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Mother of Death, Mother of Rebirth

The Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe

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WITHIN THE URBAN congestion of Mexico City, before a hill that was once the site of a principal pilgrimage center of the Aztec religion, stands the Basilica of Guadalupe. Enshrined in the church is a painting of the Virgin Mary, called Our Lady of Guadalupe, which has been the focus of Mexican religious life for 400 years. According to the pious tradition, this image is different from every other image of Mary because it was not made with human hands. On the hill of Tepeyac, former location of a temple to the Indian goddess Tonantzin, the Virgin Mary appeared to an Indian convert named Juan Diego in the year 1531. As a sign to the Bishop of Mexico that a church should be built on the site, Mary instructed the Indian to pick roses of Castile, which he would find growing on the December desert soil nearby and carry them to the Bishop in his *tilma*, a native cloak. Juan Diego did this, but when he spilled out the roses before the great Bishop in his episcopal palace in Mexico City, the real sign appeared: a full-length painting of the Virgin Mary miraculously imprinted on his *tilma* itself.

The painting that hangs in the Basilica today is indeed painted on a course piece of indigenous cloth, six and a half feet long and three and a half feet wide, woven of fibers of the maguey plant It shows a woman standing alone, atop a crescent moon, encircled by rays of the sun. It is widely considered among Mexicans, and by pious visitors, to be the "most perfect" image of Mary, since she herself painted it, and a "prodigious" or "portentious" image, a sign in which, to quote Octavio Paz, "each epoch and each Mexican has read his destiny" (Lafaye: xix).

This article explains the rise to prominence of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexican culture. First, I will show that the Virgin Mary

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began as an apocalyptic symbol and represented the millennial expectations and terrors of the Spaniards and the Indians in their traumatic and world-shattering encounter. Second, I will draw upon first-hand accounts and historical studies of religion in colonial Mexico to describe the rise of the cult of Guadalupe among both the Indians and the Spaniards of Mexico City. At the beginning, the Virgin of Guadalupe meant quite different things to these two groups. The Indians read the image as restoring to them a coherent world. Through Guadalupe, they took back their world, even though the Spaniards were now in charge. To the Spaniards, on the other hand, Guadalupe was another image of the Immaculate Conception, one among many such images they held holy. She represented Roman Catholic orthodoxy and a continuation of Spanish traditions.

Finally, I will show how both Indians and Spaniards devised a nationalistic interpretation of Guadalupe that became a way of drawing all Mexicans, conquerers and conquered, into one people. When prolonged plagues in the eighteenth century threatened the physical and moral life of all the citizens of Mexico City, the syncretism of the image of Guadalupe made this image ideally suited to renew the hopes and energies of the city. An eighteenth-century Mexican text provides a valuable eye-witness account of that time in the history of Mexico City and vividly portrays the fervent outburst of Marian devotion during the worse of the devastating plagues.

Various historical trends presaged this collective response to the Virgin of Guadalupe, but it also depended on the resonance of the image of Mary with the ancient archetype of the Great Mother, in her dual image as dreadful and nurturing, granting both death and life. Meso-american religion provided probably the most highly developed expression of the terrible, devouring goddess in history,[1] and Spanish Catholicism brought to Mexico the largely tamed, benevolent vision of Mary as a nurturing and inspiring mother and maiden. In the clash of these two polar aspects of the divine as female, most interpreters judge that the Spanish images thoroughly replaced the dreadful image of the Aztec goddess. In many ways, the Spanish religion did destroy and supplant the Aztec religion. The image of Mary as Guadalupe, for instance, could never be

[1]The enormous stone statue of the goddess Coatlicue, on display in the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City, is the most well-known representation of the Aztec goddess This impressive masterpiece of Aztec art shows Coatlicue as a massive blocklike figure Her head is formed by two snakes emerging from her neck She wears a necklace of sacrificial hands and hearts, and her skirt is made of intertwining serpents In appearance she is most similar to the image of Kali, the goddess of death in Indian On Kali, see Kinsley

mistaken for her predecessor Tonantzin, at least on the surface. But in other ways Mary did take on the awesome, dreadful qualities of the Aztec mother goddess. This enriched her religious significance in Mexico and made her not only a central symbol of the Mexican nation and its destiny, but also a numinous symbol of the *mysterium tremendum*, the dreadful and fascinating holy in feminine form.

DEATH AND THE VIRGIN: EUROPEAN CONQUEST AS MILLENIAL BATTLE

The discovery of America was a world-shattering event for both the European discoverers and the Americans discovered. For Europeans, it meant not only that maps of the earth had to be radically revised, but it also challenged at its roots the self-perception of Europeans as inhabitants of an ordered, delimited world with definite known boundaries, created by God and explained in the Christian Bible (O'Gorman: 128-29). Here was a land mass and a massive population that the prevalent cosmology of Christian Europe was unable to categorize. The discovery of America threw European thought into chaos. At first, it was nearly impossible to find any categories with which to understand the discovery of a land and a people never before imagined to exist.

Columbus had discovered something new, and although he did not even begin to fathom the newness of what he had found until his third voyage, he had already made Europe old. Writing to the Spanish royal household about his third journey to America, where he had discovered a large, unexpected mass of land in the southern hemisphere, which we now know as South America, Columbus said he had gone on "a new voyage to the new heaven and earth, which up till now has remained hidden" (O'Gorman: 100). So began the apocalyptic interpretation of the discovery and conquest of Spanish America; Columbus's reference to the Book of Revelation opened a rich vein of meaning for Europeans coming to terms intellectually and religiously with the New World.

If something new was being discovered, or born, or "invented" (to use O'Gorman's term) in America, something was also dying. Apocalyptic prophesies have always both heartened and terrified; they speak of a new paradise being born, but born out of the ruins of war, death, and destruction. In the Spanish encounter with America there was plenty of death and destruction The violence was often interpreted in apocalyptic terms—and over it always was the watchful face of the Virgin Mary

Mary had already become associated in the minds of the conquering Spaniards with the conquest—or the Reconquest—of the Moors in

Spain. In particular, a small statue of Mary, the Spanish Lady of Guadalupe, located in a monastery in Estremadura, had become the center of an important Marian cult associated with the Spanish royalty. According to legend, King Alonso XI of Castile had defeated the Moors at Salado in 1340 after commending his fortunes to the Virgin of Guadalupe, and as a consequence he dedicated the royal house to financial patronage of the monastery. From 1340 to 1561, Our Lady of Guadalupe at Estremadura was at the hub of Spanish religious life, and was closely identified with the *Reconquista* (Brown: 222-23).[2] The miracles of the Lady of Guadalupe included many cases of miraculous liberation of Christian prisoners of the Moors (Lafaye: 223) [3]

The Christian struggle against the Moors for rule of Spain had easily taken on apocalyptic tones for the Christians. The strength and early success of Islam, and its opposition to Christianity, seemed to invite comparison with the power of the Antichrist described in Revelation (McGinn: 34). The destruction and defeat of this Satanic force was laid at the feet of the Virgin, who watched over the battles as a heavenly general. In guaranteeing victory for the Christians, she inflicted death on the Moors and became in the process a sign of apocalyptic destruction.

The Conquest of Mexico was understood as a continuation of the Reconquest. Cortés' chaplain, Francisco López de Gómara, wrote in his *Historia general de las Indias* that "The Conquest of the Indians began when the conquest of the Moors had ended, in order that Spaniards may always war against the infidels" (Lafaye: 34) Again, Mary aided in the expedition. Gómara claimed that during crucial battles with the Indians in 1519 Mary sometimes cast dust in the Indians' eyes so they could not see to fight (Padden: 143). The Spaniards won a great battle with the Indians at Tabasco on March 25, 1519, and Bernal Díaz del Castillo reported that, "As it was Lady Day we gave to the town . . . the name of Santa María de la Victoria" (Díaz del Castillo: 59) It is significant that on the *Noche Triste*, in which Cortés' troops were driven out of the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlán and many Spaniards died, the statue of Mary that

[2] After the reconquest of Granada on January 1, 1492, which officially marks the end of the *Reconquista*, Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand made a votive trip to Guadalupe While they were at the monastery of Guadalupe they ordered ships placed under the orders of Columbus 1561 was the date of the building of El Escorial, which replaced Guadalupe as the center of royal religious life in Spain (Brown 114-115)

[3] These "miraculous" liberations were aided by material means the release of Christians held prisoner by Moors was often obtained with ransom money from the Hieronymite order, which ran the monastery of Guadalupe (Brown 126)

Cortés had placed upon the altar of the temple to Huitzilopochtli on the Templo Mayor was lost (Díaz del Castillo: 307). In this great defeat of the Spaniards, Mary was missing. Had she suddenly—capriciously?—withheld her favor? If this is how it seemed to the Spaniards, it added another dimension to the association of Mary with death.

THE AZTECS AND THE DREADFUL GODDESS

Images of Mary must have been associated with death and destruction by the natives who allied themselves with or battled against the Spaniards in 1519 to 1521. Cortés and his troops carried many small images and banners of Mary with them on the Conquest, and they placed the statues in native temples after the temples had been cleansed of their pagan idols and the blood of sacrifices (Padden: 143). After the battle in Tabasco, for instance, the chiefs were instructed in the basic beliefs of Christianity before an image of Mary with the Christ Child. Díaz del Castillo says that, "The Caciques replied that they liked the look of the great *Teleciguata* ["Lady"], and [begged] that she might be given them to keep in their town" (63). Cortés seems to have had an inexhaustible supply of these Marian images, which he left behind in every town along his path from the ocean to the central capital of Mexico City. It can be assumed that these images meant something different to the conquered Indians than they did to the Spaniards and that, whatever nurturing and benevolent characteristics Mary came to take on for the Indians, at first she seemed overwhelmingly to be *La Conquistadora* who had arrived bearing death, destruction, and humiliation.

Since the Aztecs at that time were as apocalyptic in their thinking as some of the Spaniards, it is likely that they also attached to the image of Mary apocalyptic significance. The Aztec cosmogony was cyclical, based on the myth of four world ages, each of which had ended with a different kind of cataclysmic destruction (Nicholson: 398). The fifth and final age, or Sun (4 Ollin), in which the Aztecs believed they lived, was to terminate with great earthquakes. The practice of human sacrifice, which so horrified the Spaniards, apparently was based on the premise that "fertility, general well-being, even the very existence of the universe depended on the nourishment of the gods, especially the solar deity, by their preferred sustenance, human hearts and blood" (Nicholson: 424).

Most of us know the story of how the Aztec emperor, Montezuma, brooded over reports that white men from the east had landed on his shores in 1519 and were slowly moving across the land toward his capi-

tal, everywhere assuming sovereignty in the name of a distant king, forbidding human sacrifice, and replacing the images of the gods with one of a goddess. Montezuma decided that Quetzalcóatl, or at least his ambassador, was returning to claim his throne, as he had promised in the ancient myths that he would return "at the end of the world" (Padden: 122-31) Montezuma's despair, as he viewed with growing alarm the signs of the imminent end of his Sun, was an important factor in the Conquest of Mexico by Cortés and his men.

The Spanish destruction of the Indian temples and statues of the gods led many other Indians to despair as well. The speech of a group of Indian nobles to the Franciscan missionaries who had told them their gods were false demons and asked them to convert to Christianity speaks eloquently of why the end of their religion seemed the end of the world for the natives.

> They [the ancestors] said
> that it is through the gods that all live . . .
> that they give us our daily fare
> and all that we drink, all that we eat,
> our sustenance,
> maize, beans, amaranth, chia
> They we supplicate for water, for rain,
> with which everything flourishes on the earth (Nicholson: 410)

With the death of their gods, the Indians felt they were watching the death of their world. In some ways, they were. The Indian way of life was thoroughly disrupted by the Spanish colonizers. After the first years of anarchy, the supreme authority in New Spain rested with the Audencia. The first Audencia, under the authority of Nuño de Guzmán, was cruel and greedy, and forced many natives into virtual slavery There were reports of Indians "hanging themselves or taking poison in acts of mass suicide, caused by the profound shock at the overthrow of their culture," and Lewis Hanke reports that the terror caused by the notorious Guzmán was so great that in Mexico cq 1530 Indians desisted from relations with their wives to avoid introducing new children into this world (26). During the epidemics of the 1570s and 1590s the native population declined from 5 million to about two and a half million, and during the winter of 1595-96 it appeared that the entire Indian population might be wiped out (Phelan: 42). The missionaries themselves wondered aloud what the Indians must think of a religion whose introduction coincided with the virtual destruction of their race (Phelan: 92).

In their traditional religion, the natives of Mexico had associated

death and misfortune most consistently with goddesses. Indeed, according to the Jungian scholar Erich Neumann, Mexico is the site of the purest expression of the Terrible Mother (179-208). At the foundation of the Aztec polytheism was a concept of a sexually dualistic, primordial power, called Ometeotl, the male-female deity who provided the basis for all the other gods and goddesses. Ometeotl was a distant, transcendent deity with no cult, something like a "High God." The male half of the paired couple was linked with the fire, maize, the first man, and especially the solar gods. The female half was linked with the mother goddesses, the earth and fertility, the first woman, and the moon. Below this primal pair was an amazing variety of gods and goddesses, we have names for 50 different goddesses in the sources (Brundage). But these deities can be grouped in "deity complexes" based on the themes they represent (Nicholson: 408). The goddesses, even more than the gods, seem to constantly overlap and become each other, and to revolve around a limited number of recurring ideas, all connected with the earth (Brundage).

In the Valley of Mexico a cluster of goddesses existed, all related to maternity, whose principal names were Teteoinnan ("Mother of the Gods"), Toci ("Our Grandmother"), Tonantzin ("Our Holy Mother"), Cihuacoatl ("Snake Woman"), Coatlicue ("Serpent Skirt"), and Xochiquetzal ("Precious Flower"). All of the earth-mother goddesses were associated both with exuberant fertility and horrifying death, the earth as both womb and tomb of life (Nicholson 422). Sahagún records the Aztec belief that Cihuacoatl, despite being the patron of women giving birth, walked at night "weeping and wailing, a dread phantom foreboding war" (3). Coatlicue, the divine mother who gave birth to gods and humans, was also thought to feed on human corpses and was called the "dirt devourer" (Hultkrantz· 269; Hellbom: 38). Teteoinnan, the Mother of the Gods, also called Toci and Tonantzin, was the patron of physicians and mid-wives, female fortune-tellers, and sweat-houses—a goddess of birth, health, and the future Yet she demanded human sacrifice, much of which was performed at the principal temple of Tonantzin on Tepeyac (Sahagún: 4). Xochiquetzal, the goddess of sexual passion, was also thought to have been the first to die in war, and women who died in childbirth—who were compared to warriors dying in the capture of a prisoner—merged with her horrifying aspect, haunting crossroads as death monsters (Nicholson 422).

This ambiguous, life-giving and life-destroying goddess seems to have lingered on in Mexico after the official gods of the state cult, Huitzilopochtli and the other solar deities, had disappeared under-

ground or been thoroughly destroyed. Perhaps this is because the goddesses were more ancient, more autochthonous and local, and were involved in the daily routine of life, birth, and death, which persisted even after the state apparatus of the Aztec empire had been destroyed. Certainly the survival of the goddesses is partly due to the syncretistic linking of them with the Virgin Mary. For whatever reason, the dreadful goddess of death continued to roam through Indian communities, snatching more victims every day.

At the end of the Conquest, the Virgin Mary showed two different faces to the people of Mexico. To the Spaniards, she represented the triumph of the Conquest. To the Indians, she stood for the despair and destruction of the conquered.

BIRTH AND THE VIRGIN: GUADALUPE AND A NEW INDIAN BIRTH

But among the Indians near Mexico City a cult of Mary arose around an obscure painting of Mary called Guadalupe. This image was associated with an Indian goddess, but it took on new, life-supporting qualities never seen in the Aztec goddesses.

The cult of Guadalupe began as an Indian cult closely linked with the earlier cult of Tonantzin, which had originally been there. Sahagún described the pilgrimages and ritual offerings that had been associated with the hill of Tepeyac before the Spaniards came.

> Close to the mountains there are three or four places where the natives used to make very solemn sacrifices, and to which they came from distant lands One of these is here in Mexico, where there is a hill called Tepeyácac, and the Spaniards call it Tepeaquilla, and now it is called Our Lady of Guadalupe, in this place they had a temple dedicated to the mother of the gods, which they called Tonantzin which means Our Mother; there they offered sacrifices in honor of this goddess and they came from distant lands, from more than 20 leagues away, from all the regions of Mexico, and brought many offerings, men, women, and children came to these festivals, the gatherings of people in those days were great, and everyone said, "Let's go to the festival of Tonantzin!" (Chauvet 65)

If there was a statue of Tonantzin there, we can assume that she had a rather horrifying appearance and that some of the identifying characteristics of the mother goddess were represented. Sahagún had elsewhere recorded a description of the mother goddess:

> There was liquid rubber on her lips and a circle [of rubber] on each

> cheek. She had cotton flowers She had a ball with palm strips. She had a shell-covered skirt, called a star-skirt. . . . Eagle feathers were strewn over her skirt, . it had white eagle feathers, pointed eagle feathers. Her shield had a golden disc in the center She carried the medicinal herb, *totoicxatl*. She used a broom. (Sahagún: 5)

The entire style of the painting of Our Lady of Guadalupe at Tepeyac is clearly Spanish and not Aztec. Moreover, the painting lacks most of the identifying elements of the mother goddess, except for the "star-skirt," which might be associated with Guadalupe's mantle covered with golden stars.

Notwithstanding the obviously Spanish character of the Virgin of Guadalupe, her early cult was overwhelmingly Indian. Sahagún considered it to be paganism that continued "under the equivocation of this name Tonantzin," which could be used by missionaries as the Nahuatl translation for the title "Our Mother" given to Mary.

> Now that there is built there a church to Our Lady of Guadalupe, who they also call Tonantzin, it gives the preachers occasion to call Our Lady the Mother of God by the name Tonantzin. And this is a thing that should be remedied, because the proper name of the Mother of God, our Lady, is not Tonantzin [Our Mother] but *Dios-inantzin* [Mother of God], it seems to be a satanic invention, to palliate idolatry under the equivocation of this name Tonantzin, and they come now to visit this Tonantzin from far away, as far as before, which devotion is suspicious, because in all parts there are many churches to Our Lady, and they do not go to those, and they come from far lands to this Tonantzin, as in the old days (Chauvet 65)

Sahagún is representative of early ecclesiastical response to this cult. The early Catholic missionaries, like Sahagún, had a limited interpretive system for understanding syncretism. The Christian stories about creation and resurrection, the Christian images of Christ and Mary, were matters of truth and good; the Aztec stories and images were false and demonic. They could not appreciate the Aztec mythology as a profound attempt to come to terms with the dreadful and fascinating heart of reality. The Aztecs were deeply pessimistic, perhaps fatalistic, about the world, but they had an elaborate, coherent symbolic system for making sense of their lives. When this was destroyed by the Spaniards, something new was needed to fill the void and make sense of New Spain, the new world of which they were now a part and in which they had suffered defeat at the hands of outsiders. The image of Guadalupe served that purpose.

Our knowledge of the early Indian perception of Guadalupe derives

not from books but from artistic representations, dances, and songs. The story of the image's miraculous appearance on Juan Diego's cloak was passed on among the local Indians by way of art and song. The myth made the image uniquely theirs, for it came to an Indian, and was created out of native material, on native soil. It was not a Spanish image imported to Mexico. The symbols of sun and moon that appear in the painting, and even the colors used, are universal elements of religious symbolism that had special significance for the Aztecs. For the Indians, it was natural to place a goddess above one of her primary symbols, the moon. If the Spaniards had destroyed the solar cult of Huitzilopochtli and human sacrifice, this new incarnation revealed that the lunar goddess had overshadowed the solar god for a time and ushered in a new age. It was a new age of war, death, and disease, which the mother goddess ever announces with her wailing at the crossroads. But it was an age also of birth and survival, which the goddess guaranteed by her guardianship of the cyclical processes of fertility and growth. Standing over the moon, symbol of her reign, and wearing the star skirt of the mother goddess, bearing the flowers of divinity, Guadalupe watched over death, defeat, and illness and assured the Indians that these aspects of life need not lead to despair. They were protected in the shade of the great Mother Goddess.

The sense of joy experienced by the Indians in the presence of the image of Guadalupe is expressed in the words of a song, collected at the end of the sixteenth century, which was sung at the church of Guadalupe. Here is an English translation of several verses of the song, taken from Mariano Cuevas' Spanish translation of the Nahuatl.

> I took delight in all the many-colored flowers, so sweet-smelling,
> that, startled and magnificant, were scattering,
> with petals half-opened, in your presence, O Mother, Our Holy Mary
>
> By the water's edge (Mary) sang.
> I am the precious plant of youthful buds,
> I am a creation of the one perfect God, but I am the best of his creatures
>
> Your spirit, O Holy Mary, is alive in the picture We men praised her,
> taking after the Great Book [Bible], and danced the perfect dance,
> and you, Bishop, our father, preached there by the shore of the lake
>
> Artistically your spirit was imprinted.
> Oh! In the worshipped canvas your spirit was hidden
> A perfect creation.

Oh! I would live securely here. (23-27)[4]

This song is in part a teaching song, intended to impart Catholic doctrine about Mary (she is a creature, made by God, not a goddess). It focusses on the story of the creation of the painting of Guadalupe "out of flowers." The Indians often made religious images out of flowers, and they could understand the image of Guadalupe as having been made in a similar way. The only appropriate response to this beautiful portrait, the song says, is to worship it by song and dance. Here, before the Holy Mother, the singer is home and will live securely here. The end of the world has led to the birth of a new world, which might be difficult, but is still comprehensible and secure.

GUADALUPE AND THE CREOLE NEW WORLD

But Guadalupe could not have become a national symbol had it not also spoken to the Spanish and creoles of Mexico. For them, the iconography of the image spoke a different language, but the meaning came almost to the same thing: the birth of a new age in Mexico, guaranteed by the election of this country by the heavenly Lady.

The church of Guadalupe seems to have become popular with Spanish residents of Mexico City in the 1550s as a shrine to visit on a Sunday excursion, just as in Madrid the residents would go to the Virgin of Atocha, or in Valladolid to the Virgin of el Prado (Chauvet 231). There were stories of miraculous cures by the Virgin of Guadalupe, especially among the Indians, as early as 1556, and by the end of the sixteenth century a tradition of apparitions to Juan Diego had appeared (Lafaye: 244) But the cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe did not attract widespread creole attention until the publication, within a year of each other, of Miguel Sánchez's book, *Image of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God, of Guadalupe, Honored in her History by the Prophecy of Chapter Twelve of Revelation* (1648), and a detailed Nahuatl account of the apparitions to Juan Diego and the miraculous appearance of the painting, published by Luis Lazo de la Vega, entitled, *The Great Event of the Appearance of the Lady, Queen of Heaven, Holy Mary* (1649).

I focus on the Sánchez book because it deals directly with the symbolism of the painting itself. Sánchez gave to the painting of Guadalupe nationalistic meaning and drew upon a tradition of Spanish apocalypticism, which was to elevate the Virgin of Guadalupe to national signifi-

[4]English translation by Miguel Ramos

cance. It was not remarkable that Sánchez associated the Virgin with the heavenly woman of the book of Revelation. That was part of the intended message of the painting. What was new in the Sánchez book was the nationalistic significance he attached to this image.

Sánchez claimed that the painting of the Lady of Guadalupe was the most perfect replica of the Virgin, and its appearance in Mexico made manifest the special significance of his country. In fact, he said, the conquest of Mexico had been ordained and directed by God only in order that this "most divine image" should appear there (Lafaye: 249) Citing Psalm 48 as evidence that Mary lived on Mount Zion, Sánchez argued that Tepeyac is the new Mount Zion, which makes Mexico the Promised Land. All Marian shrines are alike, he declared, except for this one, which is "a new paradise, set aside, sure, and protected" (Lafaye: 250). He explained that God created the Old World of Europe for Adam, "the first image of God," to be born and then for Christ, "the second Adam," to be born. But the second Eve had not yet arrived, for she awaited the new paradise. Mary's appearance in the "second creation," the second paradise of New Spain, made her the second Eve, the co-redemptress who brought faith and redemption to the New World as Christ had brought it to the Old World (de la Maza: 40).

The Virgin of Guadalupe, Sánchez said, is the woman foreseen by John of Patmos and prophetically described in Revelation 12: "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." A look at the image of Guadalupe will verify that, indeed, it could be considered a drawing of that apocryphal woman. The woman is framed by the sun's rays; she is standing on a half-moon; and the clouds surrounding her and the cherub supporting her both indicate a heavenly setting. But this is no surprise, because it is a stereotyped representation of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception as it was painted at this time in Spain and New Spain.

Painters of religious subjects were allowed little freedom of artistic expression in Counter-Reformation Spain and New Spain. The Council of Trent had recommended that religious art be used to instruct, to strengthen in faith, and to cultivate piety, and this imposed on painters a great responsibility to be accurate and orthodox in their representations. His position as inspecter of painting for the Seville tribunal of the Inquisition led the Spanish painter Francisco Pacheco to write, in his work

entitled *El arte de la pintura* (Brown: 33-57),[5] meticulous instructions as to how to paint religious subjects. Pacheco instructed painters to portray the Immaculate Conception according to the description of the woman of Revelation 12.[6] The Virgin should be painted as in the first spring and bloom of her youth, as a maiden of about twelve or thirteen years, with "grave sweet eyes," golden hair, and beautiful features. Pacheco instructed that her hands be folded on her bosom or joined in prayer, and that she be portrayed in a robe of spotless white, with a mantle or scarf of blue tied with the cord of St. Francis used by the Franciscan monks. The sun should be expressed by a flood of light around her, and the moon under her feet should have horns pointing downwards to indicate it was illumined from above. The twelve stars were to form a crown over her head, and around her should be shown cherubim bearing roses, palms, and lilies. The head of a bruised and vanquished dragon must appear under her feet to reflect not only the struggle with the dragon described in Revelation 12, but also the association of Mary with the prophecy of Genesis 3:15 that "he [the serpent] will bruise your head, and you [the woman] shall bruise his heel" (Jameson: 143).

In practice, painters never followed this model exactly, but they came close. The classic expression of the Spanish Immaculada, the seventeenth-century painting by Murillo that hung in El Escorial, seems to have followed Pacheco nearly to the letter, omitting only the crown of stars and the serpent The Mexican Guadalupe also follows the model, although less exactly. Aside from the obvious features of the encircling sun and the moon under foot, the Virgin is also young, standing alone (without child), and wearing the traditional mantle of blue, spangled with the gold stars mentioned in the vision. At one time there was a gold crown in the painting, but it has faded or chipped away. No roses or lilies are present, but the roses are part of the story, and the dress is rose-colored. Mexican writers make much of the creation of the image "out of roses": Cabrera y Quintero, for instance, described the image in 1737 as "stained in the juice and essence of celestial roses" (127). And Francisco de Florencia wrote that the image created by Mary "exceeds that excellent work of God"—the creation of human beings—because "the Image of God was formed of dust, but the Image of Mary was formed of roses" (no pagination).

[5] Written from 1598-1638, the book was published in 1649 (Brown 33-57) Also see Weismann 3, 115

[6] The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception concerns the moral purity and exceptional status of Mary; it is the doctrine that Mary, when conceived by her parents, was without original sin

The image of Guadalupe is not unique; it is one of many images of the Immaculate Conception that flourished in Spain and New Spain in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This doctrine was a rallying point for Spanish Catholics against the rising threat of Protestantism to the north, and it was carried to Mexico by the Franciscans who made up the first wave of missionaries to follow the conquistadores. The Third Mexican Provincial Council, in 1585, had declared the feast of the Immaculate Conception obligatory in Mexico, on pain of mortal sin. And many of the oldest and most revered images of Mary in Mexico are Immaculate Conception images (Cassidy).[7]

The image was well-suited to express millennial yearnings. To a great extent, the meaning of the Immaculate Conception parallels that of the Incarnation; here, in female form, is a representation of perfected humanity Like the resurrected Christ, the "first fruits of the resurrection," Mary was assumed bodily into heaven, and like him, too, she lived her life on earth without sin.[8] In the paintings of the Immaculate Conception, which are very close in style to paintings of Mary's Assumption into heaven, "the maternal character of Mary is set aside, and she stands alone, absolute in herself, and complete in her perfections" (Jameson: xxxvi) It was a potent symbol for the hopes of the Spaniards settling in Mexico, especially when it was coupled with the imagery of Revelation, including not only the passages in Revelation 12, but also the famous description of the "new heaven and new earth" of Revelation 21, which is also portrayed in feminine terms: "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; the first heaven and the first earth had disappeared now, and there was no longer any sea I saw the holy city, and the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, as beautiful as a bride all dressed for her husband" (Rev. 21:1-2).

Sánchez's explicit linking of the painting of Guadalupe with this biblical imagery provided for Mexico a symbolic way to make sense of Mexican history and Mexican community. Sánchez saw in Guadalupe a sign not of the apocryphal battle of the last days, but of the birth of a new world in the Mexican nation This view of Mexico seems to have been an important element in the self-understanding of native-born Mexicans—Spanish creoles, mixed-blood mestizos, and Indians alike—

[7]Of the twenty-eight images of Mary listed in Cassidy's book, fourteen are images of the Immaculate Conception

[8]Mary differs from Jesus, in Catholic doctrine, in that she remains human, while Jesus is both human and divine

who struggled against the double taint of ancient idolatry and humiliating defeat and colonization by Spain.

The apocalyptic understanding of Mexico is a dialectic one, alternating between a conservative moment (We are a chosen nation; this is the earthly paradise; our way of life is divinely ordained) and a violent and revolutionary moment (We are divinely ordained to establish an earthly paradise by destroying our enemies). Some have suggested that Mexico's history—and perhaps in some way the history of all the nations of the Americas—can be read in terms of this inherently unstable alternation between self-righteous conservation and violent revolution. Many interpreters of the Lady of Guadalupe have pointed to the importance of the image as a symbol of revolution, most clearly expressed in the legendary story of Miguel Hidalgo rallying the masses for revolt against Spain with the cry of Dolores: "Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe and death to the gachupines!" Hidalgo was making his own the apocalyptic battle-imagery associated with Mary, turning La Conquistadora against her former people in the name of a new people. Enormous forces of violence and hatred were unleashed under the banner of Guadalupe This is the dark side of apocalypse, and of the Virgin.

But the Virgin of Guadalupe was also a symbol of something new being born in Mexico. The story Sánchez tells, of Mary choosing Mexico as the nation where she revealed her image and established her earthly reign, is a myth that provides a divine foundation for all aspects of Mexican cultural activity. Sánchez called Guadalupe a City, "since she was herself representing her own city of Mexico" (Watson: 21) Here he draws upon a traditional and powerful association of woman with the city or nation, an association which was expressed in Spanish and Spanish-American culture by the system of city or regional patronage.

PLAGUE AND PATRONAGE: THE SALVATION OF MEXICO CITY BY GUADALUPE

In sixteenth-century Spain, every community chose or was chosen by a saint, who represented the community to God. The common term used to describe the role of this patron saint was *abogado*, legal advocate (lawyer). This was a role familiar to Castilians from their highly bureaucratic secular life, in which constant litigation was a fundamental aspect of daily existence (Christian. 55-56). The choosing of a patron saint was a matter of trial and error. When a natural disaster struck, a local community would appeal to one image after another, until one was

found that halted or slowed the plague, flood, drought, or famine. That image would then have a place of preeminence in the sacred life of the community, since the appeal to the saint had been a vow to God through the saint.

Spaniards of the sixteenth century believed God actively intervened in human affairs and the natural order when he was angered, and most vows promised devotion at a chapel in exchange for the cessation of the affliction. In some cases, communities believed that saints themselves might inflict harm if angered, and the vows were made to appease them directly. The community would organize a procession, carrying an image of the saint through the streets, and make a solemn communal vow to continue regular devotion at the shrine of the saint each year on the saint's day, with fasting, prayer, public charity feasts, and bullfights (Christian: 31-35, 57). From the twelfth century, Mary had gradually gained preeminence over the other saints as patroness of local communities.

This system of patronage was carried over to New Spain. Gibson reports that "the Spanish conception of the patron saint was enthusiastically adopted by the Indians" in the Valley of Mexico, and numerous cities in Latin America bear one of the names of the Virgin and were placed under her protection (134). A hierarchy of patronage developed in Mexico. Local images represented local communities; regional images represented entire regions, and, eventually, the Virgin of Guadalupe represented the entire nation.

But the national stature of Guadalupe emerged only gradually At first, Guadalupe competed with other images of Mary as primary patroness of Mexico City. Besides the Virgin of Guadalupe, the inhabitants of Mexico City appealed to the tiny statue of the Virgin of Remedios, to a Dominican painting of the Pieta called Nuestra Señora de la Piedad, or to an image called Nuestra Señora de la Bala (Lafaye: 260). In the plague of 1736-37 the image of Guadalupe gained preeminence in Mexico City over these other images of Mary and began to be nationally known. The story of that event illustrates how the various terrifying and consoling aspects of Mary coalesced around the image of Guadalupe and functioned to save the Mexican people not only from physical death, but also from the spiritual malaise brought on by an "end-of-the-world" mood of despair, which threatened the life of the community as a whole.

Epidemics were the most feared and destructive menace of Mexico after the Spaniards arrived. Smallpox struck the Indians first, but by 1535 another disease had appeared, most likely influenza, which the Indians called *matlzáhuatl*. Europeans largely escaped these plagues,

either because they were immune to them or because the diseases were brought on by under-nourishment and excessive toil (Priestly: 64, Phelan: 102). Lafaye says, "Worse in one sense than the floods—which it often followed—by reason of its unexpected appearance and mysterious origin, the plague *(cocoliztli)* inspired a feeling of helplessness and terror; collective conjuration of supernatural powers appeared to be the only possible remedy" (254). *Matlazáhuatl* devastated the City of Mexico in 1736. At least 40,000 people died in Mexico City in that year, nearly one in three inhabitants. Both Spaniards and Indians attributed the disease to supernatural causes, and an end-of-the-world atmosphere prevailed.

In 1738, a creole episcopal priest, Cayetano de Cabrera y Quintero, was commissioned by the Archbishop to write a book on the plague and on how "Holy Mary in Her Prodigious Image of Guadalupe of Mexico City, . . . [Had] Mitigated Its Fury Because of the Great Shade Cast by Mary." The city government paid the publishing expenses for this book, and it is a valuable record of the public recognition (civic and ecclesial) of Mary's patronage at that time. *Escudo de armas de México* was published in 1746 and has recently become available in a facsimile edition. The book provides a richness of facts and description that render it an invaluable resource for the history of Mexican medicine and religion.

The author's main theme is that the plague that terrorized the citizens of his city was, in fact, a *guerra de Dios*, a war by God in which "the Supreme Maker took up arms in vengeance, . . . and human powers were unable to resist it" (2). The Virgin of Guadalupe was enthroned finally as the shield that would defend the citizens against the terrible sword of that God to whom she herself had given birth (xix).

Cabrera describes a dreadful and barely comprehensible God, who thunders from heaven and lets his arrows fly (Ps. 18:14). "God is the principal and at times the only cause of plagues," he says (25), and he proves this by citing Ezekiel:

> On account of all your filthy practices, I will do things to you that I have never done before. . . . A third of your inhabitants shall die of plague or starve to death inside you; a third shall fall by the sword, outside you; a third I will scatter to every wind, while I unsheathe the sword behind them. My anger will be satisfied; I mean to satisfy my fury against them and be avenged. (Ezek. 5:9-13)

Perhaps in that time of plague, when every day a hundred people died, when the doctors were nearly helpless to cure or ease the suffering, only the God of the Israelite prophets was comprehensible. "In a war undertaken by the Sovereign One," Cabrera says, "there is no defense,

no power to combat it, except to fall to the earth and pray for peace" (44) Unmistakable signs had been manifested to the city's residents that prophesied the onslaught of the plague and revealed its divine source. He lists, in ascending order of importance, an earthquake on September 7, 1736; flooding, "as in the days of Noah;" sightings of comets and an eclipse of the sun; and, worst of all, a savage wind, "which the Indians call simply 'Muerte,' [Death]" that the natives were convinced carried the disease within it (44-45).[9]

In this atmosphere, it is not surprising that some predicted that the world was ending. In Cabrera's account, images of the great biblical cataclysms merge with the Aztec view of the periodic destruction of the suns. When a comet was sighted in March, 1737, at the height of the plague, some people hid in their homes in fear, waiting for the end (144). Stories of long-ago prophecies that the world would end were freshly circulated It was said that a nine-year-old Indian girl of Tlaxcala, while she was sick, had learned in a vision that God was angry at his people for their sins and would send the pestilence to destroy them. Another nine-year-old Indian girl (in what may be a variation on the same story) had claimed that God revealed to her the date of her death and the date of the end of the world. This story was reported in a book by Gerónimo de Mendieta, who believed it should be understood as referring to the end of the Indians, since they were more or less constantly dying of plagues. Cabrera also repeats a well-known prophecy by Fay Domingo de Betanzos, founder of the Province of Preaching Friars in New Spain: "That by the just judgment of God, after many ages, all of the Indians of this land will have been totally destroyed." Cabrera points out that this prophecy had already been fulfilled on the Island of Española, or Santo Domingo, which was the first land conquered by the Spaniards, and where originally there had been 20 million Indians and now were none (61-62).

It was possible for the Indians to be entirely destroyed in those years, and although the Spaniards were concerned about it (the Indians made up their labor force), the Indians themselves must have been in a desperate state of mind.[10] Cabrera reports the "ridiculous prayer" (in

[9]Gruening reports a continuing dread of wind and air in the 1920s in Mexico "Fresh air is commonly held to be dangerous" (534)

[10]Cabrera describes the Indians' mad jealousy and envy at seeing that the Spaniards generally weren't taken with the fever, and reports that some "despicable" Indians tried to do things so that the Spaniards would fall ill, such as infecting the water with corpses For Cabrera, this envy is one more indication of the poor moral state of the Indians and therefore a cause of God's wrath being inflicted on them in the form of plague (70)

his words) of an old Indian woman, who prayed, "*O! No muramos todos, Madre neustra. Y si han de morir, Señora, los Indios, que mueran tambien los Españoles*," which means, "Oh! Don't let us all die, Our Mother. And if the Indians have to die, Lady, let the Spaniards die too" (71). In her words, despair mingles with incipient revolt. Again there is appeal to the Mother of Heaven as both a rescuer and a destroyer, giver of life and of death.

The author, once he has established that God is the principal cause of plagues, admits that there were also secondary, natural causes for the plague's devastating effect upon the Indians. He mentions hunger and lack of food; the heat of day and coolness of nights, which is especially hard on those with little clothing; contact with the Spaniards, the drinking of pulque to inebriation, and "drinking cold water . . . when one is sweating and warm" (67-68). But he focusses on a mental cause of the plague, which is relevant to the final efficacy of the Guadalupe image. That cause is the Indians' dread of the plague as a goddess.

The author says he found among the natives "a certain dread of the fever so vehement and superstitious, conceived with such extreme peculiarity, that sometimes their own imagination and sorrow brought on the fever, and other times, although they already had the fever to quite an aggravated point, they avoided taking care of themselves, or medicating themselves, fearing that the fever would take them [if they did]" (69).[11] Cabrera argues that superstitious dread and imagination can themselves kill a person and that therefore this dread can be considered a secondary cause of the plague. He illustrates his point by telling of a sorcerer who "killed a multitude of Indians with a diabolical spell." Looking at them with an air of authority, he said in their language: "Go, and Die," and the group of Indians, "thinking themselves under a spell, and heavy with melancholy," went home and died (69).

The fear at large in Mexico, however, was directed primarily at the goddess of Mexico's past. "The Indians believe that the current illness is some fatal Deity, who conspires to end them; it is not only the Greeks and Romans who had a Goddess of Fever" (69). Cabrera reports, for instance, that an Indian woman appeared in a village some distance from Mexico City and convinced the villagers, who were all Indians, that she was "la Enfermedad." They worshipped her as the goddess of fever, until a religious missionary, passing through, tortured the woman into

[11] English translation of pages 69 to 72 of Cabrera's book by Luz Nuncio

disavowing her divinity, "thus healing those infected with the plague of her spell" (70).

It is clear from Cabrera's account that the Aztec goddess of death was still roaming the streets of Mexico Without her old cult, she would have been especially vengeful, and Cabrera is right to take seriously the harmful, even mortal, effects of spiritual terror. He describes one Indian man who, fleeing the fever that had seized the city, took the Via de Guadalupe and "almost imagined the Temple [of that fatal Deity] next to the Marian monuments." Traveling along the broad avenue toward the sanctuary of Guadalupe, "he perceived a woman coming out to meet him, who said she was the Fever." This woman urged him not to go where he was headed (to the Guadalupan church), but to return to the city, where he would be preserved from the illness. "But since he did not do this, . . . he died where he was going" (69).

This story may reflect ambivalence on the part of some Mexicans about where to turn for protection in this terrifying time—toward the newly introduced cult of the Virgin Mary, or back to deeper, more ancient cults of powerful goddesses. For one caught in the middle, and in the grip of conflicting loyalties, the struggle heightened imagination in a feverish and destructive way. Only in making a final choice of one protector could the religious imagination become a source of strength and wholeness to preserve life.

The story also helps make clear why the final choice was for a maternal and feminine image—why a divine mother was so potent a resource against the collapse of the city. "The one who kills is also the one who heals"—Cabrera said this of God, but it was the heavenly Mother of God who finally saved the city.

Spiritual aid was considered just as important as medical aid in colonial New Spain. Mendieta had noticed in the sixteenth century that the Indians' faith seemed to be strengthened by the onslaught of the plague. "Those who realize that the plague has struck them go on foot or are carried on the backs of their neighbors or their kinsmen to the church. Those who suspect that they are about to become ill request confession before the plague strikes them" (Phelan: 94). This certainly continued in 1736, and Cabrera mentions orders of priests, friars, and nuns who bravely served the sick and dying by preparing them for death with prayers and sacramental aid. Certain shrines became known as sanctuaries against contagion, areas of refuge where it was believed that no one would die. Chief among these sacred places was the shrine of Guadalupe, to which many people traveled in pilgrimage during the time of the plague. "Almost no one died there, even in the worst days of

the plague. The contagion vanished at the boundary of Guadalupe, and could not enter" (135).

The primary organized, public response by the city's civil and religious authorities to the plague took the form of a series of processions and novenas before the sacred images of the city, in the months of the winter and spring of 1736-37. In December of 1736, the city first solicited the patronage of Mary of Loreto, an Italian image that had been known to preserve the city from plague in the past. The archbishop of Mexico City moved the image from its side chapel to the main altar of the Cathedral and announced that a nine-day novena would be held from the 17th to the 25th of December. The novena ended on an appropriate day, Cabrera said, the day "when Mary, away from home, gave birth to the Health and Salvation of the world." The image was elaborately adorned, candles were placed before it, and the whole city gathered with the government officials and church representatives to celebrate mass and pray before the image. "So many were there that the city outside seemed mute." The novena to Loreto ended on Christmas Day, "but not the danger, which rose like a great fire" (102).

Mexico then turned to another image of Mary, "her prodigious Conquistadora image of Los Remedios." This tiny statue of Mary, which supposedly belonged to one of Cortés' men during the Conquest and was later found in a maguey plant by an Indian cacique named Juan, was one of the most venerated images in the city. It is obvious that the city was quickly moving up the scale of sacred images to the more powerful and efficacious ones. A procession was organized on January 9, 1737, and the statute of Mary of the Remedies was carried the eight and a half miles from its church in San Bartolo Naucalpán to the city Cathedral. The procession reached the area of the Cathedral at dusk, and a crowd of people followed, carrying candles, so that "the entire district was a sea of light, and the Lady who had come to conquer from Europe . . . was taken through oceans of lights and of people" (124). But the plague continued.

Some suggested that it might be well to undertake a similar procession from the church of Guadalupe, to carry the miraculous painting from its shrine to the center of the city. But the Archbishop declared that Guadalupe could not be moved to the city, and, instead, the city went out to her on January 30 for a novena. Such was the importance of the church of Guadalupe that, although located at the periphery of the political and economic center of Mexico, it had become "the center out there," a spiritual center that relativized the ordinary centers of human concerns. The primary officials of Mexico's religious and political gov-

erning bodies went out to Guadalupe to seek a spiritual aid that lay outside their power and influence. Soon after, they began a complicated bureaucratic process to secure the elevation of Guadalupe to principal patroness of Mexico City.

But such processes take time, and every day more people died of the fever. Other processions and novenas to all the sacred images in the city were being held. In February there were processions or novenas invoking Christ's Blood, St. Joseph, the Archangel Raphael, and St. Sebastian (138). In March the terror seems to have increased, and the number of processions described by Cabrera indicates a rising sense of panic. In a period of three months, from March to May, he lists thirty different images of saints for which processions or novenas were held, nearly simultaneously. These include the major images of Mary, such as Nuestra Señora de la Salud, Nuestra Señora de la Bala, la Virgen de los Dolores, Nuestra Señora de la Merced, la Virgen del Rosario, and Santa María la Redonda. Images of Christ, such as the famous Lord of Chalma, were also appealed to, although less frequently, and images of saints such as San Diego, San Antonio, San José, St. Francis Xavier, and San Vicente Ferrer are also mentioned (136-260). A contemporary of Cabrera's, Don Francisco Sahagún de Arévalo, wrote in his diary that "so many saints and relics have arrived, that never have been seen in the streets before" (xxxiv).

All this activity reflects the "trial and error" method by which Spanish towns had long selected a patron saint for protection. But the method had degenerated into a frenzy of activity driven by panic. The Spaniards were trying their usual approach to local disasters, but it was not working. Like the Indians, they turned to every possible source of spiritual protection But their ambivalence and conflicting loyalties only heightened the sense of anxiety that gripped the city.

Finally, a qualitatively new approach was taken. The authorities of Mexico City decided to move to a national level. The many local images, like the many Indian goddesses, represented some parts of the population. Guadalupe represented and protected them all. She spoke to Indians and Spaniards alike. She had been given a powerful nationalistic significance by Sánchez. Now that nationalistic meaning was taken up and embraced by the Mexican people.

In May, a solemn oath was taken by the municipal magistrates and the civil and ecclesiastical chapters, in the name of the whole Mexican nation, that swore to serve the Lady of Guadalupe as her serfs, in exchange for her patronage of the city. On May 16, 1737, the oath was published. "The municipal government elects as singular Patrona the

Sovereign Queen of the Angels in her admirable Image that is commonly called Guadalupe . . . solemnizing it annually on December 12 with a major cult, Mass, and sermon." The letter concluded: "And now we hope that the Divine Ire of castigation which we suffer in this deadly epidemic will be suspended" (266-67)

On the very day of the public announcement of the vow, Cabrera says, "the plague diminished," its harshness abated. All voices declared the remission a fact, and attributed the good news to Guadalupe. On May 25, "the terror of the plague having passed," the city prepared to express its joy with flowers, music, dancing, fireworks, and a great procession through the streets from the Cathedral Indians danced their native dances and made small statues of Juan Diego, with the painting of Guadalupe on his cape, before which they poured flowers Copies of the image of Guadalupe were everywhere (491).[12]

This was the turning point in the ascendence of Guadalupe over the other sacred images of Mexico. News of her efficacy in Mexico City spread to other cities, which followed the capital's example in electing Guadalupe principal patroness The aspiration to make the image national patroness was evident in the title of Cabrera's book about the epidemic, *The Coat of Arms of Mexico. Celestial Protection of this very noble City, of New Spain, and almost all the New World, Holy Mary in Her Prodigious Image of Guadalupe of Mexico City.* Seventeen years after the plague, Guadalupe was proclaimed the "Patroness and Protectress of New Spain" by Pope Benedict XIV. And when the Virgin of Guadalupe was crowned in 1895, she was named Queen of the Americas (Leies: 99). The image of Guadalupe had risen from an obscure localized Indian cult to the supreme position among the cults of Hispanic America.

It rose to this position because the image was ideally suited to express the hopes and passions of several different ethnic and social groups in Mexico and to unite those groups into one nation The symbolism of the painting had direct reference to the Book of Revelation and represented the millennial religious and social aspirations of the Spanish and creole populations of New Spain To the Indians, the same symbolism of sun and moon evoked not biblical prophecies, but the Aztec cyclical cosmogony with its expectation of periodic cataclysmic doom and rebirth. In the chaos and destruction of the colonial period, the image of

[12]Víctor M Ruiz Naufal, in a historical study at the beginning of the 1981 facsimile edition of *Escudo de armas de México*, reports that "the fact is that only in September could it be said that the epidemic had ended in the Valley of Mexico and it was mid-1738 before it began to end in the internal provinces (Cabrera xxxvii)

Guadalupe/Tonantzin represented to the Indians a promise that the Great Goddess who guards over death and birth would shelter them and guarantee a new cycle of life.

To be sure, the dreadful, terrifying aspect of the divine was taken over by the God of the Israelite prophets, whom Cabrera evokes But when Mary commanded armies, led bloody revolutionary forces, withheld her favor, and thus permitted plague to rage for months despite nearly constant prayer and devotion before her images, she too had a terrifying aspect. In that time of terror, when the population of Mexico City was succumbing to fever and death as much out of despair as from natural causes, only the total submission of the Mexican public to the great image of Mary at Tepeyac could halt the crisis and restore confidence and joy to the population.

Mary had taken the place of the Aztec solar gods and, to a large extent, even the Catholic God, Father and Son. In charge of death and life, she spoke of a new age, represented community bonds, and guaranteed salvation. Only her image of Guadalupe had the power to save, and it continued thereafter to stand over the nation of Mexico as a symbol of Mexican faith and hope, an expression of Mexican realism about the inevitability of death and the Mexican certainty of a new birth.

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