

## **Spanish and Native Indian Influences on Latin American Christianity**

*The story of Our Lady of Guadalupe (from a Nahuatl publication from 1649)*

Ten years after the seizure of the city of Mexico, war came to an end and there was peace amongst the people; in this manner faith started to bud, the understanding of the true God, for whom we live. At that time, in the year fifteen hundred and thirty one, in the early days of the month of December, it happened that there lived a poor Indian, named Juan Diego, said being a native of Cuautitlan. Of all things spiritually he belonged to Tlatilolco.

On a Saturday just before dawn, he was on his way to pursue divine worship and to engage in his own errands. As he reached the base of the hill known as Tepeyac, came the break of day, and he heard singing atop the hill, resembling singing of varied beautiful birds....

He then heard a voice from above the mount saying to him: "Juanito, Juan Dieguito." Then he ventured and went to where he was called. He was not frightened in the least; on the contrary, overjoyed. Then he climbed the hill, to see from where he was being called. When he reached the summit, he saw a Lady, who was standing there and told him to come hither. Approaching her presence, he marveled greatly at her superhuman grandeur; her garments were shining like the sun; the cliff where she rested her feet, pierced with glitter, resembling an anklet of precious stones, and the earth sparkled like the rainbow. The mezquites, nopales, and other different weeds, which grow there, appeared like emeralds, their foliage like turquoise, and their branches and thorns glistened like gold. He bowed before her and heard her word, tender and courteous, like someone who charms and esteems you highly.

She said: "Juanito, the most humble of my sons, where are you going?" He replied: "My Lady and Child, I have to reach your church in Mexico, Tlatilolco, to pursue things divine, taught and given to us by our priests, delegates of Our Lord." She then spoke to him: "Know and understand well, you the most humble of my son, that I am the ever virgin Holy Mary, Mother of the True God for whom we live, of the Creator of all things, Lord of heaven and the earth. I wish that a temple be erected here quickly, so I may therein exhibit and give all my love, compassion, help, and protection, because I am your merciful mother, to you, and to all the inhabitants on this land and all the rest who love me, invoke and confide in me; listen there to their lamentations, and remedy all their miseries, afflictions and sorrows. And to accomplish what my clemency pretends, go to the palace of the bishop of Mexico, and you will say to him that I manifest my great desire, that here on this plain a temple be built to me; you will accurately relate all you have seen and admired, and what you have heard. Be assured that I will be most grateful and will reward you, because I will make you happy and worthy of recompense for the effort and fatigue in what you will obtain of what I have entrusted. Behold, you have heard my mandate, my humble son; go and put forth all your effort."

*Juan Diego eventually meets the bishop and tells him what happened; the bishop does not believe him. Juan is then preoccupied by a very sick uncle, who fears that he is going to die. His uncle sends Juan out to get a priest. Juan encounters the apparition again, and explains to her that his uncle is on the point of death.*

.... The Most Holy Virgin answered: "Hear me and understand well, my son the least, that nothing should frighten or grieve you. Let not your heart be disturbed. Do not fear that sickness, nor any other sickness or anguish. 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? Do not grieve nor be disturbed by anything. Do not be afflicted by the illness of your uncle, who will not die now of it. be assured that he is now cured." (And then his uncle was cured, as it was later learned.)

When Juan Diego heard these words from the Lady from heaven, he was greatly consoled. He was happy. He begged to be excused to be off to see the bishop, to take him the sign or proof, so that he might be believed. The Lady from heaven ordered to climb to the top of the hill, where they previously met. She told him: "Climb, my son the least, to the top of the hill; there where you saw me and I gave you orders, you will find different flowers. Cut them, gather them, assemble them, then come and bring them before my presence." Immediately Juan Diego climbed the hill, and as he reached the summit, he was amazed that so many varieties of exquisite rosas de Castilla were blooming, long before the time when they are to bud, because, being out of season, they would freeze. They were very fragrant and covered with dewdrops of the night, which resembled precious pearls. Immediately he started cutting them. He gathered them all and placed them in his tilma. The hilltop was no place for any kind of flowers to grow, because it had many crags, thistles, thorns, nopales and mezquites. Occasionally weeds would grow, but it was then the month of December, in which all vegetation is destroyed by freezing. He immediately went down the hill and brought the different roses which he had cut to the Lady from heaven, who, as she saw them, took them with her hand and again placed them back in the tilma, saying: "My son the least, this diversity of roses is the proof and the sign which you will take to the bishop. You will tell him in my name that he will see in them my wish and that he will have to comply to it. You are my ambassador, most worthy of all confidence. Rigorously I command you that only before the presence of the bishop will you unfold your mantle and disclose what you are carrying. You will relate all and well; you will tell that I ordered you to climb to the hilltop, to go and cut flowers; and all that you saw and admired, so you can induce the prelate to give his support, with the aim that a temple be built and erected as I have asked."

## **The Inquisition in Spanish America**

The conquest of Portugal, in 1580, had led to a large emigration to Castile, where Portuguese soon became synonymous with Judaizer, and this was beginning to make itself manifest in the colonies.... As they described the situation, in a report of 1636, large numbers of Portuguese had entered the kingdom by way of Buenos Ayres, Brazil, Mexico, Granada and Puerto Bello, thus increasing the already numerous bands of their compatriots. They became masters of the commerce of the kingdom; from brocade to sack-cloth, from diamonds to cumin seed, everything passed through their hands; the Castilian who had not a Portuguese partner could look for no success in trade. They would buy the cargoes of whole fleets with the fictitious credits which they exchanged, thus rendering capital unnecessary, and would distribute the merchandise throughout the land by their agents, who were likewise Portuguese, and their capacity developed until, in 1634, they negotiated for the farming of the royal customs....

The seizure of so much property brought all trade to a stand-still and produced indescribable confusion, aggravated, in 1635, by the consequent failure of the bank. The men arrested had nearly all the trade of the colony in their hands; they were involved in an infinity of complicated transactions and suits sprang up on all sides. Creditors and suitors pressed their claims desperately, fearing that with delay witnesses might disappear, in the widening circle of arrests. There were many suits pending already in the Audiencia which were claimed by the tribunal and surrendered to it. It was puzzled by the new business thus thrown upon it; to a suit there had to be two parties, but the prisoners could not plead, so it appointed Manuel de Monte Alegre as their "defensor" to appear for them, and it went on hearing and deciding complicated civil suits while conducting the prosecutions for heresy.... This exacting payment of all debts and postponing payment of claims threatened general bankruptcy when the rich merchants were arrested, for their aggregate liabilities amounted to eight hundred thousand pesos ' which was estimated as equal to the whole capital of Lima. To avert this, some payments were made but only on the strength of competent security being furnished. . . .

The next day the mob of Lima enjoyed the further sensation of the scourging through the streets. These exhibitions always attracted a large crowd, in which there were many horsemen who thus had a better view, while boys commonly pelted the bigamists and sorceresses who were the usual patients. On this occasion the tribunal issued a proclamation forbidding horses or carriages in the streets through which the procession passed, and any pelting of the penitents under pain, for Spaniards, of banishment to Chile, and for Indians and Negroes, of a hundred lashes. There were twenty-nine sufferers in all; they were marched in squads of ten, guarded by soldiers and familiars, while the executioners plied the scourges, and the brutalizing spectacle passed off without disturbance, and with the pious wish of the tribunal that it would please God to make it serve as a warning.