The people were convinced that the Virgin of Guadalupe had descended to one of their own, validated them as human beings, spoke tenderly to them through Juan Diego, and yet was powerful enough to raise even the dead.

Not only did Aztecs visited the Virgin’s shrine in great numbers, but *peninsulares* (Spaniards, living in New Spain, born in Spain) did too. Mary’s cult was established through her apparition and miracles alike. Franciscan Fray Gerónimo de Mendieta (1525-1604), who moved to New Spain in 1554, estimated that nine million Indians were converted in a single decade following Guadalupe’s apparitions.<sup>22</sup> Carl A. Anderson, the thirteenth Supreme Knight of the Knights of Columbus, estimates that as around nine million members of the Roman Catholic Church in Europe left the church during the Reformation, nine million joined it in New Spain. He credits Our Lady of Guadalupe:

Many historians have attributed these many conversions to the effects of the Guadalupan apparitions. What is absolutely certain is that the continent for which Zumárraga had all but given up hope in 1530 was almost universally converted to Christianity in a matter of decades, and that Guadalupe is the single highest-profile Catholic event in the Americas in the sixteenth century.<sup>23</sup>

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called the validity of their gods into questions, but their own humanity as they had been enslaved and treated as subhuman by the Spaniards.

<sup>21</sup> Simone Watson. *The Cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe: A Historical Study*. (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1964), 51.

<sup>22</sup> Carl Anderson. *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Mother of the Civilization of Love*. (New York: Doubleday, 2009), 71. Anderson is quoting Gerónimo de Mendieta in his work *Historia Ecclesiastica Indiana*, which the latter wrote in 1600.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid*, 72.

Cardinal Ratzinger (former Pope Benedict XVI) also credits the Virgin for the conversion of the Natives: “There is one thing we must not forget: it has always been the Mother who reached people in a missionary situation and made Christ accessible to them. That is especially true of Latin America.”<sup>24</sup> Pope John Paul II also called her a great evangelizer: “[Our Lady of Guadalupe] is an impressive example of a perfectly inculturated evangelization.”<sup>25</sup>

At the outset, this section may seem to conclude a study of the Virgin of Guadalupe’s origins and importance in the conversion of Mexico. However, these views are based on a number of assumptions. A closer investigation of the apparition account and contemporary sources reveals a lack of evidence for the many claims made above. For example, if the Virgin was responsible for the conversion of nine million Natives, why do none of the missionaries working at the time of her apparitions and shortly thereafter fail to mention her in their writings? Why does no written copy of the apparition exist until 1648, nearly 120 years after Juan Diego saw her on Tepeyac? What precisely was the Virgin of Guadalupe’s role in the conversion of Mexico? The rest of this paper will focus on assumptions and evidence of the “historical” Virgin of Guadalupe. The goal is to discover how she became Mexico’s national and religious icon.

### **The Search for the Aztec Goddess Link to the Virgin of Guadalupe**

The first place to start in chronologically tracing the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe is pre-Conquest Mesoamerica. The reason for this is to investigate a major assumption that link the Virgin of Guadalupe and an Aztec goddess.<sup>26</sup> The basic premise for this theory is that if Natives flocked by the thousands and eventual millions to the Virgin of Guadalupe and not to a white, bearded God, it is because they associated her with one of their own mother goddesses who was very different from the image of God as angry Spanish *conquistador*.<sup>27</sup> Michelle Guerin writes,

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<sup>24</sup> Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI). *God and the World: Believing and Living in Our Time*. (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2000), 300.

<sup>25</sup> Pope John Paul II. *Ecclesia in America*. (Boston: St. Paul Books and Media, 1999), 11.

<sup>26</sup> To summarize thousands of years of Mesoamerican history is a daunting task. Nonetheless, a historical, cultural, and religious study reveals one general truth: the dominant cultures of Mesoamerica drew on each other’s legends and stories. Therefore, the Aztecs, for example, did not develop a new religion in a vacuum; rather, they drew on ancient Mesoamerican beliefs and gods. In fact, Norman Bancroft Hunt connects their deities to ones already worshiped at the time of the Olmecs nearly 3,000 years beforehand. See *Appendix 3—Setting the Context for Guadalupe: Pre-Conquest History*.

<sup>27</sup> Watson, 51.

Occurring only forty years after the discovery of the New World and a bare ten years after the Spanish conquest of Mexico, the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe seem, on the one hand to have formed a bridge from the Aztec version of the universal mythology of the Great Mother to the Catholic faith, and on the other hand, to have fostered within the formal boundaries of the latter a vigorous devotion to the Cosmic Mother which had the potential to spread beyond its country of origin.<sup>28</sup>

Who is this "Great Mother"? Did the Aztecs find her under the guise of the Virgin of Guadalupe?

*Tonantzin: The Aztec Link to the Virgin of Guadalupe*

Because of the large number of goddesses in the Aztec pantheon, one must focus on the most influential goddesses who could be linked to the highly influential Virgin of Guadalupe. After a careful investigation of the entire known pantheon, one goddess exists whom scholarship has linked to the Virgin of Guadalupe.<sup>29</sup> This link comes solely through the scholarship of one primary source: Franciscan chronicler of Aztec history, Bernardino de Sahagún (1499-1590).

This goddess's name is *Tonantzin*, or "little (dear) mother." She "was the Aztec name for the benevolent manifestation of the goddess *Cihuacóatl* in her role as earth goddess and mother of humankind."<sup>30</sup> Is *Tonantzin* the "Great Mother"? Did she bring about a syncretistic union of religions? If the answer is yes to both questions, then consider what Sister Michelle Guerin says:

The first consequence of this union was the reconciliation of the conquered people to the religion of their conquerors. According to Aztec belief, the Sun God had vanquished the ancient goddess, and the Great Mother had then become a demanding, bloodthirsty deity who promised a plentiful harvest only at the price of human sacrifice, victims for which were obtained by constant intertribal warfare.<sup>31</sup>

Guerin seems to think the link inseparable, and goes on to write that the Virgin Mary did not appear to Juan Diego on December 9, but *Tonantzin* did.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Michelle Guerin, "Cosmic Mother of the Aztecs: Our Lady of Guadalupe," *Anima*, 15 no 2, (Spring Equinox, 1989): 115-122, <http://www.atla.com/> (Subscriber access) (accessed October 12, 2015), 115.

<sup>29</sup> See *Appendix 4* to read about other influential Mesoamerican goddesses.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>31</sup> Guerin, 115.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*. Guerin connects *Tonantzin* with *Ometeotl*, "Mother God, Father God, by whom all live."

If true, the Virgin's connection to *Tonantzin* might explain the sudden willingness of sacrifice-laden Natives to worship her. Rather than demanding bloody sacrifice, the goddess now demanded a temple through which she could demonstrate her love, compassion, and help for the Natives. Before, the Aztecs had stolen neighboring virgins, warriors, and children of their neighboring tribes for sacrifice to appease her. Through her new apparition, the mestiza goddess showed she had heard the people's cries, and that she would now give her own son to be a sacrifice instead of theirs.<sup>33</sup>

This theory seems to account for the massive conversion of Natives to Catholicism. In 1529, Franciscan Fray Pedro Gante had expressed his frustrations in converting the Natives. Just two years before the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe, he wrote that the Natives were like "animals without reason" whom "we could attract neither to the church, nor to catechism classes, nor to sermons [...] for three years."<sup>34</sup> According Father Xavier Escalada, however, the conversion struggle changed completely after the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Escalada wrote, "From the Hill of Tepeyac, the Virgin did away with the idolatry, the human sacrifices, and the polygamy [of the Aztecs] and brought about in her children the greatest transformation [...] ever known throughout the length and breadth of Christendom."<sup>35</sup> Fray Motolinía, another missionary, estimated that five million Natives converted between 1531 and 1536 because the "Virgin of Guadalupe spoke to their hearts and moved them to line up in interminable rows and in such great numbers that the missionaries could hardly attend to them."<sup>36</sup> The mother came in a form "which they could recognize and to which they could relate."<sup>37</sup> After ten years of minimally successful mission attempts, the Aztecs had their matriarch to protect them from the patriarchal and angry Judeo-Christian God.

Another potential connection between *Tonantzin* and Our Lady of Guadalupe is their place and manner of adoration. Several scholars note that *Tonantzin's* temple stood where the present day *Basilica de Guadalupe* stands—on the hill of Tepeyac, where the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego. Carl Anderson writes that this ancient site dedicated to

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 120.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, 117.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 122.

*Tonantzin* was “one of four major ancient sites of religious sacrifice in Mexico.”<sup>38</sup> Every scholar who writes about a *Tonantzin* temple on Tepeyac quotes the same primary source: Franciscan Fray Bernardino de Sahagún. Sahagún chronicled Aztec history and religion and even mastered the Aztec language (Nahuatl). In his monumental work *Historia General* (1576), he created a detailed appendix on superstitions, which included the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe. He explained that the Aztecs worshipped *Tonantzin* on that hill, and later worshipped the Virgin of Guadalupe there as well. Sahagún writes the following:

Near the mountains are three or four places where they used to offer very solemn sacrifices, and they would come to them from very distant lands. One of these is here in Mexico (City), where there is a hill that is called *Tepeyacac* and the Spaniards call *Tepeaquilla* and is now called Our Lady of Guadalupe. In this place they used to have a temple dedicated to the mother of the gods, whom they called *Tonantzin*, which means “our mother.” ... The gathering of people in those days was great and everyone would say, “let us go to the feast of *Tonantzin*.” Now that the church of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been built there, they also call her *Tonantzin*, taking their cue from the preachers who call Our Lady, the Mother of God, *Tonantzin*. What may be the basis for thesis use of *Tonantzin* is not clear. However, we know for certain that the original use of the word means that ancient *Tonantzin*. It is something that should be remedied because the proper name for the Mother of God, Our Lady, is not *Tonantzin* but *Dios inantzin*. This appears to be an invention of the devil to cover over idolatry under the ambiguity of this name *Tonantzin*. They now come to visit this *Tonantzin* from far away, as far as in former times. The devotion itself is suspect because everywhere there are many churches to Our Lady and they do not go to them. They come from distant lands to this *Tonantzin*, as they did in former times.”<sup>39</sup>

The Franciscan scholar reveals a number of fascinating items do be investigated later on in this paper; nonetheless, of primary importance is that he wrote of a link in the place of worship of both *Tonantzin* and Our Lady of Guadalupe.

The Natives adored both *Tonantzin* and the Virgin in similar and yet different ways. Sahagún witnessed and wrote about the horrors of human sacrifice he observed in Native adoration of various gods and goddesses, including *Tonantzin*. He also wrote down songs children and adults alike would sing to her. The following is a compilation of strophes from a

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<sup>38</sup> Anderson, 29.

<sup>39</sup> Poole, 78. He quotes Bernardino de Sahagún in the third volume his work *Historia General* (p.352), which he wrote in 1576.

song dedicated to the Aztec goddess. This song and the Virgin's words to Juan Diego as recorded in the *Nican mopohua* share similarities (marked in italics):

This means, Thirteen Eagle is my sing. *I am your mother and you people of Chalma are my children.* Take the cactus dart; fill me with it. *Our mother, warrior woman, our mother, warrior woman.* [...] *This means, I am your mother, the warrior-woman My home is there* in Colhuacan, and I give someone an eagle feather with which she becomes an eagle" [emphasis added].<sup>40</sup>

The Natives worshipped through songs to their gods and goddesses. This tradition continued in their adoration of the Virgin of Guadalupe, as they sung about her in a similar way as they sung about *Tonantzin*.

Sahagún wrote at length that the Natives seemed to have latched onto the Virgin of Guadalupe as the incarnation of their own goddess, *Tonantzin*, and worshipped her as such. This is why he was hesitant to promote her veneration among the Aztecs. He saw that the Natives worshipped the Virgin of Guadalupe at the same place and in many of the same ways as they had previously worshipped *Tonantzin*.

#### *The Issues with Linking Tonantzin with the Virgin*

If the theory of an Aztec link between *Tonantzin* and the Virgin is true, then the spread of her cult in Mexico is a fairly simple one to understand. Rather than put their faith in an angry, war-mongering Spanish God, the Natives were more prepared to latch onto a gentle mother's version of Catholicism. Furthermore, they saw this new goddess as another apparition of their own mother goddess, *Tonantzin*. The Missionaries would have taken advantage of this new portal to bring Natives to the faith, reproduced her image, spread the news of her apparitions and miracles throughout the land, and brought millions of Natives to the Catholic faith—a faith that dominates Mexico to this day.

Yet consider the following questions and problems. First, within a short time of Cortés' conquest of the Aztec empire, the Franciscans sent missionaries to the land, among whom was Sahagún. Of all the missionaries, historians, and ecclesiastical leaders who wrote, Sahagún is the only one who even mentions that *Tonantzin* had a temple on Tepeyac. Second, the missionaries

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<sup>40</sup> Bernardino de Sahagún. *Primeros Memoriales*. Thelma D. Sullivan, trans. (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 144.

did not employ the Virgin of Guadalupe's image to appeal to the Natives. In fact, they saw the danger in the Natives worshipping an Aztec goddess under the guise of the Virgin, and thus strongly discouraged her veneration among the people. Third, the story of her apparition in 1531 did not exist in print until 1648—117 years after she reportedly appeared. The chapel that Zumárraga purportedly built by December 26 of 1531 was not mentioned until three decades later. Historians attributed its construction to his successor, Bishop Montúfar, in 1555.

How did Our Lady of Guadalupe rise to the top of Mexican Catholicism? A careful examination of the timeline of events and sources from 1531 through 1810 reveals several answers and overturns several assumptions.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Historical Spread of the Guadalupan Cult through present times**

In 1995, Stafford Poole published his book *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol (1531-1797)*. What distinguishes his book from others written on the apparition account is the fact that he examined nearly every extant primary source from New Spain written between the years 1531 and 1797. His wealth of resources and knowledge on the topic are evident as he traces the historical dissemination of the Guadalupan cult. Much of what is written in this section takes into account his monumental work.

Numerous issues with the Virgin of Guadalupe rise to the surface, beyond just the issues with previous claims that priests used her image to promote the new faith (in connection with *Tonantzin*). First, who worshipped her? While one may automatically assume the Natives latched onto her in their conversion, is this assumption true? Were her main followers *peninsulares*? Were they *criollos* (Spaniards born in New Spain)? Furthermore, who was the Virgin of Guadalupe? Was she the New Spain version of Old Spain's Our Lady of Guadalupe of Extremadura?<sup>42</sup> These and multiple other questions surface with a closer look at the true origins and spread of the Virgin's story.

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<sup>41</sup> In 1810, her image became inseparable from Mexican identity during the Mexican Revolution.

<sup>42</sup> Some have theorized that the Virgin of Guadalupe was confused with the Virgin of the Remedios which Cortés supposedly placed in the stead of *Huitzilopochtli* in the great pyramid of Tenochtitlan. This connection is not addressed in this paper.



*The Earliest Accounts: 1531-1555*

The first issue is this the complete silence of both Spanish and Nahuatl sources regarding the Virgin of Guadalupe between 1531 and 1555. Emperor Charles I took note of Fray Juan de Zumárraga's talent. In 1527, he appointed the Franciscan to investigate cases of witchcraft in the Holy Roman Empire. By December of that year, Charles appointed him bishop of the newly created diocese of Mexico, where he arrived a year later (December 6, 1528). When the newly arrived archbishop witnessed the brutal treatment of the Aztecs by the Spaniards, he denounced them to the king and smuggled a letter to ensure its passage across the sea. In response, Charles ended the *First Audencia* (*conquistador*-led government in New Spain) and installed the *Second Audencia* (a political official and lawyer-led government). This action brought a semblance of stability to the New World. Zumárraga's actions revealed his character: he was skeptical and unafraid of telling the truth in the face of persecution.

With this in mind, listen to what he wrote in *Regla Cristiana Breve* in 1547:

“You ought not, brethren, give way to the thoughts and blasphemies of the world, which tempt souls with the desire to see by marvels and miracles what they believe by faith... That is a lack of faith and arises from great pride. That is how they receive their reward, by falling miserably into great errors. The redeemer of the world no longer wants miracles to be worked because they are not necessary, because our holy faith is so well established by so many thousands of miracles as we have in the Old and New Testaments.”<sup>43</sup>

With these words, the archbishop to whom Juan Diego supposedly revealed the Virgin of Guadalupe's image denounced such apparitions and miracles. Furthermore, he did not mention even once in all his extant writings “the apparitions, the devotion, or the shrine” of the Virgin of Guadalupe.<sup>44</sup> He left no money to a shrine of Guadalupe at Tepeyac, nor did he request to be buried there.

Zumárraga, the Bishop of Mexico, was not the only contemporary source silent on the mention of any apparition or shrine. In a letter to Pope Paul III in 1536, Bishop Garcés recounted a miraculous story of the conversion of 10,000 Natives after two of them, Pedro and Diego, saw a vision. But they did not see the Virgin of Guadalupe, and Garcés did not refer to this story again. A missionary, Toribio de Motolinía, one of the first twelve Franciscans to New Spain, did

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<sup>43</sup> Poole, 35.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

not mention anything of apparitions at Tepeyac in either of his two monumental works.<sup>45</sup> A Franciscan group made Cuauhtitlan, just outside of Mexico City, their base of operations. From there, they wrote a letter to Charles I on November 17, 1532, less than a full year after Juan Diego would have seen the Virgin. Even though *Nican mopohua* claimed that Cuauhtitlan was Juan Diego's home, these missionaries did not make mention of Juan Diego or of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Rather, they defended Zumárraga in his work of defending the Indians against Spanish abuse.<sup>46</sup> Finally, church leaders gathered in a number of *Juntas Apostólicas* (Apostolic Meetings) from 1524-1546 to discuss methods of converting the Natives. Not once did they record the worship of the Virgin of Guadalupe in their letter to King Charles. Several Spanish sources from which one would expect to see mention of such a monumental event mention nothing of the Virgin of Guadalupe's apparitions to Juan Diego or of a chapel built for her.

While the Spanish sources are silent on the subject, no evidence of a 1531 apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe exists in Nahuatl sources either. Sister Simone Watson points to an Aztec chronicle, written by Aztec scribes who had been instructed in writing Nahuatl. She claims *Mapas*—Aztec picture chronicles—contain “clear and precise allusions” to the apparition of Guadalupe.<sup>47</sup> In *Anales de Mexico y sus Contornos*, the Aztec interpretation of the *Mapas*, it reads in Nahuatl, “1556—Xii *Pedernal*. The Lady descended to Tepeyac; in the same year the star smoked.”<sup>48</sup> In addition to *Mapas*, an Aztec man left three pieces of his land “for my very much loved Lady Holy Mary of Guadalupe who appeared on Saturday” in his will dated March 11, 1559.<sup>49</sup> Finally, an early map (1556-62) of Mexico City attributed to cartographer Alonso de Santa Cruz reveals a small hermitage atop Tepeyac hill.<sup>50</sup> While these three items allude to the Virgin of Guadalupe, they are written post-1555, they do not make mention of a miraculous apparition of the Virgin in 1531, and they are obscure and vague.

Apart from these fragmented snapshots of the Virgin in Nahuatl sources, little evidence for the Virgin of Guadalupe's early apparition exists. A document named *Inin hey*

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<sup>45</sup> *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España* and *Memoriales*.

<sup>46</sup> Poole, 39.

<sup>47</sup> Watson, 13.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>50</sup> Poole, 47. This map is called “The Map of Uppsala” because it is housed in Uppsala, Sweden.

*tlamahuicoltzin* (“This is the Great Miracle”) is the first such document to refer to the Virgin. Its date of composition is unknown. Fray Jose Fernando Ramirez received the document in 1767 when the Jesuits were expelled from New Spain. He dated the document in the late 16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>51</sup> Jesuit Historian Mariano Cuevas, who found the same document in New York, attributed it to the year 1574. The source itself does not say much. It is five paragraphs of apparent instructional material for the Natives.<sup>52</sup> It does not mention names, dates, and other aspects of the story like Juan Bernardino’s cure. It has been surmised that devoted Guadalupan Jesuits wrote it in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. As Poole says, “This document tells us relatively little about the Guadalupe tradition, in its favor or otherwise.”<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps the tradition of the Virgin’s apparition was not written down in Nahuatl, but taught from generation to generation in song and oral tradition. As mentioned previously, Nahua people often preserved the tradition and adoration of their deities through song. Watson records one such song the Natives sang in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe as they marched her image up the Tepeyac for the dedication of her chapel on December 26, 1531:

God created the Most Holy Mary  
In the midst of most miraculous flowers  
And he has renewed the again  
In the Bishop’s painting.<sup>54</sup>

Sahagún copied down the Aztec hymn of Cihuacoatl that sounded similar to a Guadalupan song. Both songs demonstrate the tradition of singing among the Aztecs. But Sahagún does not mention any song sung by Aztecs specifically to the Virgin of Guadalupe. Poole records one song, however, called *teponazcuicatl* (“Log Drum Song” or “*Pregón del atabal*”), that says:

Your heart lives only on the picture,  
You sing thereon your mat of paper [or book mat],  
You cause the rulers to dance, the bishop, only our father,  
You speak there on the edge of the water.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> This document ended up in New York in the 1920s during the *Cristero* revolt in Mexico.

<sup>52</sup> Poole, 43.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Watson, 15.

<sup>55</sup> Poole, 45.

While some may see this song as proof of Guadalupan worship (and will even date the song as early as 1548), it is difficult to deduce anything from its vague message. Even Angel María Garibay, a scholar who believes in the early apparitions, concluded this “is not a Christian song; much less, dedicated to Saint Mary.”<sup>56</sup> The *cantares* (“songs”) tradition is difficult to map and use as proof because of their nature—they were orally passed on.

The first 25 years after the 1531 apparition date should be a gold mine for someone studying the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe and her adoration at the chapel at Tepeyac. However, as Poole concludes, “Prior to 1555 there was total silence in the written sources about any apparitions at Tepeyac or even the existence of a chapel there.”<sup>57</sup>

*The Hermitage is built at Tepeyac: 1556-1570*

From 1556 on there were several writers who both alluded to both the Virgin’s miraculous apparition and referenced the hermitage at Tepeyac.

Juan Bautista, an Aztec official who collected tributes from the Natives, wrote in his notebook in 1574, “In the year 1555: at that time Saint Mary of Guadalupe appeared there on Tepeyacac.”<sup>58</sup> Later on, Bautista referred to a procession occurring on September 15, 1566, when they celebrated the Virgin’s feast. While Bautista gave 1555 as a date for the apparition, *Chimalpahin* and *Anónimo A* both dated the event in 1556. While *Anónimo C* gives the year as 1510, it seems as though by the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, 1555 or 1556 had become the traditional dates for the apparition at Tepeyac.

In the Spanish translation of the Nahuatl, *Códice Gomez de Orozco*, various authors cover parts of New Spain’s history from 1524 to 1691. They wrote, “In that year the president came here, the first who came to rule Mexico. In that same year the priestly lord bishop named Juan de Zumárraga, a friar of Saint Francis, first came at the very time when our precious mother of Guadalupe appeared.”<sup>59</sup> However, this is the only time Zumárraga is ever mentioned in the entire document. Also, “1530” is the antecedent to “in that same year,” not “1531.” Ultimately, this could be a later insertion, as the same hand penned the history through 1609.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 46.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 54.

Watson quotes *The Annals of Bartolache* as early apparition evidence. While visiting the Royal and Pontifical University, Jose Ignacio Bartolache discovered these Nahuatl annals that date from between 1454 and 1737. In these annals, he read, “13 reed year 1531. [...] and Juan Diego made known the precious noble lady of Guadalupe of Mexico; it was called Tepeyacac” and “8 flint 1548: Juan Diego, to whom the precious noble lady of Guadalupe of Mexico appeared, died; and a hailstorm fell on the white hill.”<sup>60</sup> The issue is that these documents were written in 1737, which—as will be shown—was a vital year for the promulgation of the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Many of the Nahuatl documents that recount the Virgin’s history between 1556 and 1570 are difficult to understand and are lacking in details. The sources which mention an apparition in 1531 and refer by name to Juan Diego and Bishop Zumárraga were written or edited much later than 1570. What do the Spanish sources from this time period (1556-70) say?

In 1556, an important investigation of the Virgin of Guadalupe was undertaken by the Catholic Church in Mexico. Francisco de Bustamante, an anti-Guadalupan, preached a sermon against the Dominican Archbishop Alonso de Montúfar in September of that year. Montúfar was the bishop who replaced Zumárraga. He praised the devotion of the Virgin of Guadalupe and even “made favorable mention of miracles that had been reported at the shrine.”<sup>61</sup> However, Bustamante, who arrived in New Spain in 1542, preached in his 1556 sermon that the Natives did *not* worship the Virgin of Guadalupe. He went so far as to remind Montúfar that the Lateran Councils “had established penalties for the propagation of false miracles.”<sup>62</sup> Naturally, this incendiary sermon angered Montúfar, who started an investigation against the well-loved Bustamante. He called upon three Spanish witnesses who testified that devotion was strong among the Spaniards, and that pilgrims traversed the terrain for miles on both knees and feet. Four witnesses claimed an Indian had painted the image of Guadalupe. Bustamante was one such witness. He attributed the piece of art to Marcos de Aquino, a talented Native painter who was of the same talent as Michelangelo.<sup>63</sup> However, no one, including Montúfar, mentioned the story of the apparitions.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 59.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 63. *Conquistador* Bernal Díaz del Castillo also mentions Marcos in his writings.

Despite Montúfar's silence regarding the apparitions, his contemporaries attribute the construction of the hermitage at Tepeyac to him. Aranguern, the man who married Zumárraga's niece, wrote that Montúfar was the "patron and founder of the said building."<sup>64</sup> Antonio Freire, chaplain of the hermitage, wrote a description of his residence in January of 1570. He said that Montúfar had built the hermitage 15 years prior (in 1555) with donations given by the faithful.<sup>65</sup> Finally, Zumárraga was a Franciscan. If he had built the hermitage, it seems unlikely that the Franciscans would have continued their deliberate opposition against the devotion of Guadalupe. During this time period (1555-1570), origins of a shrine or hermitage to the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared in writing. However, it was not built in 1531 by Archbishop Zumárraga in response to Juan Diego's plea. It was built in 1555 by Archbishop Montúfar.

Poole draws the following conclusions from the Virgin's history in sources from 1531-1570. First, no source mentions an apparition story as of 1556. The miraculous nature of the image pertained to its apparent ability to work miracles, not to a miraculous apparition. Second, the earliest sources abruptly mention a shrine and Guadalupan devotion. Third, Guadalupan devotion was favored by the archbishop as of 1556, but was opposed by the Franciscan missionaries. Fourth, the adoration was Spanish, not Aztec, by 1556. Fifth, witnesses were already coming forward to testify that the image was painted by a Native. Finally, Bustamante did not associate the Virgin of Guadalupe with pagan worship on the same hill.<sup>66</sup>

#### *The Clearest Writings Yet: 1571-1576*

Between the years 1571 and 1576, three men wrote down what today serves as the most detailed description of the happenings at Tepeyac in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The first man was an English adventurer—Miles Philips. In 1568, when he parted ways with company leader John Hawkins near Veracruz, he headed inland and soon arrived at a little chapel on Tepeyac, just outside Mexico City. This is what he observed:

The next morning we departed from thence on our journey to Mexico and so travelled until we came within two leagues of it where there was built by the Spaniards a very fair church called Our Lady's Church... Whensoever any Spaniards pass by this church, although they be on horseback, they will alight and come into the church and kneel before the image and pray to our Lady to

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 64.

defend them from all evil; so whether he be a horseman or a footman he will not pass by, but first go into the church and pray as aforesaid, which if they do not they think they shall never prosper: which Image they call in the Spanish tongue *Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe*.<sup>67</sup>

He continued to describe the Virgin's image as one of silver and gold—a statue, not a painting. While he mentioned the waters which had miraculous healing powers, he made no mention of the Virgin's miracles or of her miraculous apparition. Furthermore, he observed solely Spanish devotion of Guadalupe, not Native, even though he wrote about Native presence in the area.<sup>68</sup>

Did the Aztecs not pray to the Virgin at Tepeyac? To explore that question more deeply, we turn to a second man: Martín Enríquez de Almansa, viceroy of Valderrábano. Two Hieronymite friars who lived at the Virgin of Guadalupe Extremadura's shrine in Spain had heard about a similar shrine being built at Tepeyac. Upon visiting New Spain to see the shrine for himself, one of the friars, Diego de Santa María, wrote an incendiary letter to Philip II on December 12, 1574. He accused the church in New Spain of building this shrine and stealing the name and image of Guadalupe so that the church in the New World could collect donations that would otherwise have gone to the Old World's Extremaduran shrine. Viceroy Enríquez wrote an explanation to Philip II on September 23, 1575. In his letter, he explained that the common understanding was that in 1555 or 1556 a hermitage on the hill housed the image. He then wrote:

A herdsman, who used to wander about the area, proclaimed that he had recovered his health by going to that ermita. The people's devotion began to grow and they named the image Our Lady of Guadalupe because it was said that it resembled that of Guadalupe in Spain. And from that time a confraternity was established, in which they say that there are probably 400 members.<sup>69</sup>

His letter reveals a few insights into the early shrine. First, if the image truly “resembled that of Guadalupe in Spain” as he says, the image would be a small, wooden, 18-inch-tall statue, not a painting. Second, like Miles Philips, Enríquez did not mention a miraculous apparition account

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<sup>67</sup> Richard Hakluyt. *The Principal Navigations, Traffiques, and Discoveries of the English Nations*. Vol. IV. New York: Dutton, 1926), 314-15.

<sup>68</sup> Poole, 70.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, 73.

to validate the adoration at this shrine. Third, the shrine and name of the Marian cult in Mexico was nearly the same as the shrine and name of the Spanish Our Lady of Guadalupe Extremadura.

The connection between the two Virgins of Guadalupe is logical. Hernan Cortés, who had conquered the Aztecs over 50 years earlier, was a native of the Extremaduran region. Furthermore, the word “*Guadalupe*” did not originate in Mexico. *Guadalupe* was the Arabic name of a river that flowed through Extremadura, Spain, meaning “river of black gravel.” The story behind that Virgin of Guadalupe was that a peasant found a small statue of the Black Madonna on the banks of the river in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>70</sup> Decades prior to 1531, Christopher Columbus had named one of the islands he discovered in the Caribbean “*Guadaloupe*” after the famous shrine in Spain.<sup>71</sup> Therefore, Miles Philip’s observation of Spaniards praying to the Virgin of Guadalupe at Tepeyac makes sense—they saw her as the New World’s version of what they would have venerated in the Old World.

The third man’s words concerning the Virgin carry enormous import—Fray Bernardino de Sahagún (1499-1590). The famous linguist and historian of all things Indian, this Franciscan laboriously studied to understand how best to convert the Aztecs to Christianity. As mentioned previously, he was vehemently opposed to the promotion of the Virgin of Guadalupe among the Natives because he perceived their worship of her as covert worship of their goddess Tonantzin. This fear was in part because he believed they had previously worshipped the goddess at Tepeyac. He based his conclusion on his observation that despite the fact that the Catholic Church had built numerous shrines to Mary, the Natives did not go to worship at those; rather, they flocked to the Marian shrine at Tepeyac. Yet he was not solely concerned with the shrine’s location, but with the Aztecs’ word for the Virgin: *Tonantzin*. Technically, *Tonantzin* could be interpreted as “The Mother of God.” However, it could also be taken as “The Mother Goddess,” whom they had worshipped for generations. Therefore, Sahagún preferred they refer to the Virgin not as *Tonantzin*, but as “*Dios inantzin*.” He wrote, “This appears to be an invention of the devil to cover over idolatry under the ambiguity of this name Tonantzin.”<sup>72</sup> Unlike Philips or the Hieronymite friars, Sahagún witnessed Native adoration of the Virgin of Guadalupe and attributed it to the fact that they saw it as worship of their pagan goddess.

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<sup>70</sup> Anderson, 22. A monastery was promptly built where the statue was found.

<sup>71</sup> Poole, 23.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 78.



Did the Aztecs venerate her, even if it was with the intent of covertly worshipping *Tonantzin*? This seems to conflict with other sources that claim only the *peninsulares* or *criollos* worshipped her. Furthermore, Sahagún is the only source living in the 16<sup>th</sup> century who wrote that the Natives worshiped *Tonantzin* at Tepeyac.<sup>73</sup> His own Aztec informants never mentioned they had previously worshipped at a pagan shrine there. Nonetheless, Martín de León, a Dominican, wrote about the hostility of mendicant missionaries toward the Virgin of Guadalupe because it seemed to them to be neopagan.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, Juan de Torquemada, writing in the early 1600s, said Natives would walk all the way from Guatemala to offer gifts to the Virgin at Tepeyac.<sup>75</sup> Therefore, it appears Natives venerated the Virgin of Guadalupe at Tepeyac, but Sahagún alone wrote that they had a temple dedicated to *Tonantzin* on the same hill.

Upon an investigation of these three sources from the 1570s, *peninsulares*, *criollos*, and Natives were venerating an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe at a hermitage at Tepeyac beginning around 1555. Yet that the Natives worshipped *Tonantzin* under the guise of the Virgin is difficult to prove, if not impossible. As Poole states, “In light of [the previous information given], it is impossible to accept the assertion that the Virgin of Guadalupe was a deliberate substitution for the pre-Hispanic mother goddess as a means of weaning the Indians from their old religion by giving them a Christian replacement.”<sup>76</sup> As of 1576, no one had mentioned a miraculous apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

#### *Her Veneration Grows: 1572-1648*

The late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries “saw a proliferation of chronicles and religious writings in New Spain.”<sup>77</sup> A new generation of friars began their work in a church becoming less mission-oriented and more institutionalized. The lesser-class *criollo* population began to emerge, increase in number and desperately search for a sense of validation “as a special people, as God’s own elect.”<sup>78</sup> Authors like Juan Suárez de Peralta (1589) began to record the great devotion given the image and the miracles the image worked. In 1629 a flood devastated Mexico City,

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, 93.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

killing 30,000 Natives and 19,600 Spanish families in the span of four weeks.<sup>79</sup> The flood dragged on for five years. In 1635 the desperate Archbishop of Mexico, Francisco Manso y Zúñiga, sailed with the Virgin's image into the cathedral in the *zócalo* of the city. When he hung her image in the cathedral, the waters began to recede, and the people sang,

But here they are painted by diverse human hands with blends of color that human hands invent. You, O Virgin, are painted by him who made heaven and earth.<sup>80</sup>

This miraculous event earned the Virgin the name "Deliverer of the City," and marked her high point during this long yet quiet period of time in the development of her cult (1572-1648). Still, from 1531 to 1648, even though authors described miracles worked by her image and adoration of that image, there is much that the Mexican Catholic church believes today about the Virgin of Guadalupe that the church did not believe or at least deem important enough to write down in the first 117 years of her history. Poole writes the following:

[There is] no clear evidence for the story of Juan Diego and the apparitions at Tepeyac. There is no clear evidence of a strong Indian devotion, at least not after 1556. Still less is there any association of the chapel and devotion at Tepeyac with *criollismo* or an inchoate sense of Mexican self-identity. [Only in 1648 an Oratorian priest in Mexico City would] not only popularize the story of the apparitions but would also give the *criollos* a powerful new symbol of their status as a great and chosen people.<sup>81</sup>

#### *The Stories Appear: 1648-1649*

The year 1648 is one of the most important for the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This year, the first fully written account of her apparition to Juan Diego in 1531 was written. The story of the miraculous apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe not only enormously impacted the religious field in Mexico, but it became the most important work for the development of a new national identity for *criollos*. "For half a century, the image-apparition devotion, which logically should have appealed to the Indians, was exclusively *criollo*. The fusion of Guadalupe and

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<sup>79</sup> Watson, 51.

<sup>80</sup> Poole, 97. Poole quotes Juan Bautista, who wrote in 1794 and estimated that the apparition account originated during the years of the flood.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, 99.

Mexican identity began not at Tepeyac in 1531 but in Mexico City in 1648. In the story of the apparitions criollismo found its legitimacy.”<sup>82</sup> After 117 years of complete silence concerning the apparitions at Tepeyac in 1531, two works were written within months of each other—one in Spanish and the other in Nahuatl—recounting the miraculous events that took place just outside Mexico City in December of 1531.

The first version of the apparitions was written by Miguel Sánchez (1594-1674). Sánchez was a highly respected priest and a *criollo* born in Mexico City. He began his account with an exegesis of Revelation 12 and an application of the chapter to the Virgin Mary. He then retold the apparitions and concluded his work with a third exegesis of Revelation 12 with a “word-by-word application to the Virgin of Guadalupe.”<sup>83</sup> He concluded his account with a description of the procession to the newly built hermitage on December 26, 1531. Although he claimed to have studied the matter for more than half a century, he remained vague in naming his resources. Rather, he explained that he learned his information from the oral tradition of the Indians, calling these unnamed sources “a reliable tradition.”<sup>84</sup> Perhaps because of his lack of resources, he mistakenly named Zumárraga the bishop of Mexico City, even though Zumárraga was not the bishop in 1531, and his cathedral chapter did not exist until 1536. Perhaps this is also due to his motive—to give *criollos* a divine, messianic purpose. Poole writes, “In a very real sense Sanchez took a cult story that should have been exclusively Indian and appropriated it for the *criollos*.”<sup>85</sup> Despite the novelty of this book, it gained little hearing due to the author’s drab style. Yet his principle accomplishment was a new story which, six months later, another author would solidify into immortalized tradition.

Luis Laso de la Vega was a learned Indian who served as the vicar at the hermitage of Guadalupe. He wrote *Nican mopohua* in 1649, which today is the primary source for those who wish to study the apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Like Sánchez, he mentioned no sources and admitted, “Very much has been abandoned, which time has erased and which no one remembers any longer, because the ancients did not take care to have it written down at the time

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 100-101.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 101.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 107.

it happened.”<sup>86</sup> Though he did not copy Sánchez’s book, the history of his account is similar to that of the *criollo* priest. De la Vega focused on the Virgin’s tender treatment of the lowly Aztec peasant Juan Diego. He claimed that a great number of Indians turned away from their idols and became Christians as a result of the miraculous apparitions of the Virgin.<sup>87</sup>

Sánchez and de la Vega were the first two people to write that the Virgin appeared at Tepeyac in 1531, that the hermitage was built in that same year by Bishop Zumárraga, and that a multitude of Indians converted to Christianity as a result. While Sánchez focused on giving *criollos* a messianic sense of purpose, de la Vega wrote to the Natives in their own tongue (*Nahuatl*) to give them meaning and purpose in the face of subhuman treatment by the Spaniards.

#### *The Inquiry of 1666*

When Sánchez wrote his account, even though the actual book did not gain huge popularity, devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe exploded among the *criollos*.<sup>88</sup> Evidence of this explosion is the church’s inquiry into the image of Guadalupe in 1666, only 18 years after Sánchez’s work. The Archdiocese of Mexico City desired that December 12 be made a memorial day with a proper office to honor the holy image. In order to validate their request, the church needed to prove the validity of the image. Vincent of Lerins had explained in the 5<sup>th</sup> century how to make tradition into dogma: “In the Catholic Church special care should be taken that we hold to what has been believed everywhere, always, by everyone.”<sup>89</sup> This effectually meant that everyone had to be in agreement about the Virgin of Guadalupe’s appearance and image, that this had to be the accepted tradition from the time of her apparition which (according to Sánchez and de la Vega) happened in 1531, and that this had to be believed all around Mexico City. In order to meet this standard, the archdiocese summoned 20 witnesses to give their account before ecclesiastical leaders: one mestizo, seven Indians, ten Spanish clerics, and two laypeople.<sup>90</sup> Yet the investigation was a fraud—the men and women who witnessed gave formulaic answers, appearing to have been coached. Furthermore, several of them claimed they were around 100

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid, 113.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 126.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 127.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 130.

years old, which would have given them direct contact with Juan Diego or with his friends and family. Joaquín García Icazbalceta, in his biography of Juan de Zumárraga, wrote,

When I see grave priests and illustrious gentleman affirm the same falsehood, I cannot but be confused, considering how far moral contagion and the straying of religious feeling can go. There is no room for saying that these witnesses knowingly came close to perjury, but it is evident that they affirmed under oath what was not true.<sup>91</sup>

Luis Becerra Tanco, a *criollo* who had grown up among the Natives and taught at the University of Mexico, warned against accepting mere hearsay during the Inquiry. Nonetheless, he concluded that the Virgin of Guadalupe was the queen of all Marias in Mexico, and his writing on the Virgin's apparition was and continues to be influential in Mexican Mariolatry.<sup>92</sup>

The evidence gleaned in the Inquiry of 1666 proved sufficient for the Mexican Archdiocese. However, sometime after they sent their formal witness testimony and request to Rome, the request was lost among the papal archives until the following century. Without Rome's official blessing, the Archdiocese of Mexico City named the Virgin of Guadalupe its "preeminent patron."<sup>93</sup> The first official church investigation of the Virgin's apparition story, as told by Sánchez, was validated.

#### *Emergence as the "Goddess of the Americas": 1668-1756*

The apparition tradition was formed into what we have today between 1668 and 1689. The most influential work on the Virgin's apparition tradition came through Jesuit author Francisco de Florencia. In 1688, he published *Estrella del Norte* to defend the apparition and to recount a number of miracles the Virgin's image worked. When questioned about his lack of sources, he said Sánchez had obtained a good account from oral tradition and that the substance of truth was all that matters.<sup>94</sup> However, he harshly criticized *criollos* for their poor treatment of

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 142. Icazbalceta (1824-1894) wrote an overall positive work on Zumárraga. In the first draft of his book, he included a chapter in which he admitted he had not found any contemporary documents speaking of an apparition prior to Sánchez's 1648 work ("Joaquín García Icazbalceta," Wikipedia.org. accessed 28 November 2015).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 156.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 156.

the Natives. Even though he was not aware of the *Nican mopohua*, he saw the main lesson of the Virgin of Guadalupe as teaching the *criollos* to value the Natives as humans.<sup>95</sup>

The following year, a brilliant scholar named Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora (1645-1700) made an egregious error. In his work, *Piedad heroic de Don Fernando Cortes*, he concluded that a man named Antonio Valeriano wrote *Relación*, falsely believed to be the *Nican mopohua*. De Sigüenza's mistake was devastating. Because Valeriano was a contemporary of Juan Diego, attributing the *Nican mopohua* to him meant that he would have listened to Juan Diego's account first hand and copied it down into *Nican mopohua*. However, de la Vega wrote the Nahuatl account of the apparitions in 1649, nearly a century after the death of Juan Diego. Carlos María de Bustamante (1774-1848) further disseminated this mistake as he praised the *Nican mopohua* as "an original document of that period of the apparition."<sup>96</sup> Historian Mariano Cuevas later solidified De Sigüenza's error into history when he stated authoritatively that the illiterate Juan Diego dictated his account to Valeriano firsthand and this became *Nican mopohua*. As of 2016, if one visits the official *Basilica de Guadalupe* website, clicks on the "history of the apparitions" tab and reads the document *Nican mopohua*, he or she will see that the church attributes the account to Valeriano.<sup>97</sup> The church to this day accepts the unfounded scholarship of Cuevas. In doing so, they make the *Nican mopohua* the authoritative, original account.

The Virgin of Guadalupe became the Patroness of Mexico through papal decree in 1756. The Second Inquiry in 1722 began the process and a miracle in 1737 solidified it. The First Inquiry of 1666 had nearly fallen into oblivion until 1720, when the papers were rediscovered. Mexican Archbishop José de Lizardi y Eguíluz decided to appeal again to the papacy for recognition of the *Guadalupana*. He wrote in 1720,

In this kingdom there is probably not a church, chapel, house, nor hut of Spaniard or Indian, in which images of our Lady of Guadalupe are not seen and venerated. There is scarcely a person of any rank, age, or sex who does not have his mementos or medals. [...] I doubt, or better, I do not doubt that in all the world more copies have been made than of this Guadalupe of Mexico.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 165.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 168.

<sup>97</sup> "Documentos Indígenas: Nican mopohua." [http://basilica.mxv.mx/web1/-apariciones/Documentos\\_Historicos/Indigenas/Nican\\_Mopohua.html](http://basilica.mxv.mx/web1/-apariciones/Documentos_Historicos/Indigenas/Nican_Mopohua.html) (accessed November 29, 2015).

<sup>98</sup> Poole, 174.

De Lizardi received no response from Rome. Over 15 years later, in 1736, a terrible epidemic of *matlazahuatl* swept through the Valley of Mexico. After the Church supplicated 30 different saints and Maries, they turned to the Virgin of Guadalupe. On May 26, 1737, the archbishop made a solemn procession during mass in the cathedral of Mexico City and swore to give the *patronato* of the City to the Virgin of Guadalupe. At the exact moment he promised to make December 12 a holy day, “almost immediately the epidemic began to abate and was soon over. With that began the final triumph of the Virgin of Guadalupe.”<sup>99</sup> Twenty years later, in 1756, Rome made December 12 the official mass and feast day of the Virgin.

Mexican priests helped to solidify the Guadalupan tradition through their sermons among both Natives or the *criollos*? However, sermons show lopsided attention was given the *criollos*. After Sánchez’s account, from 1660 to 1697, all 76 extant sermons that mention the Virgin of Guadalupe show that *criollo* (not Aztec) devotion was the norm.<sup>100</sup> Yet within a generation, the focus began to shift somewhat. In 1733, Dominican Juan de Villa preached about how God used the Virgin to bring Natives to himself as they would gaze upon her perfect image. Only three extant Nahuatl sermons pointed out that the *Guadalupana* was for the Natives. While most focused on how the Virgin gave the *criollos* a sense of special election, a number of Guadalupan dramas were written and performed by Spaniards speaking in Nahuatl, for the purpose of “deliberate evangelization” among the Indians.<sup>101</sup> The brilliant scholar Francisco Javier Clavigero (b. 1770) recorded that one Sunday in November 25,000 Indians flocked to the shrine, along with a great number of Spaniards.<sup>102</sup> Archbishop Lorenzana wrote, “Although we mourn the loss of the authentic documents with which the Venerable Señor Zumárraga verified this miracle, it is very much justified by the constant tradition from fathers to sons, and with the many relevant proofs that the universal Church considered sufficient to grant a proper office.”<sup>103</sup> Lorenzana and others pointed to oral tradition as the mode of transferal for the Aztec

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 155.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 191. The dramas are written in simple Nahuatl, while the stage directions are written in Spanish for the actors to more easily understand what to do. These dramas were very complex, but none is completely true to either the Sánchez or de la Vega account.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, 202.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 177.

contemporaries of Juan Diego. Therefore, through sermons, dramas, and what ecclesiastical leaders called an “unbroken oral tradition,” Our Lady of Guadalupe moved into the forefront of all other saints and Maries in Mexico among both *criollos* and Natives by the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Yet despite the Virgin’s seemingly undeniable ascension to the spiritual crown of Mexico, not all were so quick to accept her cult. Enlightenment scholars—ecclesiastical and secular alike—required facts and sources before they would believe the apparition account.

Lorenzo Boturini Benaduci was one such skeptic. A knight of the Holy Roman Empire, he came to New Spain in 1736. He became fascinated with the Guadalupan tradition. As he became aware of the lack of documentation, he began a six-year long quest for reliable sources. He eventually found 500 manuscripts from both before and after the Conquest that dealt with the apparition and with Nahuatl history and culture.<sup>104</sup> In the 1750s, he published *Idea de una nueva historia general de la América septentrional*. In this work, he wrote, “I found [the apparitions’] history founded on tradition alone, without there being any knowledge of where or in what hands the sources of such a rare portent had stopped.”<sup>105</sup>

Benaduci’s disciple, Mariano Fernandez de Echeverria y Veytia, carried on his mentor’s work to find reliable sources. He concluded that the name “Guadalupe” was not of Nahuatl origins. He decided that Mary chose that name because both the Extremaduran and Mexican shrines were next to rivers, and thus were named “Guadalupe,” or “River of Black Gravel.”

Miguel Cabrera did a thorough investigation of the image itself in 1751. He found that the drawing was perfect in proportion for a 14 or 15-year-old girl. He also noted that four different styles were used together.<sup>106</sup> Yet he remained positive the image was divine and even combatted skeptics who demonstrated why the image had to have been painted by Natives.

In 1787, a third inspection was made of the image. When asked if the image was miraculous, the five painters responded, “Yes, with regard to the substantial and original that they see in our holy image; but no, with regard to certain retouchings and strokes which show beyond doubt that they were executed at a later date by presumptuous hands.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 192.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 193, quoting *Idea de una nueva historia general de la América septentrional* (2-3).

<sup>106</sup> Oil paint was used on her head and hands, tempera for her tunic, the angels, and the clouds, gouache for the mantle and tempera was layered on the background to the rays.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 205.



Critics not only analyzed the image, they also attacked the origins of the apparition account. Juan Bautista Muñoz, born in Spain in 1745, traveled to the Indies to tutor Prince Francisco Javier. While in Mexico, he wrote a paper investigating the apparition accounts of the Virgin.<sup>108</sup> In it, he concluded that Mendieta and Motolinía knew nothing of the tradition, but that it first originated during the 1629-34 flood of Mexico City. He put the onus of proof on the church, asking them “to exhibit more ancient and less suspicious documents than those that they have produced up to now.”<sup>109</sup> Muñoz’s work became a fundamental source for “antiapparitionists.” Naturally, defenders of the account, staked their claim in oral tradition over the first 100 years that were likely destroyed during the flood of 1629 or later on.<sup>110</sup>

Despite these scholarly attacks on the origin of the Virgin of Guadalupe’s apparition accounts and the image itself, the *Guadalupana* had found her place in Mexican society. *Criollos* latched onto her because she provided them a sense of nationalism. Though evidence is less clear, Natives also seemed to have put their faith in her as their validation for existence among the Spaniards. Poole summarizes, “By the end of the eighteenth century the position of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexican society, consciousness, and religious life was close to what it is today.”<sup>111</sup> Her image was immortalized into Mexican history in 1810 when Miguel Hidalgo, leader of the Mexican Revolution, raised her image and called citizens to war against Spain. This was the final step in making the *Guadalupana* an inseparable part of Mexican life. To be Mexican was to honor the Virgin of Guadalupe as a source of both spiritual and national identity.

### Conclusions

#### *Concerning the historical dissemination of the Virgin’s cult*

We return to the thesis question: how did the Virgin of Guadalupe grow into the national and religious icon in Mexico? Several conclusions concerning the historical spread of her cult follow.

**The apparition and its issues:** Catholic tradition accepts the *Nican mopohua* as the official apparition account, sometimes incorrectly attributing Valeriano as the author rather than

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<sup>108</sup> “Memoria sobre las apariciones y el culto de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de México.”

<sup>109</sup> Poole 206-07, quoting p. 608 of “Memoria.”

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 211.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 213.

Lasso de la Vega. De la Vega wrote that the Virgin appeared to Juan Diego in 1531. The reason the church holds onto the 1531 date is because after 1648 the Virgin's devotion came to hinge on the miracle of the apparition rather than the miracles the image is said to have worked. However, this date is unfounded, first appearing in Sánchez's account in 1648. Sources one would expect to mention the Virgin's miraculous apparition in the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries do not.<sup>112</sup> As Poole writes, "In terms of symbolism Mexico was not born at Tepeyac in 1531, but in Mexico City in 1648."<sup>113</sup> It seems the miraculous apparition did not influence Guadalupan theology until 1648.

**Worship at Tepeyac:** Despite the lack of apparition evidence, her veneration at Tepeyac is clearly attested to. However, we have no evidence of a hermitage or chapel being built in 1531 under Archbishop Zumárraga. While the hermitage's origin is cloudy, sources allude to a chapel being built around the year 1555 under Archbishop Montúfar. Poole suggests the chapel was built at Tepeyac in 1555 due to a local Christian Indian cult that existed there prior.<sup>114</sup>

**The Aztec goddess connection:** The connection is difficult to prove from either angle. Sahagún is the only primary source who wrote about a temple dedicated to the goddess *Tonantzin* at Tepeyac. All later scholars who have claimed the Aztecs worshiped *Tonantzin* under Mary's guise at Tepeyac have based their claims on Sahagún alone. Poole, after he poured through countless primary resources concerning this topic, writes, "That assertion [that *Tonantzin* and the *Guadalupana*] are linked should be laid to rest once and for all."<sup>115</sup>

**Who venerated her:** *Criollos* quickly latched onto her apparition after Sánchez wrote his work. They found a sense of identity in the Virgin. A few written sources claim the Aztecs came to the faith because of the Virgin of Guadalupe until de la Vega wrote his account 118 years later (1649). Even so, "Almost nothing is known about the devotion among the Indians in the seventeenth century."<sup>116</sup> From 1660 to 1800, Franciscan and Jesuit preachers along with scholars such as Florencia, Sigüenza y Góngora, and others served as "evangelists for the new devotion"

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<sup>112</sup> Although Motolinía mentions the great devotion the Indians "practiced to the Blessed Virgin and how they invoked her intercession in time of need," but he makes no mention of miraculous apparitions. Furthermore, Motolinía refers to Cuauhtitlan (the supposed birthplace of Juan Diego) without mentioning it is the birthplace of Juan Diego.

<sup>113</sup> Poole, 214.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 224.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 215.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 217.

primarily among the *criollos*, but also among the Indians.<sup>117</sup> The Virgin of Guadalupe was solidified as Mexico's national symbol during the Revolution in 1810.

**Her emergence as a national symbol:** The key document in tracking her emergence is Sánchez's work in 1648. Before his work came out labeling December 12, 1531 as the date of the miracle, scanty testimony for a widespread Guadalupan cult exists. Among these testimonies is Miles Philip's (1570), Suarez de Peralta's (1589), and the invocation of her name during the great Mexico City flood (1629-34). After Sánchez's work, her cult spread very quickly, especially among the *criollos*, and much was written and studied about her. However, not until the epidemic of 1736 was she named the patroness of Mexico. Later papal approval (1756) solidified her among the *criollos*. During the same century, priests finally concerted she represented the Natives' cause, too.

**The most trustworthy apparition account:** Sánchez's work, though unpopular, served as the basis for most of what was taught about the Virgin of Guadalupe's apparition history for over 275 years. In 1921, Mariano Cuevas named the *Nican mopohua* the new *Textus Receptus* of the apparition account and perpetuated the enormous error of attributing it to Valeriano, Juan Diego's supposed contemporary. By doing this, Cuevas gave the apparition account more legitimacy, and the effects of his blunder linger on to this day.

#### *Applications for the Lutheran evangelist*

Ultimately, there are many unknowns. How much of an impact did oral tradition have on the early history and dissemination of the Virgin of Guadalupe's apparition account? How widespread was the Aztec veneration of her? Did the Aztecs secretly revere *Tonantzin* under the guise of Guadalupe? Did *criollo* priests build her shrine as a way to divert donations from the Guadalupan shrine in Extremadura, Spain to Mexico City's archdiocese instead? What happened that was not written down by Franciscan missionaries or ecclesiastical scholars?

Upon an examination of the evidence that exists, one sees a quilt made up of various patchwork legends and stories. And yet, miracles and stories which seem "too good to be true" are sufficient for Guadalupan venerator. Historical evidence concerning an apparition account becomes unnecessary, because of what the image has accomplished on its own. When confronted with questions of canon, a Lutheran responds, "The Scriptures are self-authenticating." That is,

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

they prove their legitimacy by their own power to convince people they are the words of God. When confronted with questions of the Virgin of Guadalupe's legitimacy and historicity, a Guadalupean Catholic responds, "The image itself serves as an abiding and present 'proof' of the divine origins and historical authenticity of the apparition events."<sup>118</sup>

The Lutheran who interacts with Guadalupean Catholics must be keenly aware of the history and current adoration of the Virgin of Guadalupe. While insights gleaned from this short paper may serve as a beginning for understanding the historical spread of the Virgin's cult in Mexico, one must continue to study a variety of themes. One such study would address *mestizo* devotion toward the Virgin, particularly in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, as this paper dealt primarily with *criollo*, *peninsular*, and Native devotion. Another particularly fascinating study would dig into the apparition and ensuing cult of the Virgin of Extremadura of Spain, to explore the roots of the Mexican *Guadalupana*. Also, a thorough study of Castilian (Spanish) Catholicism, while a broad study, would reveal much of what happened with the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico. Such a study would likely reveal how tradition has formed in the church. Many traditions have not been created based on Scripture's saving truths, but have arisen due to continuous and unanimous belief, acceptance and approval. Their purpose is not typically spiritual salvation, but justification for oppressed peoples, as the Virgin of Guadalupe served *criollos* and Natives alike.

The evangelizing Lutheran's goal is to remove stumbling blocks of faith from the lives of others to clear the clutter. His or her job is to unleash the gospel into their hearts. Therefore, it is natural for an evangelist to want to use logical arguments to uncover the inconsistencies that litter the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Rather than focusing on historical evidence right away, turn them to the Bible to show them the honor Mary was given in the story of salvation in bearing the Son of God. Show them from the Gospels that when Mary spoke, she gave credit to the Savior of the World. She never asked that anyone venerate her.

The evangelist realizes the starting point of those who venerate the *Guadalupana* is not necessarily God's Word, but the church's tradition and their very identity as a people. In fact, many Mexicans who belong to different denominations or are not believers at all have the Guadalupean image hanging in their home—it represents their national identity. Beneath the iceberg lie deep identity issues for a self-professed "oppressed" person. Ironically, when the

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<sup>118</sup> Johnson, 41.

Spanish arrived and Cortés smashed the Aztec idols in their temples, the Aztec priests cried out, “If this is true [that our gods are not true], then please let us die. If the gods have abandoned us, we don’t want to live.”<sup>119</sup> Now, nearly 500 years later, the Lutheran evangelist attempts to do the same thing to those who hang onto the Virgin of Guadalupe. Realize what is being “smashed.”

This said, do not validate worship of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Rather, show interest and respect for what the person believes about her. Ask questions and become intrigued. Instead of smashing idols like Cortés, learn their language, their history, their culture and their sentiments like Sahagún. Gain their trust and impress upon them as clearly as you are able the law and gospel. Deeply hang onto the self-authenticating power of the Scripture when you reveal it to people who hang onto the Virgin of Guadalupe. Perhaps in so doing, the Spirit will shift an individual’s paradigm—from one of “This is what the church teaches me through tradition” to “This is what God teaches me through Scripture.” Former Guadalupan believers will see an approachable Father God who loves them and wants to hear their prayers directly, just as they have approached their loving mother for all those years. Only through the gospel, not through logical, historical, or biblical argument will a person be torn from one belief system to another.

I hope this paper has informed you about the development of the Guadalupan cult, and that you will be able to apply this knowledge in your ministry to those in your community or church.

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<sup>119</sup> Jeanette Rodriguez, “The Gift of Guadalupe.” *U.S. Catholic*, (Vol. 64, No. 12, pages 18-22), December 1999. <http://www.uscatholic.org/church/saints-feasts-and-seasons/2010/06/gift-guadalupe#sthash.K8AFz59D.dpuf> (accessed November 5, 2015).

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## Appendices

### *Appendix 1 – The Virgin of Guadalupe’s Image*

This is the original image of the Virgin of Guadalupe as it appears on Juan Diego’s cloak.<sup>120</sup>



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<sup>120</sup> Elisa Cipollone, “The Miracle of Our Lady of Guadalupe,” lifezette.com, <http://www.lifezette.com/faithzette/the-miracle-of-our-lady-of-guadalupe/> (accessed February 10, 2016).



## Appendix 2 – Moctezuma, Cortés, and Quetzalcoatl

*Templo Mayor*, the principle Aztec worship center, had a similar appearance and use as most various temples scattered throughout Olmec and Mayan lands. Mayan cities such as Palenque, Tikal, Uxmal and the dominant city of Teotihuacan are a few examples of urban centers with the common stepped pyramid style temple. The practice of human sacrifice and blood-letting which the Aztecs carried out to propitiate the gods appears to have begun in 900 A.D., around 500 years prior to Aztec beginnings.<sup>121</sup> Gods such as the *Tezcatlipoca* (Smoking Mirror) desired human hearts, which Aztec priests removed from the chests of their captured enemy warriors or from the children of subjugated tribes.<sup>122</sup> Mesoamerican religion was not only simple barbarism, however—they established themes of duality and complex cosmology.<sup>123</sup>

The god *Quetzalcoatl* (Feathered Serpent) played a key part in the Spanish conquest of Moctezuma and the Aztecs. *Quetzalcoatl* and the evil god *Tezcatlipoca* engaged in a dispute which ended with Smoking Mirror's banishment of *Quetzalcoatl*. However, *Quetzalcoatl* and his humiliated followers destroyed much of the city and before leaving for Tula and promised they would return to reclaim their land. The small party traveled northwest to Tula, which the Chichimec and Toltec warriors founded as their capital in 900 A.D. However, *Quetzalcoatl* was forced into exile again, traveled to the Gulf Coast, and disappeared toward the east on a raft of sea serpents, "swearing to avenge himself against *Tezcatlipoca*."<sup>124</sup> He promised to return in what would translate into the year 1363, 1467, or 1519, at the renewal of the *Ce Ácatl*—the 52-

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<sup>121</sup> Hunt, 18.

<sup>122</sup> Hunt, 24. It is vital to note that human sacrifice was not as frequent or on such a large scale as the Spanish would later believe. In fact, Hunt writes that usually priests would sacrifice between one and four victims. However, Aztecs would carry out sacrifice on a large scale during what Hunt calls a "degenerate period" of their culture. When they felt their power was not secure, they would flex their authoritarian and fear-inspiring muscle through mass sacrifice/execution (93). Timothy R. Roberts points to one such rare example is Tlacaellé, commander in chief of the Aztecs during the 15th century, ordered that 80,000 victims be sacrificed over a four day span to dedicate the new temple of *Huitzilopochtli* in Tenochtitlan. Some have estimated the number to be 250,000, others 50,000 (Roberts, Timothy R. *Myths of the World: Gods of the Maya, Aztecs, and Incas*. New York: Friedman/Fairfax Publishers, 1996, (p.51). Someone sarcastically the connection can be made, that the Aztecs understood what the Hebrews halfway around the world and the writer to the Hebrews understood through God's divine revelation, "[...] without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22.)

<sup>123</sup> Hunt, 27-29.

<sup>124</sup> Hunt, 53.

year calendar cycle.<sup>125</sup> Therefore, when Moctezuma saw Cortés and his white, bearded men that same year, he was convinced that *Quetzalcoatl* and his followers were returning to end his reign.

Yet the appearance of the white, bearded men was not the only sign of the end times. When an Aztec priest warned the emperor that he had seen a comet in the east, Moctezuma became so enraged he had the astrologers starved to death for failing to alert him.<sup>126</sup> Later that year, a fire destroyed a temple and lightning destroyed another, a mysterious column of fire was seen in the middle of the night, and waves appeared suddenly on Lake Texcoco. Moctezuma himself had a dream in which his reign came to an end. The ancient prophecy of the empire's end coming through *Quetzalcoatl's* return seemed imminent.

A peasant who witnessed the Spaniards landing for the first time in Mexico described what he saw as "moving hills in the sea."<sup>127</sup> The message was relayed to Moctezuma, who then consulted an old prophet from Xochimilco. The prophet warned him that he had read a prophecy that white skinned men would come in wooden carriages, take the land, and multiply.<sup>128</sup> When Moctezuma heard this, he became sure that Cortés was the vengeful *Quetzalcoatl*, "and so he was convinced that his reign was coming to an end."<sup>129</sup> Due to his fear of *Quetzalcoatl*, Moctezuma refused to follow his commanders' advice of confronting the Spaniards in battle. His inaction allowed Cortés to enter Tenochtitlan and conquer the Aztec empire, and in part is a reason Castilian Catholicism is the dominant religion of Mexico today instead of Mesoamerican paganism.

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<sup>125</sup> Timothy R. Roberts. *Myths of the World: Gods of the Maya, Aztecs, and Incas*. (New York: Friedman/Fairfax Publishers, 1996), 65.

<sup>126</sup> Manuel Lucena Salmoral. *America 1492: Portrait of a Continent 500 Years Ago*. (New York: Facts on File, Inc.), 224.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

### *Appendix 3 – Setting the Context for Guadalupe: Pre-Conquest History*

Thousands of years before the Spanish Conquest, the original Eurasian nomads came across the Bering Strait to Mexico. While it is not certain when this great emigration happened, David Jones estimates this emigration occurred around the year 13000 B.C. and that by 7000 B.C., much of South and North America was inhabited.<sup>130</sup> Throughout the following millennia in Mesoamerica (central Mexico through northern Costa Rica), the various cultures held in common an agriculture of corn, long-distance trade, complex market systems, human sacrifice, numerical systems and hieroglyphic writing in codices, and vast urbanism. A complex system of religion permeated every sphere of Mesoamerican life. Their stepped temples were situated in the center of their cities. The Mesoamerican ballgame—their most popular known sport—was a religious celebration complete with a human sacrifice to the gods. Themes of duality, death and the underworld, sacrifice, cyclical time, creation episodes pored through every culture in some way.<sup>131</sup> They drew on and shared a pantheon of gods and goddesses, whom they supplicated for rain and corn every year.

A primary issue with Mesoamerican history is the lack of written sources. Therefore, historians and archaeologists rely heavily on “silent sources”—temples, statues, and bone piles. The first known silent source of religious evidence is found in the southern Gulf Coast among the Olmecs and the later Zapotecs (1200 B.C.). These two cultures dominated the Preclassic Period (2500—100 B.C.). The city empire of Teotihuacan emerged as the center for religion and culture in the central region of present day Mexico during the Protoclassic Period (100 B.C.—300 A.D.). Soon after, Mayan civilization flourished and intricate temples such as El Tajin in Veracruz, Maya Tikal, Cholula and Xochicalco appeared in the Valley of Mexico during the Classic Period (300—900 A.D.) Finally, the Tula filled the power void when massive cities and religious centers like Monte Alban and Teotihuacan were abandoned. During the Postclassic Period (900—1521 A.D.), they built Chichén-Itzá in the Yucatan. It is during this time period that an intensely militaristic people rose to the surface: The Toltecs. The Aztecs understood these warriors to be their direct ancestors.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> David M. Jones. *Mythology of the Aztecs and Maya: Myths and Legends of Ancient Mexico and Northern Central America*. (London: Southwater, 2007), 6.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 14.

#### *Appendix 4 – Influential Mesoamerican Goddesses*

*Coatlicue* was the Aztec supreme earth goddess who provided rain, agriculture and sustenance. Her story is told by the great stone engraving at *Templo Mayor* in Tenochtitlan. She was magically impregnated by a feathery ball that came to her after descending from heaven as she was sweeping her house. Because her husband, *Mixcóatl* the god of hunting, was gone when she became pregnant, her 400 children plotted to kill her because of the disgrace she had brought them. However, she gave birth to the miraculous child *Huitzilopochtli*, the god of sun and war, just in time. He was born fully armed and slew all his brothers and sisters and threw them into the sky to serve as stars. In his killing frenzy, he also decapitated his sister *Coyolxauhqui*, who did not participate in the plot but had warned her mother instead. Her head became the moon as a point of honor. This violent account in the life of *Coatlicue* depicted only one aspect of her violent existence as goddess in Mesoamerica. Equipped with scales, beady eyes, a serpentine tongue, and a grotesque necklace of human body parts, she represented both the womb and the grave of humankind.<sup>133</sup> While she was a popular goddess, she was anything but an approachable Mary type, and was revered with sacrifice and fear.

*Huixtocihuatl* was another popular female deity. This warrior goddess was widely revered and had an entire ceremony dedicated to her during the Aztec liturgical calendar. During the ceremony, a virgin represented her through dance and procession along with a number of other sister-wives. However, she also falls short of a connection to the tender Guadalupe as her passion ended with the sacrifice of the dancing virgin.<sup>134</sup> Tribes subjugated by the Aztecs hated their practice of human sacrifice because it often involved the lesser tribe giving up their daughters for sacrifice. They would be very hesitant, then, to venerate a new goddess who came to earth resembling *Huixtocihuatl*.

Perhaps more closely related to a motherly figure is *Cihuacóatl* (the "Serpent Woman"), the patroness of women who died in childbirth. The Aztecs held her in high regard because she was the mother of *Quetzalcoatl*, the founder of Tula, the capital of their ancestors, the Toltecs. When the gods created men, she ground up fish and human bones from a previous creation and mixed the dry powder with blood (in some versions, blood from *Quetzalcoatl's* penis), and used

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<sup>133</sup> Jones, 29.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 42.

the paste to create men and women for the new world.<sup>135</sup> Thus, she was seen as a creation goddess, who wanted human beings to live and not to die. Although she appears to share qualities with the motherly Virgin of Guadalupe, she is more closely associated with *La Llorona*— the ghostly lady of popular Mexican folklore.

*Coyolxauhqui* was the Aztec moon goddess whom *Huitzilopochtli* slew by accident. Her character is based off of the Mayan goddess *Ix Chel*, who was the benevolent mother goddess— patroness of childbirth and procreation, medicine and healing, and life-giving rain. She was also a destructive goddess, bringing malevolence through destructive floods. The duality of this goddess seems to bring her even closer to the Virgin of Guadalupe, who gently provided for women and yet powerfully removed floods. Yet no scholars make this connection.

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 25.