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THE MARIAN CONNECTION BETWEEN THE AMERICAS AND EUROPE: OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, 1300—1900

*Emery de Gaál, Ph.D.**

"In her the destinies of the world were to be reversed, and the serpent's head bruised."

Bl. John Henry Newman

I. Introduction

Mariophanies occurred and occur the world over. While they ultimately all have in common bringing people to greater communion with God and spelling out theological verities of our faith to a great variety of cultures and peoples in different ages, the parallels between the Mariophany of Our Lady in Guadalupe in Spain and the apparitions of Our Lady in Guadalupe in Mexico are quite striking and merit closer examination.

II. Parallels between the Two Mariophanies

1. The Guadalupes—Constitutive for National Narratives

In the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe in Spain the couple Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand thanked God and Our Lady, often called *la Victoriosa*, for the successful completion of the *Reconquista* on January 1, 1492. There they also placed the expedition to explore a westerly route to India (that actually

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discovered the Americas) under the command of Columbus, entrusting the endeavor to Our Lady of Guadalupe's protection. Prior to setting out to the New World for the first time, the enterprising Genoese seafarer Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) prayed at the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe in Spain. This same pilgrimage did the conquerors Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro, as well as the Franciscan friar Zumárraga (1468-1548), undertake before embarking on perilous voyages to the New World. It is in this shrine, so sacred to the Spanish people in general, that Columbus had had baptized the first Indians brought to the Old World. Repeatedly, Cortés expressed gratitude to Our Lady of Guadalupe in Spain for protecting him on the dangerous voyages and during his cruel campaigns against the indigenous peoples of the Americas: from the perspective of the twenty-first century, paradoxically, again and again he sent from New Spain large silver coins to Our Lady. They can be found in the shrine to this day. It is also reliably related that, upon his return to Spain in 1528, he spent nine days in Guadalupe praying before the image of the *Morenita* and feeding the poor. On one occasion he presented Our Lady with a golden scorpion decorated richly with precious emeralds and pearls, as she had saved him from a scorpion's deadly poison in Mexico.¹

¹ Jacques Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531-1813* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago, 1976), 221-224. Simon Wiesenthal, *Segel der Hoffnung—Christoph Columbus auf der Suche nach dem gelobten Land* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1991). Helpful comparative studies are Sebastián García, O.F.M., *Guadalupe de Extremadura y América* (Guadalupe, Spain, 1991) and Carlos G. Villacampa, *La Virgen de la Hispanidad o Santa María de Guadalupe in América* (Sevilla: Editorial de San Antonio, 1942). Carlos García Villacampa, *Grandezas de Guadalupe, estudios sobre la historia y las bellas artes del gran monasterio extremeño* (Madrid: C. Vallinas, 1924), 14f. Cf. for the whole also Imre v. Gaál, "Unsere Liebe Frau von Guadalupe—Königin Mexikos—Emperatriz de América—Patroness of America. Ein Vorbild für eine Neuevangelisierung Europas?" in *Maria als Patronin Europas, geschichtliche Besinnung und Vorschläge für die Zukunft*, ed. Manfred Hauke, in *Mariologische Studien XX* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2009), 214-235. Also, I am much indebted to my student Rev. Fr. Manuel Dorantes, "Our Lady of Guadalupe in Spain—Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, A Comparative Study: Different Charisms, Similar Messages?" (STL thesis, Mundelein, Ill., 2010). This unpublished STL thesis was written under the author's direction. The translations from the original Spanish texts are taken from this thesis.

The centrality of Guadalupe in the history of Spain for a period of over two hundred years cannot be overstated. As Lafarge states: “Guadalupe is the history of Spain from the Battle of Salado until the construction of the Escorial”; that is, from 1340 to 1561.”²

Surprisingly, the important role of the shrine in Extremadura is paralleled by the Mexican shrine’s pivotal significance for Mexican nationhood. One is touched again and again by the ubiquity of pictures and statues depicting Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico, throughout this much-troubled country. The rather secularist Mexican author and Nobel laureate Octavio Paz (1914-1998) asserted that after centuries of defeats and experiments Mexicans now trust only Our Lady of Guadalupe and—he added, not without irony—the Mexican state lottery.³ For the conception of the Mexican ethos, the call of Father Miguel Hidalgo on September 16, 1810, for Mexican independence from oppressive Napoleonic rule is decisive: “Long live the Virgin of Guadalupe; long live America and death to the bad government.” Guadalupe and Mexican self-understanding are inseparably bonded. Despite the long rule of the pronounced secularist PRI (the Party of Institutionalized Revolution), to this day September 16th is a national holiday. The annual exuberant celebrations are a constitutive element of Mexican patriotism.⁴

2. Origins

a. Our Lady of Guadalupe in Spain

During a plague in Rome, Gregory the Great (590-604) had a statue of Our Lady carried through the streets of the eternal city. The people walked quite a distance until the supplicating procession reached the Castello Sant’ Angelo. There an angel was seen by the citizens of Rome wiping blood from his sword and returning it to its sheath. From that moment onward Rome was free from the plague. Convinced of the miraculous nature

² Lafarge, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe*, 223.

³ Lafarge, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe*, “Foreword” by Octavio Paz, xi.

⁴ Donald Demarest and Coley Taylor, eds., *The Dark Virgin: The Book of Our Lady of Guadalupe* (New York: Coley Taylor, 1956), 233.

of this Marian statue, Gregory sent Leander, Bishop of Seville, this statue along with a pallium in recognition of his successful struggle in converting the Spanish king, who at that time had been won over from the heresy of Arianism.⁵ Later, under the vain Roderic (710-712), the last Visigoth king, people from Seville fled the advancing Moslem Moors under the Arab commander Tarik and buried near the river Guadalupe the statue Pope Gregory had given Leander just a century earlier, along with documents narrating the story of that Marian statuette.⁶

During the reign of Alfonso XI (1311-1350), king of Castile and León in the fourteenth century, a humble shepherd in the Villuerca Mountains by the name of Gil Cordero attempted to cut the hide off a cow he had been looking for for three days and which seemed dead near the Guadalupe River. But to his utter surprise, the cow regained life and displayed the sign of the cross. Immediately following this miracle, Our Lady appeared to him saying:

Do not be afraid, I am the Mother of God, through whom humanity reached redemption. Take your cow and go, put it with the others. From this cow you shall have others which will remind you of this apparition. Once you have put this cow with the others, you shall go to your land [Cáceres] and tell the clergy and other people to come here to the place where I appeared, tell them to dig here and they will find an image of me.⁷

Gil's story was initially met with disbelief and ridicule by his fellow herdsmen. However, upon his return to his family, his wife informed him of the death of one of their children. Calmly, he responded by telling her that he would pray to "Santa Maria de Guadalupe," who would most assuredly and graciously cure

⁵ Germán Rubio, *Historia de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* (Barcelona: Industrias Graficas, 1926), 14-17.

⁶ Rubio, *Historia de NSG*, 17-19.

⁷ Rubio, *Historia de NSG*, 21: "No hayas miedo; cá, yo soy la Madre de Dios, por la cual alcanzó la humanal generación redención. Toma tu vaca y vé, ponla con las otras; cá, de aquesta vaca habrás muchas en memoria de aqueste aparecimiento que aquí te apareció. Y desde que la pusieres con las otras vacas, irás a tu tierra y dirás a los clérigos y a las otras gentes que vengan aquí a este lugar donde te aparecí, y que cavén aquí y hallarán una imagen mía."

their child. Immediately thereupon the boy rose from his sickbed healthy and told his father “let us go see Our Lady, Holy Mary of Guadalupe.” However, before actually returning to the miraculous site, Gil informed the local clergy. Together, Gil, his cured son, his family, members of the clergy and townsfolk went to the sacred location and retrieved the statue and the documents that had been deposited along with it almost 600 years earlier. When the king heard of these miraculous events he determined that the documents be brought to the royal archives.⁸

b. Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in México

In Mexico also, Our Lady appeared to a man of humble origins: Juan Diego Cuauhtlatatzin (1474-1548), a member of the lower class in the highly stratified Nahuatl caste system. Suggesting both intimacy and the lowly status of Juan Diego, Our Lady addressed him on December 9, 1531, while he was on his way to Mass in Tlatilolco, as “Juanito, Juan Dieguito”—“tu el más pequeño de mis hijos” (you the smallest of my children).⁹ Much as in the Spanish narrative, the Mexican visionary also sets off to inform the ecclesiastical authorities; this time represented in the person of the later archbishop of Mexico City, the Franciscan friar Juan de Zumárraga. If one is to trust the historicity of the hagiographers’ accounts—and there is no reason not to, it proves now far more difficult to convince the representatives of the Church than two centuries earlier in Spain. The Nahuatl messenger of Our Lady is put through grueling cross examinations. But, with the aid of Our Lady, Juan Diego finally succeeds: the altogether miraculous nature of both the Tilma and the unseasonal roses from Castile convince the skeptical Spanish monk and his modest entourage. Also here, the Mother of God requests a church to be built on the site of her apparitions. Likewise one encounters here the curing of an

⁸ Rubio, *Historia de NSG*, 21.

⁹ Luis Lasso de la Vega, *Hueli Tlamahuicoltica (1648)* (México: Carreño e Hijo, 1926), 29. For a translation of the Nahuatl original to Castellán, see Mario Rojas Sánchez, *Traducción del Nican Mopobua del Náhuatl al Castellano* (México: Impresa Ideal, 1978).

ailing person: the uncle of Juan Diego, Juan Bernardino, had fallen sick and was in a grave condition. However, in contrast to the event at the Spanish site, the Mexican visionary does not demonstrate unreserved trust in Our Lady, but rather asks for a doctor and a priest. In fact, he attempts even to avoid outright the Lady from Heaven by not going via Tepeyac, but to no avail. Our Lady “corners” Juan Diego and reproachfully addresses him:

. . . Am I not your Mother? Are you not under my shadow? Am I not your health? Are you not on my lap? What else do you need? Let nothing else distress you or disturb you; do not let the sickness of your uncle afflict you, he will not die now, be assured that he has been healed.¹⁰

As Juan Diego would find out upon his return, his uncle was cured of his ailment in the very moment Our Lady had spoken to him.

c. First Striking Parallels between the Two Mariophanies

In both cases Our Lady appears to men of humble social standing. In both cases the apparitions occur in mountainous regions: the Spanish Villuerca Mountains and the Nose Hill, Tepeyac in Mexico. Common to both also is the request to communicate the vision to members of the Church’s hierarchy. In both locations Our Lady thereby implicitly assumes the unity of laity and clergy. A further common feature is her request that a church be built to her honor. In addition, both visionaries experience the life-threatening sickness of a relative and Our Lady’s healing intervention. Moreover, it is implied in the Iberian narrative that the sick boy was visited by Our Lady.¹¹ The same is the case with the indigenous Nahua Juan Bernardino.¹²

¹⁰ Lasso de la Vega, *Huei Tlamahuicoltica* (1648), 41: “¿No estoy yo aquí, que soy tu Madre? ¿No estás bajo mi sombra? ¿No soy tu salud? ¿No estás por ventura en mi regazo? ¿Qué más has menester? No te apene ni te inquiete otra cosa; no te aflija la enfermedad de tu tío, que no morirá ahora de ella, está seguro de queya sanó.”

¹¹ Rubio, *Historia de NSG*, 21.

¹² Lasso de la Vega, *Huei Tlamahuicoltica* (1648), 51.

3. The Name Guadalupe

a. *The Spanish Shrine*

Only upon Gil's discovery of his lost cow and, subsequently, of the wooden statuette of Our Lady in the fourteenth century did the Spanish apparition acquire the designation "Guadalupe." As the place's name precedes the actual Mariophany, linguists agree that the name contains no spiritual or religious significance. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile investigating the etymological origins of this name. During the centuries of Moorish control of large portions of Spain, that valley had been called *Wadi'l-lubb*. The Semitic (i.e., Arab word) *wadi* refers to "a valley, river or gorge that is or can be suddenly filled with water." Interestingly, the second part of the name, *lubb*, is of Indo-European origin. It has its roots in the Latin word *lupus*, meaning "wolf." Thus, this now commonly rendered Spanish compound name means in English "River of the Wolf." Some speculate there had been an abundance of wolves in this region of the Iberian Peninsula. Mention must be made of variant readings. A minority of scholars argues for "Guadalupe" meaning either "River of Light" or "water that flows from a fountain."¹³

Ad tangentem, one may gratefully note at this point that such etymological origins of terms important for faith, may form a basis for interreligious tolerance and even dialogue. Not only is the Arab name *Maryam* (Mary) mentioned no less than thirty-four times in the Moslem Qur'an, but a central Christian tenet, namely that of the supernatural birth of Jesus, is also upheld by Islam. Little wonder then, that among all human beings, only to Mary is dedicated a complete *Sura* of the holy book of Moslems, the Qur'an.¹⁴

b. *The Problématique of the Name "Guadalupe" in Mexico*

Unlocking the original meaning of the name of the Mexican shrine is far more difficult. Even after much research, a sense of mystery and enigma remains. After almost five centuries

¹³ See Miguel Asín Palacios, *Contribución a la Toponimia Árabe de España* (Madrid: Gráficas Versal, 1944), esp. at 151.

¹⁴ Jean-Marie Abd-El-Jahil, *Marie et l'Islam* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1950), 82.

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scholars still debate whether the present name is the result of a faulty translation made by Zumárraga's personal translator, Father Juan Gonzalez, or original to that charisma.

In the official narration of the apparitions of Tepeyac, the *Nican Mopobua*, the name "Guadalupe" occurs only thrice. In the introduction one reads:

Here it is told, and set down in order, how a short time ago the Perfect Virgin Holy Mary Mother of God, our Queen, miraculously appeared at Tepeyac, widely known as Guadalupe.¹⁵

The second occurrence is in front of Zumárraga when Juan Diego unveils the image and the roses—an all-important moment.

And just as well as the different Castilian roses fell out upon the floor; then and there, the beloved Image of the Perfect Virgin Holy Mary, Mother of God, became the sign, suddenly appearing in the form and figure in which it is now, where it is preserved in her beloved little house at Tepeyac, which is called Guadalupe.¹⁶

The final recorded mention is when Our Lady speaks to Juan Diego's uncle, Juan Bernardino:

... that he [Zumárraga] would properly name her image thus: the Perfect Virgin, Holy Mary of Guadalupe.¹⁷

Strangely, the narration fails to provide a rationale for the name. The Spanish name was unknown in the Nahuatl language. Complicating matters yet further, Juan Diego was not in command of Spanish. In addition, Nahuatl makes no provision

¹⁵ Lasso de la Vega, *Huei Tlamahuicoltica (1648)*, 25—as translated by Manuel Dorantes, "Our Lady of Guadalupe in Spain—Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico, A Comparative Study: Different Charisms, Similar Messages?" 28, fn. 62.

¹⁶ Lasso de la Vega, *Huei Tlamahuicoltica (1648)*, 49—as translated by Dorantes, "Our Lady of Guadalupe," 28, fn. 63.

¹⁷ Lasso de la Vega, *Huei Tlamahuicoltica (1648)*, 51—as translated by Dorantes, "Our Lady of Guadalupe," 28, fn. 64.

for the letters G and D.¹⁸ Did perhaps Zumárraga and his translator presume (unwittingly) the Spanish name? Certainly the apparitions began immediately following the solemnity honoring Our Lady on December 8th. The Marian feast day notwithstanding, both Becerra Tanco and Florencia argue in the seventeenth century that it is unlikely that Our Lady would have chosen a foreign, Spanish name. In fact Becerra Tanco reports of reluctance on part of the indigenous people to accept a Spanish name for their sanctuary.¹⁹ Tanco already suggests two Nahuatl words as original: *Tequatlanopeuh* (“the one who has its origin in the top of the rocky crag”) and *Tequantlanlaxopeuh* (“the one who put to flight the devourer”).²⁰ At the end of the nineteenth century, the Mexican Nahua scholar Mariano Jacobo Rojas concluded the Nahuatl name Our Lady had given herself was *Coatlaxopeuh*, which means “she who bruises the serpent.” This phonetically similar variant appears quite intriguing for two reasons: 1. it is pronounced phonetically similar to the Spanish Marian shrine, and 2. it contains a rich religious meaning for both the Nahua culture and for the Spanish Catholics.²¹

Supported by the findings of the scholar Byron McAfee, an expert in Nahua culture and the Nahuatl language, Helen Behrens summarizes:

¹⁸ José Rebollar Chavez, *Santa María de Guadalupe* (Boston, Mass.: Ediciones Paulinas, 1963), 92. Luis Becerra Tanco, *Felicidad de México en el Principio y Milagro Origen que Tuvo el Santuario de la Virgen María Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, Extramuros: en la Aparición Admirable de esta Soberana Señora y de su Prodigiousa Imagen* (México [City]: Bernardo Calderón, 1675), Colección 537.

¹⁹ Francis Johnston, *The Wonder of Guadalupe: The Origin and Cult of the Miraculous Image of the Blessed Virgin in Mexico* (Rockford, Ill.: Tan Books, 1981), 47.

²⁰ Rebollar Chavez, *Santa María de Guadalupe*, 93—as translated by Dorantes, “Our Lady of Guadalupe,” 31.

²¹ Francisco de Florencia, S.J., *Estrella del Norte de México* (Barcelona: en la imprenta de Antonio Velazquez, a costa del dicho D. Juan Leonardo, 1741), 2nd ed. Accessible in: Francisco de Florencia, S.J., “Estrella del Norte de México (1688),” in Ernesto de la Torre Villar and Ramiro Navarro de Anda, *Testimonios históricos Guadalupanos. Compilación, prólogo, notas bibliográficas, índices* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982), 359-399.

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The Aztec “te coatlaxopeuh” has the same sound [as Guadalupe to the Spaniards]. “Te,” means stone; “coa” means serpent; “tla” is the noun ending which can be interpreted as “the” while “xopeuh” means to crush or stamp out. The last part of the message has to be rearranged in the following manner in order to reveal its true meaning: “Her precious image will thus be known [by the name of] ‘The Entirely Perfect Virgin, Holy Mary,’ and it will crush, stamp out, abolish or eradicate the stone serpent.”²²

If this indeed is the original indigenous term Juan Diego used, then Our Lady’s polyvalent name communicates equally forcefully a central tenet of Christian faith to both the oppressed native population and to the *conquistadores*, who had heretofore trampled with no scruples the dignity of the indigenous populace. One name unites both in believing in Genesis 3:14 (“The Lord said to the serpent: ‘Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.’”) and Revelation 12:1 (“And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars”).

While it is all too improbable that Mexicans would have used an Arab-Spanish name, there is no gainsaying that all possible Aztec variants point to an authentic Marian interpretation of this name.²³ More than simply transporting an eminently Christian message, however, the name also develops further—and to its demise—Aztec religious belief, namely in a Christian sense. Quetzalcoatl was the great Aztec serpent-god. Therefore the message the miracle of Tepeyac conveyed to the native populace was: Our Lady of Guadalupe was undoing the worship to the great Quetzalcoatl.²⁴ This assumption is

²² Helen Behrens, *The Virgin and the Serpent God* (Mexico City: Editorial Progreso, 1966), 162.

²³ Bernardo Bergöend, *La nacionalidad mexicana y la Virgen de Guadalupe* (México: Editorial Jus, 1968).

²⁴ Miguel León-Portillo, *The Aztec Image of Self and Society* (Salt Lake City, Utah: University of Utah, 1992), 187.

reinforced by the novel way in which Our Lady is represented on the Tilma according to Esteban Antícoli: in front of a sun. The implication is that by Mary standing in front of the highest Aztec deity, she proves herself more powerful than the most potent pagan deity, who is shown burned out and consumed. The pale red sun-god Huitzilpochtli (“Hummingbird of the South” in Nahuatl) is likewise eclipsed by Our Lady surrounded by pale red color.²⁵

It is significant to note that on the hill of Tepeyac, where Our Lady appeared to Juan Diego, had stood previously an important pagan temple honoring the Aztec goddess Tonantzin Cihuacóatl—meaning, significantly for the future Marian apparitions—“Our venerated Mother Woman-Snake.” This fact was still commonly known by the local population in 1531. Thus the flower miracle of Tepeyac must invariably be interpreted in a Marian context. This is all the more noteworthy as Tonantzin translates also simply as “Our Mother.”

4. *Morenita*—Dark-Skinned

While Our Lady of Guadalupe in Spain expresses the theological truth of the *Theotokos* as solemnly defined at the Council of Ephesus (431)²⁶ and Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico gives expression to the theological truth of the *Conceptio Immaculata* that would crystallize to a dogmatic definition more than three centuries later—namely in 1854,²⁷ both depict Our Lady as a dark-skinned woman. The man-made wooden carving in Spain shows both the Virgin and the Child in dark brown, and Our Lady in Mexico is shown on the Tilma in varying nuances of dark brown.

²⁵ Esteban Antícoli, *Historia de la aparición de la Sma Virgen María de Guadalupe en México ...* (México: ‘La Europea’ de J. Aquilar Vera y Cla, 1897), 15-17. Richard Nebel argues for a stronger retention, if not affirmation, of the native religion by rejecting the Nahuatl name *Tecoatlaxopeuh* as original to the narrative. See Richard Nebel, *Santa María Tonantzin Virgen de Guadalupe. Continuidad y transformación religiosa en México* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995), 125.

²⁶ Henricus Denzinger, ed., *Enchiridion Symbolorum: Definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum* (34. ed.; Barcinone: Herder, 1967), no. 250 (hereafter: DH).

²⁷ DH 1400 and esp. 2800-2804.

Per se the dark appearance is not unique as there is a long list of black *Majestas* and many renditions of *Vièrges noires* throughout Europe. Nevertheless, it is significant to point out that in these Guadalupes the dark color is not the result of aging or of an accidental fire, but original and intentional. The wood of the statue of Our Lady in Extremadura is dark. Likewise the skin color of the woman on the Tilma is originally dark.²⁸ The peoples living on the Iberian Peninsula and in Mexico have darker skins. Color seems here to express a deliberate divine solidarization with a particular segment of humankind.

5. Our Lady and the *Anawim*

The dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (55) states: "She [Mary] stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently hope for and receive salvation from Him." This is not a negligible theological *adiaphoron*, but central to the Gospel message. Already the Psalmist prays: "You listen, Lord, to the needs of the poor, you encourage them and hear their prayers. You win justice for the orphaned and oppressed; no one on earth will cause terror again" (Ps. 10:17). Psalm 34 states: "My soul will glory in the Lord that the poor may hear and be glad" (Ps. 34:3, NAB).

The New Covenant associates Our Lady with the *anawim*, the poor. For instance in Luke's Marian hymn, the *Magnificat*, the future Mother of God prays: "For he has looked upon his handmaid's lowliness . . . He has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly. The hungry he has filled with good things; the rich he has sent away empty" (Lk 1:46-58).

In both Guadalupan apparitions Our Lady chooses, in the persons of Gil Cordero in 1323 and Juan Diego in 1531, representatives of "the lowly and poor" to become her preferred messengers via the Church authorities to the world.

²⁸ Monique Scheer, "From Majesty to Mystery: Change in the Meaning of Black Madonnas from the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries," *American Historical Review* 107, no 5 (Dec. 2002): 1412-1440, esp. 1412. Jean Devisse, *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University, 1979).

Gil Cordero is a lowly “cow herder” whose identity one only knows from later, secondary testimony.²⁹ Near the shores of Lake Texoco, the commoners Juan Diego and his uncle wove mats from reed. Juan Diego’s name was preceded by the Nahuatl title *icnotlapiltzintli*, which was commonly translated into Spanish as “poor,” but in fact intimates that he was an ordinary Indian with no socially well-connected sponsors.³⁰ Reminiscent of the biblical poor, Our Lady addresses Juan Diego at the first apparition in the following way: “Juanito, Juan Dieguito, the smallest of my children.” He responds, affirming his status by saying, “I, your humble servant.”³¹ Later he explains the skepticism with which Zumárraga reacts to his words: “I am a little man, I am a string, a simple wooden ladder, I am a tail, I am a leaf, I am common folk.”³² It is touching to note a parallel between Juan Diego’s sense of unworthiness and the reaction of the Mother of God at the moment of the Annunciation. The *Nican Mopubua* identifies the *Immaculata* with the concerns and sufferings of the poor.

6. The Bidding “Build me a House”

With similar words Our Lady speaks to both visionaries, thus revealing herself as both Mother of God and Mother of the Church. The Mother of God grants a home to all believers. The *ecclesia* is to find a place to gather and worship in God’s dwelling place on earth.

The visionary Gil instructs the clergy in Mary’s name:

Take her image out and build her a house. She also said to me, that those who will be responsible for her house ought to feed all the poor (coming) to her house once a day. She also told me, that she would draw to her house many people, from different parts of the world.³³

²⁹ Rubio, *Historia de NSG*, 20f. Gretchen D. Starr-LeBeau, *In the Shadow of the Virgin: Inquisitors, Friars, and Conversos in Guadalupe, Spain* (Princeton, N.J.; Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2003), 14.

³⁰ Behrens, *The Virgin and the Serpent God*, 149.

³¹ Lasso de la Vega, *Huei Tlamahuicoltica (1648)*, 29.

³² Lasso de la Vega, *Huei Tlamahuicoltica (1648)*, 33: “... yo soy un hombrecillo, soy un cordel, soy una escalerilla de tablas, soy cola, soy hoja, soy gente menuda.”

³³ As translated by Manuel Dorantes, “Our Lady of Guadalupe,” 88. Cf. Rubio, *Historia de NSG*, 22: “Le hiciédeses una casa. Y mándame mas, que dijese a los que tuviesen cargo de su Casa que diesen a comer a todos los pobres que a ella viniesen una vez al día.”

Faithful to Our Lady's request, the local Spanish clergy built a makeshift structure immediately after excavation. Along with his wife and children, Gil became the first caretaker of the shrine. Soon after the victorious outcome of the battle of Salado in 1340, King Alfonso XI had a large Gothic church and priory built in place of the provisional shrine.³⁴

In Mexico Our Lady says:

I vividly desire that a temple be built for me, where I can show and give all of my love, compassion and defense. . . . go to the palace of the bishop [sic: Zumárraga would be consecrated bishop only in 1533] of Mexico and you will tell him how I have sent you to manifest to him how much I desire for him to build me a temple . . .³⁵

Already a fortnight after the apparitions ceased the first provisional chapel had been completed. Zumárraga personally led on December 26, 1531, a large solemn procession to this chapel. Conquered and conquerors—natives and foreigners attended together the first Eucharist held in this chapel. Paralleling the role of Gil and his family at the shrine of Extremadura, now Juan Diego became the principal custodian of the shrine at Tepeyac, where he remained until his death in 1548.³⁶

In both cases it can be seen that (1) the narratives attest to the strong theological bond that exists between ecclesiology, the sacrament of the Eucharist, and the figure of Mary; and (2) the visionaries become custodians of the respective shrines, thus guarding and vouching for the authenticity of the message revealed.

7. Our Lady of Guadalupe in Battle

Fitting to the confidently militant faith so long characteristic of the Spanish people, it does not surprise that Our Lady of

³⁴ Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe*, 222.

³⁵ As translated by Dorantes, "Our Lady of Guadalupe," 94f. Cf. Lasso de la Vega, *Huel Tlamahuicoltica (1648)*, 29: "Deseo vivamente que se me erija aquí un templo, para en el mostrar y dar todo mi amor, compasión, auxilio y defesa. . . . Y para realizar lo que mí clemencia pretende, ve al palacio del obispo de México y le dirás como yo te envío a manifestarle lo que mucho deseo, que aquí en el llano me edifique un templo."

³⁶ Behrens, *The Virgin and the Serpent God*, 166.

Guadalupe played a decisive role during two significant battles in Spanish history. The Spanish victory at the Battle of Salado (October 30, 1340) was almost universally attributed to Our Lady of Guadalupe, Extremadura. Prior to that battle Abu al-Hasan, Marinid ruler of Morocco, had amassed a large army in order to undo the Christian advances on the Iberian Peninsula achieved within the course of the previous century. Despite all the considerable efforts undertaken, the Moors suffered such a devastating defeat that the remnants of that army hastily retreated over the Strait of Gibraltar back to Africa and would never again invade the Iberian Peninsula. After this hard-fought battle, the victorious Spanish King Alfonso XI lost no time going to Guadalupe to thank in person Our Lady and immediately commissioned a magnificent Gothic basilica to be built in her honor. This victory anticipated the fall of the last Arab enclave in Spain, Granada, in the year 1492, marking the completion of the *Reconquista*. To this day many Spaniards are convinced Our Lady of Guadalupe in Extremadura secured the all-decisive victory for Castile.

When Europe faced a particularly threatening challenge from the Ottoman Empire roughly two hundred and fifty years later, Don fray Alfonso de Montúfar, archbishop of Mexico City, sent a small copy of the original image in Guadalupe, Mexico, to King Philip II (1527-1598). He suggested to the Spanish monarch that the flagship of the Christian fleet carry this image in the event Christians would become involved in an engagement with the then formidable, and far more numerous, Turkish fleet. Shortly thereafter that image of Guadalupe was carried, affixed to a mast, into the decisive Battle of Lepanto, off the coast of present-day Greece on October 7, 1571. When the Turkish Admiral Ulu Ali (Reis) (1519-1587) succeeded with his small, but numerous and agile galleys in isolating the considerably larger Christian warships under the flag of the city state of Genoa from the rest of the Christian fleet under the command of the Spanish Admiral Juan d'Austria (1547-78), the battle-tested and experienced Genoese Admiral Giovanni Andrea Doria (1539-1606), great-nephew of the famed Andrea Doria (1466-1560), fell on his knees on the ship's upper deck (named *Capitana*) and prayed to the image of Our Lady of

Guadalupe for her intercession. To the surprise of all, immediately a strong wind developed, terrifying the sailors on the Turkish warships, which were far less seaworthy than their Christian counterparts. The ensuing panic among the Turkish forces secured the Christian victory. From this resounding defeat the Turkish navy never recovered.³⁷

The small image of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico remained in the possession of the Genoese family Doria until 1811, when it was bequeathed to the town of Aveto, in the Italian province of Liguria. Ever since, the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe (Mexico) has been publicly venerated in the parish church Santo Stefano d'Aveto, Italy. Numerous miracles and healings have been attributed to this image.³⁸

III. Conclusion

In spite of these quite striking parallels, there is no credible evidence suggesting a historical connection between the two Mariophanies, possibly discrediting the authenticity of either apparition. At the close of the nineteenth century, on the occasion of the solemn coronation of Our Lady, the great Marian pope Leo XIII composed a poem honoring Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico that could equally have been written for the shrine with the same name in Extremadura:

Mexicus heic populus mira sub imagine gaudet
Te colore Alma Parens praesidioque frui
Per Te sic vigeat felix, teque auspice Christi
Immotam servet firmior usque fidem.³⁹

³⁷ José Luis Orozco, "¿La Guadalupana en la Batalla de Lepanto?" *México Desconocido* 5 (June 13, 1980): 19-20 [special edition: *La Virgen de Guadalupe, 450 aniversario*].

³⁸ *A Handbook on Guadalupe* (New Bedford, Mass.: Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, 2001), 23-26 and 102-105.

³⁹ Demarest and Taylor, eds., *The Dark Virgin: The Book of Our Lady of Guadalupe*, 234 and 198. On p. 198 the following English translation of Pope Leo's poem is also given: "Happy in possession of Thy Miraculous Image / The Mexican people rejoice in Thy sway, / And firm in their faith and Thy patronage, pray / Thy Son's Will will always govern their land."