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THE APPARITION OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE: THE IMAGE, THE ORIGIN OF THE PILGRIMAGE

An Interim Report on a Project in Progress

When I was asked to prepare this paper about a year ago, I had hoped to be able to report the results of a proposed sociological survey which would give some picture of the influence of Guadalupan devotion on the thinking and feeling of the people of Mexico and to assess the effect of Guadalupe as a unifying symbol for these people. Unfortunately, the amount of time and work required on the first two phases of the study, the historical and scientific, was far greater than at first anticipated. The historical phase is just at present being completed and the scientific has just begun.

The problem with the historical aspects of the study—and a great one—was a seemingly seventy-year lacuna in documents. The periods of upset in Mexico, both civil and religious, were unkind to historical documents. Many were lost, some possibly destroyed and others taken out of the country by collectors of colonial documents. A considerable search had to be undertaken to find relevant documents and this took considerable time.

The scientific examination of the Guadalupan Image had to await the assembly of a qualified scientific team and the necessary funding to undertake such a study. It is to be noted that this is not a scientific report but rather a description of a project for which the experimental design for the anthropological-sociological phase is still in preparation.

It will be the intent here to report (1) the purpose of these studies, (2) what has been done to date, and (3) what is hoped to be achieved in the future.

(1) In August, 1977, a study was commissioned by Mr. William Carrigan, a member of CARA's Board of Directors, to investigate the devotional life of American Catholics. His concern was

that, since Vatican II, many devotional practices which were common in the Church before the Council had been dropped or at least seemingly discouraged. Devotion to the Mother of God in particular seemed to be greatly diminished. It was felt that it would be useful to find out just what the feelings and opinions of the average Catholics were regarding devotional practices today. While it would seem that particular devotions arose in the past because of the needs and interests of the people and such devotions continued as long as the needs and interests of the people were met, at present the termination of earlier devotions seems to have taken place by quasi-clerical decree rather than by any relationship with the needs of the people.

In the area of Marian devotion, it was thought wise to investigate one of the major apparitions of Our Lady in as scientific as possible a manner. In a time when so much interest was evidenced in the scientific study of the Shroud of Turin, it was thought that such an approach would be a dramatic start for a Marian study and that, if scientific methodology would prove supportive of the apparition, devotion to Our Lady would be fostered. In addition, such an approach would quite naturally give some indication of the devotional life and popular religiosity of the people who practiced devotion to Our Lady.

After some reflection it was decided to concentrate on the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe for a number of reasons:

- (a) The apparitions of Tepeyac antedated those of Lourdes and Fatima;
- (b) The apparitions took place on the American Continent and for this reason would have greater appeal to American Catholics;
- (c) The image of Guadalupe, purportedly given by Mary herself, was a concrete artifact, eminently suited to scientific study.

The specific purpose of this phase of the study of devotional life is threefold:

- (a) to attempt to discover whether there is objective historical, scientific evidence for the validity of the apparitions and the miraculous image of Guadalupe,
- (b) to offer support for increased relevant devotion to the

- Mother of God on the part of all Catholics; and,
(c) to give fraternal support and foster greater unity between Mexican-Americans and other American Catholics.
(2) What has been done to date.

The Story

It would seem best to begin with the story of Guadalupe. The brief description given here is taken from Dr. Philip Callahan's *The Tilma Under Infra-Red Radiation*, published by CARA.¹

On December 9, 1531, Juan Diego, an Indian convert, was on his way to the village of Tlatelolco to attend Mass. As he passed the base of Tepeyac Hill his attention was drawn to a brilliant light and singing on the summit.

And while he was looking toward the hilltop, facing the east, from which came the celestial song, suddenly the singing stopped and he heard someone calling as if from the top of the hill, saying "Juan" (Luis Lazo de la Vega, 1649).

Juan Diego climbed the hill and at the summit saw the Blessed Virgin Mary "standing in the midst of glorious light." She spoke to him in his Indian tongue and told him that she was the Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God; she requested that a shrine be built in her honor for the succor and protection of the peoples of Mexico.

Juan Diego went straight to Fray Juan de Zumárraga, the as-yet-unconsecrated Bishop of Mexico City, with the Virgin's request. The Bishop, having heard of Juan Diego, asked him to return on another day. He apparently hoped to discourage the devout Indian from spreading the story.

Juan Diego returned that same day to Tepeyac Hill and there again saw the "Queen of Heaven who was even then standing there where he first saw Her" (Luis Lazo de la Vega, 1649). Since night had fallen he returned home.

The next day, which was Sunday, he attended Mass in the village of Tlatelolco and then went immediately to the Bishop's palace in Mexico City. After some difficulty, he was shown before the Bishop

¹ P. Callahan, *The Tilma Under Infra-Red Radiation: An Infrared and Artistic Analysis of the Image of the Virgin Mary in the Basilica of Guadalupe*, CARA Studies on Popular Devotion, Vol. II: Guadalupan Studies, No. 3 (Washington, D.C.: CARA, 1981).

who questioned him in detail about what he had witnessed on Tepyac Hill. The Bishop, thinking again to discourage Juan Diego, requested a sign from the Lady on the hill. Juan Diego returned to the hill and the Virgin promised to grant the Bishop's request the following morning. In the meantime, Juan's uncle became seriously ill and Juan was prevented from returning on the next morning.

The day after, December 12, according to tradition, he was again passing the hill, this time on the way to summon a priest for his dying relative, when the Virgin came down the hill to meet him. She understood why Juan was concerned and told him not to fear for his uncle for "he had Her for his Mother for health and protection; he should not need anything else, and did not need to worry" (Miguel Sánchez, 1648).

She instructed Juan to:

Go up to the mountain to the same place where you have seen me, talked with me, and heard me, and there in that place cut and gather and keep all the roses and flowers that you will find there, and bring them down here to my presence (Miguel Sánchez, 1648).

It was December and a cold icy winter but Juan did as the Virgin instructed. On the summit, he found a garden of roses and other flowers and gathered them into his tilma (an outer blanket-like garment tied at the shoulder and draped across the front and back of the body). He carried them down to the Virgin and she rearranged them in the tilma and said:

These roses and flowers are the sign which you are to take to the Bishop, and for your part you are to say to him that with these he will know whose will it is who asked, and the faithfulness of him who brings them (Miguel Sánchez, 1648).

She cautioned Juan that no one was to see what he carried in his tilma except the Bishop. Juan returned to Mexico City and after waiting a long period was ushered into the presence of Bishop Don Fray de Zumárraga.

He opened the clean mantle to present the gift of Heaven to the lucky Bishop, who, anxiously watching and waiting to receive it, saw on the mantle a Holy Flowering, a miraculous Springtime, a miniature garden of roses, lilies, carnations, irises, furze, jasmines and violets. When all of them fell from the cloak, they left painted on it the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, in

Her Holy Image, which even today conserves itself, is guarded and venerated in Her Sanctuary of Guadalupe (Miguel Sánchez, 1648).

They all knelt and venerated the miraculous image on the tilma. In the meantime the Virgin appeared to Juan's uncle and cured him of his illness.

On December 26, 1531, the holy painting on the tilma was carried to the new chapel, called the Hermitage, at the foot of the Tepeyac Hill. The Image was housed in the Hermitage from 1531 to 1622, when construction of a large basilica was begun and it was moved to a temporary church. In 1709, that beautiful basilica was completed and the painting placed above the main altar. This historic old basilica had become damaged with time, so that on December 12, 1976, the beautiful new Shrine to Saint Mary of Guadalupe was dedicated and the painting installed above the main altar where it is located at present, behind glass and in view for all.

A. *History of Guadalupe*

From the beginning of the study, there was great concern that the events of the apparitions be determined and scrutinized carefully by critical-historical methodology. CARA has worked in close collaboration with El Centro de Estudios Guadalupanos, a group of distinguished Mexican historians. The work of critical examination of historical events of Guadalupe was undertaken by this Center. A work published in 1931, *La Aparición de Santa María de Guadalupe*, by Primo Feliciano Velázquez,² was judged by the Guadalupean scholars as the most accurate and complete account of the Guadalupean apparitions extant. It was decided to make a careful examination of this work and bring out a new critical edition. The text of this edition is presently being published.

Also in preparation is a shorter, "Reader's Digest," version of Velázquez' book which CARA will translate into English and publish in the Spring of 1983. This shorter version is intended for wide popular distribution in the United States.

² P. F. Velázquez, *La aparición de Santa María de Guadalupe* (Mexico City, Imprenta Patricio Sanz, 1931).

B. *Bibliography*

From the beginning of the study, a search was undertaken to seek out Guadalupan documents. As mentioned above, between religious and political upheavals and the zeal of collectors of colonial documents of New Spain, many important documents had been lost. Under the direction of the Center for Guadalupan Studies, a renewed search was made in Mexico. Under Fr. Ernest J. Burrus, S.J., a CARA Associate, a search for documents in the U.S. and Europe was undertaken.

As new documents were uncovered, together with the realization that no complete Guadalupan Bibliography existed, a major effort was undertaken to prepare a bibliography which would be as complete as possible and would also give some critical evaluation of the manuscripts and publications. Work on this bibliography has been going on for the past two years. Publication date is set for mid-1983.

C. *Documentation*

In the quest for Guadalupan documents, two developments are of particular interest—the discovery of two manuscripts of the *Nican Mopohua* and the investigation of the claim that the United States, through General Winfield Scott, removed important Guadalupan documents from Mexico at the time of the Mexican-American War.

Nican Mopohua

The charge that Guadalupan manuscripts had been taken from Mexico in 1847 by General Scott was first made by Mariano Cuevas in his *Historia de la Iglesia en México (History of the Church in Mexico)*.³ The most important document Cuevas asserted to have been taken was the famous *Nican Mopohua*. Fr. Burrus refutes this claim in *A Major Guadalupan Question Resolved*, a monograph published by CARA in 1979.⁴

³ M. Cuevas, S.J., *Historia de la Iglesia en México*, 5 vols. (El Paso, Texas, 1928).

⁴ E. J. Burrus, S.J., *A Major Guadalupan Question Resolved: Did General Scott Seize the Valeriano Account of the Guadalupan Apparitions?* CARA Studies on Popular Devotion, Vol. II: Guadalupan Studies, No. 2 (Washington, D.C.: CARA, 1979).

In the second monograph in the Guadalupan series, Fr. Burrus gives a scholarly reply to the question first raised by Mariano Cuevas in his *History of the Church in Mexico*. Cuevas asserted that a most important Guadalupan document had been taken from Mexico in 1847 by General Winfield Scott and never returned to Mexico. The document in question is the *Nican Mopohua*, which is called by some Mexican Guadalupan scholars the "gospel of Guadalupe." The document is a report made by Juan Diego, the Indian who was the recipient of Our Lady's visitation at Tepeyac. The account was given by Juan Diego to Antonio Valeriano, a learned Indian convert to Christianity, who wrote down the account. It is written in the Aztec language, Nahuatl, and the title given it, *Nican Mopohua*, is simply the first two words of the account.

Fr. Burrus has had to do quite a bit of literary detective work to answer the question as to whether or not General Scott had in fact removed this manuscript from Mexico and, more importantly, does this document still exist? And, if so, where is it? Fr. Burrus tells us that General Scott did take a collection of documents in 1847. These documents were those in the possession of the Mexican Jesuits. These documents moreover were returned to Mexico in 1854.

What gave rise to Cuevas' speculation seems to be the fact that a collection of documents had been given to the Jesuits by a friend, Sigüenza y Góngora. Originally this collection was thought to include the *Nican Mopohua*. Research indicates, however, that if it was ever in this collection, it had been removed by 1752, long before Scott was on the scene. That it was not present in the Sigüenza collection is attested to by many scholars who sought it after that date, as Fr. Burrus reports in his article. This important document was present in Mexico in 1649, however, since we have a publication of Luis Lasso de la Vega who was able to copy and publish the text.

For the past ten years or so, it was known that a manuscript was in the New York Public Library which some felt was the *Nican Mopohua* thought to have been purloined by Scott. Fr. Burrus was able to refute the charge against Scott and gave a report of the peregrination of the manuscript from Mexico to Europe to

its present resting place in New York.

Interestingly enough, when Fr. Burrus inspected the *Nican Mopohua* manuscript in New York, he discovered there were in fact two copies of the document: "the first and oldest (clearly in a sixteenth-century script and on what seems to be Maguey paper) is incomplete . . . the second document . . . is complete. The writing is somewhat later than that of the first manuscript; I would put it at about 1590 to 1610. . . ." Since the apparitions are reported to have taken place in 1531, the origin of the first document is quite close to it in time.

A wide search for the *Nican Mopohua* was made by CARA and CARA associates in Mexico, the U.S. and Europe, but no other copies have been uncovered. (We are particularly grateful for the work of Dr. Luciano G. Rusich who spent considerable time searching for Guadalupan documents in the Vatican Library.) At present, the two manuscripts mentioned above are being studied by Mexican scholars, and a report of their findings will be published later in CARA's series of monographs. The discovery of these documents is an exciting event for Guadalupan scholars, since it evidently provides a direct report of the apparitions of Guadalupe by the eyewitness, Juan Diego.

Fr. Burrus gives us a very scholarly report of his findings.⁶ The first part of the article contains his report with copious notes. The second part of the article gives more complete documentation of his findings. A very complete bibliography is also provided.

D. *Scientific Examination of the Holy Image*

A second phase of the study was to investigate those features of the Image of Guadalupe which are purportedly inexplicable or miraculous. Three such features are generally reported to be inexplicable:

- the absence of deterioration of the material of the ayate (woven of Maguey fibers);

³ Ibid., p. 56.

⁶ E. J. Burrus, S.J., *The Oldest Copy of the NICAN MOPOHUA*, CARA Studies on Popular Devotion, Vol. II: Guadalupan Studies, No. 4 (Washington, D.C.: CARA, 1981).

- the almost perfect preservation of the pigments and colors;
- the image in the eye of the Virgin.

The image of the Virgin appears on the rough cloak of Juan Diego. This cloak (ayate, tilma) was woven by Maguey fibers. Such fibers usually disintegrate in a period of several years. The surface of the image and the surrounding area of the cloak seems to have suffered no deterioration in 450 years.

Artists have on a number of occasions tried to analyze the pigments in the Holy Image and have professed to be at a loss to explain them. An initial Infra-Red Study was undertaken by Dr. Philip S. Callahan in an initial scientific examination of the Image.

Infrared photography is an accepted technique utilized in critical studies of old paintings. It is of great value in obtaining information on the historical derivation, method of rendition, and validity of documents and paintings. Because infrared wavelengths are longer than visible wavelengths, certain special techniques are required but in general the same methods as those utilized in visible light photography are used.

Pigments from plants are usually transparent to infrared and offer little interference or contribution to black and white infrared photographs (*Applied Infrared Photography*, 1977).⁷ Certain of the pigments in the painting may be plant-derived and it is important to keep this characteristic of plant pigment in mind.

Since pigments vary in the way that they transmit or reflect longwave infrared, the technique may be used to detect the presence of overpaintings or other alterations. Infrared can, for instance, render a varnish overcoating transparent and enable the researcher to see an otherwise obscured painting. A varnish that has darkened and deteriorated with age may be rendered practically invisible so that great detail can be observed from beneath. Dirt-covered, faded, or discolored drawings may show up in detail on infrared film.

Pigments of ancient drawings and natural art materials, such

⁷ Cf. Eastman Kodak Company, *Applied Infrared Photography* (Rochester, N.Y., 1972), pp. 13-14.

as linseed oil, waxes, and mineral (inorganic) colors, show up differently from modern lacquers, varnishes, aniline or polyester-based paints. Aniline-derived pigments are similar under visible light to ancient pigments but are totally different in appearance on infrared film (Coremans, 1938).⁸

Infrared photography is recommended before any restoration or cleaning is attempted on old paintings. Most importantly, one can often detect under-sketching accomplished before the artist applied paint to the canvas. Infrared photography also enables one to determine the nature of the sizing under the paint, providing the layers are not too thick. No study of art work can be considered as complete until the techniques of infrared photography have been utilized, and certainly no valid scientific study is complete without such an analysis.

Dr. Callahan gives the following summary conclusions from his close study of the infrared photographs:

1. The original figure including the rose robe, blue mantle, hands and face, . . . is inexplicable. In terms of this infrared study, there is no way to explain either the kind of color pigments utilized, or the maintenance of color luminosity and brightness of pigments over the centuries. Furthermore, when consideration is given to the fact that there is no under-drawing, sizing, or over-varnish, and that the weave of the fabric is itself utilized to give the portrait depth, no explanation of the portrait is possible by infrared techniques. It is remarkable that in over four centuries there is no fading or cracking of the original figure on any portion of the agave tilma, which—being unsized—should have deteriorated centuries ago.

2. Some time after the original image was formed, the moon and tassel were added by human hands, perhaps for some symbolic reason since the moon was important to both Moorish-Spanish and Aztec mythology.

3. Some time after the tassel and moon were added, the gold and black line decorations, angel, Aztec fold of the robe, sunburst, stars and background were painted, probably during the 17th century. The additions were by human hands and impart a Spanish

⁸ P. Coremans, "Les rayons infra-rouges; leur nature; leurs applications dans les musées." *Bull. Musées Royaux Art Hist.* 6 (1938): 87-91.

Gothic motif to the painting. In all probability, at that time the tilma was mounted on a solid support, and the orange coloring of the sunburst and white fresco added to the background. The entire tilma for the first time was completely covered with paint. It seems unlikely that Juan Diego could have worn a tilma, stiffened with fresco on the fabric, to the Bishop's palace. Therefore, the original must have been the simple figure on the cloth. . . .

4. It is known that during the great flood of 1629, the Holy Portrait was taken from the Hermitage Chapel by canoe to the cathedral in Mexico City and that His Excellency Archbishop Don Francisco de Manzoyzuniga promised not to return the Virgin to the Hermitage until he could take her back with "dry feet" (Demarest and Taylor, 1956).⁹ It is my opinion that at this time, between 1629 and 1634 (when the image was returned to the Hermitage), the tilma was folded at two different times into three sections causing the double fold creases across the lower and upper third of the body.

In all probability, the Holy Image, especially at the bottom and around the edges, suffered some water damage and the angel and other decorations, as well as the outer fresco white, were added to cover up the damage. This is in no way different from the patches added to the Shroud of Turin to cover the fire damage to the Holy Relic.

All of these extra human additions must have been applied after 1634, when the Holy Image was returned to the Hermitage, or during its five-year sojourn in Mexico City, since there are no fold lines across the background.

5. The pigments, utilized for the additions, can probably be easily identified, and indeed I have myself speculated as to what they may be. There is no way to identify any of the original pigments without obtaining samples of the colors for a modern chemical analysis and even then it may be impossible to identify them.

In conclusion, the original Holy Image is inexplicable but the tassel and moon were probably added in the 16th century by an Indian, and the Gothic decorations and background sunburst

⁹ D. Demarest and C. Taylor, *The Dark Virgin, The Book of Our Lady of Guadalupe*. Translated from Spanish (Coley Taylor, Inc. Publ., 1956).

were also added by human hands, probably in the 17th century, in order to cover water damage and to preserve the outer fabric.

Samples will be taken from the Image and chemical analysis of these samples will be undertaken when permission is granted by the Abbot of Guadalupe.

A most interesting phenomenon also reported: the image of Juan Diego—to whom the Virgin appeared—seems to exist in the eyes of the Image, just as such an image would appear in a living eye (Purkinje effect). The reports of these previous observations and pictures of the phenomenon are being studied, and the International Eye Foundation has agreed to do a careful study of this phenomenon.

(3) What remains to be done.

As is quite obvious, much remains to be done in both the historical area as well as the scientific area. The major task which remains, over and above these two areas, is a sociological-anthropological study of the effects of Guadalupe on the people of Mexico. The importance of Guadalupe as a strong unifying symbol for nation and race is quite clear. What the perceptions of this symbol are, how it affects the people, will be a most interesting study.

A number of interesting questions may perhaps be answered by such a study:

— Is Guadalupe a purely religious symbol? Is it now perhaps a politico-religious symbol or even a national symbol with very little religious connotation?

— As a religious symbol, does it foster devotion to God, to Christ, or does it foster merely a superstitious devotion to the Virgin?

— What relationship does the symbol of Guadalupe have, if any, with the ancient Indian symbols?

Sociologists at the National University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) and the Ibero-American University (Universidad Ibero-Americano) have expressed interest in this phase of the project and have indicated interest in working with CARA.

A first step is to study the relatively large number of studies existing on Mexican culture, both ancient and modern. While

there is a general feeling that the methodology ultimately selected will include interviews with a carefully selected sample and probably a questionnaire, it is felt that further delineation of the design should await the results of the study of whatever information is presently available.

CARA would welcome suggestions from this conference either at this time or at a later date.

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