

The Virgin of Guadalupe, An Event for the Americas?



Some Central Events Leading to the Time of Our Lady of Guadalupe's Apparition

1326: the statue of the Spanish Black Madonna of Guadalupe is rediscovered

1413: beginning of the age of the Consciousness Soul

1428: rise of the Aztec Empire

1478: rise of the Spanish Inquisition

1498: end of the Spanish Reconquista

1517-21: beginning of the Reformation

1521: Cortés defeats the Aztec Emperor Montezuma

1531: apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe

Every now and then the spiritual world has an impact on the physical world that is not immediately discernable, but an important one nevertheless when seen with the benefit of hindsight. It is as if the spirit wanted to render something possible, or at least awaken human beings and give them another chance. Would this be the case with Our Lady of Guadalupe? And why would it be so?

I was standing in the vast courtyard of the Basilica of Guadalupe in early March of 1985, meaning to enter the church, apparently the most-visited Catholic shrine in the world. I had little inkling of the importance of the shroud therein contained, and at the time was more than a little turned off by the throngs, pilgrims walking on their knees and other manifestations of piety. By the end of the year I acquainted myself with the work of the Teatro Campesino of Luis Valdez and saw their very moving, traditional Mexican *Pastorela*—a Shepherds' Play—in San Juan Bautista, California. The next year they played a staging of the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe. They did this every second year in alternation with the *Pastorela*, and I had the opportunity over the years to see three or four such plays about the Virgin. It was then that I became aware of the unique story and was awakened to its importance. Having a Latino background, fluency in Spanish and a certain degree of familiarity with Mexican culture from living fifteen years in California, other elements were added over time. It was striking and quite touching to see the admiration great numbers of Mexicans have for Guadalupe even when they are not particularly devout; in fact to see the importance of the figure for the whole of Mexico. I remember in particular a hard-working landscape gardening supervisor wearing a tee-shirt of the Virgin at work, and when asked about it, responding with great pride as to

what the symbol meant for him as a Mexican, though he was not strongly religious.

Over the years more and more realizations ensued until I was moved to gather in writing what forms this essay. In previous books I have looked at North American history, and particularly at the turning points of history: what happened at the time of the Mystery of Golgotha, at the beginning of the Fifth Post-Atlantean Age, and at other unique times in history, such as the American Revolution, Lincoln's presidency and the Civil Rights Movement. It is now clear that the event of Guadalupe's apparition is another such important turning point.

The Historical Context

Hernan Cortés defeated the Aztecs in 1521 with 900 Spaniards, 80 horses, 13 brigantines and 16 pieces of artillery. Such a small contingent and force could have achieved nothing without 200,000 Native allies.¹ But after the Conquest the allies were left divided and easily subdued. They were not acknowledged, nor rewarded for their efforts. Part of the reasons for the Natives to come to Cortés's help was the nature of their subjugation to the Aztec Empire. The esoteric nature of the Aztec regime was thoroughly Ah-ri-manic. The regime turned around the dual figures of the *tlatoani* (emperor) and the *cihuacoatl* (adviser and in practice high priest). The emperor was the public figure, the high commander of the Aztec armies. Behind him stood the high priest responsible for the cult, central to the functioning of Aztec rule. In his hands stood the practice of ritual human sacrifice. Between 1427—date of the beginning of Empire and 1520—there had been seven emperors. Three of the successive emperors had very short reigns: Atotzotli, Axayacatl and Tizoc lasted respectively six, nine and five years. During this same time there were three *cihuacoatl*. Tlacaelel (1420s–1487) the first *cihuacoatl*, survived four emperors. The reason for the three to seven ratio is quite simple. Whereas the Emperor was bound to lead his armies, and was therefore exposed to death in combat, the high priest was much more sheltered in his position and privilege. As a matter of fact in him lay true leadership, rooted in esoteric power.

Aztec power revolved around the central cult of the sacrifice with extraction of the heart from a live victim. The inauguration of the main temple of Tenochtitlan alone meant the sacrifice of an estimated 10,000 victims over the space of four days. Aztec rule entailed the subjugation of all surrounding tribes and the request of tribute in goods, labor and sacrificial victims. Over their almost century-long rule much resentment arose among the subjugated tribes, though left to themselves the Aztecs, very organized and courageous warriors, kept their vassals easily subjugated with the help of their main allies.

Rudolf Steiner did not speak of the Aztecs in particular, but pointed to what their role would have been in following the decadent Mesoamerican civilization, which inaugurated human sacrifices at the time of the Mystery of

¹ Ross Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 143.

Golgotha. At that time, Steiner specifies it was the stomach which was removed from a live victim, whereas we know without a doubt that the Aztecs excised the heart.

In announcing that after their disappearance, similar sacrifices would return at the time of the fifth post-Atlantean epoch, Steiner has this to say: "Nevertheless, so much force remained that a further attack could have been made upon the fifth epoch, having as its aim so to mechanize the earth that the resulting culture would not only have culminated in a mass of purely mechanical contrivances but would have made human beings themselves into such pure homunculi that their egos would have departed."² This then was the nature of Aztec civilization, which closely followed the indicative marker of the year 1413, beginning of the epoch of the Consciousness Soul. None but the high priest and his closest acolytes could have known of the ultimate goals of the cult, but it is easy to understand that such a blood-thirsty regime was widely resented by all subjugated tribes. It was this factor that made Cortés' "Conquest" possible, a feat which resembled more closely a coup or a rebellion.

After Tenochtitlan was conquered in August of 1521 the massacre in the city lasted another four days. Elsewhere the Native allies went on killing thousands of Aztecs and stealing their property.³ This suggests that Cortés did not have control over his few remaining troops or his allies, and that their resentment went deep.

At the very beginning of Spanish occupation the Natives saw the situation as an advantage, because they could keep goods owed in tribute to the Aztecs, and were protected from the latter by the Spaniards. However, this was the very short-term outlook, after which the Spaniards gradually imposed their own, very centralized rule and requested tribute on a massive scale. The Spaniards took advantage of those groups that kept the fight against the Aztec allies—such as the strong Tlaxcaltecs (Tlaxcala is some 75 miles East of Mexico City) which played the primary role among the Natives attacking Tenochtitlan. They set one group against the other and took advantage of all of them with false promises.

After 1525 Spanish priests arrived from the mother country, together with more colonists. This brought in its wake the destruction of temples, idols, artifacts of the Native gods, books, in the attempt to quell a feared Indian revolt. Within a generation they completely wiped out the Native priesthood.⁴

² Rudolf Steiner, *Inner Impulses of Evolution, the Mexican Mysteries, the Knights Templar*, lecture of September 24, 1916, "Atlantean Impulses in the Mexican Mysteries. The Problem of Natural Urges and Impulses, The Problem of Death."

³ Ross Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 142-43.

⁴ Ross Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 149-150.

The Role of Religion

Overcoming the old religion and bringing in Christianity served as a rationale and justification for conquest. Spain needed the justification of religious conversions for the legitimacy of its occupation and for ingratiating the all-powerful Catholic church which yielded great political influence in Spain. This worked out through a series of closely interrelated events.

At the time preceding the Reformation—which saw its very first beginnings in 1517-1521—the popes, Spanish and Portuguese crowns brokered agreements for the division of the world among the two world empires. In terms of effective world power Christianity meant then only the Catholic Church. The rationale of the Pope was the Christianization of the world. The Iberian kingdoms saw this state of affairs as the natural outgrowth of their maritime power. They called on the arbitration of the popes for the enterprise which would receive his blessing as a missionary opus bringing in new converts to Catholicism.

In the years preceding the Mexican Conquest the world had been 'equitably' divided between the two rival powers. Already in 1479 the Treaty of Alcáçovas was signed by the two nations through the offices of Pope Sixtus IV and the papal bull *Aeterni regis*. This granted Portugal all lands south of the Canary Islands. Due to the tensions arising from the Spanish claims to the new territories discovered by Columbus—situated south of the Canary Islands—tensions erupted between the Portuguese King John II and his Spanish counterparts, King Ferdinand II and Queen Isabella I.

The next step led to the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas, which divided the zones of influence of the two nations along a meridian situated half-way between the Portuguese Cape Verde islands and the islands claimed by Columbus and the Spanish crown: Cuba and Hispaniola. The lands east of this meridian would go to Portugal, those to the west to Spain. The meridian cut through the easternmost part of future Brazil.

As the claims for world hegemony were taken very seriously by the two crowns it remained to the 1529 Treaty of Zaragoza, brokered by Pope Alexander VI, to specify another meridian to the East—passing roughly through the middle of Australia—as the division of the rest of the globe: west of it to Portugal, east to Spain. On the whole the two countries abided by the treaties, though there were various renegotiations.

The Spaniards had therefore the blessings of the Catholic Church in their voyages of exploration and conquest. The conquistadores who invaded the New World were those who had just experienced two cardinal events in their history. The Spanish Inquisition, had been established in 1478 by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella. It targeted primarily Jews and Muslims who had converted under pressure to maintain their lands and possession, but secretly kept their faith. The year 1498 marked end of the Spanish Reconquista with the fall of the Nasrid kingdom of Granada. The Hispanic resentment of the Muslim domination, and the repression of Jews and Muslims,

had generated a desire for revenge and retribution against any group that was culturally different. This attitude of soul was carried by the Spaniards to the New World.

Pope Alexander VI in 1493 and later Pope Julius II in 1508 gave the crown extensive authority over New Spain, with the goal of converting the Indigenous peoples to Catholicism. Spanish officials duly appointed religious authorities in Mexico. In spite of this slavery was an unsettled issue. The queen decreed that the indigenous people should be treated along the lines of the policies implemented in the Canary Islands, which precluded slavery in most situations, excluding prisoners of war, or those accused of practising cannibalism.

In 1530 the Spanish Inquisition was imported to New Spain and for a short time Juan de Zumárraga, de facto bishop, acted as its main executor. This only targeted a few Indians who had nominally converted to Christianity and then returned to their practices, and was directed especially to prominent leaders. When the Natives figured out the risk they faced, this put a damper on all conversions and the Inquisition relented.

The Political Situation

The years just preceding the apparition of Guadalupe formed a climax of intensification, particularly through what was known as the first Audiencia, the high court that governed New Spain from 1528 to 1530, headed by Nuño Beltrán de Guzmán. The future bishop Zumárraga⁵ felt the need to take an active protective role vis a vis the Natives, who complained about the repression they faced from the new settlers and the abuses of the Audiencia itself. He had written to the Spanish king, Charles the Fifth, that "the entire continent would be lost if there were no miracle to aid them in their endeavors."⁶ The clergy itself was at risk of imprisonment and execution, even murder, if they tried to intercede for the Natives.

Of the previous Native political structures the Spaniards only left power to the Natives at the level of the town, which were governed by local leaders, renamed *caciques*. Even this power was heavily curtailed by local landowners and clergy. The Native tribute in goods and labor was reoriented to supply the new Spanish overlords. At the beginning there was a certain difference between a single class of local nobility (*principales*) and the commoners (*macehuales*), but overtime even the rights of the principales amounted to little or nothing, and the fate of all Natives was lumped into one. The political class simply played the role of middlemen to the Spaniards.

This was not the end of the Natives' misery. They suffered most in fact from the effects of new diseases unknown to them, imported from Europe. It is estimated that the native population in 1519 amounted to some 25 million

⁵ Although appointed bishop on August 20, 1530, he was not consecrated until April 1533.

⁶ Stephanie Georgieff, *The Virgin of Guadalupe, Mysterious Messenger of Destiny*, 97.

people. By the year 1600, 95% of it had been wiped out, coming to just above 1 million. There were outbreaks of smallpox (1520-21) and typhus (1545-48 and 1576-81); to these were added the effects of measles, mumps, influenza, and locally malaria.⁷ The Spaniards during this time forced the remaining populations into towns where they could be more easily controlled.

Cortés had undertaken the founding of new cities and appointed men who exerted Spanish rule over all of New Spain. He also imposed the *encomienda* system in 1524. *Encomiendas* were awarded as a grant to a particular individual. They were a de facto perpetual monopoly on the labor of particular groups of indigenous peoples, held by the grant holder, the *encomendero*. Cortés reserved many *encomiendas* for himself and for his retinue, which he considered just rewards for their accomplishment in conquering central Mexico.

Another consequence the Natives faced was that of the so-called "Columbian exchange," which played negatively on their ecosystems, economy and nutrition. Wheat, with lower nutritional value than maize, employed twice as much labor and additional irrigation. The situation was even worse later in time with sugarcane. Not only did it require irrigation and extensive labor, but it used some of the best lands and altogether left Mexico for the European markets. To these were added the competition for land due to the introduction of domestic European animals: horses, cattle, sheep, goats and chickens, which were allowed to graze freely at the expense of Native land, causing overgrazing and loss of ground-cover. Add to this deforestation and the seeds were planted for disastrous ecological alterations. The results of economic policies subsidizing and forcing the provisioning of Mexico City became the equivalent of the Aztec tribute. Many Natives were forced off the land by these policies, sucking the lifeblood of the land for the privilege of the city dwellers.

The Aztec Empire had certainly been brought to an end, and with it the practice of human sacrifices. But what accomplished this was another Ahrimanic impulse of the lure of gold, as Steiner reminds us: "...the Ahrimanic influence is dispersed and scattered. But you need only study how Spain, strictly Roman Catholic as it was, was fascinated by all the treasures of gold that were discovered in America. What a hold it had upon her! You can observe how strong the specter-like working of the old Romanism still was in such a ruler as Ferdinand of Castile or Charles V, the ruler of the kingdom over which the "sun never set."⁸ The hopelessness of old has been replaced by decimation and devastation and a new form of slavery. It is within this context that we can then see the role of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

⁷ Ross Hassig, *Mexico and the Spanish Conquest*, 152.

⁸ Rudolf Steiner, *Inner Impulses of Evolution, the Mexican Mysteries, the Knights Templar*, lecture of September 17, 1916, "The Influence of Luciferic and Ahrimanic Beings on Historical Development. The clear Perception of the Sensory World and Free Imaginations as the Task of Our Time. Genghis Khan and the Discovery of America."

Zumárraga, Guzman, Cortés

Under Nuño de Guzman's presidency at the head of the Audiencia many excesses took place, which would not have been in keeping with Isabella's views. This was possible because of the distance from the motherland and a certain atmosphere of cronyism and lawlessness, which Guzman did nothing to curb. Eye-witness reports of the time offer a general view of what form and extent slavery took before and under the First Audiencia. When Guzman was governor of the province of Panuco, prior to the Audiencia, due to the scarcity of horses it was well-known that a single animal was traded for fifteen slaves.⁹ The province's population had been decimated by the slave trade. Those who were transported to the high plateau around Mexico City would often not survive the colder climate. The majority of those employed in Mexico were destined to the gold mines, of which there were none in Panuco. Others were sent to the Caribbean islands through the port of Veracruz. Things continued in the same vein when Guzman became president of the Audiencia, or even increased at the time. Zumárraga quickly became aware of these matters and mounted an opposition to Guzman.

Zumárraga had been officially named "Protector of the Indians." However, neither his duties, nor the extent of his jurisdiction had been clearly defined. The Natives brought to him all manner of complaints. Many Franciscans were outraged by the excesses of the Audiencia and pressed their superior for action. Zumárraga's attempts to inform the Spanish court of the course of events were countered by the Audiencia's strict censorship of all letters and communications from New Spain. It is said that finally a Biscayan sailor hid a letter in a cake of wax, immersed in a barrel of oil in order that it reach Spain.¹⁰

A 1530 episode involved a number of members of the Audiencia dragging a priest from a church, killed him and tortured his servant. Reacting to the excesses Zumárraga placed Mexico City under interdict—a ban on services and church rites—and the Franciscans retired to Texcoco. When the interdict was lifted at Easter the *oidores* who composed the Audiencia were excommunicated for a year. On July 1530 the Crown appointed a new Audiencia, which replaced the old one in December. This step marked a clear improvement in the Natives' lot and better relationships with Zumárraga and the clergy. Under these circumstances was nearing the miracle that Zumárraga felt necessary.

Before there was a Guadalupe in the New World, Guadalupe was the name of a black Madonna in the Spanish region of Estremadura, bordering central Portugal. Her face is slightly similar to that of the American Guadalupe. The child she carries is considered the artistic work of St Luke, the Gospel

⁹ Silvio Zavala, *Nuño Beltrán de Guzman y la esclavitud de los indios*, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25134226> and other websites.

¹⁰ Catholic Encyclopedia, Juan de Zumárraga entry at <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15767a.htm>

writer. In 711, when the Moors invaded Seville, the statue of the Black Madonna was hidden in the hills near the Guadalupe river in Estremadura. The word Guadalupe has a linguistically mixed origin, with probable Arabic-Latin derivations, meaning the "river of the wolf." The Arabic *Guadi* means dry river (present surviving term of *oued*) and the Latin *lupus* wolf. She was rediscovered by a cow herder, Gil Cordero in 1326.

Hernan Cortés was born in Medellin, Estremadura, and called himself a devotee of the Virgin of Guadalupe. For all his brutality and selfishness the conquistador had the good sense to ask the Spanish monarchs to send Franciscan and Dominican friars to Mexico rather than diocesan or secular priests known to indulge in the vices and profanities that were common in Spain. And although he was born in the Biscay province in Spain, the Bishop Zumárraga was himself devoted to the Spanish Guadalupe.

Marian Apparitions to Juan Diego and Juan Bernardino

Don Antonio Valeriano (1521-1605), who wrote the account *Nicam Mopohua*, (Herein is Related) retelling the events of the virgin of Guadalupe, was born in Azcapotzalco not far from Tepeyac. He was the nephew of the emperor Montezuma and a friend of Juan Diego, to whom Guadalupe appeared, and Zumárraga. He learned Latin and Greek, which he taught, and was professor of philosophy and dean of the College of Tlatelolco for twenty years. He became the most valued assistant of Bernardino de Sahagun, the Franciscan friar who documented the Natives' cosmovision and culture.¹¹ As a young man he was first a judge and then became "governor of the Indians" for more than thirty years. He was thus popular with both Mexicans and Spaniards. It is easy to imagine that he was accurate in taking down the accounts of Juan Diego, and Zumárraga.

Juan Diego, the individual at the center of the events, had a good amount of property, although he embraced a voluntary poverty because of his faith. He was one of the first to be converted, sometime before 1528, changing his name from Singing Eagle to Juan Diego. The farmer rose very early every morning on Saturday to attend the service in honor of Mary and Sunday for the regular mass.

The known story of Our Lady of Guadalupe was the result of five Marian apparitions to Juan Diego and his uncle, Juan Bernardino, which took place from December 9 to December 12, 1531 in the hill of Tepeyac, now situated in the suburbs of Mexico City. These were the dates in the then current Julian calendar, which were however, astronomically incorrect. When they are corrected according to the Gregorian calendar we obtain the dates of December 18 to 21. The 21st, day of the winter solstice, was known to Juan Diego and the Natives as the most important day of their cosmology and

¹¹ Sahagún compiled the *Historia general de las cosas de la Nueva España* (General History of the Things of New Spain). The most famous manuscript of the *Historia general* is the *Florentine Codex*.

spiritual practices. They could not have failed to recognize it, no matter what the Spanish calendar would say.

The following is the sequence of the apparitions:

Saturday, December 9

Early in the morning, when Juan Diego went to the hill of Tepeyac, a woman appeared to his sight, who spoke to him in his Native tongue, Nahuatl, calling herself Mary, "mother of the very true deity." On her first appearance she requested that a church be built on the site in her honor, entreating Juan Diego to convey her wish to the bishop.

Following her request Juan Diego obtained audience with bishop Juan de Zumárraga, who however, did not believe the words of the Native. Passing again by the hill Juan Diego saw once more the virgin, who again insisted that he carry out his request and meet anew with the bishop.

Sunday, December 10

The next day Juan Diego spoke once more to the bishop. Zumárraga was no doubt touched by the farmer's earnestness, but asked for a sign in order to be certain of Juan Diego's assertions. When the Virgin appeared once more to Juan Diego, the young man conveyed the bishop's request, to which Mary replied she would show him a sign the next day.

Monday, December 11 and Tuesday December 12

On Monday, however, Juan Diego was distracted from his task by an illness of his uncle Juan Bernardino. When the uncle's health took a turn for the worse overnight Juan Diego decided to travel on Tuesday to seek a priest from Tlatelolco to hear his uncle's confession and administer the last rights. Both because he was ashamed of missing his previous meeting with the Lady and because of the urgency of his task Juan Diego avoided passing by the hill of Tepeyac. The Virgin, however, appeared on his way, asking him about his errands and chiding him for his missed commitment thus: "Am I not here, who is your Mother? Are you not under my protection? Am I not your health? Are you not happily within my fold? What else do you wish?" Reassuring him that his uncle would recover, she charged him to get to the summit of Tepeyac hill, and there to gather flowers. Juan Diego was puzzled since the hill was practically barren and this was the middle of winter. Nevertheless he found there Castilian roses in bloom, a specie that had been imported by the Spaniards, and gathered them in his tilma, the Native cloak.

When Juan Diego arrived once more in the presence of the bishop, and opened the tilma, not only did the flowers fall, satisfying the bishop's request, but the tilma revealed impressed on it the image of the Lady Juan

Diego had seen four times. As Juan Diego learned the next day, the Lady of Guadalupe appeared to his uncle Juan Bernardino on the same day, and he was healed. To him she asked to inform the bishop about the fifth and last apparition and to tell him that she desired to be known as "Guadalupe."

Icon and Symbolism

By detours of grace and destiny the shroud of Guadalupe marries in its symbolism Spanish/European themes with Native meanings. The first apparition on December 9th of the Julian calendar corresponded to the then observed date of the Catholic feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. The last one to Juan Diego took place on December 12th of the Julian calendar, which on that year fell on December 21, day of the winter solstice, the most important day of Aztec and Native spiritual traditions. On that day she revealed her name, in what Juan Diego heard as a Nahuatl word. When transmitted to the bishop it sounded like Guadalupe.

It is possible that the word Guadalupe may have had a different origin and meaning in Nahuatl, language in which Juan Diego heard the virgin speak, and that it was understood as Guadalupe by Zumárraga who, like most Spaniards, could have had difficulty understanding Nahuatl words. Some Mexicans have come up with possible interpretations, which it would be difficult to corroborate. The writer Gloria Anzaldúa proposes the indigenous origin of Guadalupe as *Coatlalopeuh*, which translates as "She Who Has Dominion over Serpents." She also gives *Coatlaxopeuh* as a variant name, the one which was proposed before her by Father Mariano Jacobo Rojas of Tepoztlán.¹²

Extensive studies have been made about the Guadalupe image and its symbolism. All of them reveal that, although we have to do with a physical artifact, it does not behave strictly as one. The tilma—from the Nahuatl *tilmahtli*—is a cloak woven of maguey fibers in two separate panels meeting in the front. It has been recorded that the cloak first hung unprotected for 116 years, exposed to the hands and lips of the pilgrims, the heat and soot of the candles and the nitrous fumes of the Texcoco lake. Maguey fiber are highly perishable, and copies of the tilma, made by weavers and painters in the 1780s at the instigation of Dr. José Ignacio Bertolache, deteriorated after just seven years. The core of the image—without the later additions such as the Moon, the angel at the bottom of the mantle—has survived unchanged through the centuries. Infrared photographs elucidate the reason for the difference between the two parts. Whereas brush strokes can be seen in the angel, Moon and bottom of the mantle, none appear in the rest of the image.¹³ No plausible explanation can be offered for the technique of the painting.

The dress of the Virgin appears to be that of a Middle Eastern maiden at the time of Christ. It is fastened with a *cingulum*, worn by virgins, which

¹² Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands / La Frontera*, quoted in https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Possible_Nahuatl_etymologies_of_Guadalupe

¹³ Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate editors, *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, 59.

was removed at marriage, and by a golden circlet with a cross at the neck. While the overall colors of the image appear faded at close range, they acquire more vibrancy and freshness at a distance.

Of all features the face shows remarkable properties. At close range she looks whitish-gray, whereas at three feet distance she turns slightly gray-green and further off she takes decidedly Native hues. The softness of the outline at close range takes on more definition with the distance.

Similar effects show in the mantle. Whereas the stars there imprinted are hardly visible up close, they shine brightly from a distance. And the robe, which looks dark blue at close range, turns into a greenish-blue or turquoise from afar. Likewise the pink of the tunic, soft up close, becomes more pronounced with the distance. And, more puzzlingly than all else, the whole image appears larger when viewed from a distance, leading the editor Coley Taylor to see one reversal from the laws of Nature after another. And together with reversals he can't fail to notice a "tremendous sense of Presence."¹⁴

We have seen enough awe-inducing reversals overall to be able to sense that the laws of the etheric shine through the physical in a tilma that has been preserved unaltered for five centuries. And it is not surprising therefore, that no matter what temperature is recorded in the church, the tilma itself does not stray from 98.6°F (37°C). Thus, rather than reversals we could call all of these phenomena enhancements of the physical.

Another detail of seeming little importance, but coherent with everything else, is what can be seen in the eyes of Guadalupe. In 1962 the optometrist Charles Wahlig, looking at a 25 times enlarged picture of the eye saw the reflection of what looked like three individuals, one of which appears to be Juan Diego, from the similarity with many portraits that were made of him. When both eyes are submitted to a beam of light they show depth and become filled with it.¹⁵

We can see that even in its physical appearance—e.g. the color of her skin—the image appears to bridge the world of the colonists and that of the Natives. It does this in more than one way. The tilma is in effect much more than an image. Some have called it a "codex" in accordance with those documents compiled most often by friars collecting Native American history, religion, symbolism, etc.

The eight-pointed stars on the mantle appear to copy those that appeared over Mexico just before the sunrise on December 12 (21 Gregorian), 1531, morning of the winter solstice. They are represented in mirror image; the Corona Borealis lies invisibly on Mary's temples, Virgo on her heart, the Twins on her knees, Orion where the angel stands. The turquoise of the

¹⁴ Coley Taylor, *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, 7-8 https://ecommons.udayton.edu/cgi/view-content.cgi?article=1084&context=marian_reprints.

¹⁵ Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate editors, *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, 87.

mantle acquires special significance when we know that it was the color that only the Aztec emperor could wear.

The golden design on the tunic is another marvel to behold, a technique that defies human endeavor. And what appears as flowery motifs are adaptations of Nahuatl glyphs. The four-petaled flower over the womb (close to the lower sleeve) is a *Nahui Ollin*, the quincunx, or flower of the Sun. The eight-petaled flower is identified as the Venus glyph, originally associated with the deity Quetzalcoatl. To complete the picture there are nine large triangular, heart-shaped flowers, of which six stand below the sash, one on each sleeve and one on the bosom. They have been identified by Father Mario Rojas Sanchez as the yolloxochitl (heart-flower) of the Mexican magnolia.¹⁶

Thus overall, we have the blue-turquoise mantle of the heavens enveloping the flowers of the Earth in the tunic, protecting that very Earth which the Natives felt was succumbing to ultimate chaos.

Guadalupe and the Future of the Americas

Between 1531 and 1830 there are no records of the apparitions of the Holy Mother. This is the period corresponding to the times of the Inquisition. Thus Guadalupe stands out as an exception and a forerunner. What can we learn in comparing it to other Marian apparitions?

The earliest Marian apparitions after the events of Tepeyac occurred in France: six apparitions in 108 years

- 1830, Paris, just nine days before the July Revolution of 1830.
- 1846, La Salette, France, before an economic depression and the arrival to power of Napoleon the Third
- 1858: Lourdes
- 1871, Pontmain, a year after the Prussian armies had crossed the French border.
- 1896, Tilly-sur-Seulles
- Kerzintzen 1938, after accession to power of the popular front: Mary announcing the coming war.¹⁷

Among other worldwide events are the following:

- 1879, Knock, Ireland
- 1908, 1911, Mantara, Lebanon
- 1917, Fatima, Portugal
- 1932-33, Beauraing, Belgium
- 1949, Necedah, Wisconsin
- 1981, Kibeho, Rwanda
- 1987 Hrushiv, Ukraine

¹⁶ Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate editors, *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, 77.

¹⁷ What follows comes primarily from Ingo Swann, *The Great Apparitions of Mary: an Examination of Twenty-Two Supernormal Appearances*.

- 1981, Merdjugorje, Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁸

Many of the Marian apparitions have something in common. They either come at a time of great turmoil, or precede such events. The French apparitions happened at a time of great political upheaval, the direct aftermath of the French Revolution, the inheritance of Napoleon Bonaparte, and a very strong anti-clericalism.

The Mantara apparitions took place at a time of complete terrorism against religion. Likewise the famous Fatima event of 1917 followed a time of religious persecution: between 1911 and 1916, 17000 priests, monks and nuns were murdered. All churches were closed or destroyed, all in all a forerunner of what would later happen in Russia, with the advent of Bolshevik power in the same year.

In the years 1932-33 Beauraing was undergoing a period of economic depression, the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the impending attack of Belgium. The Ardennes hills had been traditional area of battles, and intense theatre of action during WWI & WWII.

The Kibeho apparition preceded the wave of ethnic massacres. It brought apocalyptic messages of massacres to come (between Hutus and Tutsis). Finally, the Virgin calls those of Merdjugorje her final apparition.¹⁹ Six visionaries saw her on June 24th 1981, St John's day and most of them continued to do so for more than ten years later. In 1991 started the first shots of the Yugoslav Wars that were to engulf the region in prolonged and appalling violence. The town of Medjugorje became part of the ethnically mixed Bosnia and Herzegovina Federation.

After the apparition the image of Guadalupe was displayed in public and greeted enthusiastically by the Natives with great singing and dancing. The initial chapel housing the tilma was built in two weeks by Spaniards alongside Natives and completed on December 26 (Julian calendar). Juan Diego, who realized the tilma was a heavenly codex, used it to explain the events and convert the Natives. In the next seven years eight million Mexicans were converted; other sources indicate ten million less than a decade after the apparition.²⁰

There were en-masse conversions. Natives often walked great distances to be baptized and priests offered the sacrament from dawn to dusk.²¹ Zumárraga alone, according to records, baptized 40,000 Natives.²² Another consequence of the event were much more frequent mixed-race marriages.

¹⁸ Ingo Swann, *The Great Apparitions of Mary*.

¹⁹ Janice T. Connell, *The Visions of the Children: the Apparitions of the Virgin Mother at Medjugorje*, xx.

²⁰ Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate editors, *A Handbook on Guadalupe*, 47, 80.

²¹ Stephanie Georgieff, *The Virgin of Guadalupe*, 125.

²² Stephanie Georgieff, *The Virgin of Guadalupe*, 127.

Under an impulse for brotherhood between the races, change, however slow, became more possible. Reform was set in motion to lighten the burden of the Natives, especially through the intercession of three bishops: Juan de Zumárraga, the Dominican friar and bishop Bartolomé de Las Casas of Chiapas and the bishop of Tlaxcala, Julián Garcés. They were the spearhead for what came out as the Papal bull *Sublimis Deus*. The three, together with other clerics held a council in 1537, formulating recommendations on how to convert the American indigenous people. They then sent a letter to Pope Paul III through Dominican friar Bernardino de Minaya.

The Pope's Bull *Sublimis Deus*, which came as a response, forbid the enslavement of the indigenous peoples of the Americas (called "Indians of the West and the South") and all other people who could be discovered later. It recognized the Natives as fully rational human beings with rights to freedom and private property. A closely related document is the ecclesiastical letter *Pastorale officium*, issued the same year, usually seen as a companion to the bull. Even though these bold assertions were later disputed and partly retracted, the tone was set for bold revendications, which had to vie with strong political opposition.²³ The documents continued to circulate and be quoted by Las Casas and other Native rights advocates. Other steps followed.

It was in great part due to Bartolomé de Las Casas' unceasing work of advocacy that another symbolic milestone was reached in undermining the semi-slavery status of the Natives under the *encomienda* system. Las Casas traveled to Spain to plead once again for the Indians with king Charles V and argue for achieving conversion and colonization by peaceful means. When the hearings started in 1542, Las Casas presented the narrative of atrocities against the Natives that was later published in 1552 as *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, which greatly served to inform and sensitize public opinion.

Before a council consisting of some cardinals, bishops, nobles, and members of the Council of the Indies—the central administrative organ of the Spanish Empire dealing with the American territories—Las Casas argued for the abolition of the *encomienda* system and for placing the Natives directly under the Crown as tribute-paying subjects. By the end of 1542, the emperor signed the New Laws abolishing the *encomiendas*. The legislation prohibited enslavement of the Natives and instated a gradual abolition of the *encomienda* system. The reforms however, met the strong resistance of the colonists and had to be tempered down.

²³ It appears, according to the authoritative source Stogre (1992) that *Sublimis Deus* is not present in Denzinger, the quasi-official compendium of official teachings of the Catholic Church, and that *Pastorale officium* was annulled the following year. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sublimis_Deus

New Spain, in that area that largely corresponds to present-day Mexico had undergone a dark night of the soul with complete loss of hope, mirrored at the physical level with a true genocide by illness. In this context the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe marked a turning point of hope for the American soul, one of those rare events in which a spiritual event intervenes in large-scale human affairs.

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The Painting of the Virgin

God, seeing in America a child
Embracing Faith with jubilation meet,
Took up His paints, and on a flowered sheet
By His own hand a portrait deftly styled,
For He intended Jesus' Mother mild
To be that favored Nation's mercy seat,
Whence He would issue clemency complete
As humble men implored, and Mary smiled.
At Guadalupe, Indians, behold
Your mother's beauty and kindheartedness!
Esteem her counsel more than treasured gold;
Revere her friendship; love her tenderness;
Take Mary as your Lady long foretold,
And venerate her picture's holiness.

—Translation by Margaret Coats

Poem found on a damaged painting from the early nineteenth century. See <https://classicalpoets.org/2020/12/09/poem-found-on-our-lady-of-guadalupe-painting-translated-by-margaret-coats/>. Original Spanish text: "Viendo Dios a la America su amada En brazos de la Fe recién nacida, Toma el pincel y en lamina florida De su mano a Maria dexa copiada. Madre en ella la da, tan empanada En ver a esta Nacion favorecida Que muestra su clemencia defundida Siempre que es de los hombres implorada. En Guadalupe, Indianos, alli mora Esta Madre comun, esta Hermosura A uestra consuelo se atesora Ved su amabilidad, ved su ternura."