The Virgin of Guadalupe in the Mexican Context

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Part 1: Introduction

From the barrios of Mexico City to the pueblos of the state of Zacatecas, the Mexican republic is covered with images and shrines to the Virgin of Guadalupe, a dark skinned representation of the Virgin Mary. Although the Virgin Mary is venerated by Catholics all over the world, the devotion that is manifested in Mexico towards the Virgin of Guadalupe has a special mystique that unites all Mexican people. Ena Campbell states it well when she says,

"Great and little traditions conjoin when she [Mary] is worshiped as Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico. Here the Virgin is manifested in many different guises. There have been attempts to superimpose the figure of a savior Christ on her long-lived hegemony, yet the Virgin, as Guadalupe, has ever emerged victorious. It is she who integrates the folk and mainstream cultures of Mexico. It is the Virgin of Guadalupe who expresses the sociopolitical uniqueness of the entire Mexican population. In the words of Eric Wolf, the Virgin of Guadalupe is a "national symbol."¹

She may be regarded as a national symbol, but Guadalupe’s reach extends internationally past the borders of Mexico. In 1910 St. Pious XI named her Patroness of Latin America. Timothy Matovina, when talking about the scope of the reach of Guadalupe, says,

“Today, the exuberant veneration of Guadalupe increasingly spreads beyond Mexico to other places in the Americas. Her basilica in Mexico City is the most visited pilgrimage site on the American continent, but shrines dedicated to her are also as far north as Johnstown, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. After Jesus of Nazareth, her image is the most reproduced sacred icon in the western hemisphere. She continues to appear in the daily 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”.

Since arriving in Mexico City in 2003, I have been intrigued by the multitude of images and shrines of the Virgin of Guadalupe throughout the country, but what has held my interest even more has been the strong devotion to her I have seen in the people and how this devotion has influenced the psyche of the Mexican people since the first apparition in 1531. It is said that to be Mexican is to be Guadalupano (a follower of Guadalupe), and her presence affects every evangelistic effort or religious conversation one might have, regardless of where you are in the country. Every minister of the gospel who is interested in having a meaningful religious conversation with someone in Mexico must have an understanding of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

My personal interest in the topic is two-fold. I want to be able to effectively minister to those Mexicans with whom I attempt to share the gospel, and I want to use what I learn to help equip others to understand how to contextualize the gospel for the Mexican people in their communities. I will mostly be attempting to help my students at the Mexican Baptist Theological Seminary in their ministries in local churches, but I also would like to be able to help others who have an interest in ministering to the hispanic community in the United States and abroad as they seek to understand the thinking of the Mexican people with whom they will be working.

It is my conviction that in order to effectively understand and minister to the Mexican people, we must understand the impact of the Virgin of Guadalupe on how they view God, themselves, and the world. We cannot ignore her influence on the nation, and increasingly, on the

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continent. The purpose of this paper is to seek a contextualized gospel in the context of the modern Mexican mindset.

**Part II: Model of Contextualization**

As we seek to appropriately contextualize the gospel in a context where there is a prominent view of the Virgin of Guadalupe, we will follow Paul Hiebert’s critical contextualization model of contextualization. The first step in Hiebert’s model gives the cross-cultural worker an opportunity to learn what the receiving culture believes or practices, attempting to gain as much information as possible about the subject. The second step is to study what the Bible teaches about the culture’s beliefs or practices. At this point, it is very important to try to understand the Biblical teaching with as little cultural bias as possible. It must be understood that we all approach the Scripture with our own cultural lens, and it is important to seek God’s wisdom as we humbly approach His Word to see what He says about the practice or belief of somebody else. The third step in Hiebert’s critical model of contextualization is to evaluate the beliefs or practices of the receiving culture in the light of the Biblical teachings. I believe this step is important because we must assure that the evaluation of a culture or context always takes place according to what the Bible says. Only then may we enter into the fourth step which is to form a contextualized practice based on what the Bible says about the cultural or traditional belief.

Hiebert’s critical contextualization model is a great model for us to use in this context because the Bible becomes the standard in evaluating the cultural practices. Too often we deny the belief or practice simply because it belongs to another culture or people, and as we try to share the gospel, both our message and ourselves are rejected because we are seen as completely
foreign to those with whom we are trying to share. We cannot, however, simply accept practices or beliefs without evaluating them in the light of what the Bible teaches about them. This would lead us to a severe syncretism, polluting the message of the Word of God. Using Hiebert’s model will allow us to contextualize the gospel in the culture so that it can truly be good news to the people with whom we are working.

Using the critical contextualization model, we will spend some time understanding the Mexican beliefs and practices about the Virgin of Guadalupe and then study the Biblical insights on some important subject matters in order to effectively evaluate what can be done from the perspective of someone who is coming from the outside of the culture. Again, the Bible must be our standard in evaluating religious practices and beliefs, and Hiebert’s model places a strong emphasis on the Word of God in the contextualization process, helping us as we attempt to minister cross-culturally.

**Part III: Mary in the Mexican Context**

*Historical Aspect*

The story of the Mexican devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe begins even before the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards. Even before Hernán Cortez and his army arrived to conquer the Aztec Empire and bring Roman Catholicism to New Spain, the indigenous people had their own “Mother of the gods” named Tonantsi. Ena Campbell points out that this Aztec goddess was the one who was known to have given them the cactus plant, whose milk produces *pulque*, an intoxicating drink that “fires religious ecstasy”. It was on a hill that was used to worship Tonantsi that Guadalupe would eventually reveal herself to the peasant Juan Diego.

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3 Campbell, *Mother Worship*, 12.
The Spaniards arrived in 1520 to an Aztec empire that was awaiting the return of Queztalcoatl, one of their most prominent gods who had left them but promised to return someday as a man with a white beard. Consequently, the Spaniards were welcomed into the empire and easily defeated the Aztecs despite their outstanding reputation as a warrior people. Hernan Cortez and his men had brought images of the Virgin de los Remedios for protection during their conquest and to be the patroness of the new continent. When the Aztecs were defeated the image of the Virgin Mary manifested as the Virgin de los Remedios was placed at the top of the main temple in Tenochtitlan (present day Mexico City) and anywhere else that was considered a holy place. Patrizia Granziera points out that these images of Mary “turned out to be the first Catholic holy representation that the ‘indios’ saw replacing their idols”.

Throughout the years that followed, Spanish Catholic missionaries introduced their beliefs and practices to the indigenous peoples. These beliefs included many different apparitions of the Virgin Mary, but it wasn’t until 1531 that the devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe began to develop in its entirety with the story of a peasant believer named Juan Diego.

The legend of Juan Diego is recounted in the Nican mopohua, the earliest account of the apparition of Guadalupe on the hill of Tepeyac in the northern part of Tenochtitlan, the center of the great Aztec empire and the place we now know as Mexico City. The Nican mopohua, written in Nahuatl, describes the events of the first few days of December, 1531, and especially the morning of December 12.

Pereyra summarizes the story of Juan Diego’s encounters with the Virgin of Guadalupe:

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4 Matovina, Timothy M. 2003. "Guadalupe at Calvary: Patristic Theology in Miguel Sánchez's Imagen de la Virgen María (1648)." Theological Studies 64, no. 4, 796.

“Legend says that on December 9, 1531, Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego, a humble Christianized Náhuatl Indian, when he was on his way to Tlatelolco to hear mass. He heard music and a voice which pronounced his name. Juan Diego walked in the direction of the voice and suddenly saw a beautiful woman, radiant and light, who introduced herself as the Mother of the True God from whom everything lives, the Creator of heaven and earth. She wanted a temple to be built at that site and wanted to live among the Indian people to serve them in their needs and painful lives. The Lady asked Juan Diego to talk with the Bishop in his palace. The Bishop received Juan Diego but did not believe the story. Juan Diego returned to his people and on the way, the Virgin appeared to him again inquiring about her message. Juan Diego was sad about the answer of the Bishop. He asked the Virgin to send a messenger more important than himself, since he was only a poor, non-educated Indian. The Lady asked Juan Diego to return to the Bishop's palace and give him a sign. On December 12, Juan Diego had another encounter with the Lady of Tepeyac who at this time asked Juan Diego to take some beautiful roses from the mountain and bring them to the Bishop as proof of her petition. Juan Diego took the roses and brought them to the Bishop. When Juan Diego opened his tilma, the roses fell from it. On top of the tilma was the figure of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Bishop and his servant saw this and fell on their knees before such a miracle.”

During the conquest, the indigenous population was strongly coerced to embrace Catholicism, and in 1531 there were almost 1.5 million indigenous Catholics in Mexico. Much of the population, however, did not trust the conquistadors and were reluctant to convert to their religion. After the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe, however, they began to embrace the new ideas and religion. Frances Kennett writes, “The cult spread rapidly by word of mouth among the Indian population: within seven years of the apparition, several million Indians had converted to Christianity”. Although there were still many who continued to worship their pantheon of gods, the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe to the indigenous peasant Juan Diego did more to spread the Catholic faith among the indigenous people than all of the other efforts the Spanish missionaries had tried until that point.

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7 The Marian Era (56)

The rise in acceptance of Catholicism among the indigenous people after the appearance of Guadalupe can be attributed partly to the fact that she was an indigenous representation of the Virgin Mary. Instead of accepting a foreign European religion, the indigenous people of Mexico were at once given a *mestizo* Mary of their own. This was important because of the religious implications as well as the future of Mexico. Ena Campbell says, "from the moment of Guadalupe's miraculous appearance, 'Mexico no longer belonged to Spain.' In short, the Mexican people had their own native patron saint'.\(^9\) This patron saint would go on to give both the conquered and the conquerers a new view of the Catholic faith, a new view of themselves in the world, and a new view of New Spain.

**Demographic Aspects**

Guadalupe’s influence still extends to all of Mexico, regardless of location or age. It would be easy to assume that a tradition that is almost 500 years old would be waning as time passes, but the opposite appears to be true when discussing the Virgin of Guadalupe and her followers. Anytime I have visited the Basilica dedicated to Guadalupe in Mexico City, there have been a broad range of age groups paying homage to the image. Families take their young children to the Basilica to teach them how to properly respect the Virgin. Young people crawl on their knees through the plaza towards the image of Guadalupe, and elderly parishioners attend the masses regularly. It makes little difference the age of the Mexican. To be Mexican is still to be *Guadalupano*.

This devotion to Guadalupe has also become a symbol of national pride outside of the Mexican Republic. As more and more Mexicans immigrate to the United States, there are more

\(^9\) Campbell, *Mother Worship*, 8.
shrines to the Virgin of Guadalupe spread throughout the Americas. With the increase of Mexican immigrants in the United States it is easy to see an increase in the veneration of the Virgin of Guadalupe there as well. In many places including Los Angeles, Chicago, Phoenix, and many parts of Texas, there are popular shrines to Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Each December 12 is the national celebration of the Day of Guadalupe. It is a national holiday, and followers of Guadalupe make their pilgrimages from all across the country and Latin America. Millions of people descend on the Basilica, making the Villa of Guadalupe the most visited holy site in the Western Hemisphere. This day is reserved to remember the revelation of Guadalupe to Juan Diego, the miracles that her image has done in the past, and to ask her favor for the future.

**Cultural Aspects**

The devotion to Guadalupe greatly affects Mexican culture. She is known as “The Queen of Mexico.” Throughout Mexico’s history, Guadalupe has been more than just a religious icon. She has also assumed a political and cultural role. Many of the soldiers of the revolutionary war used the image of Guadalupe as a justification for their rebellion. It was Guadalupe, in fact, who had chosen Mexico.10

**Brought Dignity to an Oppressed People**

As the story goes, Guadalupe chose to reveal herself to a member of the oppressed minority during the conquest. Juan Diego’s response included a desire for her to choose somebody else for this important mission. But the fact that she chose him is significant in the cultural aspect of the

10 Kennett, "Sor Juana and the Guadalupe." 314.
story. She was choosing to turn around the fate of the conquered indigenous people. As Matovina reminds us:

“The Guadalupe event is a counter narrative to the complete defeat of the native peoples. Guadalupe’s first words to Juan Diego are, ‘Dignified Juan, dignified Juan Diego.’ She then goes on to give him the mission of communicating to Bishop Zumarraga her desire that a temple be built on the hill of Tepeyac where she ‘will show and give to all people all my love, my compassion, my help, and my protection’.”

Guadalupe is seen as the mother of the oppressed peoples throughout Mexico, of which there are many. Although she is revered by all classes of Mexican people, she has a special interest in those who are oppressed and poor. Her story represents a reversal of roles in which the oppressed becomes the revered in the society. The story begins with Juan Diego bowing before the Bishop and ends with the Bishop bowing down before the image of Guadalupe on his garment. This message brings hope to countless people who find themselves in less than privileged situations throughout Mexico and the continent.

**United Conquered and the Conquerers**

The Virgin played an important role during the development of the republic and the eventual acceptance of the mixture of two cultures. Timothy Matovina, when speaking of Miguel Sanchez’s important work as one of what he calls the Guadalupan evangelists, writes,

“following established conventions for writings about miraculous images and their sacred sites, in the final section of his work Sanchez narrates various miracles attributed to Guadalupe’s intercession...in this section he narrates seven miracles: the first three benefited indigenous devotees, the next three involved persons of Spanish heritage, and the final miracle was the rescue of Mexico City from the disastrous flood of 1629-1634...noting that Mexico City archbishop Francisco Manso y Zuniga temporarily had the Guadalupe image transferred to his cathedral where devotees asked that her intercession abate the floodwaters, Sanchez professed that with the Guadalupe image

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11 Matinova, *Theology of Guadalupe*. 489-490
‘attending, accompanying, abiding, and touching the informed city, she healed it, dried it out, liberated it, redeemed it, restored it, and conserved it’."\(^\text{12}\)

The image of Guadalupe was important not only for the indigenous people, but also for the Spanish conquistadors and the new nation that was brought about by the mixing of these two cultures. It continues in this tradition of importance to this day.

**The Importance of the Mother**

It is also important to note the role of the mother in the community. It is one of the most beloved and important roles one can have in the culture. In the Mexican mindset, a mother is sacred. She is to be honored and revered.

Many social analysts insist on this element of Mexican culture: "A mother is seldom faced with the dilemma so publicized in the United States, of having to choose between her children and her paid job. The granting of sick leave to the mother of a sick child is a matter of the employer's duty to respect the sacredness of motherhood which the individual woman shares with the Virgin Mary and with the great mother goddesses of pre-Christian times.

In a study by R. Diaz Guerrero, more than 85% of the respondents questioned answered affirmatively to the question, “Is the mother for you the dearest person in existence?” He goes on to say that “The Mexican family is founded upon two fundamental propositions: the unquestioned and absolute supremacy of the father and the necessary and absolute self-sacrifice of the mother.”\(^\text{13}\) If this is true of the mother role in the society, the role that Guadalupe plays as “The Mother of God” amplifies her role among the Mexican people.

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\(^{12}\) Matovina, Timothy M. 2003. "Guadalupe at Calvary: Patristic Theology in Miguel Sánchez's Imagen de la Virgen María (1648)." Theological Studies 64, no. 4: 805-806.

\(^{13}\) Campbell, *Mother Worship*, 14-16.
The Mother vs. The Father

As was mentioned earlier, the hill of Tepeyac, where Guadalupe first appeared to Juan Diego, was an important place for Tonantsi, one of the many goddesses in the mythology of the indigenous people. Not only did Tonantsi provide the indigenous people with the cactus plant and pulque, she also protected and nurtured her children. One account says,

“Even after the onslaught of Christianity, the loving Tonantsi continued to defend her children against the wrath of the Judeo-Christian God. According to legend, Tonantsi would not allow this foreign god to punish her children. Part of the folklore of Mexico expresses this protective function of the goddess: she challenged God, her son, to produce mother's milk (as she had done), to prove that his benevolence equaled his disciplinary harshness. It is God's role to punish; it is her role to nurture and intercede: "Not the milk of cows, not the milk of goats, but my own [human] milk," states the Aztec legend describing the encounter between Tonantsi and God.”

The mother’s role is always to protect and nurture.

Patrizia Granziera reveals that there were a number of female earth goddesses in the pantheon of the indigenous peoples who were regularly worshipped during their rituals in their mostly agricultural lifestyle. Mary fit right into their religious mind. She comments,

“We can say that Mary's association with flowers, gardens, trees and water made her compatible with the Nahua's views of sacred power. When the Spanish invaders suppressed the Nahua's public religion and offered the cult of their mostly venerated 'Immaculate Virgin' in exchange, Mary became the most important sacred female available for indigenous adaptation. Coming from a tradition in which female divinities were significant players and the sacred was conceived in terms of deified forms of the cosmic human and vegetal cycle, Nahuas were predisposed to grant importance to the only major female figure presented to them by Christianity.”

Religious Aspects

Everything we have seen up until this point has also been associated with the religious aspects of Mexican devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe. There is very little separation between

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14 Campbell. *Mother Worship*, 12.

15 Granziera. "From Coatlicue to Guadalupe”, 269.
the sacred and the secular when it comes to Guadalupe. Those who believe in her do so for all aspects of their lives. This makes the devotion to Mary in Mexico in the version of Guadalupe much stronger than most Marian Catholic devotion in other parts of the world. She has more than just a religious influence on the Mexican people. She is a symbol of national pride. She has become the caregiver that God the Father could never be (in the eyes of the Mexican people), and she stoops down to help those who are lowly in the eyes of the majority of the world.

Peterson notes that “Pope Pius XII once called for a correct balance of Mariology and Marian devotion. Pope John XXII sounded the same note. In 1951 the Holy Office issued a warning against Marian excesses”. 16 This warning could definitely be heeded in Mexico as the devotion to Guadalupe has become so strong.

**Part IV: Apply the Model**

Having seen the historical, cultural, and religious aspects of the topic of the Virgin of Guadalupe in the Mexican context, we now turn our interest to some of the main themes that must be addressed as we attempt to work contextually. There are four main themes that I believe arise from our previous study, and in this section I hope to address each of them in a manner that will present the God of the Bible and His Son Jesus Christ in a way that connects to the hearts of the hearers who have been influenced by the Virgin of Guadalupe.

The four main issues that we will attempt to connect to the topic of the Virgin of Guadalupe are the following: The nurturing aspect of the mother figure, the interest in the poor and oppressed, the indigenous nature of God, and the qualities that show that God cares.

* A Nurturing God

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As has been already noted, part of the appeal of Guadalupe to the Mexican mindset is a view that God’s role is to punish, but the role of Guadalupe, as the mother, is to nurture and intercede for her children. Since motherhood is such a respected aspect of Mexican culture, and to be the Mother of the family is one of the highest honors one can receive, it is congruent to think that Mary, when she is viewed as the Theotokos, or “mother of God”, she is highly revered. The Father, on the other hand, is seen through the eyes of respect but also fear and rejection.

The view of God as the one who desires to punish and enforce stems from view of God that overemphasizes only one aspect of His being. Along with being a God of justice and judgment, God the Father, too, has nurturing motherly qualities. Kenneth Bailey writes, “A number of Hebrew Scripture texts specifically refer to God as mother.”17 While it may seem strange to us to seek motherly qualities of God, they are exhibited in the Scriptures.

In Isaiah 66:7-9, Jerusalem is compared to a mother. The returning children are the pilgrims who are nurtured and cared for by their mother. As Bailey describes, “Suddenly, the imagery shifts: ‘As one who his mother comforts, surely I will comfort you; you will be comforted in Jerusalem’ (Isaiah 66:13). Clearly, Jerusalem has now become the place where comforting occurs. God is now the comforter who comforts like a mother.18 Bailey adds that Psalm 131 implies inferences to God as mother, “In Psalm 131 the Psalmist addresses God and then likens himself to a weaned child with its mother, the strong inference being that the mother is a symbol for God.”19

17 Bailey, Kenneth E. Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel’s Story (Downer’s Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2003), 91
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid, 59.
God sometimes acts as a mother. His nurturing qualities are important to our understanding of who He is and how He relates to us. We must present these qualities of God along with His other attributes. If, in fact, the motherly aspects make people more appealing because of the way that Mexican culture sees the roles of fathers and mothers, we would do well to talk more of the nurturing, caring qualities of God as He protects His children. We cannot stand outside of the Biblical tension that God does enforce His justice, but He also stands beside His people in grace and in love, protecting them as a mother.

In Mexico, because of the cultural understanding of the role of the father as the authoritarian, enforcer of rules, perhaps we need to remember more those parts of the Bible that show God’s motherly qualities, allowing people to see just how much He cares for His children.

The idea of presenting God as a nurturing mother-like being, however, may run into some problems in Mexico due to the strong *machismo* that is exhibited. Men are to be manly, and if God or Jesus, who have traditionally been presented from a more culturally *macho* point of view, is shown to have a nurturing side like that of a mother, perhaps they will lost part of that aspect of who they are in the mind of the culture.

*A Liberating God*

Guadalupe appeals to the Mexican mindset as well because she stands up for the poor and oppressed. In the case of the story of Juan Diego, she appeared to an indigenous man who was very poor, and as a result of this encounter with her, Juan Diego was eventually revered among all Mexicans and even granted sainthood by the Roman Catholic Church.

God stands up for the poor and oppressed. Many who have discovered the story of Guadalupe have used it to develop themes of liberation or justice, “the breaking in of God’s reign
which upends the status quo of the world: in the way of Mary’s Magnificent, the way God ‘has deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places’ (Luke 1:52).”

The truth is that God does indeed care for the poor. Jesus embodies this aspect of God’s involvement with mankind. God has chosen the weak and powerless things of the world, but always so that He may be glorified. It is never for our own glory that He chooses to use us. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:27-29, “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him” (ESV). God uses the weaknesses of His people for great things.

God does look out for the poor and lowly. Jesus, when describing His ministry in the synagogue as recorded in Luke 4, reads from Isaiah 61:1-2, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” His mission is always set, however, within the context of redeeming people and bringing them into the Kingdom of God. In Matthew 26:11 He acknowledges that, “The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.” He cares for the poor and oppressed. He blesses them, but He also wants to redeem them from their sins and not just those sins which have been done to them.

In seeking to understand God as a liberator and relate it to those who look to Guadalupe as one who shows special favor for the poor and needy, we must remember to present Jesus as the

20 Matovina, The Theology of Guadalupe, 489.
Redeemer, but we should also seek to help those who are in need, as this is an important aspect of who Jesus is and what He desires to do in the lives of people.

A Global yet Local God

As we have seen in our study of the historical aspect of the story of Guadalupe, the appeal of the time for the indigenous population was that this apparition of Mary was a *morena*, meaning that she resembled the indigenous population more than the European population because of her darker skin and features. This automatically led them to accept her more than they had accepted *La Virgen de Los Remedios*, who was the Spanish image of the Virgin that they had brought with them during the conquest. Guadalupe was more like them and the other images of the Virgin were more like the conquistadors.

As time passes, Guadalupe becomes more and more a national symbol, causing the Mexican people to accept her more. If she is a national symbol and the popular saying, “To be Mexican is to be *Guadalupano,*” is true, then to reject the Virgin of Guadalupe is to reject your nationality. Any other idea about God is foreign.

Throughout the Bible we see that God is the God of the whole world. John 3:16 says that He loved the world. He does not play favorites (Ephesians 6:9). He came to be one of us. In Luke 20, the teachers of the law and the chief priests were attempting to catch Jesus in a difficult position, so they sent spies to question Him. As they inquired about paying taxes to Caesar, they stated a truth about Him. They said, “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God.” Even His opponents acknowledged that He shows no partiality but is for everyone.
Jesus truly showed His disciples in the Bible that He was impartial to people. In John 4, as He speaks with the Samaritan woman at the well, He shows everybody once again that His desire is to be worshipped by all people of every nation. His final commandment to His disciples before ascending into heaven, as recorded in Matthew 28:20 is to “make disciples of all nations.”

We see this demonstrated again in the New Testament as the church begins to expand away from Jerusalem. In Acts 10 Paul is told to go share about Jesus with Cornelius, a devout and God-fearing Gentile. This began the spread of the gospel to all nations as God desires because of His love for all peoples.

The problem that we see in our attempt to share Jesus as an “insider” or someone who is not foreign is that we always present Him from our own context. The Spanish missionaries were not incorrect in trying to present God from their perspective. It is impossible to communicate the gospel without using culture. They were doing what they knew how to do. We must, however, make the best attempt possible to share Jesus in a way that will show that God is not foreign to those with whom we are sharing.

*A Caring God You can Trust*

Guadalupe is seen as important to the lives of people because she listens to their prayers and cares for them on a personal basis. Her image is said to have performed countless miracles. Timothy Matovina, when sharing aspects of devotion to Guadalupe, states,

“Finally, Guadalupe's multitudes of devotees are attracted to her countenance because they see someone whom they can trust and to whom they can freely pour out their hearts' concerns. Her litany of achievements, many deemed miracles by her devotees, is endless: providing rain and abundant harvests, driving back flood waters, abating epidemics, safeguarding immigrants, protecting soldiers at war, restoring broken relationships, enabling students to have success in pursuing an education, providing help with employment, healing all manner of infirmity and distress. Prayers of petition and thanksgiving for her intercession flow continuously. In the hearts of her faithful
followers, Guadalupe never fails. Turning to her is a surefire step in responding to a
difficult or even hopeless situation. And what of the cancer patient who fails to recover,
the son who shows no sign of turning from wrongful ways, the poverty that is endemic?
What matters most to them is not that their prayers be always answered in the manner
desired, but that they see in Guadalupe's face someone who cares about them, someone
who is ever willing to listen.”

Paul, when speaking with the Athenians, describes God as not being far from each one of
us (Acts 17:27). From the time of the Garden of Eden He has taken the initiative in the
relationship with us. He wants to know what is going on in our lives. He truly cares for us, and
He has the ability to respond to our prayers.

We need to present God as the God who cares for each of us and the One in whom we can,
indeed, we must trust. When we are in a difficult or hopeless situation, Jesus is the One who can
help us through it. We are to pray to Him. He knows how to give good gifts to His children. Luke
11 reminds us that He will give good gifts to those who ask. We are reminded again in James
1:17 that every good gift comes from “Father of lights.”

Our attempts at presenting God and Jesus in the context of Mexicans who are strongly tied
to Guadalupe must be accompanied by a strong commitment to present Christ as one who cares
for us and who has the power to work in our lives the things for which we ask Him. He loves us
and cares for us, and we must not forget this aspect of the gospel as we present Jesus to those in
our community.

The Importance of Contextualization

We cannot minister in a culture effectively without attempting to understand the things that
make it what it is. In Mexico, that means we must seek to understand the role of the Virgin of
Guadalupe. This short analysis of a major theme in the Mexican context seeks to avoid a denial

21 Matovina, The Theology of Guadalupe, 498.
of the presence of Guadalupe in the history and thought of the nation, but it also seeks to avoid an uncritical acceptance of her that would lead to syncretism. The characteristics that make her appealing are characteristics of God, who is to be worshipped. What makes Mary special is her relationship to Jesus Christ. We must never forget that it is Jesus we must present in a loving way, seeking to show His supremacy for His glory alone.

**Part V: Conclusion**

This study of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Mexican Context has brought many important things to my attention, especially the questions that Mexican people are asking about God as seen in their relationship with Guadalupe. They believe they are finding the answers to these questions in Guadalupe, when, in fact, they can be found in Jesus Christ Himself. The major questions that I believe are being asked are, “Is God a foreigner who stands outside of my immediate context and does not care about me?” “Will He be willing to stoop down to my side and lead me into a new life?” “Does He care enough to nurture me as a mother nurtures her children?” “Will He look at the poor and suffering and help them in their plight for a better life?” Because Guadalupe appears to answer these questions, the devotion to her has increased throughout Mexico and increasingly in Latin America.

I believe that the Bible teaches that Jesus Christ answers these questions in a much more complete manner, allowing for those who seek the answers to these questions to look to Him from their context and see Him for who He really is. An improved Christology will help us as we seek to answer these and other questions that come into our lives.
Throughout the research and contextualization process, I found myself thinking and feeling many things. The process of researching the topic gave me many new insights into the layers surrounding the mystique of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico. There are many cultural, religious, and historical aspects to the issue, and they could keep my mind occupied for a lifetime. Because of this it made me realize that contextualization is an ongoing process. We must constantly be examining and evaluating the issues, digging deeper into them in order to be an effective witness in the world. The command in 2 Timothy 2:15 to “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (ESV) rings true for all who are attempting to understand a new culture and learn how to relate to the many layers of context that must be understood in order to present the Word of God in a way that answers the questions that the people are asking.

The process of contextualization was frustrating at times. In my research I found very little written about Guadalupe from a Protestant perspective. I am still unsure of how most Protestants have reacted to the topic of Guadalupe in the past, but I feel that this information would be very important to consider as I continue my journey of understanding what to do with Guadalupe in my current ministry in Mexico. I would like to see more dialogue from Protestants about what to do in this context and culture. It would also be beneficial to hear leading Mexican Protestant Theologians speak about the topic, but I have yet to find anything on the subject.

I have benefitted personally in many ways from completing this project. I feel that I now have a better understanding of some of the reasons the Virgin of Guadalupe is so important to the Mexican mindset. After researching more about the historical influence she has had in the country, I have a better understanding of her current place in Mexican culture and society. I also
have a greater understanding of the kind of Jesus that may be appealing to the people of Mexico, and I realize the need there is for an indigenous representation of the gospel that does not appear to be from outside in the context of missions, especially in the context of a fatalistic worldview in which things have always been imposed upon them.
Bibliography


