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American Magnificat

Protestants on Mary of Guadalupe

Edited by Maxwell E. Johnson

Foreword by Timothy Matovina

Concluding Reflection by Virgil Elizondo



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Foreword



Devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe has evolved for nearly five centuries into a deeply rooted, multifaceted tradition. The Guadalupe basilica in Mexico City is the most visited pilgrimage site on the American continent. After Jesus of Nazareth, her image is the most reproduced sacred icon in the Western Hemisphere. Theological analyses of Guadalupe have shaped and been shaped by every epoch of Mexican history since the seventeenth century. She continues to appear in the lives of her faithful in Mexico and beyond: on home altars, T-shirts, tattoos, murals, parish churches, medals, refrigerator magnets, wall hangings, and in countless conversations and daily prayers.

Long acclaimed as the national symbol of Mexico, at the unanimous request of the Roman Catholic bishops of the hemisphere, in the 1999 apostolic exhortation *Ecclesia in America* Pope John Paul II acclaimed her the “mother and evangelizer of America,” from Tierra del Fuego to the northernmost reaches of Canada, and decreed that her feast “be celebrated throughout the continent” (11). Today Guadalupe appears among an increasingly diverse array of peoples, places, and religious groups in North America and beyond. Shrines dedicated to her exist as far north as Johnstown, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Bishop Fred Henry of Calgary, Alberta, has advocated making Guadalupe’s feast a holy day of obligation—a day of required attendance at Mass—for all Canadian Catholics. Her numerous devotees encompass a Mexican artist who is a self-proclaimed “Guadalupan Jew.” Her image adorns a Sikh temple near Española, New Mexico, as well as the shrine room at the Kagyu Shenpen Kunchab, a Tibetan Buddhist center in Santa Fe.

American Magnificat: Protestants on Mary of Guadalupe accentuates yet another element of the expanding Guadalupe phenomenon: the

growing Protestant engagement of Guadalupe. A number of Protestant congregations now celebrate the December 12 Guadalupe feast. In his groundbreaking work *The Virgin of Guadalupe: Theological Reflections of an Anglo-Lutheran Liturgist* (2002), the editor of this current volume, Maxwell E. Johnson, acclaims Guadalupe as a source of “hope and strength to a people wandering in despair.” He also notes that “Guadalupe permeates Hispanic-Latino culture in the Americas” and thus “not to pay wider and close theological attention to the image, narrative, and cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe would be a serious error” for those who minister among Latino peoples. Johnson’s enlistment of the collaboration of Episcopalian, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian authors in this volume further enhances his leading contribution to the Protestant engagement of Guadalupe. Collectively the essays in this volume illuminate new vistas in theologies of Guadalupe through their emphasis on the interrelations between developments in the scriptural and theological understanding of Mary with Protestant reception and thought about Guadalupe.

An ecumenically diverse range of views on Mary of Guadalupe should come as no surprise. The canonical gospels themselves present various early Christian memories and portraits of the mother of Jesus, each evangelist emphasizing different aspects of Mary’s life and faith. In what could be construed as a more Protestant understanding of Mary, Mark presents her as a concerned mother whose life hinges more on her faith than on her motherhood. From the perspective of many Marian devotees, Mark 3:20-35 is the most shocking text on Mary in the New Testament. Jesus’ family arrives in Capernaum “to take charge of him, saying, ‘He is out of his mind’” (NJB). Mark implies that Mary was one of these family members, stating further on in the passage that “his mother and his brothers arrived, and as they stood outside they sent word to him to come out.” Jesus does not go out to greet them, but instead replies: “Who are my mother and my brothers?” Then he sets his gaze on the disciples seated around him and declares, “These are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does the will of God is brother and sister and mother to me.” This statement does not exclude Mary from being part of Jesus’ “true” family, but it does relate that, even for Jesus’ own mother, faith and the following of God’s will were what mattered. St. Augustine summarized this meaning of the text succinctly: “It means more for her, an altogether greater blessing, to have been Christ’s disciple than to have been Christ’s mother.”

Luke/Acts has the most extensive treatment of Mary and thus it is not surprising that Roman Catholics tend to gravitate more toward Luke’s rendering of Mary, not just as a woman called to discipleship, but as a

model disciple to be emulated. The infancy narrative passages in Luke 1–2 are some of the most commonly known biblical texts in which Mary is a central figure as they encompass the joyful mysteries of the rosary: the annunciation, the visitation with the *Magnificat*, the birth of Jesus with the visit of the shepherds, the presentation, and the finding in the temple. From the outset Luke reveals that Mary is both family member *and* believer. He presents Mary as one blessed not just because she is called to be Jesus' mother but even more because of the faith with which she courageously accepts God's will and calling in her life. Luke highlights Mary's example of faith throughout his infancy narrative, in four passages about Jesus' public ministry in which she is mentioned, and as one of those who gathered in faith and prayer on the day of Pentecost.

Theologies of Our Lady of Guadalupe continue in the same vein as the gospel writers. Guadalupe is arguably the most ecumenical Marian apparition tradition in the history of Christianity in that Guadalupan theological writings tend to focus on issues and concerns that resonate across denominations. Indeed, from the first published theological work on Guadalupe—Miguel Sánchez's influential 1648 book *Imagen de la Virgen María*—down to the present, those who have explored the theological meaning of Guadalupe have given scant attention to frequently neurologic ecumenical questions about Mary, such as belief in her perpetual virginity, immaculate conception, and assumption. Rather, theologians have examined the Guadalupe image, apparitions account, and its historical context as a means to explore the collision of civilizations between the Old and New Worlds and the ongoing implications of this clash for Christianity in the Americas and beyond. Today Guadalupe is most frequently associated with both the struggle to overcome the negative effects of the conquest of the Americas and the hope for a new future of greater justice, faith, conversion, harmony, and evangelization. Theologies of Guadalupe are thus an ongoing effort to articulate a Christian response to one of the most momentous events of Christianity's second millennium: the conquest, evangelization, and struggles for life, dignity, and self-determination of the peoples of the Americas. On these vital questions there are certainly great possibilities for ecumenical convergence.

Published theological works on Guadalupe have increased remarkably in recent decades. The trend in theological discourse that has most influenced these analyses is the attempt to more systematically articulate the context out of which a particular theology arises, especially the efforts to develop theologies from the perspectives of marginalized peoples. Latina and Latino theologians in the United States, for example, have articulated

claims like Guadalupe's significance as the premier evangelizer of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, a source of empowerment for women, a symbol of hope and liberation, a sign of ecclesial unity, an inculturated expression of the Christian tradition, and a paradigm of authentic human freedom and relationships, among various other themes.

I am honored to welcome readers to this volume whose range of contributors further enhances theological analyses of Guadalupe through a Protestant engagement of the Guadalupe tradition. A number of these essays are especially insightful in their integration of Guadalupe with liturgy, devotion, and scriptural and theological themes that are at the core of Christian faith. Several essays examine the *Magnificat* and amplify the chorus of that liberating hymn as a font of new life in the Americas. Together the essays further the evangelical urgency proclaimed in the Guadalupe tradition: building an evangelizing church and a just social order in the Americas. To these and the other inspirations that await you, I welcome you as reader to journey with these authors into the fascinating faith phenomenon of Mary of Guadalupe.

Timothy Matovina
University of Notre Dame

Introduction: Can Protestants Celebrate the Virgin of Guadalupe?*

Maxwell E. Johnson



The event and image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, *La Virgencita* (“the dear Virgin”), or *La Morena* or *La Morenita* (“the dark one”), are so obviously Roman Catholic and clearly part of the self-understanding of Mexican and Mexican American Roman Catholics. Why, then, would Protestants of any stripe, whether Anglo or Hispanic-Latino, want to celebrate or pay any attention whatsoever to her and her story? That is the question I sought to address in my study, *The Virgin of Guadalupe: Theological Reflections of an Anglo-Lutheran Liturgist*,¹ and this is the question, I am pleased to note, other theologians from differing Protestant traditions join me in pursuing

* A major portion of this essay was originally given as a public lecture, “Santa María de Guadalupe y la Teología Luterana,” at the Benedictine Abbey of Tepeyac, Cuautitlán, Mexico, October 21, 2005. An abridged version appears as “Why Would Lutherans Celebrate the Virgin of Guadalupe? A Theological Meditation,” in Virgilio Elizondo, Allan Figueroa Deck, and Timothy Matovina, eds., *The Treasure of Guadalupe, Celebrating Faith: Explorations in Latino Spirituality and Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 87–94.

¹ Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Virgin of Guadalupe: Theological Reflections of an Anglo-Lutheran Liturgist*, *Celebrating Faith: Explorations in Latino Spirituality and Theology* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002).

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in this volume. For, as United States Roman Catholicism and Protestantism alike become intentionally more multicultural as we all seek to be open to the experiences and gifts of the other at our doors and at our borders, and as Hispanic-Latino people come in increasing numbers to all of our churches, is it not necessary for us to listen to their stories and to embrace their images and symbols? And, clearly, one of those central stories, images, and symbols is the Virgin of Guadalupe.

It is often said, with some exaggeration, of course, that “not all Mexicans are Roman Catholics but all are Guadalupanos.” Hence, as our Christian identities become increasingly “Latinized” in this country, the story and image of Guadalupe might well seek and find a place among us as “Protestant Christians,” even among us Anglos, as some of the essays in this collection certainly suggest. Note, please, I did not say that we Protestants should “use” the Virgin of Guadalupe in order to attract Roman Catholic Hispanic-Latinos to our churches or to try to make “converts” out of Hispanic-Latino Catholics, something that has certainly been alleged by Roman Catholics from time to time.² Such deceptive use of the cherished religious symbols of others has no place among us! But Mary of Guadalupe may well find her own home among us as she comes along with others into our midst and into our congregations. In fact, there are signs throughout our country that she is already here, with one of the newest Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) parishes in Irving, Texas, bearing the name of La Iglesia Luterana Santa María de Guadalupe; with the last official act of Archbishop George Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, being the consecration of Our Lady of Guadalupe Episcopal Church in Waukegan, Illinois; and with several parishes of diverse denominations now finding room for her image and celebrating her December 12 feast. Indeed, the Virgin of Guadalupe is appearing everywhere, it seems, as tattoos, jewelry, fine art, folk art, home altars, yard shrines, rugs, ornaments and decorations for cars, baseball caps, T-shirts, *paños* (pieces of cloth or handkerchiefs painted by prison inmates), computer mouse pads, murals on the sides of buildings and homes, or *veladoras* (devotional candles) in grocery stores. And now, increasingly, she is to be seen even in Protestant churches and contexts, such as, for example, in Flavio Pellegrino’s lovely mural from Trinity Lutheran Church, Manhattan, on the cover of this book, in which she embraces Martin Luther and Frederick Douglass.

² See the essay by Edgardo A. Colón-Emeric, below, pp. 107ff.

Ever since I spent time in Mexico and first visited her basilica in Mexico City over thirty years ago, images of the Virgin of Guadalupe have been a presence in my life. During Advent in the days prior to December 12, in fact, my family and I often hang a tapestry of her facing out on the inside of our front door which is then illuminated by the lights inside our house. A few years ago on December 12, having ordered a pizza from Bruno's Pizza—the place for pizza in South Bend, Indiana—a young man, who was Hispanic-Latino, came to deliver it. Pointing to the tapestry, he said to me, "It is beautiful." And, in response, I said something like, "Oh yes, today is her feast. Happy feast!" And he said, simply, "She's my Mom." Not in a formal sense of "She's my *Mother*," but with the simple and beautiful language of intimacy and relationship, "She's my *Mom*." Now, I don't know if this person was Roman Catholic, had any real religious background whatsoever, or was a member of one of the numerous fundamentalist communities that seem to be attracting large numbers of young Hispanic-Latinos. But I began to ask myself from that moment on, "If this person were to come into a Lutheran congregation, would we tell him that *he* is welcome but his 'Mom' is not, even though his 'Mom' is also the Mother of Jesus, our Brother, in her Mexican appearance?" I think not! I believe, however, that there are other reasons beyond hospitality, openness to the other, and cultural sensitivity that might provide reasons as to why we, as Protestant Christians, as Hispanic-Latino Protestants, and others, might want to celebrate the Virgin Mary of Guadalupe.

Protestants Can Celebrate Mary of Guadalupe because She Proclaims the Gospel

First, I believe that we Protestants can celebrate Mary of Guadalupe because, like Mary herself in her great New Testament hymn of God's praise, the *Magnificat*, she proclaims to us the Gospel, the good news of our salvation in Christ, the good news of God who scatters the proud, exalts the lowly, fills the hungry with good things, and remembers his promises to Abraham and his children forever. The great New Testament scholar, the late Raymond Brown, once wrote regarding Guadalupan devotion:

[F]or a people downtrodden and oppressed, the devotion made it possible to see the significance that the Christian Gospel was meant to have. In the Indian tradition, when Mary appears in the ancient garb of the mother of the Indian gods, she promises to show forth love and compassion, defense and help to all the inhabitants of the land. Ten

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years before, the whole Indian nation, their gods and their tradition had been torn down. She hears their lamentations and remedies their miseries, their pains and their sufferings. In the devotion to the Lady, the Christian Gospel proclaims hope for the oppressed. When one looks at the first chapter of Luke one realizes how authentic a Gospel hope that is. . . . For Mary, the news about Jesus means that God has put down the mighty, and He has exalted the lowly. . . . The Gospel of God's Son means salvation for those who have nothing. That is the way Jesus translates it, and that is the way Mary translates it. . . . Luke presents Mary as a disciple not only because she said, "Be it done unto me according to your word," but because she understood what the word meant in terms of the life of the poor and the slaves of whom she is the representative. I think that is exactly what happened in the case of Our Lady of Guadalupe. She gave the hope of the Gospel to a whole people who had no other reason to see good news in what came from Spain. In their lives the devotion to Our Lady constituted an authentic development of the Gospel of discipleship.³

And in her essay below in this volume, the Rev. Bonnie Jensen, former executive director of the Women of the ELCA, has also drawn attention to Mary of Guadalupe in the following manner:

I was struck by how lowly, insignificant people have to beg the church to regard them with the esteem with which God regards them. We are not sure whether Mary appeared in a vision to this poor man. Perhaps we have our Protestant doubts. Yet even if we question the vision, the tragic truth remains: the poor and lowly often have to beg the church to proclaim and live out its message of a merciful, compassionate God!⁴

So also United Methodist Church historian Justo L. González narrates the following event from his own experience:

When I was growing up, I was taught to think of such things as the Virgin of Guadalupe as pure superstition. Therefore, I remember how surprised I was at the reaction of a Mexican professor in seminary when one of my classmates made some disparaging remarks about Guadalupe. The professor, who was as Protestant as they come and who often stooped because he was then elderly, drew himself up, looked at my

³ Raymond E. Brown, "Mary in the New Testament and in Catholic Life," *America* (May 15, 1982): 378–79.

⁴ Bonnie Jensen, "We Sing Mary's Song," p. 168 below.

friend in the eye, and said: "Young man, in this class you are free to say anything you please. You may say anything about me. You certainly are welcome to say anything you wish about the pope and the priests. *But don't you touch my little Virgin!*" At that time, I took this to be an atavism of an old man who had been fed superstition in his mother's milk. But now I know better. What he was saying was that . . . there was in there a kernel of truth that was very dear to his heart—and all the dearer, since so much of the religiosity that he knew, both Catholic and Protestant, denied it. For generation upon generation of oppressed Indian people, told by word and deed that they were inferior, the Virgin has been a reminder that there is vindication for the Juan Diegos. And that is indeed part of the gospel message, even if it has not always been part of our own message.⁵

The problem, as González notes further, is precisely the relationship of religious faith and culture. Does one need to deny one's very culture in becoming or being Protestant, especially when that culture has been shaped to a large extent by Roman Catholicism itself? He writes elsewhere that

there is in much of Latino Protestantism a sense of cultural alienation that is very similar to that produced by the much earlier Spanish colonization of the Americas. Just as Spanish Roman Catholicism told our native ancestors that their religion, and therefore much of their culture, was the work of the devil, so has Anglo Protestantism told us that the Catholic religion of our more immediate ancestors, and therefore much of our culture, must be rejected. . . . In many ways, just as for many natives in the sixteenth century it was necessary to abandon much of their cultural traditions in the process of becoming Catholic, so are many Latinas and Latinos forced away from their cultural roots as they become Protestant. And in both cases, this cultural alienation is depicted as good news!⁶

Consequently, he continues: "Caridad, Guadalupe, and novenas are not

⁵ Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1990), 61; emphasis added.

⁶ Justo L. González, "Reinventing Dogmatics: A Footnote From a Reinvented Protestant," in *From the Heart of Our People: Latino/a Explorations in Catholic Systematic Theology*, ed. Orlando O. Espín and Miguel H. Díaz (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 225. On the "Catholic" roots of Hispanic-Latino culture see also Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 8ff.

part of my more immediate tradition. Yet they are part of my culture. Does that mean that, like my native ancestors five centuries ago when faced by the initial Catholic ‘evangelization,’ I must renounce my cultural heritage in order to affirm my Christianity? I do not believe so.”⁷

We can celebrate the Virgin of Mary of Guadalupe, then, because she proclaims to us the Gospel and because the message of Mary of Guadalupe is the same as that of Mary’s own *Magnificat* of praise in the Gospel of Luke. Indeed, in so many ways, the Virgin of Guadalupe is simply the Mary of the Bible!

We Can Celebrate Mary of Guadalupe because She Embodies for Us God’s Unmerited Grace

A second reason we might celebrate Mary of Guadalupe as Protestants is that she embodies for us in a special way God’s gracious act of salvation, God’s own unmerited and free grace. How quickly even Lutherans seem to have forgotten Martin Luther’s own high regard, esteem, and praise for the Blessed Virgin Mary in his life and writings, even long after the Reformation had begun. Contemporary Luther scholar Eric Gritsch summarizes Luther’s views, noting that for him:

Mary is the prototype of how God is to be “magnified.” He is not to be “magnified” or praised for his distant, unchangeable majesty, but for his unconditional, graceful, and ever-present pursuit of his creatures. Thus Mary magnifies God for what he does rather than magnifying herself for what was done to her. . . . “Being regarded by God” is the truly blessed state of Mary. *She is the embodiment of God’s grace*, by which others can see what kind of God the Father of Jesus Christ is. . . . Mary sees wisdom, might, and riches on one side and kindness, justice, and righteousness on the other. The former reflect human works, the latter the works of God. God uses his works to put down the works of [people], who are always tempted to deify themselves. God’s works are “mercy” (Luke 1:50), “breaking spiritual pride” (v. 51), “putting down the mighty” (v. 52), “exalting the lowly” (v. 53), “filling the hungry with good things,” and “sending the rich away empty” (v. 53). . . . [And] Mary is the “Mother of God” who experienced his unmerited grace. Her personal experience of this grace is an example for all humankind that the mighty God cares

⁷ González, “Reinventing Dogmatics,” 228.

for the lowly just as he cares for the exalted. . . . Thus she incites the faithful to trust in God's grace when they call on her.⁸

It is precisely the language of God's free grace that several contemporary Catholic authors use to speak about the Virgin of Guadalupe today. That is, according to them, the God proclaimed in the Guadalupan story is none other than "the God-who-is-for-us,"⁹ characterized by "a maternal presence, consoling, nurturing, offering unconditional love, comforting," and "brimming over with gentleness, loving kindness, and forgiveness" as "an unconditional and grace-filled gift to the people."¹⁰ And, if so, then the story of Mary of Guadalupe is precisely a proclamation of the God who justifies "by grace alone." And that this gift is received "through faith" is surely exemplified in the response of Juan Diego, who, like Abraham and countless prophets in the Hebrew Bible before him, interprets this encounter as a call to his own prophetic ministry both to his own people and to the governing (ecclesiastical) authorities to whom he was sent. It must be recalled here that in distinction from several other visions of Mary throughout history, especially the more modern ones, Mary of Guadalupe asks for *nothing* to be done other than the building of what she calls a "temple." And this temple is itself to be nothing other than a place or "home" where all peoples might encounter divine love, compassion, help, and protection, and where their laments would be heard and all their miseries, misfortunes, and sorrows would find remedy and cure. In other words, this temple, this "Beth-El" (House of God) of the Americas was (and is) to be a place where the God of unconditional love, mercy, compassion, grace, and forgiveness is proclaimed and encountered.

Even the implications and call for justice and liberation so often associated in a particular way with the Virgin of Guadalupe are also consistent with a Protestant understanding of justification by grace through faith. From within his Reformed theological perspective Daniel L. Migliore

⁸ Eric Gritsch, "The Views of Luther and Lutheranism on the Veneration of Mary," in *The One Mediator, The Saints, and Mary*, ed. H. George Anderson, J. Francis Stafford, Joseph A. Burgess, Lutherans and Catholics in Dialogue 8 (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1992), 236–37; emphasis added.

⁹ Orlando Espín, "An Exploration into the Theology of Grace and Sin," in Espín and Díaz, eds., *From the Heart of Our People*, 139.

¹⁰ Jeannette Rodríguez, "Guadalupe: The Feminine Face of God," in *Goddess of the Americas, La Diosa de las Américas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*, ed. Ana Castillo (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 25–31.

writes of the relationship between the sovereignty of grace and the pursuit of justice exemplified in Mary's *Magnificat*, saying:

Neither the biblical portrayal of Mary's passion for justice expressed in the *Magnificat* nor the classical Reformed emphasis on the sovereignty of grace lead to passivity or complacency. On the contrary, acknowledgment of salvation by grace alone goes hand in hand with a passionate cry for justice and a transformed world. This passion for justice remains anchored in God; trust is not transferred to revolutionary ideologies. Nevertheless, zeal for God's honor and the manifestation of God's justice in all creation ignites a real rebellion and a spirit of resistance against all forces of injustice and all the powers and principalities that oppose God's redemptive purposes.¹¹

If Migliore himself is not concerned specifically with Mary of Guadalupe in this context, the parallels are obvious. As in the *Magnificat*, so in Guadalupe is manifested Mary's own "zeal for God's honor," which, perhaps today more than ever, has led to a "real rebellion and a spirit of resistance" against racial, social, and economic injustice in the world. At times, that rebellion and resistance may indeed be transferred more to revolutionary ideologies than to the biblical *God* of justice and/or righteousness. But the persistent presence of the Guadalupan image often associated with movements of rebellion and resistance nonetheless keeps open the possibility of hearing what Migliore calls "*God's* righteous concern for the poor" and its implications expressed so powerfully in Mary's own *biblical* proclamation, her *Magnificat*. To be justified by grace alone sets one free in the name of God to risk oneself and one's identity in the pursuit of God's own justice and righteousness for the world.

I would like to suggest that we might best appropriate the story and image of the Virgin of Guadalupe under the category of parable, that is, "the Virgin of Guadalupe as parable of justification," or, "Mary of Guadalupe as parable of the reign of God." By the use of the word "parable," I mean to draw attention to how the Guadalupan story actually functions. That is, as modern New Testament scholarship on the parables of Jesus has come to emphasize, parables function as "stories that defy religious conventions, overturn tradi-

¹¹ Daniel L. Migliore, "Mary: A Reformed Theological Perspective," *Theology Today* 56, no. 3 (October 1999): 354.

tion, and subvert the hearer's expectations"¹² about how God is *supposed* to act in the world and, in so doing, "make room" for the inbreaking of God's reign. If contemporary biblical scholarship is correct, the parables of Jesus, as reversals that make room for the advent of the reign of God as surprising gift and invite the action of response to that reign, point unmistakably to Jesus as the Great Parable of God himself. Indeed, it is precisely the Crucified One who functions as the ultimate parable of divine reversal and salvation, especially as this is proclaimed by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:27-31:

God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

The narrative and the widespread presence of the image of Mary of Guadalupe can certainly be interpreted then as functioning parabolically in the same sense as the biblical parables themselves. For the Guadalupan story is precisely a parable of the great "reversals" of God, the subversion of both indigenous and Spanish cultural-religious worldviews and assumptions, standing them on their heads, in order to "make room" for something new. Juan Diego is none other than precisely one of the "low and despised in the world," who, in this encounter, becomes himself the prophet or messenger of the reign of God even to the ecclesiastical authorities, and, as an indigenous *layperson*, subverts even the heavily clerical leadership structure of Spanish colonial church life. It is no wonder that, increasingly, Juan Diego is becoming today the model for the ministry of the laity, the concrete example of the priestly ministry of the baptized—the "priesthood of all believers" in our traditional terminology—especially within Mexican and Mexican American contexts.¹³

Nor is it any wonder why early ecclesiastical responses to the Guadalupe event would have been so strongly negative. Then, as now, Guadalupe challenges the wise, the powerful, the noble, and the strong to a new

¹² Nathan Mitchell, *Real Presence: The Work of Eucharist* (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998), 48.

¹³ See Roberto Piña, "The Laity in the Hispanic Church," in *The New Catholic World* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 168-71.

conversion to the presence of the reign of God as located precisely in the weak, the lowly, the despised, and the rejected. This is nothing other than what Lutherans like to call a *theologia crucis*, a “theology of the cross.” For, like the parables of Jesus, the Virgin of Guadalupe, as parable of the reign of God, or parable of justification, is connected to the great biblical stories of reversal, which point, ultimately, to the great reversal of the cross. As such, the narrative and image of Guadalupe belong, most appropriately, in close association with images of the Crucified One himself. For it is only in light of the image of Christ crucified, in the image of the cross, where the meaning of Mary—of Guadalupe—as “the embodiment of God’s grace” is best revealed and appropriated.

In this light, perhaps, Protestants can come to appreciate the following insight offered by Virgil Elizondo in his *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation*:

What most people who have not experienced the Guadalupe tradition cannot understand is that to be a Guadalupano/a (one in whose heart Our Lady of Guadalupe reigns) is to be an *evangelical Christian*. It is to say that the Word became flesh in Euro-Native America and began its unifying task—“that all may be one.” In Our Lady of Guadalupe, Christ became American. Yet because the gospel through Guadalupe was such a powerful force in the creation and formulation of the national consciousness and identity of the people as expressed, understood, and celebrated through their art, music, poetry, religious expression, preaching, political discourse, and cultural-religious expressions, its original meaning—that is, the original gospel of Jesus expressed in and through native Mexican terms—has become eclipsed. This has led some modern-day Christians—especially those whose Christianity is expressed through U.S. cultural terms—to see Guadalupe as pagan or as something opposed to the gospel. It is certainly true that just as the gospel was co-opted and domesticated by Constantine and subsequent “Christian” powers, so has Guadalupe been co-opted and domesticated by the powerful of Mexico, including the church. Yet neither the initial gospel nor the gospel expressed through Guadalupe has lost its original intent or force, a force that is being rediscovered as the poor, the marginated, and the rejected reclaim these foundational gospels as their chief weapons of liberation and as sources of lifestyles that are different from those engendered by ecclesial and social structures that have marginalized, oppressed, and dehumanized them.¹⁴

¹⁴ Virgilio Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 113–14; emphasis added.

And, as former Lutheran campus pastor Richard Q. Elvee at Gustavus Adolphus College, St. Peter, Minnesota, has written:

The power of the pregnant Virgin asking Native Americans in a native tongue to become bearers of the Good News of Jesus Christ to the Americas was a powerful experience. Native peoples, who were being exterminated by foreign disease and decimated by oppression and war, became the bearers of the news that Jesus Christ was waiting to be born in the Americas. The oppression of the conquistadors would not destroy the people. God's messenger, the mother of Jesus, came to give hope and strength to a people wandering in despair. These conquered people were to teach their European conquerors the meaning of God's call of faith. These seemingly hopeless people were to become the hope of a hemisphere. With Jesus waiting to be born in the Americas, the Mexican people were to give him a home.¹⁵

What could be more "evangelical" than that?

Protestants Can Celebrate Mary of Guadalupe because She Is a Type and Model of What the Church Is to Be in the World

It is not only that the Guadalupan story proclaims the unconditionally gracious, loving, merciful, and compassionate God who justifies the Juan Diegos of the world by grace alone through faith. In addition, the very image of Mary of Guadalupe is revelatory of the multiracial, multiethnic, multicultural, *mestiza* (mixed) church that came to be incarnated as the result of the sixteenth-century cultural confrontation between Spain and Mexico and still struggles to be born in our own day. Both the person and the image of Mary of Guadalupe, we might say, function as a *typus ecclesiae*, a "type," or "image," or "model" of the church. As Eric Gritsch has noted with regard to Luther's Marian theology: "to Luther Mary was the prime example of the faithful—a *typus ecclesiae* embodying unmerited grace. Mary is a paradigm for the indefectibility of the church."¹⁶

The third reason, then, Protestants can celebrate the Virgin of Guadalupe is that she is a type and model of what the church is to be in the

¹⁵ Ibid., 1.

¹⁶ Gritsch, "The Views of Luther," 241.

world. That is, if the narrative of Mary of Guadalupe can be interpreted correctly as being about justification by grace alone through faith, then the image—which depicts the *typus ecclesiae* herself as pregnant with the Incarnate Word—can surely be seen as, like a mirror’s reflection, what the church itself, thanks also to God’s unmerited grace, is and is called to be as similarly “pregnant” with the same Incarnate Word for the life and salvation of the world. Indeed, for those who might object that it is precisely *Christ* who appears to be absent from this narrative and image of justification, the words of Virgil Elizondo need to be heard: “The innermost core of the apparition . . . is what she carries within her womb: the new source and center of the new humanity that is about to be born. And that source and center is Christ as the light and life of the world.”¹⁷ And in this sense, then, Mary of Guadalupe is truly “of the gospel” because the narrative and image of Guadalupe is, ultimately, about *Christ*!

Indeed, the interpretation of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe as an image and model of the church itself may be one of the most profound Guadalupan gifts that Mexican and Mexican American spirituality can make to the whole church catholic in our day. For the church being called into existence is, more than ever before, one called to be clearly multicultural and *mestiza* in form, and such a church of the future appears to be already present proleptically in Mary of Guadalupe’s *mestiza* face. To gaze contemplatively upon her image, then, is to gaze at the future church in the making, and to gaze at what we hope, by God’s grace and Spirit, the church of Jesus Christ, racially, culturally, and even ecumenically, will become.

There may be yet, however, another and very simple reason why Protestants might want to celebrate the Virgin of Guadalupe. In one of his Christmas Eve sermons Martin Luther once said:

This is the great joy, of which the angel speaks, this is the consolation and the superabundant goodness of God, that man (if he has this faith) may boast of such treasure as that Mary is his real mother, Christ his brother, and God his father. . . . See to it that you make [Christ’s] birth your own, and that you make an exchange with him, so that you rid yourself of your birth and receive instead, his. This happens if you have this faith. By this token you sit assuredly in the Virgin Mary’s lap and are her dear child.¹⁸

¹⁷ Elizondo, *Guadalupe*, 128–29.

¹⁸ Martin Luther, “The Gospel for Christmas Eve, Luke 2[:1-14],” in *Sermons II*, vol. 52 of *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1974), 15–16.

Perhaps, then, in the words of both my pizza delivery person and Martin Luther himself, Protestants can celebrate Mary of Guadalupe, porque “Ella es nuestra mamá, ella es nuestra mamita”; because, finally, in faith, she is also *our* Mom!

The essays in this volume, whether directly or indirectly, deal positively with various facets of the Guadalupan phenomenon from diverse Protestant perspectives. In “The Virgin of Guadalupe: History, Myth, and Spirituality,”¹⁹ Alberto Pereyra (Lutheran) argues for a theological approach based on an indigenous or native spirituality encouraging us “to be flexible and walk to the Tepeyac of our own spiritual experience.”²⁰ Cody C. Unterseher (Episcopalian) provides an excellent overview of modern Protestant thinking on Mariology in “Mary in Contemporary Protestant Theological Discourse,”²¹ with special attention given to the recent ecumenical dialogue document produced by the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC II) in February 2004, *Mary: Grace and Hope in Christ*. Reminding us that “the Cold War between Protestants and Roman Catholics over Mary has ended,”²² Unterseher underscores that in the context of immigration issues in the United States,

Christians of all church bodies are rapidly having to find ways of embracing Latino/a cultural expressions. Anglo-European Christian communities in the United States will soon have no choice but to confront (or to be confronted by) the dark-skinned, pregnant Mary dressed in red and veiled in blue-green, who herself was an alien—both in Egypt and in the Americas.²³

Carl C. Trovall (Lutheran), in “Juan Diego: A Psychohistory of a Regenerative Man,” looks not so much at the Virgin of Guadalupe herself but at intriguing parallels between Martin Luther and Juan Diego as historical figures within a sixteenth-century context who in their differing ways facilitated a “reformation” in faith, life, and culture. Using the categories de-

¹⁹ This essay originally appeared in *Currents in Theology and Mission* 24, no. 4 (August 1997): 348–54.

²⁰ See p. 28 below.

²¹ An earlier version of this essay appeared in *Worship* 81, no. 3 (May 2007): 194–211.

²² Scot McKnight, *The Real Mary: Why Evangelical Christians Can Embrace the Mother of Jesus* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2007), 5.

²³ See p. 46 below.

veloped by Erik Erikson in his work on figures such as Gandhi and Luther, Trovall presents Juan Diego as a great *homo religiosus* and “generative man’ for a whole generation of Mexican people as well as their descendants.”²⁴ “Beyond Word and Sacrament: A Reformed Protestant Engagement of Guadalupean Devotion,”²⁵ by Rubén Rosario Rodríguez (Presbyterian), provides a strong Christocentric interpretation of the Virgin of Guadalupe’s narrative and image, a surprising and even radical approach given the historical iconoclasm of classical Calvinism. Ecumenically sensitive, and rooted in a classic Protestant theology of creation, Rodríguez suggests that, “while not every Christian community need embrace the Guadalupean devotion, every Christian community can broaden its understanding of God by listening to what Guadalupe teaches us about creation and liberation.”²⁶

On December 12, 2004, the *Chicago Tribune* reported a story about a controversy surrounding a small local Hispanic-Latino United Methodist Church, Amor De Dios, where an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe had been enshrined by the pastor and neighborhood processions and rosaries in her honor had been held.²⁷ Roman Catholics and Methodists alike (especially Methodists who had left that congregation as a result, as well as other Methodist pastors) were both highly critical of this parish and its new practices.²⁸ How fortunate, then, to have Edgardo A. Colón-Emeric’s essay, “Wesleyans and Guadalupeans: A Theological Reflection” as part of this volume. Colón-Emeric argues, in particular, that “a serious engagement with the sources of Wesleyan theology prepares the way for a Methodist reception of Guadalupe, a Wesleyan Guadalupeanism.”²⁹

Along somewhat similar lines, José David Rodríguez (Lutheran), in “The Virgin of Guadalupe from a Latino/a Protestant Perspective: A Dangerous Narrative to Counter Colonial and Imperialistic Power,” reminds us that

²⁴ See p. 53 below.

²⁵ Another version of this essay appears in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42, no. 2 (2007): 173–95.

²⁶ See pp. 100–101 below.

²⁷ This is available at <http://www.religionnewsblog.com/9726>.

²⁸ I have since learned from a colleague who at the time was teaching at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago that the pastor of this parish had been reading my *The Virgin of Guadalupe: Reflections of an Anglo-Lutheran Liturgist*.

²⁹ See p. 109 below.

the Virgin of Guadalupe confronts us with a powerful and important challenge for the mission and ministry of the church. This story constitutes an important link in a provocative memory of an ancient biblical tradition that even today witnesses to the power of God that emerges from weakness. For Martin Luther and Christian believers of all times, this type of power was made evident in Mary's song of the *Magnificat*. Contemporary theologians find in Mary's witness the continuation of a narrative of faith empowering the liberation struggles of oppressed and excluded sectors of society. For an increasing number of believers who claim our heritage of faith and cultural identity from the sixteenth century in these lands called the Americas, this divine power was also reflected in the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe. This popular expression of Mary's witness dating from the sixteenth century in Mexico constitutes an important symbol of our tradition of faith to resist the forces that throughout time and space, intend to oppress our people and tear down our human dignity.³⁰

The next four essays all deal with issues related either to celebrating the feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe or to various devotional elements and practices. My own contribution, "The Development of the Liturgical Feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe and Its Celebration in the Season of Advent,"³¹ provides an overview of the historical development of the December 12 feast itself from the sixteenth century to the present. In addition, I argue that for both Protestants and Catholics the feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe can be viewed as a *major* feast of the Advent season uniting both the eschatological and incarnational orientations of that liturgical season.

Formed initially by Methodist, Congregationalist, and Presbyterian Christianity, author and poet Kathleen Norris in "Virgin Mary, Mother of God,"³² offers a very personal account of how her encounters with Benedictine monasticism on the plains of North Dakota and elsewhere brought her face-to-face with the black Madonnas, especially with Our Lady of Einsiedeln and the Virgin of Guadalupe. With specific regard to the Guadalupe narrative, she writes, "As a Protestant I'll say it all sounds suspiciously

³⁰ See p. 128 below.

³¹ An earlier version of this appeared in Maxwell E. Johnson, *Worship: Rites, Feasts, and Reflections* (Portland, OR: Pastoral Press, 2004), 243–64.

³² This essay appeared originally in Kathleen Norris, *Amazing Grace* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 13–25.

biblical to me, recalling the scandal of the incarnation itself, the mixing together of human and divine in a young, unmarried woman.”³³

Bonnie Jensen (Lutheran), in what was originally a homily, “We Sing Mary’s Song,”³⁴ given at a Consultation on Justice and Justification held in Mexico City December 7–14, 1985, by the then American Lutheran Church (now part of the ELCA), directs our attention to the fact that

behind the vision’s gilded cactus leaves, miraculous roses, and imprinted cloak is the longing for a God who comes, not in the might of military conquest, nor in the ecclesiastical forms and evangelism plans of a mighty church, but in simple, compassionate respect and regard for the lowly, the hungry, the women, the poor, the children.³⁵

Even if many Protestants can come to agree on some kind of overall positive theological approach to the narrative, feast, and image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, can they move another step toward some kind of devotion and prayer? In his *The Thousand Faces of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, George H. Tavard asked appropriately: “is it not possible on the basis of justification by faith and on the strength of Luther’s example to count as a permissible *adiaphoron* a contemplative attitude before the mother of Christ, made of gratitude, admiration, and love?”³⁶ And in my own study of Guadalupe I agreed with Tavard and suggested that within Lutheranism at least something like the “Hail Mary” ending at “Blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus,” might be highly appropriate. But I stopped short of advocating or defending a more direct invocation of Mary or the saints (i.e., “pray for us”). Robert Jensen (Lutheran), however, has taken that next step in “A Space for God,”³⁷ wherein he argues strongly, and convincingly, in my opinion, the following:

Interestingly, Luther and Melancthon were happy to say that the saints as a company pray for us, that the church in heaven prays for the church on earth. To invoke Mary’s prayer as the prayer of the *mater dei*, the

³³ See p. 162 below.

³⁴ This essay appeared originally in *Word and World* 7, no. 1 (1987): 1–3.

³⁵ See p. 168 below.

³⁶ George H. Tavard, *A Thousand Faces of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 117.

³⁷ This essay originally appeared in Carl Braaten and Robert Jensen, eds., *Mary, Mother of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 49–57.

prayer of the Container of the Uncontainable, is to invoke precisely this prayer. Perhaps, indeed, Mary's prayer, as the prayer of the whole company of heaven, is the one saint's prayer that even those should utter who otherwise accept Melancthon's argument against invoking saints.³⁸

If Jenson is not directly concerned in this essay with the Virgin of Guadalupe per se, the implications of his approach for Guadalupan devotion could not be clearer since it is precisely Marian devotion that is the issue.

The first word and last word in this collection belong to two of my Notre Dame Roman Catholic colleagues, who are themselves both first-rate Guadalupan scholars, Timothy Matovina, who writes the foreword, and Virgil Elizondo, who writes a concluding reflection in response to the other essays included herein. Matovina has written extensively on Guadalupan topics related to faith and culture in the Southwestern United States, especially Texas,³⁹ as well as with regard to the 1648 Spanish, rather than the Náhuatl, version of the Guadalupe narrative, namely, the *Imagen de la Virgen María, Madre de Dios de Guadalupe*, composed by Miguel Sánchez,⁴⁰ a diocesan priest from Mexico City.⁴¹ And, since so many of the authors in this book depend on Elizondo's compelling methodological and hermeneutical approach to the Virgin of Guadalupe, as exemplified in his many books and articles,⁴² it is highly fitting that he have the opportunity to respond to this honor and offer his own insights. To both of

³⁸ See p. 178 below.

³⁹ Timothy Matovina, *Guadalupe and Her Faithful: Latino Catholics in San Antonio from Colonial Origins to the Present* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). See also his essay, "Theologies of Guadalupe: From the Spanish Colonial Era to John Paul II," *Theological Studies* 70 (March 2009): 61–91.

⁴⁰ For the text see Miguel Sánchez, *Imagen de la Virgen María, Madre de Dios de Guadalupe: Milagrosamente aparecida en la Ciudad de México, celebrada en su historia, con la profecía del capítulo doze del Apocalipsis* (Mexico City: Imp. Vidua de Bernardo Calderón, 1648; reprinted by Cuernavaca, Morelos, 1952).

⁴¹ Timothy Matovina, "Guadalupe at Calgary: Patristic Theology in Miguel Sánchez's *Imagen de la Virgen María* (1648)," *Theological Studies* 64 (December 2003): 795–811.

⁴² See especially his *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* and *La Morenita: Evangelizer of the Americas* (San Antonio, TX: Mexican American Cultural Center Press, 1980).

these colleagues, and to all of the authors participating in this collection, I am most grateful.

Special thanks also go to my former graduate assistant Annie Vorhes McGowan, a doctoral candidate in liturgical studies at the University of Notre Dame. Her research and editorial assistance have been invaluable to me. Special thanks also go to my current graduate assistant, Nathaniel Marx, a doctoral student in liturgical studies at Notre Dame, for his excellent assistance in proofreading. And my thanks go as well to both Peter Dwyer and Hans Christoffersen for their willingness to take on this project and see it to completion under the imprint of Liturgical Press.

Finally, because the narrative of the apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe to Juan Diego may not be familiar to all readers of this collection, I provide by way of an appendix, an English translation of the popular Náhuatl version, the *Nican Mopohua*, traditionally attributed to Antonio Valeriano (1520–1605), but now commonly agreed to have been composed from various sources by Luis Laso de la Vega, the vicar of Guadalupe in 1649.⁴³ The particular translation used here, by kind permission of Orbis Books, is that of Virgil Elizondo from his study, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation*.⁴⁴

Maxwell E. Johnson
March 25, 2009
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⁴³ See Lisa Sousa, Stafford Poole, and James Lockhart, eds., *The Story of Guadalupe: Luis Laso de la Vega's Huei tlamahuiçoltica of 1649*, UCLA Latin American Studies, vol. 84 (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

⁴⁴ Elizondo, *Guadalupe*, 5–22.