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OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE: A SIGN OF ECCLESIAL UNITY

by
Sixto Garcia, Ph.D.*

I. A HISTORICO-THEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE MANIFESTATIONS OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

The purpose of this paper is to offer a historico-theological reflection on the figure of Mary of Nazareth, the Theotokos, Immaculate in her Conception and, manifested as Mary of Guadalupe in one concrete historical instance, a sign of ecclesial unity.

First, we will review the story of and the historical evidence for the apparitions of our Lady of Guadalupe; second, we will briefly examine the philosophico-theological notions of sign and symbol; third, we will correlate the manifestations of Our Lady of Guadalupe with the image of Mary in the New Testament; fourth, we will then offer some theological and historical reflections to show that Mary of Guadalupe is, and should always be, considered as a sign of ecclesial unity. A common contextual reference of the preceding discussions will be the presence of Mary of Guadalupe in popular spirituality.

II. THE STORY OF MARY OF GUADALUPE

A. Preliminary Remarks

The manuscript and eyewitness evidence for the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe on the forty-meter (129 ft.)

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high hill of Tepeyac are quite substantial; we may mention the following:

1. Antonio Valeriano's *Nican Mopohua* (Good or Happy News), a transcription in the Nahuatl language of the story of the apparitions¹;
2. the translations of the *Nican Mopohua* into Latin by the diocesan priest Agustín de la Rosa in his *Disertatio Historica-Theologica*, which bears the subtitle "Quae mexicano scripta est, mexicit fuit edita anno 1649 a Presbytero D. Ludovico Lazo de la Vega . . ." ²;
3. the translations into Spanish done at a later stage (early eighteenth-century) by Primo Feliciano Velázquez and by Luis Becerra Tanco. (Becerra Tanco also retrieves the essentials of the story in his *Felicidades de México*.³)

The ancillary literature on the geography, history and culture of sixteenth-century Mexico, as well as on the development of the missionary activities of the time, is also fairly abundant and historically accurate. The three mendicant orders which bore the main task of evangelization from 1523 to 1572—the Franciscans, the Dominicans and the Augustinians—compiled an impressive record of documentation on their catechetical and cultural work. These records were kept also after 1572, the year the first Jesuits arrived and effectively initiated a new age of missionary methods and activities.⁴

Additional information is provided in the chronicles of three Franciscans: Fray Toribio de Benavente (known as Motolinía), Fray Jerónimo Mendieta, and the Flemish Franciscan Armand Zierikzsée whose impressive *Chronica compendios-*

¹José Rebollar Chávez, *Santa María de Guadalupe* (Boston: Ediciones Paulinas, 1963), 11. Cf. also Francis Johnston, *The Wonder of Guadalupe* (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 1981), 46, 61, 63-65, 78.

²Chávez, *S. M. de Guadalupe*, 23.

³Chávez, *S. M. de Guadalupe*, 19.

⁴Robert Ricard, *The Spiritual Conquest of Mexico: An Essay on the Apostolate and the Evangelizing Methods of the Mendicant Orders in New Spain, 1523-1572* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966, 1982: ET by Lesley Byrd Simpson).

sisima ab exordio mundi, was written in 1533, barely two years after the apparitions.⁵ The work of Motolinía receives an added aura of authenticity from the fact that the author had been one of the famous Twelve, the first group of Franciscan missionaries who arrived at the port of San Juan de Ulúa (where Hernán Cortés had originally landed on Holy Thursday, April 19, 1519) on May 13, 1524, and who rode on muleback to Ciudad Mexico (known simply as México), where they arrived on June 18, 1524.⁶

B. Juan Diego and the Lady from Tepeyac

Juan Diego came from the now-vanquished, once-mighty Aztec nation; in fact, *Aztec* was the name the Spaniards gave them, a word derived from *Aztlán*, a fabled faraway land whence these warring nations presumably hailed. The Aztecs called themselves the Tenochas (the People). Their loosely-built empire had almost succeeded in driving back Cortes' forces in a single night of struggle (this was the *Noche Triste*, the Grieving Night, of Cortés), which witnessed an impressive Aztec victory that drove the Spaniards from Tenochtitlán and almost annihilated his forces. But Cortés rallied his troops and counterattacked. Eventually, the mighty Tenochas succumbed before the outnumbered but better-equipped Spaniards and their Indian allies from Tlaxcala; on August 13, 1521, the feast of St. Hyppolitus, the Spanish established supremacy over Mexico once and for all.

But the surviving monuments of this unique nation bespeak of their greatness. The recently excavated Templo Mayor (the High Temple), which stood at the center of ancient Tenochtitlán, bears the imposing images of Quetzalcoatl, the head of the Aztec and Toltec pantheons, and Huitzilopotchtli, the Hummingbird-Wizard god, to whom human sacrifices were offered every day since the earliest Aztec tribe had settled in the valley of Mexico in 1325. The High Temple presently stands in El Zócalo, a huge square at the heart of Mexico City, bordered on one side by the

⁵Chávez, *S. M. de Guadalupe*, 21.

⁶Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest of Mexico*, 21.

sixteenth-century Cathedral and, across from it, by the Presidential Palace. Quetzalcoatl and Huitzilopochtli seem to stand watch over the centuries, as silent witnesses of the greatness that once was. From this mighty nation, defeated a scant ten years earlier, came Juan Diego, the baptized Tenocho Indian who beheld the Lady on the slopes of Tepeyac.

Juan Diego was born in Cuautitlán, about sixteen kilometers (ten miles) from the city of Mexico. He had married Maria Lucia, a young woman of his nation who was also baptized, and both probably lived with Juan Diego's uncle, Juan Bernardino. Juan Diego attended daily Mass and received catechetical instruction in the nearby town of Tlatelolco. It was almost certainly during one of his daily travels from Cuautitlán to Tlatelolco that Juan Diego had the first encounter with the Lady.

The manuscript witnesses mentioned above agree on the essentials. Juan Diego told of four apparitions of the Lady: the first took place as he was crossing the summit of the Hill of Tepeyac, shortly before sunrise (about four o'clock in the morning) of Saturday, December 9, 1531. The dialogue of this first encounter reveals the theological foundation and meaning of the Guadalupe experience then and now (as we will discuss later in this paper). It set the context for the dialogue of the next three manifestations, and its main part deserves to be reproduced. Juan Diego related how he heard a singing, more beautiful than that he was accustomed to hear from the Coyoltototl bird (a relative of the Quetzal bird) and then heard a voice calling him: "Juanito . . . Juan Dieguito."

Velázquez' translation of the Nahuatl chronicle⁷ tells the story as follows: He approached the place whence the voice came, and beheld, near (or at) the summit, a lady, standing there, who beckoned him to draw closer. Upon coming closer to her, he was awe-struck at her magnificent appearance. Her dress was shining and dazzling like the sun. The

⁷Chávez, *S. M. de Guadalupe*, 23-27; Johnston, *Wonder of Guadalupe*, 23-26. The quotations in the text of the paper (p. 6-9) were drawn from Chávez, p. 28-78; Johnston, p. 26-47. Also important is Luis Becerra Tanco's translation of the *Nican Mopohua*, 1675.

rocky soil upon which her feet stood shone as if made of precious stones, and the ground shone like a rainbow. She said: "Juanito, the smallest of my children, where are you going?"

He answered:

My Lady and my mistress (*mi Niña*), I have to go to your house in Mexico Tlatilolco, to learn the divine things, which our priests give and teach us, as messengers of our Lord.

She answered:

Know and understand well, you, the most humble among my children, that I am the ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of the True God, through whom we all live; of God the Creator within whom everything that is dwells, the Lord of Heaven and Earth. I most earnestly wish that a Temple in my honor be built here, so that from it I will give out all my love, my compassion, my help and protection, for I am your most pious Mother, and I will [give this love] to you, to all of you the inhabitants of this land, and to all those who love me and invoke me, [I wish] to listen to their grief, and relieve their miseries, their pains and their sorrows.

Juan Diego added that the Lady asked him to present her request for the Temple to the Bishop of Mexico, the Franciscan Fray Juan de Zumárraga, the first ordinary of Mexico (a pastoral function he held for twenty years, 1528-1548). He and his successor, the Dominican Fray Alonso de Montúfar (who held the see of México from 1554 to 1572), would eventually become the more pre-eminent advocates of the cult to the Lady of Guadalupe, facing the opposition of their fellow Franciscan and Dominican missionaries.

Bishop Zumárraga's first reaction to Juan Diego's story was understandably negative. As Juan Diego himself conveyed it to the Lady during their second encounter, the Archbishop said: "You will come again; I will then listen to you more carefully. I will discern very carefully, from the very beginning, your attitude and your intention."

The second encounter took place that same day, December 9, at or after sunset. According to Juan Diego, Mary insisted in sending him, not any one of the other many messengers that she could have chosen. Archbishop Zumárraga's reaction was negative. According to the main narratives, he demanded a sign from the Lady, to verify Juan Die-

go's story. The third apparition took place as Juan Diego returned to his village, at an undetermined time of the day, on Sunday, December 10. The Lady told Juan Diego to return the next day, that she would provide the sign the Archbishop had asked for. Upon arriving at Cuautitlán, however, Juan Diego found his uncle, Juan Bernardino, gravely ill, according to Juan Diego's account (the general Nahuatl term used by the chronicles, *cocoliztli*, referred to a number of contagious diseases).

Juan Diego apparently decided not to meet with the Lady the next day, as he had been told. All we know is that shortly after sunrise (about 6 in the morning) of Tuesday, December 12, Juan Diego was crossing the southern slope of the Tepeyac, on his way to Tlatelolco to summon the parish priest to his uncle's deathbed; it was there that he beheld Mary for the fourth time. Mary's words to the perplexed Aztec catechumen are probably among the most cherished and widely repeated of all the utterances Juan Diego heard from the Lady:

Let nothing distress you. Am I not here, I, your Mother? Are you not under my protection? Do not allow your uncle's sickness to afflict you, for he will not die. Be certain that, as of now, he is fully healed.

Velázquez' translation tells us that the Lady ordered Juan Diego to climb to the summit of Tepeyac where he would find many different kinds of flowers. She told him to cut them, gather them and bring them to her presence. (Juan Diego later expressed his awe at finding roses [*"rosas de Castilla"*] in early December, in an otherwise craggy and barren terrain.) The Lady commanded him to fold the roses into his tilma and press it to his bosom, and not to show them to anyone, nor to unfold the tilma, until he stood before Archbishop Zumárraga. Juan Diego reached the Archbishop's residence three hours later, and unfolded his tilma. As the roses fell to the floor, in front of the prelate, there was, plainly visible to all, the image of the Lady Juan Diego had beheld four times as he crossed the heights of Tepeyac. Later in the day, upon his arrival in Cuautitlán, he found his uncle,

Juan Bernardino, fully healed. Juan Bernardino said to his nephew that he, too, had beheld the Lady, at about the same time she had appeared in Tepeyac, and she had commanded him too to go see the Archbishop, to tell him about his healing and that her image should be venerated as that of the "ever-virgin, Holy Mary of Guadalupe."

Juan Diego's tilma can be seen today, carefully and skillfully encased in a bulletproof glass panel located behind the main altar of the new Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The new Guadalupan church has been designed as a nomadic tent, to evoke the biblical theme of the wandering, pilgrim People of God of salvation history. Situated diagonally across the square is the seventeenth-century ancient basilica (built to replace the original chapel), leaning perilously and inaccessible to pilgrims, severely damaged, as are many buildings in Mexico City, because of the crumbling wooden underpinnings which basically hold most of the city above the ancient lake of Tenochtitlán, where the proud Tenochas had built their city. Behind it, quiet and inviting in bucolic serenity, looms the hill of Tepeyac; pilgrims climb to its summit by following a spiraling road which wends its way through well-springs and flower beds, ending in the turn-of-the-century church which stands in the place where a sixteenth-century chapel was once built. From the spiraling road, pilgrims can look 129 feet down and behold the new basilica, as a present which springs from the past through which they travel as they ascend toward the summit of Tepeyac.

Juan Diego's tilma was a common tunic used by the natives of the land and by the poorer people in general. Much has been written on the nature of the material from which it is made. It seems to have been made from two pieces of linen, sewn together by cotton fibers. The linen is probably made from fibers from the Maguey plant, *Iztle* in the native Mexican language. The present-day measurements of the tilma, according to Luis Toral González, an artist from Puebla and a self-made Guadalupan scholar, are 170 centimeters (51.6 in.) long by 105 centimeters (31.9 in.) wide. It hangs behind the main altar of the new basilica, standing watch over time and history, pregnant with faith and hope.

C. The Dialectics of the Growth and Inculturation of the Devotion to Mary of Guadalupe

The cult to the *Virgen Morena* (the Brown Virgin, as she became known) faced unexpected hostility from the missionary mendicant orders to which fell the task to evangelize Mexico from 1524 to 1572, the year in which the first Jesuits arrived there.⁸ As mentioned before, the first two Archbishops of Mexico, Juan de Zumárraga and his successor, the Dominican Alonso de Montúfar, were among the foremost advocates of the devotion to the Guadalupeana. It would seem that the bishops of Michoacán, the diocesan priest Vasco de Quiroga (1538-1565), and his successor, Antonio Ruiz Morales, also a diocesan prelate (1567-1572), all promoted the devotion. Based on similar, rather incomplete evidence, one might argue that the bishops of Tlaxcala-Puebla, the Dominican, Julián Garcés (1526-1542), the Franciscan, Martín de Hojacastro (1546-1558), and the diocesan priest, Fernando de Villagómez (1563-1570), were also strong advocates of the cult to Mary of Guadalupe.

The mendicant orders offer a different historical picture. The only evidence of an early Franciscan advocacy of the cult to the Guadalupeana was a procession organized in 1544 to the chapel built on Tepeyac, to beseech deliverance from a grave epidemic then devastating Mexico City.⁹ But the evidence of Franciscan hostility against the cult in these early years is abundant. On September 8, 1556, preaching on the Feast of the Nativity of Mary, the Franciscan Provincial for Mexico, Fray Francisco de Bustamante, denounced the cult. He stated that it had no historical foundation, and that the image in Juan Diego's tilma had been painted by an Indian. He denounced Archbishop Montúfar for tolerating and even promoting the devotion to Mary of Guadalupe. Bustamante added that the cult was dangerous, because it led to disguised idolatry.

⁸Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest*, 176-193.

⁹Consult Juan Primo Feliciano Velázquez, *La Aparición de Santa María de Guadalupe* (Mexico: Editorial de Historia, 1931). Cf. also Toribio de Benavente (Motolinía), *Historia de los indios de la Nueva España* (ET: *Antiquities of Mexico*; ed. Kingsborough, London: 1948, Vol. 9).

Montúfar, as might be expected, took a dim view of this attack on his pastoral acumen, and ordered an investigation of the attitudes towards the cult among the Franciscans. One of Bustamante's colleagues admitted that the sanctuary was frequented by a great number of natives, but that the cult itself had begun to wane due to the warnings and the preaching of the Franciscans. Two other members of the Commission appointed by Montúfar reported a conversation they had with the Franciscans, Antonio de Huerte and Alonso de Santiago, both active missionaries known for their energy and zeal. Both men showed unmistakable and unrepentant hostility towards the worship of the Guadalupeana. Fray Alonso said that the cult was dangerous because the Indians believed that the image in the tilma was Mary herself, and worshipped it as an idol.¹⁰ Another Franciscan, known only as Fray Luis, told the Commission that all the Friars opposed and deplored the cult. Dominicans and Augustinians took a more indifferent attitude towards the whole issue, although they definitely discouraged pilgrimages to the original chapel built on the slopes of Tepeyac.

It seems that some of the Franciscans, with more sincerity than discernment, had developed a fear that the Indians whom they were trying to evangelize and instruct might revert to idolatry. The fear might have been fueled by the association many Aztecs might have made between Mary of Guadalupe and the pre-Christian goddess Tonantzin, whose shrine, destroyed during the conquest, had stood also on the slopes of Tepeyac. The word *Tonantzin* means, or might be construed to mean, "Mother"; thus, it would hardly have been surprising that converted Christian Tenochas would have used the word when praying to Mary before the tilma, without implying idolatry of any sort.

¹⁰On the debate concerning the origins of the word *Guadalupe*: cf. Chávez, S. M. *de Guadalupe*, 91-96; Johnston, *Wonder of Guadalupe*, 45-48. The Roman-given name of *Aquae Lupiae*, given to the river in Extremadura (Spain) where Mary reportedly appeared to Gil Cordero in 1326, seems like a plausible explanation. There are equally substantial arguments, however, in favor of the Nahuatl *Coatlicue* (the other name of the goddess *Tonantzin*), whose shrine was located near the site of Juan Diego's visions; other related words, such as *Tequatlanohehu*, pronounced by the Spaniards as Tequatalope, and *Tequantlaxohehu*, cannot be dismissed easily.

The historian of these early efforts to promote the cult to Our Lady of Guadalupe (which proved to be decisive in rooting this devotion as a cohesive religious, social and even political element in Mexican history) must then look to Zumárraga and Montúfar as the true pioneers of this devotion, men who must be admired for their foresight and their missionary insightfulness. In 1533, Zumárraga took the tilma from the Cathedral to the small chapel he had built in Tepeyac; he also managed to persuade Hernán Cortés to organize a collection to build a more suitable shrine. This original basilica was begun in 1556, and dedicated in 1709. The present basilica was dedicated in 1969; the old one is still undergoing painstaking restoration by the government's Ministry of Historical Sites and Monuments.

It was Archbishop Montúfar, however, who pursued the devotion to the Brown Virgen of Tepeyac with unique missionary instinct. On September 6, 1556, two days before the Franciscan Provincial Bustamante delivered his scathing attack on both the cult and on Montúfar, the latter had preached a sermon promoting the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe.¹¹ In 1557, he presided at the offering of a silver statue of the Guadalupeana, which the renowned craftsman Alonso de Villaseca had made specially for the new Shrine.¹² On repeated occasions, Fr. Bustamante encouraged missionaries and parish priests to use the tilma as an open textbook of evangelization, using the signs present in the image as so many pointers for doctrinal truths.

III. OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE AS A SIGN OF ECCLESIAL UNITY

A. *Excursus 1: Preliminary Theological Remarks on the Question of Marian Apparitions*

The historical survey which introduces our study has provided the foundational ground for our remarks on Mary of Guadalupe as a sign of unity in the Church. We cannot pursue any theological reflections on the theological and ecclesio-

¹¹Ricard, *Spiritual Conquest*, 188-190.

¹²*Ibid.*

logical meaning of the Brown Virgin without a close scrutiny of the concrete form that her apparitions took—as found in the historical evidence, provided mostly by eyewitnesses and historians of the period.

We do not wish, nor would this be the appropriate place to do it, to engage in a full discussion on the theology of apparitions. But some fundamental remarks are in order concerning the epiphany of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

1. Marian apparitions and the messages communicated through them must be regarded as concrete historical forms which the Trinitarian God's salvific love (already given totally in Jesus Christ's Paschal event) assumes in particular places, addressed to particular people, and in privileged ways. We reiterate the obvious when we say that they do not add anything to the essential, full Revelation of God. God's own self-communication has been given in propaedeutic form to the people of Israel and has been fully sacramentalized in Jesus Christ, the Only Son of God.
2. We cannot accept the current ideologized theories that Marian apparitions do not pertain to Mary of Nazareth as such, but are simply the manifestations of the feminine side of God. Such theories are simply retrojections of ideological concerns, without warrant in the data of Scriptures or the theological tradition of the Church, and represent one of the several currents of Neognosticism presently afflicting Christian theology.
3. We should bear in mind, however, that any encounter between a seer (of a Marian apparition) and Mary is basically the encounter between a historically situated person, one still journeying in his or her pilgrimage towards the Father, and Mary who stands already within the realm of the Resurrection event. Christian resurrection, properly interpreted, is not merely a return to life, but rather the entrance into a new, radically full life; it is a new creation, new humanity, new history—the fully pneumatic (and yet fully human) body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:44-45: "A natural body is put down and a spiritual

body comes up. If there is a natural body, be sure there is also a spiritual body. Scripture has it that Adam, the first man, became a living soul; the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit." See also 2 Cor. 5:17: "This means that if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation").

Mary speaks at these encounters, but her speech cannot be interpreted as the usual exchange of phonemes conveying meaning between two historically placed persons. The seer is moved by the Holy Spirit to interpret Mary's manifestation as the epiphany of Our Lady in a concrete form, accessible to the mind and the understanding of the beholder and taking into account the precise historical and cultural milieu. The seer may indeed speak to Mary, using his or her own language, in response to the message heard coming from Mary; but, all along, one must assume the mediating presence of the Spirit, making intelligible, as form and word, the Marian epiphany. Juan Diego's account of the messages of Mary in Tepeyac Hill was, indeed, really and truly the message which God—through Jesus Christ, acting through His Mother in the life of the Spirit—intended Juan Diego to understand and communicate. As such, the entire experience of Our Lady of Guadalupe that was lived by Juan Diego, not just parts of it, is in itself a sign and also a symbol of the concrete form assumed by the salvific will of God for a people at that moment in human history.

B. Excursus 2: Remarks on Sign and Symbol

We need to preface any further study on this theme by recalling the contemporary meanings of sign and symbol, before we proceed to discuss the theological correlation between Mary and the Church communicated to us by Scriptures and the living theological tradition. We will focus on a definition of symbol as found in Karl Rahner's studies on the subject.¹³

Symbol is that which partakes of, or communicates, the reality it symbolizes. As such, Rahner reminds us, a symbol is

¹³Karl Rahner, "The Theology of the Symbol," in his *Theological Investigations* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 14:221-252.

distinct from, and yet constituted by, the reality it symbolizes. Following Paul Tillich's insight, we may distinguish sign from symbol as follows: a *sign* does not bear a necessary (ontological) relation to that to which it points, whereas the *symbol* participates in the reality of that for which it stands.¹⁴ A symbol will represent the sacramental dimension of the deeper layers of reality. The sign points away from itself to reality it signifies; it stands in signifying relationship to it, but it does not partake of its intimate reality.¹⁵

C. Mary of Guadalupe as Sign and Symbol

Within the context of the above, we wish to argue that Our Lady of Guadalupe is both sign and symbol. She points away from herself to the hope of Redemption brought by her Son; she wills to be—as the first dialogue with Juan Diego suggests—the Mother of an oppressed people, who in their hunger, poverty and experience of discrimination cry out to God for help. She will listen to their cries, and from the Temple (= sign) which she wishes built in her honor, she will issue forth love, compassion, consolation, hope. As a sign of love, compassion, and hope, Mary of Guadalupe has become a universal sign for the peoples of the Western Hemisphere (See Pius XII's 1945 proclamation of Our Lady of Guadalupe as patroness of all the Americas).

Mary is also a symbol, insofar as she partakes of the reality she symbolizes and, in a sense, constitutes this reality. This reality is the concrete life and historical pilgrimage of the People of God, journeying in faith and hope, and sustained by a Love deeper and larger than their own hearts, towards the loving encounter with Jesus Christ, Kyrios and Son, who will fulfill the deepest meaning of John 14:9b: "He who has seen me, has seen the Father."

We can legitimately argue that Mary constitutes the reality of her people's wanderings, of which she is a symbol, by pointing to the historical concreteness of Marian devotion in Mexico (and in other countries). Guadalupan devotion was

¹⁴Rahner, "Symbol," 236-240.

¹⁵Rahner, "Symbol," 244-252.

opposed fiercely by some missionaries, who feared a relapse into idolatry by the worshippers, and yet was supported and given confirmation by two sixteenth-century bishops whose foresight and sincere concern for the poorest of the poor within their pastoral range allowed them to see the image imprinted in the tilma as a textbook of evangelization. Mary of Guadalupe stands, therefore, as the cohesive element that keeps the faith-experience of an entire people alive; she gives form to that faith.

Here we find echoes of Hans Urs von Balthasar's well-known theological correlation between Mary and the Church. Whereas, according to *Lumen gentium*, the Church is, as it were, a sacrament of Christ (*veluti sacramentum*), the Church possesses, nevertheless, the form of Mary (*form* according to Balthasar's understanding of the term, i.e., the *eidos*, or constitutive profile of reality).¹⁶

In a deeper and more meaningful way, Mary partakes of and communicates the reality she symbolizes at Tepeyac, when she defines herself as the Mother of the Living God, the Theotokos. Fr. Frederick Jelly has reminded us, with contemporary, cogent theological arguments,¹⁷ that Mary's title of Theotokos is for us (in the post-Vatican II era) what it already was for Clement of Alexandria in 325, for the Conciliar Fathers at Ephesus in 431, and for the Scholastics: the source of everything she is, of everything the Church says, proclaims and teaches about her (cf. *Lumen gentium*, 56-58, 62). In her apparitions at Tepeyac, then, Mary shows herself primarily as the Mother of the Risen Lord, who is the source of life and renewal; hence, she shows herself as the giver of Love Himself, whom she bore within her by her assent to God's Word. Standing at the crossroads of history in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4), Mary opened herself like the fertile soil God meant her to be for His Word to take root in, grow and renew

¹⁶Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Theology of History* (ET: New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963); cf. also his *Das Betrachtende Gebete* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1955) and his *Maria für Heute* (Freiburg: Herder, 1987), esp. chap. 3.

¹⁷Frederick M. Jelly, *Madonna* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 1986), 90-99.

humanity and creation.¹⁸ Mary of Guadalupe as symbol communicates the reality she ultimately symbolizes, Jesus the Christ, the Only Son of God, her Son.

D. Mary as Sign and Symbol of the Ecclesial Unity

In his exhaustive treatise on the *Notae* (Properties) of the Church, published in the collection *Mysterium Salutis*, Yves Congar states that the unity of the Church has its foundations in a threefold perspective: unity in the faith; unity in the *koinonia* (communion), which forms the tangible profile of the Church; and unity in the breaking of the Bread and the sharing of the Cup (the Eucharistic celebration), the living anamnesis of the Paschal event of Jesus Christ.¹⁹ Seen in this perspective, Mary of Guadalupe is a sign that points to unity in faith, faith in her Son's salvific reality; unity in the *koinonia*, the communion brought about by the cult which developed around her apparitions, a cult which the bishops of Mexico channeled properly to its teleology in Jesus Christ; and a unity in a liturgy which, to this day, goes on unceasingly in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, where Masses follow upon one another and where the well-dressed pilgrim from afar has the unique and unsettling experience of kneeling (or standing) elbow-to-elbow with the raggedly dressed *campesinos* from the hinterlands. Indeed, nowhere else in the world will one find such a tangible sacrament of ecclesial unity in the diversity as there is, day in and day out, at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. What to the orderly mind of a First World executive visiting the shrine may seem like an unseemly chaos of people, coming and going, praying and weeping, is but the fully alive, vibrant and ebullient Church of the Poor, expressing their hopes, fears, joys and sorrows to the *Virgen Morena*, whose own sign, the tilma, hangs behind the main altar inside a bulletproof glass panel. While protecting her image, it cannot prevent the prayers, hopes, and

¹⁸Cf. the echoes of Is. 55:10-11.

¹⁹Yves Congar, "Propiedades esenciales de la Iglesia," in *Mysterium Salutis: Manual de Teología como Historia de la Salvación*, ed. by Johannes Feiner and Magnus Löhrer (Span. Ed.), 4/1:382-422.

yearnings of Mary's people from touching her who wished to be there, already on that dim morning of December 9, 1531, at the summit of Tepeyac.

We may take another approach to the notion of Mary of Guadalupe as a sign of unity. Fr. Johann Roten, S.M., in his contribution to a memorial work in honor of Hans Urs von Balthasar,²⁰ offers incisive thoughts on the complex and beautifully enriching relationship between Balthasar (1905-1988) and the physician/mystic, Adrienne von Speyr (1902-1967), who became, according to Balthasar himself, the most influential spiritual force in his life. They worked together on Balthasar's cherished project, the formation of the *Johannes-gemeinschaften*, the Communities of St. John, conceived as communities of laity and priests centered on a Johannine-Ignatian spirituality.

Balthasar himself has left us a comprehensive account of that relationship in his *Erster Blick auf Adrienne von Speyr* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1968 = ET: *First Glance at Adrienne von Speyr* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1981]). Adrienne von Speyr, in several of her works (Cf. especially her *Handmaid of the Lord* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985]), meditates on the New Testament role of Mary; she introduces a unique ecclesiological element in her Mariology. Mary becomes the Church at the foot of the Cross, together with the beloved disciple. Pursuing this further, Balthasar sees the Church as constituted by the Johannine form of obedience, on the one hand: an obedience marked by the unique love of the beloved disciple standing at the foot of the Cross, and the Ignatian form, on the other hand: drawn from Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*²¹ and inspired particularly by Ignatius' prayer ("Take Lord and receive . . ."), the prayer of total self-surrender, yet structured around a Christology and anthropology drawn from the *Exercises* and

²⁰Johannes Roten, "The Two Halves of the Moon," in *Hans Urs von Balthasar: His Life and His Work*, ed. David Schindler (San Francisco: Ignatius Press/Communio Books, 1991), 65-86.

²¹Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Erster Blick auf Adrienne von Speyr* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1968); Werner Löser, S.J., "The Ignatian Exercises in the Work of Hans Urs von Balthasar," in *Balthasar: Life and Work*, 103-120.

sacramentalized in the Society of Jesus' being unconditionally at the service of the total Church.

The Lady of Guadalupe speaks to this conception of the Mary/Church relationship. She manifests herself as the Theotokos who has done God's will in a radically pleromatic way, yet she requires the mediation of the visible Church—Juan Diego, Juan de Zumárraga and his successors—to create the concrete sign/symbol (the basilica) of the unity of the Mexican—and, eventually, of the Western Hemisphere's—Church. We may here indulge in a bit of typology: Juan Diego may well represent the beloved disciple (indeed, Mary addresses him in almost those exact words) who bears the cross of poverty and certain discrimination. He and the Lady form the seeds of the future Mexican Church, in their truth and in obedience. Just as Mary of Guadalupe is the form of the Church in this particular continent at this point in history, so is Juan Diego the image of all the beloved disciples who trust and love in obedience.

There is, however, another equally significant point. This is the image of Mary as symbol of the poetry of truth, love and unity in the Church. Mary is the poetry which the Church faithful sing (or recite) in unity with one another. This is much more than a fanciful, rhetorical idea. Thus, I would like to offer a brief reflection on Martin Heidegger's philosophy of language, and more specifically, on his reflections on poetic language.²²

For Heidegger, language unveils reality; it illuminates it. He plays on the original etymology of the Greek *albyeia*, usually translated as truth, but etymologically related to illuminating and unveiling. Poetic language opens the deeper layers of reality: using Rainer Maria Rilke's (1875-1926) expression, it points to *Das Offne* (the Open—although in Rilke's case this was not God, but the unknown and sacred). Heidegger appeals in particular to Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) and his expression: *Voll verdienst, doch dich-*

²²Martin Heidegger, *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1959; ET by Albert Hofstadter = *Poetry, Language, Thought* [New York: Harper and Row, 1971]).

terisch, wohnt der Mensch auf dieser Erde ("Well deserving, poetically, man dwells in this Earth").²³

In earlier writings on the role of the Hispanic theologian, I have pursued the idea of the theologian's role as, among other things, the poet of the community. By poet, I mean that the theologian should reflect, be the voice of, the yearnings and hopes of the communities within which he theologizes. As poet of his community, the theologian must use the community's language and yet transcend it in new and creative ways, so that it will convey, theologically and poetically, the expression of the community's pilgrimage in history.

The theologian, however, must belong to his community. Hans-Georg Gadamer applies this concept to the poet and to those who wish to engage in the hermeneutics of poetry. The theologian must possess what Gadamer calls *Zugehörigkeit*, that is, *belonging-ness*, as Richard Palmer translates the German word. This belonging-ness is much more than just being there; it means constituting and being-constituted-by the life, prayers, liturgy and life-experience of the community.²⁴

And so, finally, we bring forth our final and concluding thought. The apparitions of Mary of Guadalupe—and in a sense, all genuine Marian apparitions—are the poetry of the Trinitarian God, who, like any true lover, wishes to continue His conversation with His beloved, with His children, particularly those who, like Juan Diego, are among the smallest of His People. Mary then becomes the ongoing song, the never ending poetry of her Son, beckoning her children to gather together to celebrate, united by faith and seeking commitment, encouraged by hope and awaiting deliverance from the structures of sin, fed and renewed by love pursuing its plenitude in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18).

²³Heidegger, *Poetry*, 211-228.

²⁴Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: J. C. Mohr, 1960), 438.