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The First Guadalupan Pastoral Manual: Luis Laso de la Vega's *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* (1649)

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Millions of devotees acclaim the Nahuatl-language Nican mopohua *account of the apparitions of Our Lady of Guadalupe to Juan Diego as the foundational text of the Guadalupe tradition. A number of scholarly analyses have also examined the* Nican mopohua *as a prime source for that tradition. But no previous study has focused on a theological examination of Luis Laso de la Vega's* Huei tlamahuiçoltica *(1649), in which the* Nican mopohua *was first published.* Huei tlamahuiçoltica *is the premier Guadalupan pastoral manual and encompasses other important material, such as the* Nican motecpana *account of miracles attributed to Guadalupe's intercession, and the earliest published synopsis of Juan Diego's life posed as a model for Christian discipleship. This article explores Laso de la Vega's contributions and the ongoing significance of his treatise for the development of theological works and pastoral ministries centered on Guadalupe.*

Keywords: Our Lady of Guadalupe, Juan Diego, Luis Laso de la Vega, pastoral theology, *Nican mopohua*, *Nican motecpana*, *Huei tlamahuiçoltica*

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 in the Americas. After that of Jesus of Nazareth, the image of Guadalupe is the most reproduced sacred icon in the Western Hemisphere. Millions of devotees acclaim the Nahuatl-language *Nican mopohua* (the title of which is derived from the document's first words, "Here is recounted") as the foundational text of the Guadalupe tradition. The text narrates the well-known tale of Guadalupe's reported 1531 apparitions to the indigenous neophyte Juan

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Diego, whom she sent to request that Juan de Zumárraga, the first bishop of Mexico, build a temple in her honor on the hill of Tepeyac (in present-day Mexico City). At first the bishop doubted the celestial origins of this request, but he came to believe when Juan Diego presented him exquisite flowers that were out of season and the image of Guadalupe miraculously appeared on Juan Diego's *tilma* (cloak).

A number of theologians have examined the text of the *Nican mopohua* as a prime source for the Guadalupe tradition, such as Virgilio Elizondo, whose book *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* includes an English translation of the *Nican mopohua* and is an extended theological commentary on that text.[1] Yet scholarly analyses of Luis Laso de la Vega's 1649 work *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* (By a Great Miracle), in which the *Nican mopohua* was first published, are limited to short assessments in more general works on Guadalupe. Typically these works focus on the significance of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* for larger historical debates about the origins of the Guadalupe tradition, as is exemplified in Stafford Poole's 1995 book precisely on that topic. Other studies, like David Brading's 2001 *Mexican Phoenix,* focus primarily on a comparison of Laso de la Vega's publication to a similar work released the year before, Miguel Sánchez's *Imagen de la Virgen María*.[2] To date no publication has focused exclusively on a theological examination of

[1] Virgilio Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of the New Creation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997). See also Angel María Garibay K[intana], "La maternidad de María en el mensaje guadalupano," in *La maternidad espiritual de María: Conferencias leídas en los Congresos Mariológicos 7–12 octubre 1957 y 9–12 octubre 1960* (Mexico City: Editorial Jus, 1961), 187–202; Garibay, "The Spiritual Motherhood of Mary," in *A Handbook on Guadalupe* (New Bedford, MA: Franciscan Friars of the Immaculate, 1997), 9–16; Clodomiro L. Siller Acuña, *Flor y canto del Tepeyac: Historia de las apariciones de Santa María de Guadalupe; Texto y comentario* (Xalapa, Mexico: Servir, 1981); Elizondo, *La Morenita: Evangelizer of the Americas* (San Antonio: Mexican American Cultural Center, 1980); Jeanette Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-American Women* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); Richard Nebel, *Santa María Tonantzin, Virgen de Guadalupe: Continuidad y transformación religiosa en México* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1995); José Luis Guerrero, *El Nican mopohua: Un intento de exégesis*, 2 vols. (Mexico City: Realidad, Teoría, y Práctica, 1998).

[2] Stafford Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531–1797* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995), 110–26; D. A. Brading, *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe, Image and Tradition across Five Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 81–88; Miguel Sánchez, *Imagen de la Virgen María* (Mexico City: Viuda de Bernardo Calderón, 1648), as reprinted in *Testimonios históricos Guadalupanos*, ed. Ernesto de la Torre Villar and Ramiro Navarro de Anda (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982), 152–267.

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the full contents of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica*, the first Guadalupan pastoral manual.

Luis Laso de la Vega was a Mexico City diocesan priest, though little is known about his life. He was enrolled in a course of study in canon law at the University of Mexico in 1623 and at some point completed his licentiate. In 1647 he was appointed to serve as vicar of the Guadalupe sanctuary, where a substantial church had been consecrated in 1622 to augment the original chapel on the site. As vicar, Laso de la Vega oversaw the rebuilding of the first chapel, as well as the construction of walls around the springs where many infirm drank water or bathed in search of healing. Subsequently Laso de la Vega was promoted to the Mexico City cathedral chapter. The full title of his publication is *Huei tlamahuiçoltica omonexiti in ilhuicac tlatocacihuapilli Santa Maria totlaçonantzin Guadalupe in nican Huei altepenahuac Mexico itocayocan Tepeyacac* (By a Great Miracle Appeared the Heavenly Queen, Saint Mary, Our Precious Mother of Guadalupe, Here Near the Great Altepetl of Mexico, at a Place Called Tepeyac). Though in time its contents, particularly the *Nican mopohua*, had a significant impact on the Guadalupe tradition, *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* began inauspiciously as a thirty-six-page tract with various typographical errors and inconsistencies in its text. It is Laso de la Vega's only know publication.

Huei tlamahuiçoltica is a composite work, and scholars disagree about whether Laso de la Vega was the sole author, collaborated with Nahua assistants, or outright reprinted some writings of others. In particular, historians have long debated the authorship and proper dating of the *Nican mopohua* apparition account. Proponents of a sixteenth-century original composition avow that the *Nican mopohua* reflects the style of Nahuatl from the early stages after the Spanish conquest, or even the elegant Nahuatl of a native speaker from that period. Some attribute the document to the sixteenth-century Nahua intellectual Antonio Valeriano. Their opponents disagree and place the creation of the *Nican mopohua* in the seventeenth century after Valeriano's demise.[3]

Amid such debates at least one point is indisputable: even if the *Nican mopohua* was the first account of the apparitions ever *penned*, it was not the first account ever *published*. That distinction belongs to Miguel

[3] For opposing arguments on the authorship of the *Nican mopohua*, see Fidel González Fernández, Eduardo Chávez Sánchez, and José Luis Guerrero Rosado, *El encuentro de la Virgen de Guadalupe y Juan Diego*, 4th ed. (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 2001), 171–74; Lisa Sousa, Stafford Poole, and James Lockhart, ed. and trans., *The Story of Guadalupe: Luis Laso de la Vega's* Huei tlamahuiçoltica *of 1649* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1–47, esp. 43–47.

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Sánchez's 1648 book *Imagen de la Virgen María*. While the precise relationship between the works of Sánchez and Laso de la Vega also remains a debated topic, a comparison of their contents reveals their close correlation. Discrepancies such as the ordering of the main sections of the two volumes, the inclusion of twice as many Guadalupe miracle accounts in Laso de la Vega's work as in Sánchez's, and the number of times Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego—five in Sánchez, four in Laso de la Vega—are minor as compared to the common thematic material contained in both works. Moreover, Laso de la Vega wrote a glowing commendation for inclusion in *Imagen de la Virgen María* in which he confessed that though he had long venerated Guadalupe, "after I read the history of her miracle" in Sánchez's book "the desire to be totally hers has grown [even more] in my heart."[4]

Yet there are also noteworthy differences between the two works. The *Nican mopohua*'s extensive use of poetic devices, diminutive forms, and the indigenous narrative style of accentuating dialogue is noticeably distinct from the more straightforward presentation of narrative details in Sánchez's volume. Moreover, the theological elaboration and the numerous scriptural and patristic references found in *Imagen de la Virgen María* are comparatively scant in *Huei tlamahuiçoltica*. Such differences demonstrate the most striking distinction between the two works. Sánchez sought to examine Guadalupe and the evangelization of Mexico vis-à-vis the wider Christian tradition, particularly the writings of Augustine and other church fathers and the image of the "woman clothed with the sun" in Revelation 12,[5] while Laso de la Vega's purpose was to provide a pastoral manual to promote Guadalupan devotion and Christian faith among Nahuatl-speaking residents.

Laso de la Vega's intended audience was priests engaged in pastoral service with Nahuatl-speaking communities, and perhaps some Nahua lay elite. *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* encompasses an author's preface, the *Nican mopohua* apparition narrative, a brief description of the Guadalupe image, the *Nican motecpana* ("Here is an ordered account") relation of miracles attributed to Guadalupe's intercession, a short biographical sketch of Juan Diego, the *Nican tlantica* ("Here ends [the story]") summarizing some history of Mary's influence in New Spain and exhorting the faithful to Guadalupan devotion, and an appended Guadalupan prayer loosely modeled on the Salve Regina. Theological investigation of these main parts in Laso de la Vega's treatise reveals his pastoral intentions and sheds light on the significance of his publication for the development of the Guadalupe tradition.

[4] Sánchez, *Imagen de la Virgen María*, 263.

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

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Father Baltasar González, a Jesuit fluent in Nahuatl who worked at the College of San Gregorio in Mexico City, where he taught elite indigenous students, served as official ecclesiastical censor for *Huei tlamahuiçoltica*. He endorsed it for publication as a work that "will be very useful and advantageous for enlivening the devotion of the lukewarm and regenerating it in those who live in ignorance of the mysterious origin of this celestial portrait of the Queen of heaven."[6]

The catechetical purpose of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* is highlighted in its preface, which is clearly of Laso de la Vega's authorship. It states his desire that "the humble commoners see here and find out in their language all the charitable acts you [Guadalupe] have performed on their behalf," particularly "the very great miracle by which you have appeared to people and have given them your image which is here in your precious home in Tepeyacac" (55). In an apparent apologetic about his decision to write in the Nahuas' native tongue, Laso de la Vega directs himself to Mary, the Mother of God, who does "not spurn the languages of different peoples when you summon them" (55). He also recounts that the marker above Jesus' head on the cross was written in three languages, cites Bonaventure as saying "the great, marvelous, exalted miracles of our Lord God are to be written in a variety of languages so that all the different peoples on earth will see and marvel at them" (57), and notes Mary's intercessory and encouraging presence at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to be understood in diverse tongues. Calling on that same Spirit, Laso de la Vega prayed that he might "receive his tongues of fire in order to trace in the Nahuatl language the very great miracle by which you revealed yourself to the poor humble commoners and by which you also very miraculously gave them your image" (59).

Thus from the outset Laso de la Vega's intention is clearly consistent with that of numerous other clergy who composed pastoral manuals to guide apostolic labors among the various native peoples of the Americas. In the case of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica*, Laso de la Vega urges pastors to help their indigenous charges appreciate Guadalupe's great concern for the native peoples, see in her image a miraculous gift of her compassionate presence, learn the Christian message in their native language, and impel them to abandon their former religion and embrace the devout practice of Spanish Catholicism in response to the love and revelation Guadalupe offers them.

[6] Luis Laso de la Vega, *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* . . . (Mexico City: Imprenta de Juan Ruiz, 1649), reprinted with an English translation in Sousa, Poole, and Lockhart, *Story of Guadalupe*, 51. Subsequent quotations from *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* are also from Sousa, Poole, and Lockhart's translation and are cited parenthetically in the text by page number.

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The *Nican mopohua* follows this brief preface. It is the centerpiece of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica*, encompassing 40 percent of its pages and serving as the primary reference point for the material that follows. The narration is intended for use in public orations or proclamations and embodies the purposes Laso de la Vega articulates in the preface. Consistent with the claim that Guadalupe showed special favor to the native peoples, from the outset the *Nican mopohua* states: "First she revealed herself to a humble commoner named Juan Diego" (61). Guadalupe's opening words to Juan Diego were "dear Juan, dear Juan Diego" (63), a tender greeting that resounded in her various exchanges with him throughout the narrative. The enchantment Laso de la Vega wants devotees to feel in the presence of Guadalupe's image is modeled in the depiction of Juan Diego when his eyes first beheld the beauty of her countenance and its transformative effect on the landscape around her:

> When he came before her, he greatly marveled at how she completely surpassed everything in her total splendor. Her clothes were like the sun in the way they gleamed and shone. Her resplendence struck the stones and boulders by which she stood so that they seemed like precious emeralds and jeweled bracelets. The ground sparkled like a rainbow, and the mesquite, the prickly pear cactus, and other various kinds of weeds that grow there seemed like green obsidian, and their foliage like fine turquoise. Their stalks, their thorns and spines gleamed like gold (63–65).

Above all, the *Nican mopohua* repeatedly underscores the celestial assistance Guadalupe desires to bestow on her sons and daughters. In her first encounter with Juan Diego, she asks that he ask the bishop to build her a temple at Tepeyac "where I will manifest, make known, and give to people all my love, compassion, aid, and protection . . . and listen to their weeping and their sorrows in order to remedy and heal all their various afflictions, miseries, and torments" (65, 67). Her words to Juan Diego in a later encounter, when he was troubled about the illness of his uncle Juan Bernardino, are the most quoted among contemporary devotees: "Do not be concerned, do not fear the illness, or any other illness or calamity. Am I, your mother, not here? Are you not under my protective shade, my shadow?" (79).

The *Nican mopohua* also presents Juan Diego as a prototype of a faithful believer's response to divine revelation and to Guadalupe's maternal care. Juan Diego joyfully enters into a mystical encounter with Guadalupe and contemplates her beauty and presence. He speaks with her in deeply respectful yet intimate communion. He is quick to obey her requests and perseverant in overcoming the obstacles he confronts. He is humble and trusting. He honestly presents his concerns about his lowly status to her. His steadfastness in the Christian faith is evident when he discovers his uncle Juan Bernardino is

in danger of death, as he immediately sets out "to summon one of those beloved of our Lord, our friars, to go hear his confession and prepare him, for what we were born for is to come to await our duty of death" (77). From his first encounter with Guadalupe, their filial bond becomes his heart's treasure and overshadows any hesitancy or doubt.

Juan Diego's response to Guadalupe is mirrored in that of his indigenous contemporaries. His uncle Juan Bernardino testified before the bishop and his household that at the very moment Guadalupe consoled Juan Diego about his illness she appeared to him and he was cured. More broadly, the final lines of the *Nican mopohua* avow that "there was a movement in all the altepetls [communities] everywhere of people coming to see and marvel at her precious image. They came to show their devotion and pray to her; they marveled greatly at how it was by a divine miracle that she had appeared, that absolutely no earthly person had painted her precious image" (89).

A short physical description of the Guadalupe image follows. Located immediately after the conclusion of the *Nican mopohua*, the intricacy of this written sketch—including details such as "her precious face, which is perfectly wondrous" (89)—appears designed to incite devotees to make pilgrimage to Tepeyac and behold and venerate her there. Seen in this light, the primary purpose of the *Nican mopohua* and its central place in *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* is to foster among the faithful a deeper devotion to Guadalupe's wondrous appearance, her maternal care, and her ongoing presence in her miraculous image.

Like the *Nican mopohua*, the *Nican motecpana*, the other major section of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica*, has close parallels in Miguel Sánchez's *Imagen de la Virgen María*. Both works draw on an earlier visual source. Samuel Stradanus, a Flemish artist and New Spain resident, made an engraving (ca. 1613) that depicts the Guadalupe image surrounded by eight scenes of miracles devotees attributed to her, apparently drawn from ex-votos these supplicants had enshrined at the Guadalupe chapel. These eight scenes and six other miracles are presented in the *Nican motecpana* (92–115), while Sánchez recounts seven miracles attributed to Guadalupe, six of which are also narrated in the *Nican motecpana* and three depicted in the Stradanus engraving. These three primary sources present the earliest composite records of Guadalupe's reported interventions on behalf of her faithful, most of them involving cures for various afflictions.[7]

[7] Sánchez, *Imagen de la Virgen María*, 245–55. The Stradanus engraving is reprinted in Jaime Cuadriello, Carmen de Monserrat Robledo Galván, and Beatriz Berndt León Mariscal, *La Reina de las Américas: Works of Art from the Museum of the Basílica de Guadalupe* (Chicago: Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, 1996), 106. The most detailed

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The first three miracles recounted in the *Nican motecpana* focus on Guadalupe's favor to the indigenous peoples, applying the lessons of Juan Diego to a wider indigenous audience. According to the account, when the newly constructed Guadalupe chapel was ready a "grand" procession encompassing Spanish officials, "all the Mexica [indigenous] rulers and nobles," and "the people from other altepetls all around" (93) transferred the Guadalupe image the three miles from the Mexico City cathedral to enshrine it at Tepeyac. Unfortunately the exemplary collective response to this important occasion was disrupted en route. A stray arrow from a mock skirmish, which residents of New Spain often conducted as an entertainment on such occasions, struck and killed one of the indigenous participants. His relatives placed him before Guadalupe and begged for her intercession, at which point he revived and his arrow wound was healed. Seeing this, "absolutely everyone marveled greatly and praised the consummate Virgin, the heavenly Lady, Saint Mary of Guadalupe, for the way she was now carrying out the pledge she made to Juan Diego that she would always help and defend the local people and all those who invoke her" (95). Moreover, "from that moment on this humble person remained at the precious home of the heavenly precious Lady; there he used to sweep her temple and home for her" (95). The clear parallel between Guadalupe's compassionate concern for Juan Diego and for his native brother who was slain with the arrow, as well as between the homage and service both offered to their mother Guadalupe in gratitude, reveals the need for all the natives to imitate Juan Diego in approaching Guadalupe and dedicating themselves to her.

Yet in *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* the contours of that devotion reflect the religious sensibilities of seventeenth-century Catholicism in Spain and its New World territories. For example, the second miracle account in the *Nican motecpana* illuminates the Spanish Catholic tendency to view God as stern and distant, inciting appeals to Guadalupe and other Marian figures as compassionate mothers and intercessors. Faced with a severe epidemic that at its peak reportedly resulted in one hundred deaths a day, Franciscan friars organized a procession to the shrine at Tepeyac. As the friars and natives made their way they beseeched "our Lord to have pity on his altepetl, that there be an end to his ire and wrath, in the very name and for the sake of his precious, revered mother, the consummate Virgin, our Queen, Saint Mary of Guadalupe" (95). They even employed the Spanish penitential practice of

treatment of the Stradanus engraving is Jeanette Favrot Peterson, "Canonizing a Cult: A Wonder-Working Guadalupe in the Seventeenth Century," in *Religion in New Spain*, ed. Susan Schroeder and Stafford Poole (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2007), 125–56.

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enlisting young children to flog themselves as they processed.[8] The narration implies that Guadalupe had a tempering effect on her son's perceived anger, as the epidemic soon subsided.

A third miracle that benefited the indigenous illuminates the attitude of Spanish and Criollo (the designation in the Spanish caste system for a person of Spanish blood born in the New World) clergy like Laso de la Vega toward the indigenous peoples and their faith. The miracle itself is a healing account like those that precede it. Recalling Guadalupe's beneficent healing of Juan Bernardino, a man with a grave illness asked his children to carry him to Tepeyac, where he pleaded for a cure and subsequently offered thanks through seeking to spread devotion to his celestial mother. In the process of narrating these events, the *Nican motecpana* states that Guadalupe "cherished, aided, and defended the local people" (97) in the wake of the Spaniards' arrival. Yet at the same time the document concurs with the Spanish colonial enterprise in presuming that Guadalupe was a protagonist in the Spanish efforts to displace indigenous ways, since, because of her compassion, the natives "despised and abhorred the idolatry in which they had been wandering about in confusion on the earth, in the night and darkness in which the demon had made them live" (97). The Guadalupan pedagogy that Laso de la Vega expounds is clear: Guadalupe favors the natives as a means to entice them to "entirely give themselves and adhere to the faith" (97) that Mary of Guadalupe and Catholic missioners propagated among them.

The emphasis on Guadalupe's preferential care for the natives is particularly evident in an account of how she miraculously counteracted the decrees of Spanish authorities. According to this narrative, in 1558 Francisco Quetzalmamalitzin, a Nahua ruler from the town of Teotihuacan, a short distance from Mexico City, led his people in protest of a decision to replace the Franciscan friars with Augustinians in their local community. When royal officials sought to punish them, the natives "went about hiding in various places, because they were being sought everywhere" (111). In this hour of need, Quetzalmamalitzin turned to Guadalupe, who reportedly convinced the viceroy and members of the Royal Audiencia (Royal Tribunal) to rescind the mandate to remove the Franciscans and to desist from punishing the natives who had opposed their decrees.

Another miracle account in the *Nican motecpana* symbolically indicates Guadalupe's devotional primacy over Nuestra Señora de los Remedios (Our

[8] For the practice of children participating in Spanish penitential processions, see William A. Christian, *Apparitions in Late Medieval and Renaissance Spain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 217–18.

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Lady of Remedies), the Spanish Virgin whose image reportedly assisted Hernán Cortés and his men in the conquest of Mexico. During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Mexico City devotees invoked Remedios more often than Guadalupe for celestial assistance, especially in times of epidemic or drought. Yet the *Nican motecpana* recounts the healing of an indigenous convert named Juan de Tovar, who according to tradition found the Remedios image that one of Cortés' men had hidden among maguey plants as they retreated after an early loss to indigenous forces. Significantly, Juan's illness was not healed in response to prayers offered before the Remedios image, for which he was the caretaker. Rather, "because he knew how the heavenly Lady [of Guadalupe] had healed Juan Bernardino" (97), he had his loved ones carry him a distance of over two leagues to the Guadalupe sanctuary. There, Guadalupe effected his cure and sent him back to build a chapel for Remedios. In a subsequent section, *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* reminds readers "that the heavenly precious Lady, the only precious mother of God's precious child, is a single thing" (119), and thus her various manifestations "everywhere in the world" (119) are all the same Mary, the Mother of God. But that subsequent text also reiterates that Remedios was a Spanish image the conquerors brought from their homeland, while Guadalupe appeared in Mexico and "set up her residence here at Tepeyacac and by a great miracle gave people her image, which no earthly human artist made or colored" (121). Thus Guadalupe was distinctive in that she was both native to Mexico and her image was a gift from heaven to the indigenous peoples. Consciously or not, in attempting to maximize the appeal of Guadalupe to the Nahuas, Laso de la Vega's pastoral manual provided a rationale for natives to sense their own divine election.

Collectively, the fourteen miracles enumerated in the *Nican motecpana* range from petitioners being saved from a horse accident and falling lamp to healings of headaches, dropsy, and severe swelling of the feet and neck. These miracles are recounted as independent units and with relatively little interpretive analysis of their deeper significance. The briefest of the miracle accounts illustrates their suitability for proclamation as illustrations in sermons or other orations, as well as their basic pattern of affliction, supplication, and celestial aid, with expressions of thanks and grateful commitment to Guadalupe added in various instances (though not the one cited here):

> A sacristan named Juan Pavón, who took care of the churchly home of the heavenly Lady, our precious mother of Guadalupe, had a small child, and it contracted a swelling of the neck. It was gravely ill and about to die; it was no longer able to breathe. He took it before her and anointed it with the oil that burns in her lamp. At that very moment it was healed, favored by the heavenly Lady (111).

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The intended effect of such testimonies—individually and taken as a whole—is to draw the faithful to Guadalupe and to her home at Tepeyac. One passage describes the spring at Tepeyac that "is effective with all different kinds of illnesses for those who in good faith drink it or bathe in it" (105). The wonders recounted in the *Nican motecpana* are merely a sampling of the "innumerable" (105, 113) miracles affected through Guadalupe's intercession. They are related in order to attract the devout and those in need so that in seeking Guadalupe's aid they might also strengthen their Catholic faith.

The next section of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* is a short treatment of Juan Diego's life. In *Imagen de la Virgen María*, Sánchez had interspersed details about Juan Diego and presented various analogies between Juan Diego and biblical figures. For example, he asserts that Moses' theophany on Mount Sinai and reception of the Ten Commandments prefigured Juan Diego's ascent of the hill of Tepeyac to encounter Guadalupe and receive her miraculous image as a new ark of the covenant.[9] But Laso de la Vega published the earliest sustained synopsis of Juan Diego's life, which he posed as a prototype of the ideal Nahua response to the many marvels of Guadalupe.

It is not clear whether Laso de la Vega intended to do so, but his hagiographic sketch portrays Juan Diego as a model Franciscan lay brother or layperson living a consecrated life. After his encounters with Guadalupe, Juan Diego "dedicated himself entirely to the heavenly Lady as his patron" (113). He served as caretaker of the Guadalupe image and site, where he spent the remainder of his days in prayer, fasting, penance, solitude, and with frequent confession and communion. His relation to Guadalupe was reportedly so strong that "whatever he would ask her for, when he prayed to the heavenly Lady, she would grant it all" (115). The account even claims that, though married to a woman named María Lucía, who died two years before the apparitions, Juan Diego remained a chaste virgin throughout his life in response to a sermon of Fray Toribio de Benavente, one of the original Franciscan "twelve apostles" to Mexico who was also known as Motolinía (the Poor One). *Huei tlamahuiçoltica*'s description of Juan Diego's death relates a comforting vision of Guadalupe in which she welcomes him into the joy of heaven, a favor the account states she had earlier bestowed on his uncle Juan Bernardino. Laso de la Vega's catechetical purpose in *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* is acutely manifest in the concluding invocation of his exposition about Juan Diego's saintly life: "May it be her [Guadalupe's] wish that we too may

[9] Sánchez, *Imagen de la Virgen María*, 184–86. Other biblical figures that Sánchez compares to Juan Diego include John the Evangelist, King David's friend Jonathan, Adam, and the patriarch Jacob. Ibid., 179, 193–94, 229–30, 237–38.

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serve her and abandon all the worldly things that lead us astray, so that we too may attain the eternal riches of heaven" (115).

The final section of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica*, the *Nican tlantica*, situates Guadalupe within the wider context of Mary in the Catholic world. Echoing an antiphon from Matins of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary,[10] Laso de la Vega reminds his readers that Mary has "destroyed and annihilated all idolatry and perverse belief over the entire earth" (125). Guadalupe fulfilled this Marian mission among the natives of New Spain. She elected to reveal herself to Juan Diego, Juan Bernardino, and their fellow natives, won their hearts with her healing love, gave them her miraculous image as an enduring presence, and led her indigenous daughters and sons to dispel "the images of the demon" and "revere and believe in our Lord Jesus Christ" (123). Thus "not only did the heavenly Queen, our precious mother of Guadalupe, come here to reveal herself in order to aid the humble commoners in their earthly afflictions, she wanted even more to give them her light and aid so that they would recognize the one true deity, God, and through him see and know the heavenly life" (123). Laso de la Vega confesses that many of the wonders Guadalupe worked have regrettably been forgotten with time, but he contends that enough is known and recounted in his treatise to make her maternal predilection and salvific desire for the natives abundantly apparent. The apostolic duty of pastors like Laso de la Vega is to ensure natives fully appreciate "that it was for their very sake that their Queen condescended to house herself there" (121) at Tepeyac. Above all, pastors are to make the designs of Guadalupe known to native (and other) believers so they might "awaken and open their eyes to see…[what] the heavenly precious Lady did for their sake, in order to consider what they need to do to return and pay back her love…with all our heart here on earth until that time when by her aid we will see her with our eyes in her fortunate dwelling place" (125).

The final page of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* presents a "prayer to be directed to the heavenly Queen, our precious mother of Guadalupe" (127). In the original publication it is set off from the main body of the text on a single page, suggesting it is an appendix intended as a prayer for devotees to memorize and recite. Indeed, the oration summarizes the main themes of the treatise and serves as a concise catechetical tool for imparting its core contents.

[10] The Marian Library/International Marian Research Institute at the University of Dayton provides an excellent overview of The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary originally created by Chad Pfoutz and available at http://campus.udayton.edu/mary/prayers/LittleOfficeBVM.htm. The cited text is based on the antiphon for Psalm 95 from the Third Nocturn of Matins.

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The prayer opens with a Trinitarian invocation, calling on Mary to rejoice as "the precious daughter of God the Father…the precious mother of God's precious child…the precious spouse of God the Holy Spirit" (127). Successive further invocations laud her for miraculously revealing herself to the native peoples and giving them her image so they could present their supplications to her. Then the prayer turns to petition, asking for her assistance in our troubles, her light to guide us on the heavenly path, her help in receiving from God forgiveness for our sins, and her intercession to "appease the heart of your precious child; may all his wrath and anger subside" (127). Finally, reinforcing various statements in *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* about our ultimate destiny as humans, the prayer (and the treatise itself) concludes: "And then at the time of our death please remove and put to flight our foe, who leads us astray, so that happily and peacefully our souls may go to lie entirely in your hands, so that they may go appear in the presence of God, their creator. Amen" (127).

The immediate impact of Laso de la Vega's *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* on preaching and other evangelization efforts among Nahuatl-speaking natives is difficult to assess. Like most other tracts of its era, *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* undoubtedly had a relatively limited publication run. The fact that it is written in Nahuatl further reduced its reading audience. Certainly Guadalupan devotion spread among indigenous and other devotees subsequent to the publication of Laso de la Vega's treatise, but the extent of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica*'s influence on these developments is not clear. Priests sent to indigenous and other rural parishes after receiving their seminary training in Mexico City facilitated the expansion of the geographic range and density of Guadalupan devotion, but the impact of these clergy increased most dramatically a century after the publication of Laso de la Vega's treatise.[11] Moreover, the full text of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* was not reprinted until 1926, when Mexican historian and Nahuatl specialist Primo Feliciano Velázquez published an annotated version with a Spanish translation.[12] The

[11] William B. Taylor, "The Virgin of Guadalupe in New Spain: An Inquiry into the Social History of Marian Devotion," *American Ethnologist* 14 (February 1987): 14–15; Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 285–86; Taylor, *Shrines and Miraculous Images: Religious Life in Mexico before the Reforma* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010), esp. 125.

[12] Luis Lasso [Laso] de la Vega, *Se apareció maravillosamente la Reina del Cielo Santa María, nuestra Amada Madre de Guadalupe, aquí cerca de la ciudad de México en el lugar nombrado Tepeyácac,* ed. and trans. Primo Feliciano Velázquez (Mexico City: Carreño e hijo, 1926). The Velázquez translation of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* is reprinted in De la Torre Villar and Navarro de Anda, *Testimonios históricos Guadalupanos*, 282–

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subsequent influence of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica*, particularly the *Nican mopohua*, is easier to chart than the significance of the treatise in Laso de la Vega's own era.

Like pastoral writings on Guadalupe that followed in its wake, *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* both addresses and is limited by the circumstances of a particular pastoral situation, in this case the evangelization of the conquered native peoples of what today is Mexico. One element of this historical context was the scope of indigenous devotion to Guadalupe during the century before the publication of Laso de la Vega's account. Like the practice of Guadalupan devotion among Spaniards, during these years indigenous devotion was largely confined to the immediate environs of Tepeyac and Mexico City. Nonetheless, extant records indicate that the genesis of indigenous devotion was concurrent with that of their Spanish counterparts. For example, the 1563 will of Teotihuacan leader Francisco Verdugo Quetzalmamalitzin bequeaths four pesos so that the priest assigned to the Guadalupe chapel would offer masses on his behalf after his death. It also states: "To Our Lady the Blessed Virgin Mary, queen of heaven, I ask that she be my advocate before her precious son, the redeemer of the world." An entry in Indian official Juan Bautista's chronicle of events describes a 1566 procession to Tepeyac in which Spanish dignitaries "and all of us Indians" participated. An anonymous author's 1634 poem recounts the return of the Guadalupe image from Mexico City, where she had been brought to intercede during a devastating flood. The poet attests that the general populace processed Guadalupe part of the way back to Tepeyac, while the following day indigenous devotees held a separate procession to escort her image the rest of the way. Other sources reveal that by the early seventeenth century native peoples and Spaniards each conducted their own fiesta seasons at Tepeyac.[13]

Given the association of Tepeyac with pre-Columbian worship, the Nahua tendency to absorb rather than resist the gods of their rivals, and the catastrophic effects of the conquest and European diseases on indigenous communities—five decades after the conquest the native population of central

308; the first and only English translation of the entire treatise is Sousa, Poole, and Lockhart, *Story of Guadalupe*, published in 1998.

[13] Francisco Verdugo Quetzalmamalitzin, *Testamento* [Will], 2 April 1563, reprinted in González Fernández, Chávez Sánchez, and Guerrero Rosado, *El encuentro de la Virgen de Guadalupe y Juan Diego*, 363–64; Juan Bautista, *Anales*, reprinted in ibid., 325–26; Martinus Cawley, *Anthology of Early Guadalupan Literature* (Lafayette, OR: Guadalupe Abbey, 1984), 79–80; Taylor, *Shrines and Miraculous Images*, 125. For further studies of the history of Guadalupan devotion during the colonial era in New Spain, see the influential works of William B. Taylor cited in note 11 above.

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Mexico was less than one-third what it had been before the Spaniards arrived —it is not difficult to imagine that Guadalupe emerged as a paradoxical figure among indigenous devotees. She was a powerful mother and intercessor, a brown-skinned woman like them who provided continuity with an ancient Nahua pilgrimage site. She reportedly worked miracles that alleviated their people's suffering. Her chosen messenger and the first recipient of her healing care were two of their own, Juan Diego and Juan Bernardino. Yet, at the same time, she was a force whom Spaniards engaged to enhance native peoples' acceptance of colonial rule and missionary efforts, a protagonist in the Spanish efforts to displace indigenous ways.[14] Laso de la Vega's writing is clearly rooted in the Eurocentric presumptions of such an approach, albeit with the intent of persuading rather than coercing native peoples to embrace the Catholic faith.

Huei tlamahuiçoltica also reflects the Spanish Catholic tendency to view God as distant or even vengeful, necessitating that devotees approach God through an intermediary, especially Mary, who as God's mother purportedly has the most effective capacity to assuage divine wrath. Such a perspective has a long trajectory among Roman Catholics of various backgrounds. As scholars like Orlando Espín contend, this perspective was prevalent from the initial stages of evangelization in Mexico, when the framework of Spanish domination distorted the missioners' transmission and the native people's reception of Christian faith in Trinitarian monotheism. According to Espín,

> [Under these circumstances] it was only a matter of time before the vanquished projected their family and social experiences onto God, and there being no trinitarian inculturated catechesis to critique these projections, the people's God all too often resembled their earthly fathers and lords. In this context the mother of Jesus became a necessary religious symbol of compassion and care in an otherwise cruel system.

Louise Burkhart concurs that the Nahuas learned well the Spanish practice of approaching Guadalupe and other Marian representations as a "protector and advocate," potentially exacerbating distorted images of God as a stern father who lacks compassion and, indeed, of a dysfunctional celestial family in which one needs maternal intervention to cajole unpredictable paternal authority.[15]

[14] Michael E. Smith, *The Aztecs* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996), 60–64; Taylor, "Virgin of Guadalupe in New Spain," 19–24; Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred*, 291–96; Davíd Carrasco, *Religions of Mesoamerica: Cosmovision and Ceremonial Centers* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 135–38.

[15] Orlando O. Espín, *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 59; Louise M. Burkhart, "The Cult of the Virgin of

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Laso de la Vega's contention that Guadalupe interceded to soothe God's "ire and wrath" mirrors these long-standing tendencies. So too does his provision of a prayer text for devotees to ask Guadalupe to "appease the heart of your precious child; may all his wrath and anger subside." His publication fostered Guadalupan devotion, but at the potential expense of promoting the image of an angry God who lacks the compassionate qualities Guadalupe is said to embody.

Despite its limitations, *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* is the premier work to address the most enduring pastoral challenge of Guadalupan pastoral ministry: devotees' tendency to focus on the favors Guadalupe bestows rather than on the life of discipleship to which she summons her faithful. As early as 1556, Fray Francisco de Bustamante preached a sermon in which he reportedly avowed that "one of the most pernicious things that anyone could sustain against the proper Christianity of the natives was the devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe." Bustamante based this claim on his perception that a growing number of indigenous devotees who sought Guadalupe's aid later abandoned the Christian faith when their pleas were not answered in the manner desired. He urged his hearers to employ other means of evangelization that would focus the natives on formation in the faith rather than on seeking miraculous assistance. Bustamante's concern is strikingly similar to that of a US priest with half a century of experience in Hispanic ministry who wrote me a few years ago. He related that many Guadalupan devotees in his parish seem "locked into" their "attraction to the Virgin as a source of favors" and pay scant attention to living out the discipleship and evangelization church leaders proclaim as Guadalupe's call to her faithful.[16] Laso de la Vega provides wise pastoral counsel to address this vital concern. The *Nican motecpana* section of his treatise accentuates the miracles of Guadalupe on behalf of the native peoples and all those who turn to her. But it emphasizes even more that the proper response to Guadalupe's maternal care is to live as daughters and sons who express their gratitude by following the commands of her son. His entreaty that pastoral leaders relentlessly guide devotees beyond seeking favors to seeking deeper faith commitment is as timely today as ever.

Guadalupe in Mexico," in *South and Meso-American Native Spirituality: From the Cult of the Feathered Serpent to the Theology of Liberation*, ed. Gary H. Gossen in collaboration with Miguel León-Portilla (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 211. For a treatment of understandings of a stern God and compassionate Mary in the longer history of Christianity, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003), chap. 4, "Cul-de-Sac: The Maternal Face of God."

[16] "Información por el sermón de 1556," reprinted in De la Torre Villar and Navarro de Anda, *Testimonios históricos Guadalupanos*, 44; Father John Koelsch, letter to the author, 22 September 2009.

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Laso de la Vega's presentation of Juan Diego as a model of saintliness is another significant contribution of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* that subsequent writers and devotees have emulated. Indeed, the first known initiative to gather indigenous testimony about Guadalupe indicates that natives originated the veneration of Juan Diego. Conducted nearly two decades after the publication of Laso de la Vega's treatise, the 1665–66 investigation included testimonies from, among others, seven indigenous and one *mestizo* (a person of mixed Spanish and native ancestry) resident of Cuauhtitlan, the place traditionally considered Juan Diego's hometown. The elderly informants, who reportedly ranged in age from seventy-eight to over one hundred, all affirmed that Juan Diego was a "good Christian." Most recounted parents, grandparents, aunts, or neighbors who knew Juan Diego personally and lauded his sanctity. Marcos Pacheco recalled his aunt's frequent plea that "God would do to you [and your brothers] what he did to Juan Diego." Gabriel Suárez stated that Juan Diego resided and served at Tepeyac, where local natives often visited him "to ask that he intercede for them with the Most Holy Virgin to give them good seasons [harvests] in their maize fields."[17] No Spanish or Criollo sources of that period—including the twelve witnesses from these backgrounds who testified in the 1665–66 inquiry—mentioned seeking Juan Diego's intercession for intentions such as good harvests, nor did they express the desire that God would grant them the blessings and holiness of Juan Diego. While it is not clear whether *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* had a direct bearing on Pacheco, Suárez, and other witnesses, their testimony is consistent with Laso de la Vega's pastoral counsel that Juan Diego be presented as an exemplar of Christian life.

Subsequent writers followed Laso de la Vega in expounding the evangelical virtues of Juan Diego, though systematic treatments of his life did not emerge until the twentieth century. In tandem with a growing national adulation of Mexico's indigenous past following the Mexican Revolution (1910–17), Catholic leaders initiated a movement to promote Juan Diego's cause for canonization. One important promoter was Bishop José de Jesús Manríquez y Zárate, who wrote a 1939 pastoral letter calling on Mexican church leaders to champion Juan Diego's cause. Later that year he published *¿Quien fue Juan Diego?* (Who Was Juan Diego?), a short book that provided the rationale for declaring Juan Diego a saint. Father Lauro López Beltrán's numerous writings on Juan Diego over the ensuing six decades included the small journal *Juan Diego*, which he founded and edited for nearly thirty

[17] A facsimile and transcription of the official inquiry can be found in Eduardo Chávez Sánchez, *La Virgen de Guadalupe y Juan Diego en las informaciones jurídicas de 1666*, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: Ángel Servin, 2002); quotations at 152, 166, 178–79.

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years. In the decade before and after Juan Diego's 2002 canonization, an increasing number of publications have examined his inspiration for aspects of discipleship, such as evangelization, lay ministry, and the call to holiness.[18]

The most conspicuous contribution of Laso de la Vega's treatise is his publication of the *Nican mopohua*, which over time became commonly acclaimed as the foundational text for the Guadalupe tradition and the guiding narrative for the widespread worship practice of dramatic proclamations and reenactments of the apparitions. *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* promoted both this dissemination of the Guadalupe event and a pastoral engagement of it through a process of what could be deemed mystagogical catechesis, an explication of the holy mysteries the faithful encounter in their Guadalupan devotion. For Laso de la Vega, the content of this Guadalupan catechesis is straightforward, and its promotion a most urgent pastoral priority. He admonishes pastoral leaders to entice indigenous peoples with the beauty of Guadalupe and to teach them about Guadalupe's providential election of Juan Diego and of them as her favored sons and daughters. Their favor is even indicated in the *Nican motecpana*'s exposition of a remarkable incident in which Guadalupe defended the natives of Teotihuacan against the viceroy and other Spanish officials. Moreover, their favor is underscored in the Mexican Guadalupe's precedence over the Spanish Our Lady of Remedios, an inference rooted in a bold claim repeated in various passages of *Huei tlamahuiçoltica*: without Spanish intermediary, the Mother of God herself had descended from heaven to evangelize the natives through Juan Diego. Laso de la Vega urges pastors to impress these mysteries of celestial election on the hearts of Guadalupe's faithful, and then to lead them to seek the ways of heaven out of gratitude for her boundless love and that of her son, Jesus Christ.

The extensive focus on the *Nican mopohua* in contemporary Guadalupan theologies continues the work that Laso de la Vega began. It is an ongoing

[18] José de Jesús Manríquez y Zárate, *Carta pastoral que el Excmo. y Rvmo. Obispo de Huejutla dirige a sus diocesanos sobre las necesidades de trabajar ahincadamente por la Glorificación de Juan Diego en este mundo*, 12 April 1939, as reprinted in Lauro López Beltrán, *Manríquez y Zárate, primer obispo de Huejutla, sublimador de Juan Diego, heroico defensor de la fe: Obra conmemorativa del quinto centenario del natalicio de Juan Diego, 1474–1974* (Mexico City: Editorial Tradición, 1974), 40–47; Manríquez y Zárate, *¿Quien fue Juan Diego?* (1939), as reprinted in López Beltrán, *Manríquez y Zárate,* 24, 77–84, 155–61; López Beltrán, *La historicidad de Juan Diego y su posible canonización* (Mexico City: Editorial Tradición, 1981); Virgilio Elizondo *et al.*, *A Retreat with Our Lady of Guadalupe and Juan Diego: Heeding the Call* (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1998); Norberto Rivera Carrera, *Juan Diego: El águila que habla* (Mexico City: Plaza & Janés, 2002); Eduardo Chávez Sánchez, *Juan Diego: Una vida de santidad que marcó la historia* (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 2002).

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attempt to articulate the theological and catechetical significance of a sacred narrative that gradually grew in stature among millions of devotees. Like Laso de la Vega, a number of contemporary commentators observe that at its core the *Nican mopohua* relates Guadalupe's providential choice of an indigenous neophyte as her emissary. Many note the significance of Guadalupe communicating with Juan Diego in the Nahuatl language and cultural idiom, an observation based of course on Laso de la Vega's publication of his work in Nahuatl. Various writers reflect on the dramatic reversals effected in the apparition narrative, such as Juan Diego's transformation from a sense of his inferiority to the dignity of serving as Guadalupe's messenger, the bishop's changing attitude toward Juan Diego from initial suspicion to confidence, and the shifting geographic focus from the bishop's residence in the capital city to the outlying indigenous settlement around Tepeyac, where in the end the bishop and his entourage accompanied Juan Diego to build the temple that Guadalupe requested. These contemporary writers also mirror Laso de la Vega in exhorting Guadalupe's devotees to live a gospel-based life out of wonder and gratitude for the gift of Guadalupe. Collectively their writings convey the message that the Guadalupe encounter calls Christian disciples to listen to the voice of the marginalized and the forgotten, defend and help them to sense their dignity as God's sons and daughters, and preferentially choose them as the recipients of the church's proclamation of the gospel, service, and struggle for a more just social order.[19]

Laso de la Vega challenges pastoral leaders to engage the Guadalupe event and Guadalupan devotion within the wider context of God's offer of salvation and our call to holiness and discipleship. *Huei tlamahuiçoltica* is rooted in the presumption that God and Mary of Guadalupe are already present and active in everyday human life. The pastoral task is to increase awareness of this abiding presence and saving action, and above all to inspire Christian transformation borne of thankfulness for the splendid gratuity of divine love. Laso de la Vega's Eurocentric perspective and his notion of a vengeful God reveal that human limitations inevitably diminish our articulation and enactment of such a lofty pastoral vision. Nonetheless, the attempt to ground this vision in the concrete realities of local life—the sacred site of Tepeyac, the encounter with Guadalupe, the witness of Juan Diego, the testimonies of celestial aid—illuminates a pastoral approach that has shaped the Guadalupe tradition since *Huei tlamahuiçoltica*'s publication.

[19] For an overview of contemporary theological interpretations of Guadalupe, see Timothy Matovina, "Theologies of Guadalupe: From the Spanish Colonial Era to Pope John Paul II," *Theological Studies* 70 (March 2009): 78–88.

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