



STUDIES

IN
THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS

Virtual Vessels, Mystical Signs

*Contemplating Mary's Images
in the Jesuit Tradition*

THOMAS M. LUCAS, S.J.

BX3701 .S88x

Studies in the spirituality of Jesuits.

Issue: v.35:no.5(2003:Nov.)

Arrival Date: 02/11/2004

O'Neill Current Periodicals

35/5 · NOVEMBER 2003

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It concerns itself with topics pertaining to the spiritual doctrine and practice of Jesuits, especially United States Jesuits, and communicates the results to the members of the provinces through its publication, *STUDIES IN THE SPIRITUALITY OF JESUITS*. This is done in the spirit of Vatican II's recommendation that religious institutes recapture the original inspiration of their founders and adapt it to the circumstances of modern times. The Seminar welcomes reactions or comments in regard to the material that it publishes.

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VIRTUAL VESSELS, MYSTICAL SIGNS

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The first word . . .

Borgo S. Spirito 4 does not rank high on my list of regular hang-outs. If the truth be told, I've been in the building only once, a fact that bears testimony either to my ability to fly under the radar of the home office or my inability to fly at all. Stealth or kiwi, I'm not sure which. That one visit remains vivid in my memory, however. Since I had never been to the south side of the English Channel, after a summer of helping out in our parish in Benin City, Nigeria, a be-nice-to-Richard strategy called for a return to New York through a few European capitals. (A word to young Jesuits: If you long to visit the great cities of the world, don't pick American film history for your academic specialization, since most travel opportunities for scholarly research seem to lead only as far as Culver City and beautiful downtown Burbank.) During my short stay in Rome during the dog days of August, Father Vinnie O'Keefe graciously invited me to a gathering of Americans at the Curia. (Putting "graciously" and "O'Keefe" in the same sentence borders on tautology, doesn't it?)

In my fevered imagination, I had always pictured the building as a maze of dark corridors, populated by dark soutanes, dark rimmed glasses, dark briefcases, and dark faces shadowed by dark beards that had somehow survived the morning's skirmish with inadequate razors. Not at all. The Roman sun on the rooftop garden overlooking the city was simply radiant, and the company delightful. After dinner, we gathered for coffee in the common room, and my host for the day introduced me to the two recently appointed papal delegates: Father Joseph Pittau, a charming conversationalist who spoke perfect English, and Father Paolo Dezza, then serving in place of Father Arrupe, who had been stricken some months earlier. My one regret was that I did not ask to see Father Arrupe, who was bed-ridden and unable to speak, but who, I was later told, still had days when he enjoyed seeing Jesuit visitors. I muffed my chance to meet one of the truly great Jesuits of our time, or probably of any other time.

My meeting with Father Dezza, however, remains one of the truly extraordinary events in my Jesuit life. His English was a bit strained, or so it appeared, since after our introduction, he seemed to have the impression that he was meeting a veteran Africa hand. The misunderstanding grew to comic proportions. As many can attest, Father Dezza's vision was quite impaired, and naturally he wore extremely thick glasses. For my part, I was still in the pre-bifocal generation. I used glasses for distance but would take them off for close work, like eating, looking at my watch or proofreading tiny six-point text at *America*. Try to picture this. In his eagerness to

learn about the work of the Society in Nigeria, Father Dezza seized both my hands in his and tried to pull me into his focus. At this close range, my glasses created a huge blurry image swamping my horizon. With hands held captive, I couldn't get my glasses off. I tried to step back to place him within my visual range. Father Dezza followed in relentless pursuit, trying to focus in on his agitated American visitor. When I stepped backward, away from his huge menacing head with those crazed eyes bulging behind monstrous glasses, he stepped forward. He advanced; I retreated. One, two, three; one, two, three. How many people do you know who can say they waltzed around the floor of the recreation room of the Curia with Father Dezza? Roger Corman, the famous producer of teenage screamies for drive-ins could have filmed us as a scene in "Attack of the Forty Foot Killer Eyeglasses."

Despite my rejection of "Africa expert" status, then and now, several memories, vivid at the time of my Roman dance debut, have remained and perhaps have even grown more powerful through the filter of years. Like many visitors to Nigeria, I found the first Sunday liturgy at St. Joseph's parish overwhelming. It lasted nearly two hours, everybody sang and the processions, with an element of dance far more graceful than my curial waltz, at both the offertory and communion provided a third inning stretch as well as a seventh. At midweek, the Mass at the leper hospital at Ossiomo matched the parish liturgy for sheer exuberance. Both experiences, repeated several times during that summer, make the expression "celebrate" liturgy more than an ecclesiastical catch phrase.

Yet both then and now, the recollection bears a tinge of regret. As much as I tried to join in, I was a liturgical, and more basically, a cultural tourist. In different settings on several occasions, well-intentioned worshipers invited me to join in the dance and singing. I tried, but frankly, I couldn't. Like many Westerners, I am a prisoner of the Enlightenment, a child of the age of reason grown to maturity in a universe of ideas. Twice victimized are Jesuits like myself, whose ministry imprisons them behind a desk and professorial lectern. Schooled in the Spiritual Exercises in a quasi-monastic setting from our earliest days, we pray in silence, alone in a quiet room. Others may reach God through dance and song, ritual and icon, but most of us in the Society, at least in the West, are hostages of words, beautiful, glorious words capturing marvelous concepts, and in moments of poetic intensity, still more words expressing equally marvelous emotions. We search for God, or allow God to search for us, in forests of language, in our isolated thickets of word and concept. So be it. Language and thought certainly rank among God's greatest gifts to us, his privileged creatures. Shakespeare, the King James Bible and F. Scott Fitzgerald are liberators and jailers alike.

Words, of course, despite their beauty and power, come with their own limitations, as the parishioners at Benin City taught me so poign-

antly. In preparation for the feast of Saint Ignatius, the fathers provided a series of "spiritual lectures" followed, as I recall vaguely, by evening Mass. The parish church was filled to overflowing each afternoon. I remember most vividly a strikingly beautiful woman, six-feet tall or more, with impossibly straight posture and a dark, almost jet black skin tone, unusual for that region, which she set off perfectly with the color of her dress, jewelry and head covering. In New York or Paris, she certainly could have been one of the "exotic" supermodels that fashion magazines like to feature these days. She always sat near the front, clinging to every word of the speaker. One afternoon, as the priests greeted the congregation after the service, she approached me, smiled and nodded as though to assure me of my success as a preacher. At that brief exchange, I realized that she did not speak English.

In my world, the situation rang with absurdity. Why sit through a series of lengthy lectures in an incomprehensible language? In hers, as I reflect upon it, her presence made perfect sense. I think in terms of words and concepts; she, I truly believe, thought in terms of community. For me, getting something out of the lectures justifies being there. For her, being there justifies the lectures. With my colossal ego, I thought that her presence was a tribute to my preaching; she felt that my preaching was a tribute to her presence. By that I mean, she could find God in becoming part of a congregation of like minded believers. Listening as part of a group and responding with song and movement provided an avenue of grace, a pathway to God. What the priests had to say, what concepts they presented, were really of secondary importance. How different for us victims of the academy, who find the "homily" of paramount importance in the success or failure of liturgy.

This notion of "being there" requires a bit of refinement. For many American Catholics of the old school "getting to Mass" despite obstacles of age, health and weather lies at the heart of practicing the faith. In fact, the greater the obstacles, the greater the merit. (Like many Jesuits, I waged an on-going argument with my aging mother about the wisdom of attending Mass on television rather than risking icy sidewalks on the way to church. Like most Jesuits in similar circumstances, I invariably lost.) Once inside the building, a strange phenomenon takes place. Such a person can be quite adept at creating a private space in a crowded church by means of rosary beads or devotional booklets or even those dreadful but ubiquitous missalettes. Neither the ceremonies nor the congregation seems very important. What is important is being there, in a room while something is going on against the front wall, and passing the time with some personal devotion. If one sacrifices or risks a great deal to fulfill the obligation of being there, so much the better. This is holiness, but it's not community, at least not in any sense that the parishioners from Benin City would understand.

This is also the culture that imprisons me, and I suspect many other Jesuits as well. Somehow I just cannot picture many of us North American Jesuits of a certain age as being all that comfortable with noisy processions or fiestas in honor of local saints, or ceremonies honoring relics or even with those huge rallies in soccer fields that often mark the climax of papal visitations. We experience little enthusiasm in our Jesuit communities for litanies, common office, novenas, benediction, a weekly “high” Mass or even a daily low one. We preach and teach as public persons, but in many respects, we remain resolutely private in our own spiritual lives. That’s who we are, and that is what our culture has made us. I don’t presume to speak for everyone, but I suspect I’m not alone.

In this current issue of *STUDIES*, Tom Lucas proposes a few alternatives to our solitary, intellectual pursuit of holiness. Need our spirituality be confined to words and concepts all the time, or is there something we are missing? The Church, even in Europe and the Americas, has a rich tradition of shrines and icons that seem if not an embarrassment then an inconvenience for many of us today. So much the worse for us, with our impoverished imagination, literal-minded theologizing and debilitating individualism. Sacred places and things have been avenues of grace for generations of Christians through the centuries, and yet we modern believers find ourselves oddly estranged from our traditions. Why? And if this is the case, haven’t we been diminished? On the other hand, does the attempt to recover the tradition necessarily imply a regression to nineteenth-century piety, simplistic theology or even medieval superstition? Or does popular Marian piety undermine Vatican II’s insistence on the primacy of the Eucharist in our public prayer?

In a word, how can we reconcile our hard-earned modernity to our devotional tradition? Fine teacher that he is, Tom leads us patiently through several of his own experiences with holy images and holy places. As historian, he explains not only their origins, but their import to countless believers who have found themselves strengthened as members of a community that gathers in the presence of the sacred. As believer, he helps us understand the reward of “being there” in holy places with holy objects. As priest, he shows their importance for us today.

One final practical note: as a scholar of images, Tom has enriched his text with over forty illustrations that are available on the Web, at www.usfca.edu/fpa/studies. The printed word of this monograph stands alone, but readers who access the full-color images will find the essay doubly rewarding. The Seminar hopes readers find Tom’s essay as stimulating and enjoyable as we did.

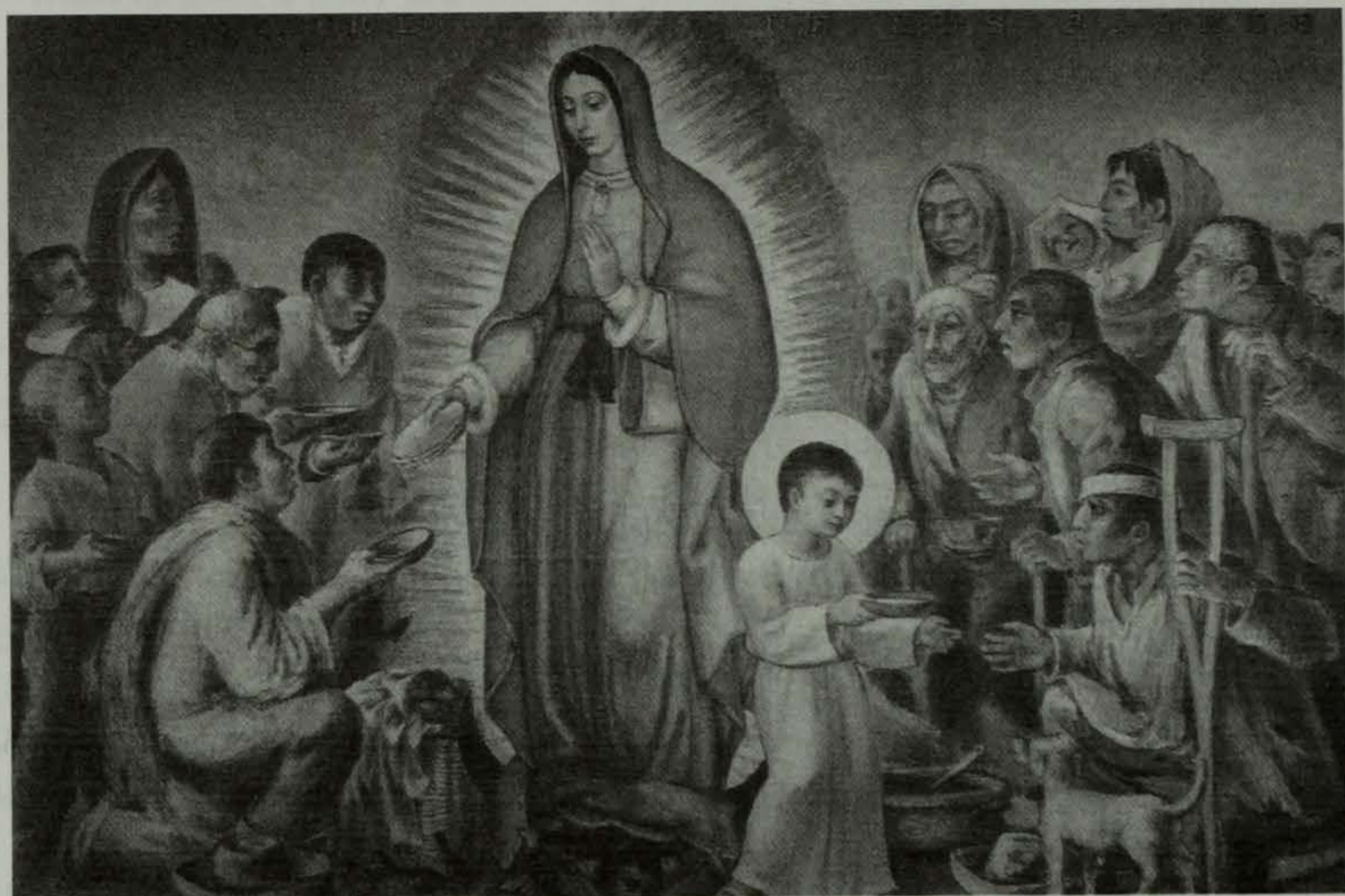
Richard A. Blake, S.J.
Editor

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Madre de los Pobres
Antonio Sotomayor
Casa de los Pobres, Tijuana

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VIRTUAL VESSELS, MYSTICAL SIGNS

Contemplating Mary's Images in the Jesuit Tradition

Through the centuries, from the patristic era to the present, Christians have struggled to find appropriate uses of images and shrines to express faith in an Incarnate God at home in the material universe. Their efforts have led through pendulum swings between idolatry and iconoclasm, the Baroque and the austere, the sublime and the tawdry. Sacred objects and places proved pivotal in the life of Ignatius, and in the lives of early Jesuits. Their experience of distant cultures, of Renaissance and Reformation, of Suppression and Restoration, and even of the Second Vatican Council have continued to influence their spirituality of material objects. Appreciating Marian traditions centered around the Holy House of Loreto, the Salus Populi Romani at the basilica of St. Mary Major and Our Lady of Guadalupe helps contemporary Christians enrich their own faith experience.

From Folklore to Family

My journey began at the threshold of a place I'd never imagined going.

In November, 1976, I was sent as a novice to the Casa de los Pobres in Tijuana, Baja California, Mexico. The Casa is a social services and catechetical powerhouse: a soup kitchen, outpatient clinic, and counseling and referral center run with immense compassion and equal efficiency by the Mexican Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Peace. In the intervening 27 years, the Casa has become an important way station for

hundreds of Jesuits in formation from around the United States Assistancy and beyond.

In a little chapel by the gate, the Casa's fundamental icon is the Madre de Los Pobres, the Mother of the Poor. The large image (drawn in pastels by Antonio Sotomayor in 1974) shows Our Lady of Guadalupe distributing tortillas to the poor, sick, and hungry who come to the casa each day. Her son, portrayed as a five-year-old Indio, is serving a bowl of soup to a handicapped man [Web 1, 2].¹

I was charmed by the image at first sight, and my fellow novice and I participated in the fiesta days surrounding the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on December 12 with great gusto. On the evening of December 11, we marched to the cathedral in a firecracker-punctuated procession with the fruit, vegetable, and flower merchants who donated regularly to the Casa. Later that night, mariachi came to the gatehouse chapel to serenade the image. My fellow novice and I were sent at dawn to the heart of the red light district to collect more mariachi and an ancient, hung-over marimba player for the morning Mass in the patio outside the chapel. For a moment at least, the House of the Poor was transformed; there was music, and more than enough food for everyone. The Lady presided over it all, tortillas in her hand.

Looking back, I think that I welcomed the warmth of that devotional, even folkloric atmosphere because it provided what was for me a helpful and healthy corrective to the chilly, intellectually and psychologically focused 1975 novitiate experience I was then undergoing.² I saw another face of the Church, another way of celebrating, another, intuitive way of approaching the Mystery of God and our broken humanity. It revolved around an image.

¹ A note to readers: To illustrate the various items referred to in the text, the author has prepared a website to accompany this article. It can be found at www.usfca.edu/pa/studies. The numbered references to individual images are given within the text in square brackets, e.g., [Web 1].

² This characterization of my 1975 novitiate experience and another that appears later on in this essay reflecting on my mid-1980s theology experience in Rome are not intended as attempts to offer either a liberal or traditionalist critique of my training. Lest the reader be distracted by waiting for the other shoe to drop, let me answer the implicit question straight out: the writer is most emphatically *not* a restorationist. I consider myself to stand about thirty degrees left of center on the theological spectrum, and am a card-carrying Vatican II, Arrupe-inspired, GC 34-compliant Jesuit. The point of this essay, I hope, is to show that one can absorb and be nourished by the visual and devotional tradition of the Church without turning one's back on the recent past, the present, and the future.

For several years during formation I spent a major portion of each summer at the Casa driving trucks, working in the kitchen, tiling floors. My fellow scholastics and I lived in a small room immediately next door to the chapel of the Madre de los Pobres.

You learn a lot about your neighbors when only a thin wall separates you from them: how and when their friends tend to stop by to chat, to sing, to commiserate, to sit in a comfortable place, to get in out of the rain. They arrived throughout the day, beginning when the gate opened at 6:45 A.M. Some old and sick, some young mothers with little ones playing on the floor we had tiled, some deranged or drunk, all of them felt at home there, as I began to feel at home as well. I came to understand intuitively the power of sacred images and holy places to console and to fortify. That intuition set up a field of questioning about the function and role of images in the Catholic tradition and in our own Jesuit spirituality that this paper will try to address.

Sacred Images and Holy Places in the Catholic Tradition

Across the ages the devotional use of images in the Catholic tradition has been a tidal force, flowing and ebbing and flowing again. High tides have sometimes caused great damage, low tides have beached ships and revealed wreckage below. Yet moon-drawn tides can neither be denied nor diverted.

The primitive church grew out of the matrix of observant Judaism in the idolatrous, image-soaked splendor of the Roman empire. In the Rome of Peter, Paul, and Priscilla, a hundred-foot-tall golden statue of *Divus Nero* dominated one end of the Roman Forum. Holding fast to the first commandment of the Decalogue, Christians of the first three centuries went to their deaths at Rome and throughout the empire for refusing to offer sacrifice before images of Roman gods and emperors. It is hard to imagine a more convincing testimony to the power of images and symbolism than those freely chosen deaths. Although Roman persecutions of the early church were sporadic and motivated by a variety of political, social, and economic as well as theological motives, they were nonetheless real and bloody events, and early Christian antipathy to the veneration of "pagan" images was often the flashpoint that set them off.

Although some early theologians like the cantankerous Tertulian considered artists and makers of images "harlots and actors" who lured spectators into debauchery and idolatry, from the earliest times the early Christian community did, in fact use images.³ In Coptic Egypt, hauntingly beautiful portrait masks, precursors of the Eastern iconic tradition, were placed over the faces of the dead. From the late first century onward, Christian public burial places were decorated with frescoed wall paintings. The second-century Roman Catacomb of Priscilla is richly decorated with Old Testament scenes (Daniel in the lions' den, the young men in the fiery furnace, Susanna and the elders, to name a few), images of Christ as good shepherd and the *fractio panis*, and what may be the oldest extant image of the Virgin and Child (ca. A.D. 170). She is seated beneath a flowering tree, and an adjacent prophet (Balaam? Isaiah?) points to the Star of Bethlehem above her [Web 3].

Constantine's vision of a glowing cross over the Milvian Bridge—"In hoc signo vinces"—heralded nothing less than a revolution in Christian self-understanding and self-expression. The church became proprietor and builder of grand and imposing edifices, and

imperial artisans were put to work decorating them. Mosaic depictions of Christ, the saints, living church leaders and sacred topography (Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Rome) became commonplaces as the Celestial King and his court took precedence over the earthly emperor and his retinue. In 351, Pope Liberius traced the foundations of Santa Maria Maggiore in the snow after a miraculous storm blanketed the Esquiline Hill in early August. The mosaics of that

Theologians like Basil the Great and Athanasius justified the veneration of images by making a crucial distinction between the sign and what it signifies, while affirming the analogical unity between them.

first Marian shrine, rebuilt and expanded in the 430s when the Council of Ephesus defined Mary as *theotokos*, Mother of God, portray Mary both as a historic figure and dressed in contemporary imperial raiment. With Ephesus' dogmatic declaration, the cult of the

³ Moyshe Barasche, *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea* (New York: N.Y.U. Press, 1992), 111–21.

Virgin began to spread quickly, especially in the eastern part of the empire [Web 4].

The move away from the anti-iconic traditions of Judaism required theological justification. The orthodox Christian response came from a number of directions. As the Christological crises eventually worked themselves out, a coherent theology of the incarnation emerged, in which Christ's visible humanity became the warrant for making images of the Word made flesh. Theologians like Basil the Great and Athanasius justified the veneration of images by making a crucial distinction between the sign and what it signifies, while affirming the analogical unity between them. They held that because of that linkage, honor moves naturally from image to prototype.

Just as no one who looks at the imperial image in the marketplace and acknowledges the emperor would deduce the existence of two emperors, first the image and then the real emperor, that is the situation here, too. If the image and the emperor can be one (for an image does not cause a multiplication of the emperor) the same holds true of the divine *logos* and God.⁴

This essentially neo-platonic system was severely challenged during the iconoclastic crisis of the eighth and ninth centuries. The causes and history of the crisis are far too complicated to detail here. They entail, among other factors, centralizing geopolitical and economic factors in a monophysite-friendly imperial court, as well as a general questioning, provoked by Islam's rapid and relentless spread, of the protective and wonderworking powers of images. In response to the iconoclastic challenge, St. John Damascene (675–749) framed Christianity's first coherent theology of images.

In the rejection of images, John Damascene saw a rejection of the incarnation of Christ. "I worship Him who clothed himself in the

⁴St. Basil the Great, *De Spiritu Sancto*, 17.44. "In the image, the features of the emperor have been preserved unchanged, so that anyone who looks at it recognizes him in the image. . . . Thus the image would say, 'I and the emperor are one.' He who honors the imperial icon therefore, honors in it the emperor himself" (Athanasius, *Oratio III Contra Arianos*, 3.5 and 5). Both of these are cited in Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 153. Also see D. A. Brading, *Mexican Phoenix, Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition across Five Centuries* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 14.

royal purple of my flesh. . . . I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter who took flesh."⁵ John created a neo-platonic "great chain of images" linking the comprehensible—read "visible"—revelation of the Trinity to all creation. The Son is the visible image of the Father, humanity is created in the image and likeness of God, the visible world is an imaging-forth of the power of God and the figures and types of the Old Testament are prefigurations of the revelation of the New Covenant.

Finally the sixth class comprised the material remembrances of past events, be they the words of scripture, icons, or objects such as Aaron's rod or the jar of manna. In all these categories of images, the divine power was in some measure revealed, and, if the Holy Spirit dwelt within the saints, so also he stayed close to their images and tombs. Thus it was not only Christ's images that were to be venerated, but also the likenesses of his mother, the saints, and the angels.⁶

Inherent in this system is an epistemology that grounds the reality of image in the archetype, the seen in the unseen. The image is thus understood as a vessel that contains and participates in the divine reality, rather than standing as a mere re-presentation of it. That

The image, then, is understood as a mnemonic tool, a useful pointer rather than a metaphysical vessel.

vessel provides the individual believer and the community free and unmediated access to what it contains.

Called by the pro-icon Empress Irene in 787 at the end of the first phase of the Iconoclastic conflict, the Second Council of

Nicea produced a dogmatic formulation on the proper use of images in Catholic worship and devotion. It fuses the thought of Basil, Athanasius, and John Damascene, and sets up the parameters and distinction between the adoration due to God alone and the veneration that can rightly be given to images. The text (see note 7) is important, moreover, because it served as the Council of Trent's

⁵ St. John Damascene, *On the Divine Images*, trans. David Anderson (Crestwood N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 16 f., 52 f.

⁶ Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*, 17.

model for its response to early Protestant iconoclasm in the sixteenth century.⁷

In the Christian West, St. Augustine's serial, typological reading of the Old Testament, (*Vetus Testamentum in Novo patet, et Novum Testamento in Vetere latet*) greatly influenced all who followed him, including St. Gregory the Great. Not given to flights of theological fancy, Gregory proposed a straightforward representational understanding of images:

Not without reason has antiquity allowed the stories of saints to be painted in holy places. And we indeed entirely praise thee for not allowing them to be adored, but we blame thee for breaking them. For it is one thing to adore an image, it is quite another thing to learn from the appearance of a picture what we must adore. *What books are to those who can read, that is a picture to the ignorant who look at it; in a picture even the unlearned may see what example they should follow; in a picture they who know no letters may yet read.* Hence, for barbarians especially a picture takes the place of a book.⁸

The image, then, is understood as a mnemonic tool, a useful pointer rather than a metaphysical vessel.

Gregory's great contribution was a practical understanding of transference and assimilation of sacred practices and landscapes. He specifically ordered missionaries going to Britain to replace non-Christian idols with Christian images but not to destroy temples.

⁷ "[Icons] like the figure of the honored and life-giving cross, the revered and holy images, whether painted or made of mosaic or of other suitable material are to be exposed in the holy churches of God, on sacred instruments and vestments, on walls and panels, in houses and by public ways; these are the images of our Lord, God and savior, Jesus Christ, and of our Lady without blemish, the holy godbearer [*theotokos*], and of the revered angels and of any of the saintly holy men. The more frequently they are seen in representational art, the more are those who see them drawn to remember and long for those who serve as models, and to pay these images the tribute of salutation and veneration. Certainly this is not the full adoration in accordance with our faith, which is properly paid only to the divine nature, but it resembles that given to the figure of the honored and life-giving cross, and also to the holy books of the gospel and to other sacred cult objects. Further, people are drawn to honor these images with the offering of incense and lights, as was piously established by ancient custom; and he who venerates the images, venerates the person represented in that image" (*Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, ed. Norman Tanner, 2 vols. [London: Sheed & Ward; Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1990], 1:135 f.).

⁸ *Ep. ix*, 105, in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 77:1027 (emphasis added).

They were to reconsecrate or “baptize” those temples, and to try to reconcile pre-Christian festival calendars, pilgrimages, and celebrations with ordinary Christian practice. This program became a charter for missionary activities in Europe and elsewhere.⁹

For all the West’s pragmatism, mystical and folkloric elements abounded. The East preferred panel icons, wall painting and mosaics, possibly because ongoing and widespread distribution of sculptural imperial images in the Byzantine empire reminded Christians of former days of persecution. In the West, the burgeoning cult of relics led to a gradual admission of sculpture into the repertory of religious images, first as reliquaries and shortly thereafter in the form of crucifixes and seated statues of the Madonna and Child. For the pilgrim faithful of late antiquity, relics functioned the way snapshots of dead relatives do for us today: relics linked believers directly with a person, and with experience of that person. The snapshot, like the relic, creates a visible, tangible *anamnesis*, a powerful re-creative memory of how things were and are [Web 5].

Given the lack of bodily relics of Jesus and Mary, both East and West gave pride of place to miraculous “direct” images of Christ

⁹ “When, by God’s help you reach our most reverend brother Bishop Augustine, we wish you to inform him that we have been giving careful thought to the affairs of the English, and have come to the conclusion that the temples of the idols among the people should on no account be destroyed. The idols are to be destroyed, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water, altars set up in them, and relics deposited there. For if these temples are well-built, they must be purified from the worship of demons and dedicated to the service of the true God. In this way, we hope that the people, seeing that their temples are not destroyed, may abandon their error and, flocking more readily to their accustomed resorts, may come to know and adore the true God. And since they have a custom of sacrificing many oxen to demons, let some other solemnity be substituted in its place, such as a day of Dedication or the Festivals of the holy martyrs whose relics are enshrined there. On such occasions they might well construct shelters of boughs for themselves around the churches that were once temples, and celebrate the solemnity with devout feasting. They are no longer to sacrifice beasts to the Devil, but they may kill them for food to the praise of God, and give thanks to the giver of all gifts for the plenty they enjoy. . . . If the people are allowed some worldly pleasures in this way, they will more readily come to desire the joys of the spirit, for it is certainly impossible to eradicate all errors from obstinate minds at one stroke, and whoever wishes to climb to a mountaintop climbs gradually, step by step, and not in only [a single] leap” (Instructions to Melitus (future archbishop of Canterbury, on departing for England in 601 C.E., cited in *A History of the English Church and People*, by the Venerable Bede, trans. Leo Sherley-Price [Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1955], 86 f.).

like the shroud (*mandylion*) or Veronica's veil (the "*vera-icona*") [Web 6] or to a bewildering array of images of the Virgin that tradition claimed were painted or sculpted by St. Luke himself.¹⁰ Such Marian images, including those found at Santa Maria Maggiore (the "*Salus Populi Romani*"), Loreto, Montserrat, and Guadalupe de Extremadura in Spain, became major European pilgrimage destinations. Many of these preeminent images depict the Madonna with a black or dusky face, a fact that makes some anthropologists posit a connection with earth-black fertility goddesses of antiquity [Web 7].¹¹

The typology of miracle stories surrounding the statue-shrines of many of these madonnas has been classified as *el ciclo de los pastores*. The stories, while admitting local variants, share a vocabulary of similar elements: through signs and wonders (often light, music, or fragrance), a miraculous image of the Virgin Mary reveals itself in an out-of-the-way place to a shepherd or some other social outcast. The image has been hidden, often for centuries, to avoid profanation: buried, placed in a cave, under water, inside a cleft tree, etc. The Virgin asks for a little house or chapel to be built, but the shepherd is unable to convince local civic and church authorities of the credi-

*There [Ignatius] experienced
the colorful ceremonial of
medieval court and church.*

¹⁰The attributions to St. Luke are nowhere explained but universally accepted. Some modern commentators speculate that oral tradition may have assigned Luke the artist's role because he gave such a detailed account of the infancy of Christ in his Gospel. See Belting, *Likeness*, 49.

¹¹The phenomenon of the so-called "Black" or "Dark" Madonnas still awaits a careful and thorough anthropological and historical study. Mary Lee Nolan and Sidney Nolan, in their *Christian Pilgrimage in Modern Western Europe* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 202–9, identify 167 such images in Europe, including those found in the important pilgrimage churches at Chartres, Rocamadour, Montserrat, Loreto, Guadalupe de Extremadura, and Einsiedeln. Some 43 of those in the study "are associated with legends of loss and mysterious rediscovery in such places as caves, crypts, trees, wells, or simply underground" (207). Ean Begg, in *The Cult of the Black Virgin* (New York: Penguin Arkana, 1996), has produced a gazetteer of such shrines that includes many new world sites as well. The Dark Madonna phenomenon has produced a flurry of speculative, often syncretistic, writing that is sometimes based more on wishful thinking than on hard scholarly research. For an example of the genre, see China Galland, *Longing for Darkness: Tara and the Black Madonna: A Ten Year Journey* (New York: Penguin, 1991).

bility of his message. More signs and wonders ensue (healing springs begin to flow, celestial lights are seen, the image transports itself back to its chosen locale when moved) until at last a sanctuary is created. Typically the shrines are *extra muros*, far from city life and distant from the control of the hierarchy. They become centers for pilgrimage for a large region, and create a *communitas* distinct from parishes and dioceses among the faithful who flock to them.¹²

One such destination, the shrine of Our Lady of Oñate or "Aránzazu" ("You among the thorns" in Basque), grew up in the hills not far from the Loyola citadel in northern Spain. In 1469, two

decades before Iñigo Lopez de Loyola's birth, a poor shepherd named Rodrigo Balzategui had a vision of a beautiful lady, who told him "My son, tell your father to build on this site a tiny shrine of five thin boards and seven tiles." The next day, high in the mountains above Oñate in Guipuzcoa, he was drawn by the sound of a bell. Following the sound, he found an image of a lovely dark lady nestled in a hawthorn tree. A *casita* was built to house her, and it was there that

[Ignatius] was steeped in the traditions of chivalry and values of courtly love, traditions and values that he would transfer with some difficulty from earthly ladies and princesses to Our Lady, Queen of Heaven, during and after his conversion experience in 1522.

Iñigo made his first all-night vigil after leaving his ancestral home in 1522. There, before the lady among the thorns, he vowed a life of perfect chastity [Web 8].¹³

¹²See Vincente de La Fuente, *La Vida de la Virgen Maria con la historia de su culto en España*, 2 vols. (Barcelona: n.p., 1879); Stephen Sharbrough, "El Ciclo de los Pastores, *History of Religions at UCLA Newsletter*, 1975, 3:7—11. For an anthropological interpretation of Christian pilgrimages in general with particular emphasis on the role of Marian devotion, see Vincent Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), and Nolan and Nolan, *Christian Pilgrimage* for extensive statistical and social analysis.

¹³For Aránzazu, see Juana Gutiérrez Haces et al., *Cristóbal de Villalpando* (Mexico City: Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1997), 246. For the vigil, see "Reminiscences" [often called the "Autobiography"], in *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings*, trans, with introductions and notes by Joseph A. Munitiz and Philip Endean (New York: Penguin: 1996), 18, 362 n. 14.

Finding Home

In 1982, I was offered the opportunity to go to Rome to study theology. As an artist and budding historian I was deeply nourished there, but like so many others over the centuries, I was deeply disappointed to find the numinous so artfully hidden beneath so much decoration. An hour after my arrival at the Gesù, I visited the rooms where Father Ignatius lived and died. It was a dreary, opaque experience.

I experienced the numinous in only three places during those years: in the hills around Assisi, in the scavi under St. Peter's Basilica, and in the Madonna della Strada Chapel at the Gesù. Designed and painted by Jesuit artist Giuseppe Valeriano for an image that had adorned the Society's first church, the della Strada Chapel was the one place in all the magnificence where I felt at home. I remember writing a friend that going into that little chapel was like sitting by the fire [Web 9].

A kind of rigid, Germanic reading of the theology of Vatican II that I was receiving at the Greg (and that I discovered my classmates were also getting at Berkeley and Weston) warned against the dangers of excess in devotion, the perils of relying on misleading imagery, and most of all, the dead end of reading the tradition of the church in any other hermeneutic than the historical-critical method. Yet as I started reading the life of Ignatius, studying the Exercises, and learning about the history of the early Society, I discovered that the Society's spirituality is profoundly rooted in the world of images, narrative, and devotion, and that at the beginning of the modern period, the Society was the primary promoter of at least three important strands of Marian tradition.¹⁴

Images and Iñigo

We cannot appreciate Ignatius' radical contributions to the Catholic tradition—his discontinuity—without first exploring his personal experience, without looking closely at the world he left behind in Loyola. Ignatius was born a year before Columbus sailed, a year before Ferdinand and Isabella expelled the Jews from Spain. Growing up as youngest son of a clan lord, young

¹⁴Granted that the curriculum at most theologates has opened up significantly since the early '80s, I am unaware of any Jesuit theologate that requires a course in iconography or Christianity and art.

Iñigo, whose mother had died when he was seven, was farmed out to the court of their Most Catholic Majesties. There he experienced the colorful ceremonial of medieval court and church. He was steeped in the traditions of chivalry and values of courtly love, traditions and values that he would transfer with some difficulty from earthly ladies and princesses to Our Lady, Queen of Heaven, during and after his conversion experience in 1522.¹⁵

At Montserrat, the medieval courtier held a solemn, night-long vigil at arms before the Black Madonna, leaving his sword and dagger there at dawn on the feast of the Annunciation before departing for Manresa.

It is all but impossible to overestimate the importance of the images of the Virgin Mary in Medieval Spain. From the premier shrine at Zaragoza (whose Lucan statue was believed to have been delivered directly by Mary to St. James early in the first century) to Montserrat to Guadalupe de Extremadura in the south, Marian devotion is recalled in hundreds of place names and thousands of

images. The oratory of the citadel at Loyola had two Marian images:

¹⁵ During his recuperation at Loyola, Iñigo was deprived of his usual diet of romantic novels and tales of chivalry. With only the *Lives of the Saints* and the *Life of Christ* to distract him, he began to read and reflect. It is interesting, however, to see how important the former tales of chivalry still loomed on his mental horizon thirty years later, when he was dictating the *Reminiscences* to Gonçalves da Câmara:

“Reading through [the lives of Christ and the saints] often, he was becoming rather attached to what he found written there. But, on ceasing to read them, he would stop to think: sometimes about the things he had read, at other times about the things of the world he was accustomed to think about before. And, out of many vain things that had previously presented themselves to him, one held his heart in such deep possession that he was subsequently absorbed in thought about it for two or three and four hours without noticing it, imagining what he was to do in the service of a certain lady, the means he would take so as to be able to reach the country where she was, the witty love poems, the words he would say to her, the deeds of arms he would do in her service. He was so carried away by all this that he had no consideration of how impossible it was to be able to attain it. For the lady was not of the ordinary nobility, nor a countess nor a duchess: rather her state was higher than any of these” (“Reminiscences” [6], in *Personal Writings*, 14 f.).

Many commentators opine that the unattainable lady was the Infanta Catarina.

a carved pieta and a fine Virgin of the Annunciation given to Ignatius' sister-in-law Magdalena by Isabella La Cattolica herself [Web 10].

Ignatius' *Autobiography* or *Reminiscences* recounts a key moment in his conversion experience: a vision that galvanized him, empowering him to leave his former life behind:

These desires [to leave all things behind, go to Jerusalem, and follow the examples of the saints] were confirmed for him by a visitation as follows: being awake one night, he saw clearly a likeness of Our Lady with the holy Child Jesus, at the sight of which, for an appreciable time, he received a very extraordinary consolation. He was left so sickened at his whole past life, and especially at matters of the flesh, that it seemed to him that there had been removed from his soul all the likenesses that he had previously painted in it. Thus, from that hour until August, 1553, when this is being written, he never again had even the slightest complicity in matters of the flesh. On the basis of this one can judge that the thing has been of God, although he himself did not venture to define it, nor was he saying more than to affirm the above said [Web 11].¹⁶

After Iñigo left home and performed his vigil at Aránzazu, he collected on some old debts, and gave part of the money to restore

¹⁶ "Reminiscences" [10], in *Personal Writings*, 16. Note that Ignatius here uses the language of art: he removed the images of chivalry "that he had previously painted there."

William Meissner S.J., in his *Ignatius of Loyola: The Psychology of a Saint* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 56–60, posits that the vision was, rather, a substitution for the convalescent's erotic attraction to his older sister-in-law, Magdalena, who was nursing him. Meissner's evidence for this theory is that in later life Ignatius covered an image of Mary in his copy of the *Little Hours of the Virgin* because he found its resemblance to Magdalena distracting. Here is Meissner's conclusion:

"We can conjecture, then, that the vision of Our Lady with the child Jesus was a reflection of Iñigo's idealized image of his own mother as well as that of Magdalena, toward whom his unconscious libidinal impulses had been stirred. We might suggest as well that in his fantasy Iñigo saw himself as the baby Jesus, who could be cared for, loved by, and who in turn could possess his idealized mother. The wishful repression to a preoedipal state would avoid the destructive consequences of the potential oedipal conflict. Regression to a state of blissful union with the idealized mother also denies any incestuous longings that might carry the stamp of a more mature and differentiated sexuality" (59).

It is tempting in this case to suggest a paraphrase of Freud's famous dictum: Sometimes a vision is only a vision.

an image “of Our Lady, which was in bad repair, so that it could be repaired and very finely adorned.”¹⁷ On the road to Montserrat, only a fateful turn taken by his donkey kept Iñigo from stabbing a Moor who impugned the perpetual virginity of Mary. At Montserrat, the medieval courtier held a solemn, night-long vigil at arms before the Black Madonna, leaving his sword and dagger there at dawn on the feast of the Annunciation before departing for Manresa [Web 12]. During his eleven month stay there, he often prayed at the shrine of Our Lady of Villadordis, where he once passed a week in a comatose state that has been described as rapture, but which also resembles a catatonic breakdown. Before leaving for the Jerusalem pilgrimage, he seems to have revisited the shrine at Montserrat.

Iñigo’s self-description as “The Pilgrim” and his vivid experience of visiting the holy places during his short sojourn in Jerusalem point not only to the importance of the religious practice of pilgrimage in his day, but to his powerfully visual imagination [Web 13]. That imagination, born of the medieval *mythos*, reshaped at Manresa and nourished by wide travel throughout the Catholic world, undergirds the dynamics and meditations of the Spiritual Exercises. In them, composition of place, application of senses, and narrative always inform speculative considerations or ground abstract theological principles. The metaphysics of the First Principle and Foundation is counterbalanced by the profound images of light and water descending, growth, and toil in the culminating Contemplation for Attaining Love. In the most fully articulated and poetic contemplation of the Exercises, that of the Incarnation, the cosmic purview of the Trinity gives way to a simple domestic scene:

Preamble 2: The composition, seeing the place, which here will be to see the great extent of the round earth with its many different races, then, in the same way, I will see the particular house of Our Lady and its rooms in Nazareth in the province of Galilee. [103]

I see and consider the three divine persons, as though they are on the royal throne of their Divine Majesty, how they look down on the whole world and on all its peoples living in such great blindness, and dying, and going down to hell; And I see Our Lady and the

¹⁷ “Reminiscences,” [13], in *Personal Writings*, 18.

Angel who greets her. And I should reflect in order to draw profit from such a sight. [106]¹⁸

Contemplations based on visualizing New Testament narratives make up the bulk of the Exercises. In a bold yet tender innovation, Ignatius even added one non-scriptural Marian contemplation, Christ's first post-resurrection appearance to his mother [*SpEx* 218–225, 299 and Web 14].

The practice of the “application of the senses” at the end of each day (“to see the persons with the imaginative sense of sight . . . to hear what they say or could say, to smell and to taste . . . to touch with the sense of touch . . . always seeking to derive some profit from this” [*SpEx* 122–126]) connects the spiritual realm to the concrete world of the retreatant's own sensory experience with all its symbolic and metaphorical furnishings.

For Ignatius those furnishings included images, shrines, and celebrations of the Virgin Mary. They served as important anchoring devices linking the world of

It is evident that Ignatius and the early Jesuits who were sent to Loreto to found the Illyrian College in 1555 and to serve as confessors at the papal shrine had no questions about the miraculous provenance of the shrine and its image.

incarnate, sacramental reality to the realm of the infinite. The Madonna was understood as humanity's first and primary intercessor before the throne of God, and frequently during the Exercises, Triple Colloquies begin with a prayer for her assistance. When the first companions made their first promises at Montmartre, they did so on the feast of the Assumption. Years later, they chose to pronounce their final vows before a late Byzantine mosaic of the Virgin and Child at St. Paul outside the walls in Rome [Web 15]. Eighteen months after his ordination, Ignatius finally celebrated his first Mass on Christmas Day, 1538 at the Altar of the Crib (*Cappella della Cuna*) at Sta. Maria Maggiore in Rome. There too he would have had the

¹⁸ *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola: A Translation and Commentary*, trans. with commentary by George Ganss, S.J. (St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992). In this essay quoted texts place the traditional paragraph markings in square brackets.

opportunity to visit the image of Our Lady *Salus Populi Romani*, which would later become a fundamental icon for the Society's missionary activities [Web 16, 26].

It is perhaps a happy coincidence that the Society's first church, a small neighborhood mortuary chapel for the Astalli family, was named "Madonna della Strada," Our Lady of the Way. Even before the formal approval of the Society in September, 1540, Ignatius and Pietro Codacio, the Society's first professional Father Minister, negotiated the transfer of the well-sited church for the Society's usage. Its fundamental icon, an 18 inch square fresco of the Madonna and Child, was saved when the chapel was torn down in 1568 to make room for the Chiesa del Gesù, and was reincorporated into the new church next to the tomb of Ignatius.¹⁹ Although there is no hard evidence that Ignatius had a particular devotion to the image, some early biographies say that he often prayed looking down into the chapel through a window connecting it to his rooms. [Web 9]

Although Ignatius' personal austerity is well documented, at least four works of art adorned his rooms: a crucifix (now lost), and three images of the Virgin Mary. Two were devotional items: a small Italo-Byzantine icon and a charming Umbrian Madonna and Child [Web 17]. The most famous painting is the *Holy Family with St. John the Baptist* that hung over the altar in Ignatius's private chapel [Web 18]. While the sixteenth century *scuola Romana* canvas is undistinguished as a work of art, its spiritual resonance for members of the Society is immense. In his *Spiritual Diary* (an account of his prayer and discernment during the early stages of composing the Constitutions in 1544–45), Ignatius details fifteen various Masses of Our Lady celebrated before it, numerous visions of Mary there and in other places, and endless tears which came from the spiritual consolation he received at the altar before the painting.²⁰ The painting was hanging on the wall when Ignatius died in that room on July 31, 1556.

¹⁹Thomas Lucas, *Landmarking: City, Church & Jesuit Urban Strategy* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1997), 92–98.

²⁰See Ignatius's "Spiritual Diary," in *Personal Writings*, 73–109.

Two Important Ladies

At the time of Ignatius, the shrine of Our Lady of Loreto on the Adriatic coast was second only to Rome as a pilgrimage destination in Italy. In fact, it served as a convenient destination for Romans who wanted to visit something other than their own holy sites. The several of the first companions spent three days there in 1537 on their way to Rome, and Francis Xavier went there on Palm Sunday, 1540, before leaving for Portugal and the Indies. Polanco was sent there to pray—unsuccessfully, as it turned out—for Good Pope Marcellus' health. On two different occasions Ignatius himself expressed his desire to visit the shrine, but was impeded each time by bad health.²¹

The first written account of the Loreto's Dark Madonna and the flying house of Nazareth dates to the 1470s, roughly the same period when the Papacy was consolidating its hold on eastern Italy and the Marches. The written legend recounts that in 1294 angels transported intact from Nazareth to Dalmatia the stone house where the Virgin Mary had received the Angel Gabriel. When the Dalmatians failed to revere the miraculously transported dwelling and its carved Cedar-of-Lebanon madonna, Our Lady ordered the angelic movers to take the house to the Adriatic coast of Italy not far from Ancona. When two brothers found the house on their land, they began to squabble over it, necessitating a further angelic intervention to move the house to a nearby hill top. Simple country folk recognized it as a place of healing, and a cult following and pilgrimage tradition emerged. [Web 19, 20, 21]

Twenty-first century historical-critical methods did not exist in the sixteenth century. It is evident that Ignatius and the early Jesuits who were sent to Loreto to found the Illyrian College in 1555 and to serve as confessors at the papal shrine had no questions about the miraculous provenance of the shrine and its image. Peter Canisius popularized the devotional practice of reciting the Litany of Loreto by publishing it, perhaps for the first time, at Dillingen in 1558. He

²¹ Paul Murphy, "The Jesuits and the Santa Casa de Loreto: Orazio Torsellini's *Lauretanae historiae libri quinque*," in *Spirit, Style, and Story: Essays Honoring John W. Padberg S.J.* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2003), 269 f.



Sixteenth-century Woodcut,
Our Lady of Loreto



Byzantine Icon,
Salus Populi, Rome



Loreto, Baja California



Chinese *Salus Populi*
(Field Museum)

also commissioned Orlando de Lasso, the court composer to the Duke of Bavaria, to set it to music [Web 22].²²

Jesuits like Orazio Torsellino and Louis Richeome wrote best-selling apologetic histories of the shrine, as well as pilgrims' manuals and retreats based on visiting the Holy House of the Incarnation. Richeome's 1604 *Pelerin de Lorette* went through eight editions in French, English, Latin and Flemish, and moved the Ignatian techniques of composition of place and application of senses into new waters. Richeome created an imaginary, forty-day-long pilgrimage centering on the life of Mary and the gospels for those who could not make the physical trek to Loreto. Each day combined imaginative exercises, reflection on the commandments, and structured meditations. Torsellino stressed that Loreto served as shrine for all humanity, not just for local Italians, a theme that corresponded with the counter-reformation tendency toward global rather than local thinking [Web 22, 23].²³

Legend has it that during the reign of Gregory the Great, the icon was processed through the streets of Rome to avert a plague, and in response Michael the Archangel appeared with a healing, flaming sword over Hadrian's Tomb (soon thereafter renamed Castel Sant'Angelo) near the Vatican.

The international appeal of the Loreto devotion soon made itself felt. Jesuits exported the devotion throughout Germany and the Hapsburg empire, building literally scores of accurate replicas of the Holy House to serve as local pilgrimage centers. Loreto chapels dotted the Paraguayan reductions, and in perhaps its most spectacular reincarnation, a Loreto chapel crowned the Jesuit Novitiate complex at Tepetzotlán outside Mexico City.

²² László Szilas, "Loreto nella letteratura spirituale dei Gesuiti," in *Loreto: Crocevia Religiosa tra Italia, Europa, e Oriente*, ed. Ferdinando Citterio and Luciano Vaccaro (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1997), 263–72.

²³ Murphy, "Jesuits and the Santa Casa," 272.

In 1675, Italian Jesuit Giovanni Battista Zappa brought a copy of the cult image as well as precise measurements of the Holy House from Italy. Construction began on a Loreto chapel at Tepotzotlán in 1678. Together with its *camerin* (an octagonal “dressing room” behind the replica of the Holy House where the statue was clad in its various costumes, built in 1733), the Loreto Chapel there forms an integral part of the complex that many consider to be the absolute masterpiece of the Mexican Baroque [Web 24].²⁴ Zappa’s fellow Italian, Giovanni Maria (Juan María) Salvatierra, who had constructed a less elaborate Loreto Chapel at the Colegio de San Gregorio in Mexico City in 1679, brought a copy of the image to Baja California in 1697, and named the first Spanish settlement in the Californias “Loreto.” That same statue is still venerated there today. Over the door of the often-rebuilt church is a telling inscription: *Cabeza y Madre de las Misiones de Baja y Alta California* (the head and mother of the Missions of Baja and Alta California) [Web 25].

The rapid spread of the missions of the Society of Jesus led to the widespread diffusion of another important Marian image, the icon now called the *Salus Populi Romani*, (protector or health of the Roman people) housed at Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. The original, an icon attributed to St. Luke, dates to the sixth century or perhaps later.²⁵ Legend has it that during the reign of Gregory the Great, the icon was processed through the streets of Rome to avert a plague, and in response Michael the Archangel appeared

On his return voyage to the New World, Calvinist pirates overtook his ship and threw overboard Azevedo and his thirty-nine companions.

²⁴María Teresa Franco, *Museo Nacional del Virreinato y Excolegio de Tepotzotlán* (Mexico City: INAH, 1996), 42–47.

²⁵The literature on this image is quite extensive. See Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 68ff., and Stephen Ostrow, *Art and Spirituality in Counter-Reformation Rome: The Sistine and Pauline Chapels in S. Maria Maggiore* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), chap. 3. Ostrow’s notes to chapter 3 are particularly useful for bibliography.

with a healing, flaming sword over Hadrian's Tomb (soon thereafter renamed *Castel Sant'Angelo*) near the Vatican.

The icon served as the axis around which Rome's greatest Marian devotion revolved: the annual "visit" of a venerable icon of Christ (called the *acheiropoeton*, "not made by human hands") to the image of his mother on the feast of her Assumption. The Christ icon, normally housed at the *Sancta Sanctorum* papal chapel at St. John Lateran, was carried through the streets and Roman forum in an all night procession that recalled the Triumphs of the Roman Empire. The ceremony ended when the two icons met in the nave of Santa Maria Maggiore, were caused to bow one to the other, and then were enthroned side by side in the apse as a kind of ritual reenactment of the Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin [Web 26].

The icon of Christ was not the only visitor to the icon of Santa Maria Maggiore. When Ignatius celebrated his first Mass across the nave from it in the *cappella della cuna*, a visit to the *Salus Populi* image, which was kept in a freestanding marble shrine in the nave and only exposed on feast days, would undoubtedly have been part of his devotional itinerary that day [Web 17].

Francisco Borja had a mystical experience before the image in November, 1566. In 1569, at the urging of the missionary to Brazil Ignacio de Azevedo, Borja petitioned and received extraordinary permission from Paul V to have an exact copy made for the Casa Professa in Rome [Web 27]. This first copy became a prototype for a huge production of painted and engraved copies. Borja's first biographer Diego Vázquez recounted that Borja even established a print shop for the brother novices at the Roman novitiate of S. Andrea fitted out with

all the tools and necessary equipment that they might print images on silk, paper, and metal in the huge quantities (*grandissima quantità*) that could be carried and sent to the whole world. In such a way, the Father [Borja] sent from Rome innumerable prints in diverse formats and materials, to the Western and Eastern Indies, to Japan, Germany, Poland, Spain, and the other provinces. This [activity] was destined to promote devotion among Catholics and to create in the

Society a spirit absolutely opposed to that of the heretics, who grumbled about our devotion and evangelical spirit.²⁶

According to historian Gauvain Bailey, the image “thanks to the Jesuits probably enjoyed wider currency than any other image on earth by the turn of the seventeenth century.”²⁷ It served as a canonical image for sodalities throughout Europe, and appeared on the seal of the city of Vienna and of Bavarian Jesuit colleges.

Painted copies were sent to the royals of Portugal, Spain, and Austria, and Rodolfo Acquaviva presented a copy (painted by Jesuit brother Manuel Godinho) to Akbar, the Great Mogul, in 1583.²⁸ In China, Matteo Ricci hounded his Roman and mission superiors to send him high quality art work and engravings, and in 1599 was delighted when a “very well painted” copy of the *Salus Populi* image arrived at the mission. A few years later, through intermediaries, Ricci presented another especially fine, large copy of the image to the Wan Li emperor. The emperor in turn gave the canvas to his mother, who placed it in her own chambers, and burned incense in front of it daily. The dowager’s appropriation of the image points to the resonant power of images: the Roman Madonna echoed the popular Chinese Buddhist devotion to the bodhisattva of mercy, the *Songzi Guanyin*, “the sender of sons” who is portrayed as a woman with a male child on her lap. After initial hesitation, Ricci and his companions built on this resonance as a catechetical tool, much as the Jesuits in Japan used the parallel *Kannon* form as an iconographic tool.²⁹ Before a copy of the *Salus Populi* image Xu Guangqi was

²⁶ Pascuale D’Elia, in his “La prima diffusione nel mondo dell’immagine di Maria ‘Salus Populi Romani,’” in *Fede e Arte* (October 1954), 6, cites Vázquez’s unpublished biography *Vida del p. Francisco de Borja*, found in the Jesuit Roman Archives (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu), *Vitæ*, 80, ff. 280–281r. According to D’Elia, the biography was never published because Vázquez was a troublemaker, part of a movement of conservative Spaniards called “*memorialisti*” who flooded the court of Spain and the Inquisition with letters demanding tighter “law and order” in the Society.

²⁷ Gauvain Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America, 1542–1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁹ D’Elia, “Prima diffusione,” 5; on *guanyin* and *kannon* images, see Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Mission*, 89.

baptized, and it was the patronal image of the sepulchral chapel (a converted Buddhist temple) where Ricci and his companions were buried [Web 29].

The image's connection with the new world of the Americas is no less profound. Ignacio de Azevedo's role in the saga of copying the image has already been recounted. On his return voyage to the New World, Calvinist pirates overtook his ship and threw overboard Azevedo and his 39 companions. Azevedo was witnessed going to his watery grave clutching an engraving of the Roman Madonna to his chest. His heroic devotion is celebrated in Algardi's bas-relief that decorates the sarcophagus of St. Ignatius [Web 30].

In 1576, Father General Everard Mercurian sent four copies on canvas to the fledgling mission in Mexico. During the transit, storms twice threatened the ship. While still in the Mediterranean, the crew needed to lighten the ship load by throwing baggage overboard, but the trunk containing the images remained rooted to the deck until the images were removed. Nearing the Mexican coast, winds threatening to ground the ship were diverted when one of the canvases was nailed to the mainmast. The miraculous copy ended up at the church of the Colegio Maximo in Mexico City, and the others were sent to other colleges throughout Mexico.³⁰

Images of Home

So why Loreto and *Salus Populi* and not other images? What did they mean to the Jesuits of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? What did they inspire?

In my fairly extensive reading, I have not been able to unearth any theological or liturgical treatise written by Jesuits or others that explains the extent of the popularity of these two images. I will hazard some speculation, with the caveat that it is just that: speculation.

I think that the images worked for the Jesuits because they were linkages to home.

³⁰ See Francisco de Florencia and Juan Antonio de Oviedo, *Zodiaco Mariano* (Mexico City: n.p., 1775), republished with an introduction by Antonia Rubial García (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, 1995), 144–46.

Home means many things to humans: context, security, warmth, a place of memory and repose. The Holy House of Loreto contextualized, concretized the experience of the incarnation into tangible reality. Something wondrous happened there. So they built copies of “there” in the belief that something wondrous can happen “here.” In Poland and in Paraguay and in Baja California, the shrines served as brick-and-mortar acts of hope that the transcendent could break through as easily there as it once did in Nazareth. The shrine, the copy-of-a-house that is in all likelihood a copy-of-a-house, belies Thomas Wolfe’s dictum: it says “you *can* go home again.”

What made Loreto work is that, while a church is perceived—it doesn’t matter whether explicitly or implicitly—as the Father’s house of business, the shrine is the Mother’s home: a place of nurture, comfort, a place the believer can come home to, a place of memory and repose. It’s a place where one is permitted to cry, to wheedle, to rant and rave. Loreto works because one can imagine a tearful, frightened, and elated pregnant teenager there.

Our childhood home is a place of fantasy and wooden blocks, the place where we dream, imagine, and construct our world. We go forth

from there, certainly, but we always take it with us. I think that’s why Ignatius and early Jesuits constructed spiritual exercises around images of what we already know, or can see or touch, encouraging us to compose places and apply our senses from the rich inventory of our own experience so that we can finally find our way back home through story, narrative, and faith.

Salus Populi was an image from their high school sodalities; for the Roman trained, the remembrance of their Saturday walks to Santa Maria Maggiore; for the lonely missioner, the courageous badge of drowning martyrs.

But home means more. It means connectedness, being part of

the family, despite all its dysfunctionality.

The early companions hit the road almost immediately. Images, particularly powerful, ancient, and resonant ones like the *Salus Populi*, helped keep them connected, not only to the “main office” of the Society and the Church, but to each other. To use twenty-first century language,

the familiar image helped to create *virtual communities* among those separated by great distances. *Salus Populi* was an image from their high school sodalities; for the Roman trained, the remembrance of their Saturday walks to Santa Maria Maggiore; for the lonely missionary, the courageous badge of drowning martyrs.

The sight of one's own flag in a foreign country can bring a flood of emotions: nostalgia, longing, a sense of belonging in spite of the vastness of the world. We live in a world of discount video and instant messaging, but still we tape pictures of those we love to the bathroom mirror and on the refrigerator, and put a crucifix on the wall. Images stir our hearts in ways words don't; they pull us together or tear us apart. Consider the power of the now iconic television images of the collapse of the World Trade Center the world shared on September 11, 2001.

The strongest, best images bring us home to ourselves, to our hopes, to our values, to our commitments one to the other, and finally to God. An enigmatic lady wrapped in a blue starry robe with her child on her lap did that for our ancestors. The question is, can she do the same for us today?

Building a House Where Love Can Dwell

What Do We Do with the Past and the Future?

I remember attending a first communion and confirmation Mass in the patio of the Casa de los Pobres as a scholastic. Bishop Juan Jesus Posadas, who was later killed by the Mexican Mafia in Guadalajara, was presiding. He stood on a platform under a wooden cross I'd built, and under the arm of the cross was the image of the Dark Lady of Guadalupe. That day, in the patio, a phrase from the liturgy opened up before me. After the institution narrative, the bishop boomed the invitation to the acclamation: "Este es el sacramento de nuestra fe." What he used, of course, was the approved text in Spanish, but that text translates the Latin "mysterium" as "sacrament": as grace-filled, outward sign of invisible reality and personal and communal encounter.

Five years later and a week after my ordination, I stood in the same place, under the same images, in a new vestment with Guadalupe's face embroidered over my heart. The sacrament was much, much more than the elements on the table in front of us. It was the whole mysterious blend of people, tradition, and



Our Lady of Guadalupe

faith, of hunger, need, and hope that make up the living sign that transforms, gives grace. Presiding over it all, smiling under the arm of the cross, was the graceful, enigmatic Lady.

Guadalupe: What We Know

Colorfully celebrated by the indigenous and scorned by the skeptics, the recent canonization of Juan Diego Cuautitlán graphically presents the complicated cluster of questions that undergirds this essay. How do religious images work? What is the connection between their origins (miraculous or mundane) and the lived experience of the faithful? How are we, post-modern, post-miraculous, post-historical interpreters of text and image, to deal with images that continue to escape convenient pigeon-holing? What are we to do with the lovely lady dressed in blue who won't go away?

This short essay is no place to review the extensive and contradictory literature on the Guadalupe image and phenomenon. In an appendix, I have provided a short, annotated bibliography of some recent scholarship *pro* and *contra*. Nor does this essay propose to solve the questions of interpretation, criticism, and praxis that challenge the devout and delight the skeptic. Rather, after a brief discursus on what we can say with historical certainty about the Guadalupe phenomenon, this essay will look at how the primary promoters of the devotion, the seventeenth and eighteenth century Mexican Jesuits who are our ancestors in the tradition, interpreted the meaning and message of the image and its narrative. While their experience is remote from ours, their questions can be useful to us in framing our own [Web 31].

Bustamante's critique, which centered on the danger of reversion to indigenous idolatry, included a claim that the image had been painted "yesterday" by an Indian named "Marcos."

What we can verify using contemporary historical-critical methods can be summarized briefly. Sometime in the second quarter of the sixteenth century but certainly before 1556, a Marian shrine was erected at a place called Tepeyac just north of Mexico City (Tenotiztlan), on the site of a former temple of Tonantzin, the mother goddess of the indige-

nous peoples [Web 32]. On September 6, 1556, Bishop Alonso de Montúfar, a Dominican who served as the second archbishop of New Spain, preached a sermon extolling devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe, commenting positively on miracles associated with the shrine and linking it to approved New World and continental Marian devotions including those of Loreto, Montserrat, and Zaragoza. This sermon, the earliest extant documentary evidence of devotion at Tepeyac, was countered two days later (on the feast of Spanish Guadalupe of Extremadura, from which the Mexican devotion seems to have taken its name) with a blistering attack by the Franciscan Provincial Francisco de Bustamante.³¹ Bustamante's critique, which centered on the danger of reversion to indigenous idolatry, included a claim that the image had been painted "yesterday" by an Indian named "Marcos." The contretemps, one skirmish in a protracted struggle between the original Franciscan missionaries and an episcopacy attempting to regularize a diocesan structure with non-religious clergy, led to Bustamante's eventual removal as provincial.³²

Some twenty years later (1577), the preeminent Franciscan historian Bernardino de Sagahún recast the same idolatry charges against the shrine in an appendix to his *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*. His text bears citing at some length:

Near the mountains are three or four places where they [the indigenous peoples] used to offer very solemn sacrifices, and they would come to them from very distant lands. One of these is here in Mexico [City], where there is a hill that is called Tepeyacac and the Spaniards call Tepeaquilla and is now called Our Lady of Guadalupe. In this place they used to have a temple dedicated to the mother of the gods, who they called Tonantzin, which means "our mother." . . . The gathering of people in those days was great and everyone would say "let us go to the feast of Tonantzin." Now that the church of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been built there, they also call her Tonantzin, taking their cue from the preachers who call Our Lady, the Mother of God, Tonantzin. . . . It is

³¹ Jacques Lafaye, in his *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe: The Formation of Mexican National Consciousness, 1531–1813*, trans. Benjamin Keen with a forward by Octavio Paz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 217, offers possible place name sources. See also *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*, ed. Ana Castillo (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), xv–xix.

³² Stafford Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531–1797* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 62 f.

something that should be remedied because the proper name for the Mother of God, Our Lady, [in Nahuatl] is not Tonantzin but Dios inantzin. This appears to be an invention of the devil to cover over idolatry under the ambiguity of this name Tonantzin. They now come to visit this Tonantzin from far away as in former times. The devotion itself is suspect because everywhere there are many churches to Our Lady and they do not go to them. They come from foreign lands to this Tonantzin, as they did in former times.³³

Encouraged by the financial success of the shrine, in 1575 the Jeronimites who controlled the eponymous Guadalupe shrine in Spain unsuccessfully sued the Mexican shrine for what amounts to copyright or trademark infringement, demanding a cut of the Mexican shrine's revenues. At about the same time, Jesuit Superior General Everard Mercurian actively and successfully lobbied Gregory XIII for a prolongation of the 1575 Jubilee Indulgences conferred on the shrine. This negotiation, which took place only a few years after the Jesuits first

³³ Bernado de Sahagún, *Historia de las Cosas de Nueva España*, 3:352, translation in Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, 78. Another early, ca. 1573, eyewitness account comes from an unlikely source: an English Protestant pirate named Miles Philips, who was taken to Mexico City for trial before the Inquisition. His memoirs include a detailed and charming description of the early shrine:

"The next morning we departed from thence on our journey towards Mexico [City], and so traveled till we came within two leagues of it, where there was built by the Spaniards a very fair church, called Our Lady's Church, in which there is an image of our Lady of silver and gilt, being as high and as large as a tall woman, in which church and before this image, there are as many lamps of silver as there be days in the year, which upon high days are all lighted. Whensoever any Spaniards pass by this Church, although they be on horseback, they will alight, and come into the Church, and kneel before the image, and pray to our Lady to defend them from all evil, so that whether he be horseman or footman he will not pass by, but first go into the Church, and pray as aforesaid, which if they do not, they think and believe that they shall never prosper; which image they call in the Spanish tongue, Nuestra Senora de Guadalupe. At this place there are certain cold baths, which arise, spring up as though the water doth seethe; the water whereof is somewhat brackish in taste, but very good for any that have any sore or wound, to wash themselves therewith, for as they say it healeth many. And every year once, upon our Lady Day [March 25, the feast of the Annunciation], the people used to repair thither to offer, and to pray in that Church before the image; and they say that our Lady of Guadalupe doth work a number of miracles. About this Church there is not any town of Spaniards that is inhabited, but certain Indians do dwell there in houses of their own country."

See Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, 69 f. and 254 n. 2.

arrived in New Spain in 1572, marked the first of many Jesuit-Vatican negotiations on behalf of Guadalupe.³⁴

Although fairly abundant documentary evidence on the shrine exists from 1556 forward, and a few images have come down to us dating from the early seventeenth century, the first published account of the familiar Guadalupan appearance narratives dates from 1648. In that year Miguel Sánchez, a diocesan priest who joined the Oratory of St. Philip Neri later in life, published *Imagen de la Virgen María, Madre de Dios de Guadalupe, Milagrosamente aparecida en la ciudad de Mexico*. The work spells out in writing for the first time the appearances of the Virgin Mary to Juan Diego, a Nahua catechumen, dating those appearances to December 1531 [Web 33, 34].

The book is hard going for modern readers. It places the miracle stories in the midst of a dense thicket of neo-platonic metaphorical, typological, and allegorical interpretations of scriptural references, linking the Guadalupe image not only to the “woman dressed in the sun” of Revelations 12 but also drawing parallels to Noah’s ark, the burning bush, Aaron’s flowering rod, the Ark of the Covenant, and Rachel, and defining Tepeyac as a new Mount Zion and Bethel. The work moreover, begins a pattern of what commentators call “*criollo-ism*,”

The history of the image, of course, does not end with its canonical approval. In 1810, revolutionary priest Miguel Hidalgo took up the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe as the battle flag and rallying point of the Indian and mestizo revolt against Spanish rule.

using the Madonna of Tepeyac as a sign of special divine favor for the New World and its indigenous and native born *criollo* (as opposed to Spain-born) inhabitants: “For Mary to appear among the

³⁴Fidel González Fernández, Eduardo Chávez Sánchez, and José Luis Guerrero Rosado, *El encuentro de la Virgen de Guadalupe y Juan Diego* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 2000), 389. The papal brief *Deiparæ semper Virginis*, dated March 28, 1576, extended the Guadalupe indulgences for ten years and also applied them to the cathedral, “lest it [the cathedral] be rendered destitute because of the usual concourse of people [going to Guadalupe]” (*ibid.*, 390 n. 69).

flowers was to signalize this land as her own, not only as her *patria*.³⁵

A few months later, a second—and to modern eyes and ears, more congenial—account of the apparitions was published in Nahuatl. *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* (“The Great Happening”) included the apparition narrative *Nican Mopohua* (“Here it is recounted”) as well as a series of fourteen miracle stories (the *Nican Motecpana*).³⁶ Its author, Luis Laso de la Vega, vicar of the Sanctuary at Tepeyac, presented essentially the same narrative sequence as Sánchez, but in the luxuriant, highly charged, poetic *flor y canto* style of indigenous storytelling [Web 34, 35].³⁷ The poetic work, a composite of different styles, is an extremely complicated text to parse, but most commentators feel that it relies for its narrative structure on Sánchez’s account. The burning questions that no one can resolve absolutely are whether the Sánchez and Laso de la Vega texts were: A) based on oral traditions alone; B) based on an earlier, written “Q” or *ur-text*, now lost, allegedly composed by a Indian scholar named Antonio Valeriano in the last quarter of the sixteenth century; or C) invented without reference to any actual event or tradition.³⁸

³⁵ Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*, 69. A note on terminology: Society in the Iberian New World was divided into as many as sixty-four distinct classes depending on place of birth and degree of mixed blood. At the acme of the class structure were the *peninsulares*, Spaniards born in Europe. *Criollos*, American-born children of full-blooded Spanish (or later, *criollo*) parents found various routes of upward social mobility blocked to them, although they were often more able and talented than the *peninsulares* sent to govern them.

³⁶ An English translation of the *Nican Mopohua* can be found on the web at <http://virgendeguadalupe.org/mx/nicaningles.htm>

³⁷ Fernández et al., *El encuentro*, 133 f.

³⁸ Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*, 117 f. Carlos Sigüenza y Góngora, a former Jesuit and a seventeenth-century poet and polymath, is responsible for the “Q” text thread of the tradition. He professed to have documentary evidence of the *urtext*, but scholars have been unable to unearth the manuscript he claimed to have seen.

Recently the so-called *Codex Escalada* has come to light. It is named for Jesuit Xavier Escalada, who discovered it in 1995 in a private collection in Mexico. Dated 1548, it features a drawing that resembles a seventeenth-century engraving of the apparition and text references in Nahuatl that seem to refer to the apparition to Juan Diego; it also bears the signature of Bernado de Sahagún, the adamant Franciscan foe of the devotion. The parchment deserves to receive more serious and objective study than Escalada’s experts have given it. Brading, the most reliable modern critic,

In 1665–66, as part of a process to obtain a fixed feast day (December 12), Mass proper and office for the feast, the Cathedral Chapter of Mexico City took solemn depositions from twenty elderly witnesses. They included one mestizo, seven Indians, ten religious and a lay *criollo* and *peninsular*. Several of the Indian witnesses claimed to be more than 100 years old. The Chapter, working 135 years after the fact, needed to deal with the fact that the appearance narrative first appeared in print 119 years after the 1531 date assigned to the apparition by Sánchez and Laso de la Vega, and the further complication that no written records of any kind referring to the apparitions existed prior to 1648. The witnesses all testified that the story was an enduring and well-known oral tradition that they had received from parents, grandparents, and ancestors. Some testified that their ancestors had known Juan Diego.³⁹

"I will be with you until the end of the world in my images, both of brush and carving, and you will know that I am in them when you see through them I work miracles and wonders."

Rome moves slowly, of course, and approvals for the feast day, Mass proper, and office were not given until 1754. Guadalupe was the third Marian shrine so honored, following Loreto and Zaragoza in Spain.⁴⁰ For almost a century, the process had been constantly promoted and oiled by Mexican, Spanish, and Roman Je-

suits. In the interval, dark Guadalupe's success in ending epidemics and stopping floods finally vanquished Cortez's white Virgin of

dismisses it saying: "Here, indeed, was a great discovery, a rare invention of modern science. Within the context of the Christian tradition, it was rather like finding a picture of St. Paul's vision of Christ on the road to Damascus, drawn by St. Luke and signed by St. Peter." See Fernandez et al., *El encuentro*, 340–52, for arguments pro, and Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*, 344 f., for arguments con [Web 33].

³⁹ Fernandez et al., *El encuentro*, chap. 10, pp. 423–75, gives a detailed and interesting account of the Juridical Inquiry (*Informaciones jurídicas*) of 1666.

⁴⁰ Mexican commentators made much of the fact that while the Loreto and Zaragoza images were attributed to St. Luke, the Guadalupe image was rendered, not by human hands, but by the Virgin or God himself. See Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*, 135.

Remedios, and Guadalupe was named Patroness of Mexico City (1737) and New Spain (1747) [Web 36, 37].

The history of the image, of course, does not end with its canonical approval. In 1810, revolutionary priest Miguel Hidalgo took up the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe as the battle flag and rallying point of the Indian and mestizo revolt against Spanish rule [Web 38]. Throughout the convoluted ecclesiastical and social history of nineteenth and twentieth century Mexico, Guadalupe remained. Despite searing attacks by anticlerical critics, the onslaught of the modern critical method, and cooption by every sort of movement from Zapatistas wearing her as a cockade in their sombreros to *Cristeros* and United Farm Workers marching under her banner to radical feminists transforming her into a sneaker-wearing jogger or rose-bikini clad modern woman, Guadalupe remains, a constellation of meanings and associations as complicated—and as beautiful—as the stars on her peacock cloak. [Web 39–42]

The Jesuit Connection

“The Reverend Jesuit Fathers throw themselves at Your Excellency’s feet, and beg him to grant them permission to commend themselves to Our Lady of Guadalupe and bid farewell to that divine Lady when they pass by her sanctuary.”⁴¹ Thus the Jesuit provincial wrote to the Viceroy of New Spain in 1767, as almost 700 Jesuits were rounded up and marched into exile from the great cities and colleges of Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Puebla, and from the great *estancias* of Sonora and the desert wastes of Baja California. The procession took three years, as Jesuits shipped across the Pacific from the Philippine Islands joined the long file that led to Veracruz and thence to Europe.

According to Jacques Lafaye, one can trace a direct line from the Jesuits’ tearstained farewell at Guadalupe to the bloodstained rally of Hidalgo’s troops under their *Nueva Capitan-General’s* banner, greeted with the battle Cry of Dolores “Long live religion! Long live

⁴¹ Beatriz Ramírez Camacho, “Breve relación sobre la expulsión de los jesuitas de Nueva España,” *Boletín del Archivo General de la Nación*, 2nd ser., vol. 7, no. 4 (Mexico City, 1966), 885, cited in Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe*, 99.

our very holy Mother of Guadalupe! Long Live America! Down with the rotten government!"⁴² *Criollo* Jesuits had attained intellectual equality with, and often surpassed, their European confreres, serving both the *criollo* middle and upper classes in their colleges and the far-flung Indian missions of Northern Mexico and Baja California. Their expulsion was met with shock, disbelief, and a sense of betrayal by Spain on the part of the *criollos*, and with open rebellion in several places by the Indians. The Cry of Dolores that began the revolution in 1810 was still forty years in the future, but Mexico still hears its echoes and experiences its aftershocks today, two hundred years later.

The intellectual climate of late seventeenth and eighteenth century Mexico was a heady one. D.A. Brading's careful reading of and research on Guadalupan sermons and panegyrics convincingly demonstrate great Mexican interest in Greek fathers of the Church during the period in question, and shows that that study, promoted by the Jesuits especially at their colleges in Mexico City and Puebla, led to a particular focus upon and interpretation of the Guadalupe image.

Foremost among the Jesuit Guadalupan apologists was Francisco de Florencia. Born at St. Augustine, Florida, in 1620, Florencia was sent to Mexico City to study at the Society's Colegio Real de San Ildefonso. He entered the Society in 1642, was ordained in 1654, and served at various times as rector of the Colegio Espiritu Santo, Puebla, and Colegio Maximo de San Pedro y San Pablo in Mexico City. He served for several years as procurator of the Mexican province both in Spain and in Italy. While in Italy he visited Loreto, and wrote a short treatise on Loreto and its devotions.⁴³ No doubt inspired by Torsellini and Richeome's work, he later composed a nine-day retreat (*Las Novenas del Santuario de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*), based on the Spiritual Exercises and the Guadalupe apparition narrative. During a visit to Genoa in 1670, he managed to recruit Salvatierra and Zappa for the Mexican missions.

⁴² Lafaye, *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe*, chap. 7, esp. pp. 99–112.

⁴³ Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*, 102. For details of Florencia's life and scholarly output, see *Diccionario bio-bibliográfico de la Compañía de Jesús en México*, ed. Francisco Zambrano and José Gutiérrez Casilla (Mexico City, 1961–77), 6:703–66.

Florencia was both theologian and historian, and his *magnum opus* was a defense of the historicity of the Guadalupan event entitled *La Estrella del Norte de Mexico* (The Polestar of Mexico), published at Mexico City in 1688. His apologetic work included a résumé of the various historical research (including the 1665–66 depositions) and theories surrounding the image and the devotion to date. Addressing the question of the lack of early written evidence of the apparition narrative, he predictably relied upon the oral transmission of “the constant tradition of parents and children” while maintaining that “for me what carries most weight is the many miracles that God has performed and every day is working through the Holy Image of Guadalupe.”⁴⁴ He invoked the example of the oral transmission of traditions of Loreto and Spanish shrines as well. *Estrella del Norte* provides a classic introduction to the frustrating convolutions of seventeenth century historiography (Florencia, for example, dots his text with a series of red herring references to documents that have not come down to us), yet his theological conclusions on the meaning of the image and the apparition narratives contained therein are particularly interesting in the context of this paper [Web 43].

Florencia was much influenced by the work of a fifteenth century Franciscan mystic Blessed Amadeus of Portugal, whose *Apocalypsis Nova* was quite popular in Mexico at the time of the composition of *Estrella del Norte*. In Amadeus’ visions of Mary, she revealed her immaculate conception (bolstering a favorite doctrinal theme of the Franciscans), and related a promise she had made to the apostles: “I will be with you until the end of the world in my images, both of brush and carving, and you will know that I am in them when you see through them I work miracles and wonders.”⁴⁵ Florencia improvised a “riff” on such revelation in another of his works, *Origen de los dos célebres santuarios de la Nueva Galacia*:

Know you my children, said the Lady, that through the grace of my Lord Jesus Christ I shall also be with you bodily until the end of the world: not in the Sacrament of the Altar, as is my Son, since that is neither convenient nor decent, but in my Images, of brush (as is that

⁴⁴ Francisco de Florencia, *La Estrella del Norte de Mexico* (The polestar of Mexico; Mexico City, 1688), 187–215. See Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*, 102 f.

⁴⁵ Florencia, *Estrella del Norte*, 486–89; see Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*, p. 113.

of Guadalupe of Mexico) or of sculpture (as are those of San Juan, of Zapopan, that of Los Remedios of Mexico and others) and then you shall know that I am in them when you see that some miracles are made through them.⁴⁶

Florencia and the following generation of Jesuit preachers skated perilously close to the edge of, and indeed sometimes over into, positing a kind of quasi-sacramental presence, a parallel to transubstantiation, that takes place in certain miraculous images: "this image . . . is not to be considered simply as Image, but as Mary, not only as the image of Mary, but as Mary herself, Virgin and mother of God." While availing himself of passages from St. Peter Chrysologus ("The image and the original are the same thing as regards their power, although different as regards their being") and St. Basil's affirmation that the honor paid to the image is transferred to the archetype, Florencia's daring affirmation of enduring, quasi-sacramental presence is a decided step beyond the traditional understanding of images, relying more on counter-reformation exuberance than on proof texts.⁴⁷ In Guadalupe, Florencia and his brethren found new models of transformation: roses transformed into image transformed into presence; signs of a new, mixed-race world transforming the stasis of old Europe; a New World religious experience of healing presence unlike any that the Old World had experienced. All revealed on a piece of cactus fiber cloth that showed a dark lady clothed in the sun.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Francisco de Florencia, *Origen de los dos célebres santuarios de la Nueva Galacia, obispado de Guadalajara en la América Septentrional*, 3rd edition (Mexico City, n.p., 1766), 150.

⁴⁷ Florencia, *Origen*, 49; see Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*, 113.

⁴⁸ Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*, 113 f. It should be noted that Florencia was not alone in positing this presence. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Jesuit preacher Juan de Goicoechea defined her as "sacramental image and sacrament of images . . . sacramented in a cape." He points to "the continuous miracle, through which she is present in her painting, according to appearances, like Christ in the Eucharist, in which with the substance of the bread destroyed, the accidents remain without the support of the substance, colors of bread and wine suspended in the air, like the color of our Marvelous Phoenix [Guadalupe] also suspended in the air" (*ibid.*, 147 f.).

Where Are We Today?

Eruptions of iconoclastic violence . . . are efforts to foreclose the power of presence in things, or to limit the access of particular communities to that power. Political regimes may obliterate presence in one set of objects and images in order to transpose it, often by force, censorship, and torture, into others. Ecclesiastical institutions try to control the traffic in presence-bearing objects. Devotional experience, including the intimate handling of sacred objects, may be discounted and pushed to the social and psychological margins, branded infantile or even insane, especially when it is associated with women. At the same time the devotional or instrumental experience of images and objects is commonly appropriated by elites, as in the European and North American vogue for "primitivism" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. . . . The nomenclature itself (*primitivism* as a term simultaneously of desire and denigration) articulates the dual colonialist project of domination and spiritual repossession; it also hides one way of seeing (the devotional) inside another (the aesthetic).⁴⁹

We live in an iconoclastic world, which, ironically, is awash with images. Between the Internet and 500 channels of Cable TV, it's possible to see more diverse images in a day than a peasant in any age besides our own ever saw in a lifetime behind the plow. Yet seeing is no longer believing.

Leaving digital manipulation and Photoshop aside, we don't trust visual imagery. The great epistemological divide seems to have opened up at the time of the Renaissance and Reformation. German art historian Hans Belting summarized two paradoxical, interlocking moves: the Protestant

In the English-speaking Jesuit world and in North America especially, a kind of calculated philistinism seems (to me at least) to have characterized the Society's approach to and use of the arts: nothing too dangerous, nothing too daring, nothing too beautiful was allowed.

⁴⁹ Robert A. Orsi, "The Many Names of the Mother of God," in *Divine Mirrors: The Virgin Mary in the Visual Arts*, ed. Melissa R. Katz (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 7. *Divine Mirrors* is the stunning exhibit catalog for the exhibition of the same name held at the Wellesley College Art Museum in 2000.

Reformation's different forms of puritanical iconoclasm exiled the image in favor of the word at about the same time that the religion of art—aestheticism—displaced the art of religion.

A generation before Luther, Dominican Girolamo Savanarola had warned his Florentine congregation to shun works of art lest they fall into idolatry, contemplating in them “not God but art.” With the rediscovery of the art of antiquity and its allegorical and mythological themes, Art (with a capital “A”) and the artist's inspiration came to supplant the traditional categories of sacred image and divine inspiration. Even in the Catholic world, the work of art lost much of its power, its presence: the painting was no longer understood as a vessel for meaning that contained the absolute, but as a window into the individual, and often idiosyncratic world of the artist's own mind and imagination.

At the same time, the *sola scriptura* doctrine of the reformers left little or no room for public devotional art, and at best allowed for discreet private images like Durer's engravings. Stripped churches and mutilated statues served as dramatic lessons to congregations that the only vessel capable of carrying meaning was the word.⁵⁰ With the ascendancy of Enlightenment deism and the skepticism of David Hume, the possibility of divine intervention in the world, of miracles, was allegedly laid to rest.

Counter-reformation and baroque Catholicism, of course, reacted to the neo-puritan iconoclasm of the reformers. In its very last set of decrees, Trent plainly reaffirmed the traditional teaching of the Fathers of the Church on appropriate veneration and use of images and relics, and the use of sacramentals.⁵¹ But Jesuits and other reformed religious orders used exuberant and sometimes dizzying religious arts in their buildings, and promoted the performing arts as didactic and emotive tools as well, even when their deep and mystical origins were sometimes forgotten or ignored. It was not accidental that Jesuits promoted pilgrimages and reduplicated Loreto around the world, that they created *son e lumiere* productions for Forty Hours devotions, and that they held on to ancient images like

⁵⁰ See Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, chap. 20, for a nuanced treatment of these complicated issues. For the Savanarola quotation, see *ibid.*, 472.

⁵¹ For Trent's decrees, see Tanner, *Decrees*, 2:774–76.

Salus Populi and promoted new ones like Guadalupe. The pedagogy of the Exercises had taught them to value the works of the imagination, and their *Constitutions* instructed them to use all things “like the spoils of Egypt” to build up the kingdom. Even the arts. And that, of course, provided extra ammunition to jealous monarchs and beauty-fearing Jansenists leading up to the Suppression in 1773.

The Society of Jesus that reemerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century after the Suppression was much chastened and highly cautious. Mirroring the conservative, even retrograde environment of the retrenched Church, Jesuits never recaptured the *élan vital*, the style and verve and courage of the Society’s early years. In the English-speaking Jesuit world and in North America especially, a kind of calculated philistinism seems (to me at least) to have characterized the Society’s approach to and use of the arts: nothing too dangerous, nothing too daring, nothing too beautiful was allowed. In that, Jesuits were right in line with religious tastes in general. Bland plaster statues of the Immaculate Conception and saccharine “bearded lady” images of the Sacred Heart of Jesus by and large dominated the visual horizon of devotional Catholicism from the French Revolution to the Second Vatican Council.

While the Liturgical Movement of the early to mid-twentieth century attempted to recover ancient parts of our tradition, its emphasis was more architectonic and literary than artistic or image-driven. In the 1950s, the Easter Triduum was reformed, and in the 1960s, the structures of the Eucharistic celebration and other sacraments were overhauled, streamlined, made more accessible and intelligible through translation into the vernacular. What was lost, and what has not yet been replaced, is a liturgical and paraliturgical milieu rich in images and sensual appeal.

In the decades following Vatican II, all too often “wannabe” Shaker simplicity read through the hermeneutic eyes of mid-twentieth century modernist architecture produced intellectually correct but emotionally neutral new church buildings and restorations. Discarded plaster saints, when replaced at all, have been substituted with bland, resin-cast mediocrity from church goods catalogs. Liturgists and architects groan when an ethnic community in the parish insists that “their” Madonna or patron saint interrupt the pure flow of unadorned wall. Yet strangely enough those inclusions often

become dynamic focal points of life, color, and warmth in an otherwise frosty milieu. God, we might remember, did not create the world as a perfect white cube, but let it evolve into a richly colorful, multidimensional place of rare, complex, and sometimes contradictory pied beauty.

Without a doubt much of the devotional apparatus of Catholic devotionism had become irrelevant by the mid-twentieth century,

That's why Ignatius didn't hesitate to make beautiful churches even while he and his followers lived in utter simplicity.

and much of it was theologically shaky. In the housecleaning after Vatican II, a lot of admittedly musty bath water was thrown out along with year-old baptismal water that once was consecrated with chrism, salt, and breath, cast to the four points of the compass, and thrice probed by a phallic paschal candle. However, the question

that many—and not only those of the extreme right wing—have begun to raise is whether or not the baby went with it. Certainly the Lady who held Him in the past is rarely to be seen.

Where Can We Go from Here?

*Earth's crammed with heaven and every common bush afire with God
But only those with eyes to see take off their shoes;
The rest sit round it and pluck blackberries.*

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will shine out like shining from shook foil.*

Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Gerard Manley Hopkins got the point. If God's power is immanent as well as transcendent, it will be revealed. Ignatius got it, too. Using tools ready to hand—memory, understanding, will, the arts and sciences, human lore and longing, ancient traditions—he created a spiritual road map that finds sacramental revelation everywhere, from our sinfulness to our profound experience of beauty seen or imagined.

That's why Ignatius didn't hesitate to make beautiful churches even while he and his followers lived in utter simplicity. That's why

he wasn't afraid to have a few beautiful images in his poor rooms. That's why some of his most powerful religious experiences, from Montserrat to the room where he died, happened before religious images.

So how do we, image-soaked people who don't trust images, make sense of the Church's and Society's immemorial traditions of using images and fostering devotion to them? How do we reclaim what Andrew Greeley correctly identifies as our disappearing "Catholic imagination?"⁵² Clearly we can't become pre-Enlightenment thinkers, nor turn our backs on modern historical and theological scholarship.

By way of conclusion, I will suggest a few avenues by which to approach these complicated issues. They are not intended as pronouncements but as invitations to reflection.

Among their many functions in the Catholic tradition, images function as theological statements, as *theologoumena*. They can tell us, if we listen to them with our eyes, about the ground level realities of our belief. It's often difficult, especially when confronted with mediocre religious art, to get beyond the surface, to quiet our well-trained critical voices long enough to learn anything from it. Really great religious art—and there's a lot of it around, more easily available to us than ever before in history—can teach us, but only if we allow ourselves to be taught. A simple word of advice: don't bother with the schlock, or get annoyed by it. Find something beautiful and simply gaze at it. The first step is silence before the mystery of beauty, which is silence before the Lord of Beauty.

In theory, we're trained as contemplatives, but most of us meditate more easily than we contemplate. Structured, discursive meditation appeals to "Type A" people (like most Jesuits) because it has a beginning, a middle, and an end, specific points to be hit or missed, something like a goal to be attained. Contemplation of images, like the best contemplations of the Exercises, is a pre-conscious, sub-conscious activity. It works when we listen to what the image says to us, to what the deepest parts of our psyche resound with, are moved by, are even sometimes frightened or repelled by.

⁵² Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 2001).

Rudolph Otto had it right: the experience of the Holy is analogous to the experience of the Beautiful: always *fascinans et tremendum*, always attractive and at least a little frightening. It requires a degree of surrender, surrender that is based on trust that what will be revealed is benevolent, for our good, trustworthy.

If the contemplation of images requires something like the “willing suspension of disbelief,” so be it. We are comfortable enough with that approach to fiction and cinema, readily accepting the truth that underlies the magic realism of Garcia Marquez or the cyber evangelism of *The Matrix*, yet oddly we are hesitant to admit its usefulness in the religious sphere. In the end, does it really matter if the details of the Guadalupe narrative are accurate historical accounts written a century after the event, any more than it matters whether or not three astrologers really brought gold, incense, and embalming compound to the infant King of the Jews? What matters is the truth behind the image and narrative, the truth that sometimes is best, sometimes is ultimately *only* communicated in narrative, image, and art. To say that God is all forgiving is a true theological proposition, but nowhere near as true, instructive or helpful as hearing the story of the Prodigal Son or seeing Rembrandt’s painting of the Prodigal’s return.⁵³

In the aftermath of Vatican II, we rightly dismissed much meaningless lore and hollow observance. We simplified our worship into an almost exclusive focus on the Eucharist, which all agree is the Church’s most complete and perfect prayer. But it would behoove us to remember that there are many other kinds of public prayer, other kinds of devotion that are not only sanctioned, but which, with appropriate, heartfelt adaptation, still might move us and teach us.⁵⁴

Pilgrimage and Taizé prayer before the cross bring us to liminal points, to thresholds. Praying the rosary at a wake remains

⁵³ It is interesting to note that in the Rembrandt painting, the father’s two hands are very different: one is the hand of an old man, the other the hand of a woman, perhaps the mother.

⁵⁴ For a refreshing “take” on rediscovering the devotional tradition, see the short pieces compiled by James Martin in two Lenten articles: “Contemporary Catholics on Traditional Devotion,” *America*, March 3, 2003, 8–14, and March 10, 2003, 14–17.

for many the most consoling way to say “adios,” “until we meet again in God” to those who have crossed through the final threshold of death. Re-attuning ourselves to the cycle of the seasons and the inherited wisdom of the liturgical calendar can help us to live more consciously, more mindfully, perhaps better, more wholeheartedly in the world. We can find inspiration in John Nava’s brilliant tapestries and Robert Graham’s multicultural statue of Our Lady of the Angels, which transform José Rafael Moneo and Cardinal Roger Mahoney’s new Los Angeles cathedral from one more impressive modern structure into a vivid house of prayer for the community [Web 44, 45]. Reconnecting with the “cloud of witnesses,” the saints and blessed of the Church and of the Society, and especially with the Mother of Jesus, can help reconnect us to one another as the devotions of the early Society helped to create a “virtual” community of men dispersed around the globe.

This emphatically *isn't* to suggest nightly litanies or required Benediction on Sunday. Holy Houses of Loreto and *Salus Populi* images are unlikely to make a comeback in our chapels and houses.

In the end, it doesn't really matter to me if Juan Diego existed or not, or whether "roses, lilies, violets, carnation, jasmine, irises, rosemary and broom" arranged by a mysterious lady in a peasant's cloak became a miraculous sign.

Rather this paper serves as an invitation for us to revisit and re-imagine the treasures of our tradition, to adapt and apply them to the present circumstances. It serves too as an invitation to poets, storytellers, and artists. The careful and creative use of religious images in our houses, work places, and worship-places can foster an atmosphere where such adaptation and contemplation are supported and encouraged. It

might contribute to creating a “virtual” reality that transforms the mundane world in which we live.

Whether or not we can accept the teachings of the Greek Fathers or the seventeenth century Mexican Jesuits who believed that images are vessels that mysteriously, sacramentally contain the presence of the one they signify, as a first step we could do worse than to find humility enough to learn from the simple, those for

whom our Society has voiced a preferential option. "We speak in terms of color, composition, expression, and the means of conveying things like space and movement. . . . We refuse, or refuse to admit, those elements of response that are more openly evinced by those who are less schooled," writes art historian David Freedberg.⁵⁵ Maybe we can learn something from Guadalupe and her children.

More than any other contemporary devotion, I think that Guadalupe has the potential to bind together the disparate, to be a source of meaning to the confused, to be a consolation to the afflicted. My pink-haired Wiccan secretary wears her as proudly as the blue-haired Legion of Mary ladies of our parish. Guadalupe appears in murals on the side of *panaderias* in Denver, on oak trees in Watsonville, California, in reflections on the side of an office building in Clearwater, Florida, on the tattoos of prisoners at San Quentin and on the dingle balls of taxi cabs in Tijuana's red light district. I saw her in a side chapel in the Patriotic Cathedral of Shanghai, and she seemed quite as much at home there as at Tepeyac. She creates a virtual community, full of proleptic promise, wherever she goes. As Francisco de Florencia pointed out 300 years ago and contemporary essayist Richard Rodriguez insists today, she grew out of our soil, is the color of our earth, wears the complexion of a new humanity. We could do worse than to sit quietly at her feet, gaze at her, and learn.⁵⁶

In the end, it doesn't really matter to me if Juan Diego existed or not, or whether "roses, lilies, violets, carnation, jasmine, irises, rosemary and broom" arranged by a mysterious lady in a peasant's cloak became a miraculous sign. For some, the sign is empty without the miraculous origin. For me, as for Florencia three hundred years

⁵⁵ David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 17 f. Also see *ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁶ Richard Rodriguez's elegant, thought-provoking, and often perplexing writings develop many of these same themes in the light of contemporary culture. His essay "India," in *Goddess of the Americas: Writings about the Virgin of America*, ed. Ana Castillo (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), 17–24, is a sketch for a more ambitious and lyrical treatment of the New World discovering its own novelty found in his recent collection of essays, *Brown: The Last Discovery of America* (New York: Viking, 2002).

ago, the miraculous sign begins when you see people gather below her image.

Three Epilogues

Wisdom hath builded herself a *casita*

October 31, 2001. After meetings at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Puebla, I steal a few days in Mexico City. My first morning there, I go to visit the Lady. I get out of the bus half a mile from Tepeyac, and walk the last distance to the Basilica on a road that used to be an Aztec causeway across the waters. People have been walking here for at least a thousand years to visit the dark lady, first Tonantzin, now La Morenita, Lupita, La Guadalupana. On the way I see a newsstand with a front-page color picture: the victorious star of the Mexico City soccer team has pulled up his jersey. His triumphant head is bent over to kiss the head of the image of Guadalupe emblazoned on his T-shirt.

As I get nearer, the stalls begin: people hawking candles and cheap chromolithographs, newly-cast plaster San Juan Diego figurines, churros, cokes, and candy. I buy some roses, and candles. Although it's a weekday morning, there is a mood of carnival in the air, even as a wife and daughter push a man in a wheelchair up the long ramp that leads to the plaza. As I step into the plaza, the "Atrio de America" as it is called, my eyes begin to mist up. A man, carrying his baby girl in a bright pink blanket smelling of fabric softener, inches across the plaza on his knees, accompanied by his wife and father. There is fear in his eyes, and hope.

Inside the Basilica, a modern building at once intriguing and ghastly, I sit for a long time, gazing at the woman dressed in the sun. Mass begins, and I'm relieved that the priest speaks simply and directly, without bombast or pretense, about our need for compassion and God's love. Sacraments happen, in bread and wine, in *flor y canto*. Behind me, during communion, a woman sings the harmony line to "Pescador de hombres" in perfect thirds. I can hear her weeping as she sings. At the Lady's feet I leave my needs together with the roses: for healing for my nephew and for an old, dear friend who is dying, for the abused and the abusers in our Church, for an increase in my own faith. I have never felt more at home in this world.



On Sunday, December 12, 1999, we gathered at St. Ignatius Church in San Francisco to dedicate a shrine to Our Lady of Guadalupe that I helped to design. That year marked the 302nd anniversary of the Jesuits' arrival in Loreto, Baja California, and the 150th anniversary of their arrival in San Francisco, Alta California on the feast of the Immaculate Conception, 1849 [Web 46].

At the end of the solemn liturgy, an ancient Mexican lady I'd never seen before or since came over to me. She grabbed my wrist, held on for dear life, and told me "You have brought sweetness into this place. It will pour over into all our lives." She was right, except that I had little to do with it except helping to make a casita in the midst of the Baroque splendor of our immense church. Yet that small house has changed the building's geography of space and memory. Whenever you go into the vast building now, it seems like there is always someone sitting in the chapel, or kneeling there. One of our faculty members, a gifted sociologist named Esther Madriz who recently died of cancer, told me not long before her passing that she would go there every day, just to sit. That was enough.



On December 12 for the past four years, at dawn, there gathers an unlikely community at the university chapel: Mexican cleaning ladies, janitors, and gardeners; high ranking administrators and professors, punked-out clerical workers and librarians, pierced and tattooed students, Jesuits, parishioners, neighbors, transvestites, gay people, straight people, strangers and friends. More come each year from all over the city, gather for a moment, enfolded in the same mantle, to experience the same sweetness. Maybe that is miracle enough.

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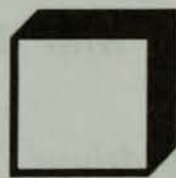
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