

# Dime Con Quién Anda Guadalupe

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## Abstract

*Dime con quién andas, y te diré quién eres – Tell me with whom you walk, and I will tell you who you are. This is one of the most common sayings in the Spanish language, and one that appears at least as far back as Cervantes’ Don Quijote de la Mancha, published in 1615.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I will explore briefly how this saying applies to Our Lady of Guadalupe by asking with whom the Virgin walks in order to discern who the Virgin is. I consciously do not start with theology, with the magisterium, or with the clergy. Instead, I look at the story, and at the storytellers – those stories that describe mysteries “cured in centuries of blood and candle smoke,”<sup>2</sup> those people for whom “five hundred years of sorrow have not destroyed their deepest faith.”<sup>3</sup> In their experience and praxis we find Guadalupe.*

## Introduction

Jon Sobrino has identified two basic human groupings: those people who can take life and survival for granted, and those people who cannot take life and survival for granted. For the purposes of this paper, the arts of the oral tradition – the arts featuring continuity, variation, and election by the community – are the arts of those people who cannot take life and survival for granted.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, José Manuel Lucía Megías, editor. *Don Quijote de la Mancha*. (Madrid: Editorial Verbum, 2015), 384, 452.

<sup>2</sup> Tom Russell, *Guadalupe*, CD, Blood and Candle Smoke (Shout! Factory LLC, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Russell, *Guadalupe*.

<sup>4</sup> Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1993), 85.

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## *Flor y Canto*

In the beginning, there was music.

The beauty of *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe* cannot be depicted through words. Neither Nahuatl, nor Spanish, nor English has the capacity to convey the richness of the beauty Juan Diego encountered. But these opening musical whispers tell us of a truth more profound than spoken language. The music forces us to privilege beauty, that it might take its rightful place alongside truth and goodness. In this context, and through this process, the beauty of *La Morenita*<sup>5</sup> subverts all human aesthetics, “for it is the beauty of the mestizo, of the poor, a beauty rejected by the conquerors. It is a beauty recognizable only to those whom the world has deemed ugly and de-formed.”<sup>6</sup> This is divine beauty, and unless we completely readjust our aesthetic understandings, we cannot fully encounter *La Morenita*.

## *Dignidad*

In the beginning, there was a person created in the image of God.

The divine recognized what many mere mortals could not; the immense dignity of the “lowly,” the honor of all those who have been cast down, cast aside, or cast out by imperial codes. Juan Diego, after all, is a commoner, a poor man who lives in “a jacal, a humble shack with a dirt floor as modest as any inhabited by an impoverished being of the indigenous race ten years after the conquest, and still today.”<sup>7</sup> In Juan Diego’s own words, he is “one of those campesinos, a piece of rope, a small ladder, the excrement of people; I am a leaf; they order me

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<sup>5</sup> Literally, little brown woman, or beloved brown woman. The word in this form connotes endearment, and a warm and loving relationship.

<sup>6</sup> Roberto Goizueta, “U.S. Hispanic Popular Catholicism as Theopoetics,” in *Hispanic/Latino Theology: Challenge and Promise*, ed. Ada María Isasi-Díaz and Fernando F. Segovia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 283.

<sup>7</sup> Ana Castillo, ed., *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe* (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 1996), xvi.

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around, lead me by force; and you, my most abandoned Daughter, my Child, my Lady, and my Queen, send me to a place where I do not belong.”<sup>8</sup>

This poor campesino knows full well that his voice and his very being mean nothing to the powerful in their thrones. But *La Morenita* expresses a preferential option for the campesino: «¿Acaso no estoy yo aquí, yo que tengo el honor de ser tu madre?». (“Am I not here, I who have the honor of being your mother?”).<sup>9</sup> She declares that being Juan Diego’s mother is an honor – a radical concept in the empire in 1531, and arguably a more radical concept in the empire in 2023. Jeanette Rodriguez notes that Guadalupe bears “...attributes otherwise excluded from mainline Christian perception of God as Father, Son, and Spirit.”<sup>10</sup> However, Guadalupe’s collaboration with Juan Diego reaches beyond an argument with patriarchy; she offers dignity to all the victims of the conquerors, and she demonstrates an eagerness to accompany those who accept the mystery of her presence. She offers the promise of “a Church capable of walking at people’s side, of doing more than simply listening to them; a Church which accompanies them on their journey.”<sup>11</sup>

The performing arts provide a window to the key countercultural role that Guadalupe plays in opposition to imperial and colonial rule, and do so in plain sight (unlike most political, economic and policy perspectives, whose full function is established beyond the scope of public scrutiny). Like education, imperial arts have served to “destroy Indigenous cultures, value

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<sup>8</sup> Virgilio P. Elizondo, *Guadalupe, Mother of the New Creation* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1997), 10.

<sup>9</sup> Francis, “Homilía Del Santo Padre: Santa Misa En La Basílica de Guadalupe” (Mexico City, February 13, 2016), at The Holy See, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco\\_20160213\\_omelia-messico-guadalupe.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/es/homilies/2016/documents/papa-francesco_20160213_omelia-messico-guadalupe.html), (quoting *Nican Mopohua*, §119).

<sup>10</sup> Jeanette Rodriguez, “Guadalupe: The Feminine Face of God,” in *Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe*, ed. Ana Castillo (New York, NY: Riverhead Books, 1996), 26.

<sup>11</sup> Francis, “Address Of Pope Francis to The Meeting with The Bishops of Brazil on the Occasion of the XXVIII World Youth Day” (Rio de Janeiro, July 28, 2013), at The Holy See, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130727\\_gmg-episcopato-brasile.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130727_gmg-episcopato-brasile.html).

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systems and appearance”<sup>12</sup> and served instead to impose, ingrain and reinforce the “underlying code of imperialism and colonialism”<sup>13</sup> The social architecture of the Western symphony orchestra, for example, reflects and consolidates the rigid and unquestioned hierarchies that an imperial system requires in order to function: a dictatorial structure that controls whose voice is heard and pays little heed to the community. It is a vertical, top-down model.

Conventional hierarchical fine arts treat audiences analogously to the way Paulo Freire describes conventional education: the artistic process becomes “an act of depositing” in which the audience is the depository and the artist is the depositor.<sup>14</sup> In this banking model of the arts, the artist is the subject of the artistic process, while the audience members are mere objects. The experience of art is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves artistically superior upon those whom they consider aesthetically impaired. When artists project an absolute ignorance onto their audience, those artists practice an ideology of oppression, and nullify the artistic experience as an opportunity for personal and communal inquiry.<sup>15</sup>

Linda Tuhiwai Smith offers questions that, when applied to the artistic works relating to *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*, allow the observer to get past the imperial, hierarchical and segregationist assumptions that plague all the arts in the empire, and to ask basic questions about the provenance and process of the arts: Whose performance is this? Who owns it? Whose interests does it serve? Who will benefit from it?<sup>16</sup> Smith’s critiques of scholarly methodology help frame an examination into the place, space, and role of the arts in colonized communities.

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<sup>12</sup> Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Third Edition (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2021), 22.

<sup>13</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New Revised 20th-Anniversary Edition (New York: Continuum, 1993), 53.

<sup>15</sup> Those who cannot take life and survival for granted rarely reach the level even of depository of the fine arts; they appear only infrequently as audience in our symphony halls, our theaters, and our museums of fine art (although they are a common sight entering and exiting the employee entrances of those venues).

<sup>16</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 10.

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## Arts of the Oral Tradition

Unlike the banking or symphonic models of the arts, the arts of the oral tradition channel voices from below, in a context that recurs in all the arts: a human creates a work, a performer presents the work, an audience member receives the performance of the work. These relationships can be condensed – painters or poets can create and present their own work, for instance. But all these elements form much of the context for art and must be joined for art to exist at all. When these elements come together in a context of “love, humility and faith, dialogue becomes a horizontal relationship of which mutual trust between the dialoguers is the logical consequence.”<sup>17</sup> Healthy artistic collaboration establishes such a horizontal relationship, between artist, artwork, and audience, a relationship of accompaniment rather than service, and confers a social dignity on those players individually and collectively. Importantly for this conversation, Freire’s model substitutes the audience’s agency for the audience’s passive anonymity as a depository.

Oral traditions in the arts celebrate the people’s “spiritual relationships to the universe,”<sup>18</sup> and have the capacity to circumvent the imperial restrictions and underlying codes that have commodified contemporary arts in the empire. They also offer means of unifying colonized communities in the face of globalized fragmentation. The guidelines produced by the 1954 Sao Paulo conference of the International Folk Music Council articulate the features of oral artistic traditions, while also providing guidelines for examining the process of oral transmission on the part of colonized peoples.<sup>19</sup> The arts of the oral tradition feature three distinctive characteristics: continuity, variation, and election by the community. In other words, these arts link the present to

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<sup>17</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 72.

<sup>18</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 84.

<sup>19</sup> Maud Karpeles, “Definition of Folk Music,” *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 7 (January 1955): 6–7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/834518>.

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the past, much like tradition in Catholic teaching. They encourage creative engagement, much like inculturation in Catholic teaching. And, especially, they trust the audience, and like the *sensus fidelium* in a synodal church, the community determines much of the form in which the art takes place in history.<sup>20</sup>

As citizens of the empire, we only infrequently experience living stories that feature these characteristics, and that truly emerge from oral traditions. Our imperially sanctioned stories most often descend to us from the algorithms of capital markets, in which corporate executives decide the teller, the listener and the message. These sanctioned stories reinforce the power hierarchies and relationships of the empire, rely on spectacle to hide the fact that the sanctioned story bores us, rarely offer us a glimpse into our real lives, and “take away the dignity and subjectivity of the colonized peoples.”<sup>21</sup>

Did I mention – sanctioned stories are boring?

Living stories, on the other hand, celebrate and nurture dignity. Living stories give the anonymous teller a voice. Living stories give a community the agency to listen or not to listen. Living stories abound with respected, collective experience and imagination. Living stories transform a fleeting moment into sacred time, a patch of dirt into sacred space, a grouping of words or notes or colors into a sacred message. Living stories recognize their imperial context, while also offering shared resistance to the oppression in that context.

Living stories, in fact, become dangerous for the empire when: (1) those stories reinforce the values, actions, customs, culture and identity of Indigenous and colonized communities, (2) those stories mirror the nature of the Indigenous and the colonized, celebrating their existence as

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<sup>20</sup> Karpeles, “Definition of Folk Music,” 6.

<sup>21</sup> C. Alejandra Elenes, *Transforming Borders: Chicana/o Popular Culture and Pedagogy* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2011), 105.

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both individuals and as communities, (3) those stories embrace the truth,<sup>22</sup> and (4) those stories reinforce our individual dignity, and the dignity of our families and community.<sup>23</sup>

Living stories are transmitted in the commons, “in the context of family relations or people ‘doing’ family in informal spaces such as the kitchen table, a parent’s lap, or in the car.”<sup>24</sup> That is, the stories take place in spaces beyond the full control of the empire, refute the empire’s narrative, and encourage the listener to dig deeper into actual lived experience. They also offer an alternative to accepting the oppositional terms upon which a patriarchal narrative thrives, rejecting vertical, top-down, hierarchical, assumptions of ownership. They build instead from a horizontal, collaborative, and community model of sharing.

The living stories of oral traditions offer a perspective that eludes conventional scholarship as much as it eludes imperial control. These traditions create a multivalent reality, where sacred space, sacred time, and a sacred message resist both the empire and the oppression of scholarly research and theory, an oppression in which “objectification of the other” relies on a “process of dehumanization.”<sup>25</sup> Oral traditions, in fact, allow the lowly to practice agency. “Real power lies with those who designed the tools,” and when the tools belong where the people are, and the people belong where the tools are, the result is not simply agency.<sup>26</sup> It becomes a living reality that reconciles “what is really important about the past with what is important about the

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<sup>22</sup> Shakespeare pretty much set the standard on truth in the arts. He says that the purpose of the arts, ever since the beginning,

...is to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to  
nature, to show virtue her own feature, scorn her  
own image, and the very age and body of the time  
his form and pressure. (Hamlet III.2).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Patricia Grace, quoted in Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 39.

<sup>24</sup> Elenes, *Transforming Borders*, 73.

<sup>25</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 44.

<sup>26</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 42.

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present,”<sup>27</sup> in order to reprioritize based on the reality of *lo cotidiano del pueblo*: the people’s lived daily reality.

### Beauty, Dignity, and Song

Andrew Greeley argues that “religion is story before it is anything else and after it is everything else.”<sup>28</sup> The story of Guadalupe takes us closer to her religious meaning.

On a Saturday morning in December 1531, Juan Diego left his bare hut before dawn to go to church. As he got to the small hill named Tepeyac, he heard singing. This was no purely earthly singing, but a singing of transcendent beauty, a singing which seemed to be arranged as a choral call-and-response between the heavens and the earth. When the singing calmed, and Juan Diego could no longer hear it, he heard instead a call from the summit of the hill: “Dignified Juan, dignified Juan Diego.”<sup>29</sup>

Thus, within the first few lines of the *Nican Mopohua*, two explicit narrative elements establish the context of the Guadalupe story. First, song and its beauty serve as the inciting incident in the narrative, the very moment when the world is upended. Second, the still unidentified divinity utters the word which lays the foundation for her subsequent relationship with Juan Diego, throughout the *Nican Mopohua*, and today: dignified. *Nuestra Señora* celebrates the beauty and the dignity of Juan Diego, of the Nahuatl peoples, and of all the colonized people of the earth.

There is a resonant theology in a world where beauty, dignity, and song thrive. “When the dignity of the human person is respected, and his or her rights recognized and guaranteed, creativity and interdependence thrive, and the creativity of the human personality is released

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<sup>27</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 43.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 35.

<sup>29</sup> Elizondo, *Guadalupe, Mother of the New Creation*, 7.

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through actions that further the common good.”<sup>30</sup> The “world can be seen more clearly from the peripheries. We must listen to the peripheries, open the doors to them and allow them to participate. The suffering of the world is better understood alongside those who suffer.”<sup>31</sup> In fact, an artistic system that excludes is a system that creates less compelling art. The people with whom Guadalupe walks, those who cannot take life for granted, enjoy this dignity, and sow its seed – as storytellers, as audience, as the living representation of the work of art.

In declaring the beauty and dignity of Juan Diego, the story of Guadalupe as narrated in *Nican Mopohua* subverts standards of both the conquest and of the church hierarchy. *La Virgen* is *La Morenita*. Right away, she breaks rules simply by being brown. She wears the clothing of the Indigenous peoples, and speaks their language. She walks with Juan Diego, also Nahuatl, also brown, exceedingly poor, and with no discernible connection to power or station. *La Morena* and Juan Diego try to convert a bishop of La Conquista, but this seat of authority repeatedly resists taking Juan or Guadalupe seriously. The story calls into question every person who has ever sat on a throne, and explicitly tells every commoner that they do not need a throne to have dignity. And for five hundred years, despite a war between Texas and Mexico, a war between the United States and Mexico, innumerable disappeared cultural activities, the watering down of long-established cultural traditions, and scads of Anglo-American newcomers, Guadalupe survived. Guadalupe thrived. Guadalupe brought hope to those who cannot – and could not – take life and survival for granted in any age of the empire.

For 500 years, those who cannot take life and survival for granted have suffered condemnatory Protestant leaders and harsh Catholic leaders; clergy who were often

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<sup>30</sup> Francis, “Video Message Of The Holy Father Francis On The Occasion Of The Fourth World Meeting Of Popular Movements,” <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2021/documents/20211016-videomessaggio-movimentipopolari.html>, §4.

<sup>31</sup> Francis, “Video Message Of The Holy Father Francis On The Occasion Of The Fourth World Meeting Of Popular Movements.”

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Anglo-American or European-American; clergy who frowned upon or forbade many of the traditional faith practices; clergy who attempted to ban, replace and condemn the oral traditions. Despite a Cristero War and *maquiladoras* and border fences and *hieleras* and NAFTA and corruption, *el pueblo* has endured, retelling the story, singing the story and painting the story through the worst days of conquest, of rape and pillage, of murder, of sorrow, of cruelty and humiliation. The people in the thrones have not succeeded in squashing the story or the revolutionary society it portrays – or the hope that accompanies the story.<sup>32</sup>

That hope means that, unlike many conventional attempts to imagine the transcendental, Guadalupe does not represent a divinity who divides and renders harsh judgement upon the colonized. Guadalupe presents us with a divinity who “allures, brings together, and unites,”<sup>33</sup> a divinity who rejects no one, a divinity who offers refuge to those who cannot take life for granted. “She wants to be the very personal mother of all the inhabitants of ‘the nations’”<sup>34</sup> and she makes clear that at “Tepeyac no one is to be rejected.”<sup>35</sup>

This is not just the fantasy of an isolated cult beyond the imagination or reach of the empire. Over and over and over again, in formal church statements, in Papal homilies, in popular devotion and practice, in the original story of the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe, she accompanies the poor and the indigenous. And she has convinced the church hierarchy to join *el pueblo* in this. She has become Patroness of the Americas, but also Patroness of the Excluded, the Rejected, the Expelled, the Dismissed, the Ignored, the Discounted, the Left Out, the Left Behind, the Marginalized, the Disregarded, the Exiled, the Displaced, the Deported, the Driven From Home, the Discarded, and the Immigrant. Guadalupe makes real a church that is “a place

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<sup>32</sup> Timothy Matovina, “Conquest, Faith, and Resistance in the Southwest,” in *Latino Religions and Civic Activism in the United States*, ed. Gastón Espinosa, Virgilio P. Elizondo, and Jesse Miranda (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 23, 28.

<sup>33</sup> Elizondo, *Guadalupe, Mother of the New Creation*, 113.

<sup>34</sup> Elizondo, *Guadalupe, Mother of the New Creation*, 68.

<sup>35</sup> Elizondo, *Guadalupe, Mother of the New Creation*, 112.

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of mercy freely given, where everyone can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged to live the good life of the Gospel.”<sup>36</sup>

At Tepeyac, no one is to be rejected. This is radical.

### A Musical Story of Guadalupe

The oral tradition example I explore below does not abide by a folk purity code, but it clearly reflects continuity, variation, and community election. It is authentic, but its true strength is less about its recitation of history and more about its grasp of memory and feeling.

*Las Apariciones Guadalupanas* provides a narrative that is consistent with the *Nican Mopohua* account. But *Las Apariciones Guadalupanas* does not tell us what happened at Tepeyac with any great fidelity. Instead, *Las Apariciones Guadalupanas* tells us what it *felt* like, then and now. What does it feel like to experience beautiful music on a beautiful morning? What does it feel like to experience the promise of joy, light and harmony throughout the Anahuac? What did the sound of transcendently beautiful music feel like to Juan Diego? What could it possibly have felt like to be treated with respect and dignity by the divine? Renditions of this song try to address those questions, and when they get it right, the performance reverberates with joy and hope as the feeling permeates the musicians, the song, and the audience.

### Las Apariciones Guadalupanas

Desde el cielo una hermosa mañana  
(bis)<sup>37</sup>

La Guadalupana, la Guadalupana  
La Guadalupana bajó al Tepeyac (bis)

From heaven on a beautiful morning (bis)

The Guadalupana, the Guadalupana  
The Guadalupana at the base of  
Tepeyac (bis)

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<sup>36</sup> Francis, Apostolic Exhortation on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), §114, at The Holy See, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html)

<sup>37</sup> In Spanish-language musical notation, “(bis)” represents “repeat.” In “*Las Aparicionas Guadalupanas*,” each verse repeats the first line by itself, and the second and third lines together, in an AABCBC pattern.

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Suplicante juntaba las manos

Y eran mexicanos, y eran mexicanos  
Y eran mexicanos su porte y su faz.

With her clasped together in prayer

Those hands were Mexican, they were  
Mexican  
Her hands, her face, were Mexican.

Su llegada llenó de alegría

De paz y armonía, de paz y armonía  
De paz y armonía todo el Anáhuac.

Her arrival filled the land with joy

Then peace and harmony, peace and  
harmony  
Peace and harmony filled all of  
Anáhuac.

Junto al monte pasaba Juan Diego

Y acercóse luego, y acercóse luego  
Y acercóse luego al oír cantar.

By the mountain passed Juan Diego

Then closer he came, then closer he  
came,  
Then closer he came when he heard  
the song.

“Juan Dieguito” la virgen le dijo:

Este cerro elijo, este cerro elijo  
Este cerro elijo para hacer mi altar

The virgin then told Juan Dieguito:

I choose this hill, I choose this hill,  
I choose this hill for my altar

Y en la tilma, entre rosas pintadas

Su imagen amada, su imagen amada  
Su imagen amada se dignó dejar.

Among painted roses in the tilma

Her beloved image, her beloved image  
Her beloved image she was honored  
to leave.

Desde entonces para el mexicano

Ser guadalupano, ser guadalupano  
Ser guadalupano es algo esencial.

Ever since for the Mexican people

Being a Guadalupan, being a  
Guadalupan  
Being a Guadalupan is essential.

Madrecita de los mexicanos,

Que estás en el cielo, que estás en  
el cielo,  
Que estás en el cielo, ruega a Dios  
por nos.

Mother of all the Mexican people,

You who art in heaven, you who art in  
heaven,  
You who art in heaven, pray to God  
for us.

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En sus penas se postra de hinojos  
Y eleva sus ojos, y eleva sus ojos  
Y eleva sus ojos, hacia el  
Tepeyac.<sup>38</sup>

For their sorrows she falls to her knees  
Then she raises her eyes, then she  
raises her eyes,  
Then she raises her eyes up to  
Tepeyac.

*Las Apariciones Guadalupeñas* is a corrido, and corridos fit firmly into the oral tradition. Corridos offer the continuity of linking the present with the past. They feature variation that grows out of different interpretations by different performers in different eras. Most importantly, they represent election by the community – they are not imposed from without but emerge from within the community over generations.

Corridos rather famously depict the texture of Mexico’s history, “documenting the experiences of people who often have no other voice. They are always written from the perspective of *el pueblo*, everyday people.”<sup>39</sup> This history-from-below vantage characterizes the art form: “...the corrido always takes the point of view of the working class; it is from this perspective that an issue is documented, analyzed, and interpreted. In a world in which common people have little economic or political power and influence, cultural expressions such as *corridos* play an important role in amplifying the voice of *el pueblo*.”<sup>40</sup>

Although secular perspectives of the corrido miss some of the sacred character of this particular corrido, secular corrido traditions offer an intriguing insight into *Las Apariciones Guadalupeñas*. Like many corridos, *Las Apariciones* is an anonymous folk narrative that offers a poetic chronicle meant for everybody in the community. It presents itself as a popular history of Mexico. It implies a tension between the sorrows of the community and the saving grace that *La*

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<sup>38</sup> Owen Alstott, ed., “Las Apariciones Guadalupeñas,” in *Flor y Canto*, trans. Michael Warner, 3rd Edición (Portland, OR: OCP Publications, 2011), #215.

<sup>39</sup> Celestino Fernández, “Corridos: (Mostly) True Stories in Verse with Music,” *Journal of Folklore and Education* 8 (2021): 63–73, 63.

<sup>40</sup> Fernández, “Corridos: (Mostly) True Stories in Verse with Music,” 64.

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*Morenita* promises, and it takes only a slight step of imagination to envision a heroine who saves the people from undeserved oppression and who repairs a “violated communal social order.”<sup>41</sup> It depicts a humble people trying to survive, trying to adjust to the power of the empire.

But *Las Apariciones* contains more than impersonal secular meaning. *Las Apariciones* serves as a narrative of a remembered past, as a repository of the most essential truths of the Guadalupean story, and as a condensed rendering of the faith. It makes clear that Guadalupe has tremendous agency in the universal church, and that she has influenced church teaching on popular piety to the highest levels.

The seminal *Aparecida Document* (2007) articulates how *piedad popular* is changing theology in the universal Catholic Church.<sup>42</sup> The Latin American bishops explicitly recognize that popular religiosity, and specifically Marian devotion (primarily Guadalupe), have “helped make us more conscious of our common condition as children of God and of our common dignity in His eyes, despite social or ethnic differences or those of any other kind.”<sup>43</sup> *Aparecida* notes “the rich potential of holiness and social justice encompassed in the people’s mysticism,”<sup>44</sup> and maintains that “Popular piety contains and expresses a powerful sense of transcendence...[which] is why we call it popular spirituality, that is, a Christian spirituality which, while it is a personal encounter with the Lord, includes much of the bodily, the perceptible, the symbolic, and people’s most concrete needs. It is a spirituality incarnated in the culture of the lowly, which is not thereby less spiritual, but is so in another manner.”<sup>45</sup> Jesus,

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<sup>41</sup> Roland Greene et al., eds., “Chicana/o Poetry: Corrido,” in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Student edition, Fourth Edition (Princeton University Press, 2012), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2tt8jz.11>, 227

<sup>42</sup> Although the document enjoys wide currency in the global Church, it is largely invisible in Catholic churches and seminaries in the United States.

<sup>43</sup> Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano [CELAM], *Concluding Document: V Conferencia General Del Episcopado Latinoamericano y Del Caribe: Aparecida* (Bogotá, Colombia, 2007), §37

<sup>44</sup> Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano [CELAM], *Aparecida*, §262

<sup>45</sup> Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano [CELAM], *Aparecida*, §263

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alongside Guadalupe, “walks arisen among the poor”<sup>46</sup> and we therefore “cannot deprecate popular spirituality, or consider it a secondary mode of Christian life, for that would be to forget the primacy of the action of the Spirit and God’s free initiative of love.”<sup>47</sup>

As both an influencer and one influenced of the *Aparecida Document*, Pope Francis addresses popular piety at length in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (*Joy of the Gospel*), and it is worth noting at some length the substantive authority of popular piety in Francis’ theology. From the beginning of his pontificate, Francis has called for “a Church which is poor and for the poor.”<sup>48</sup> This, for Francis, is not an act of service or charity. The poor “have much to teach us. Not only do they share in the *sensus fidei*, but in their difficulties they know the suffering Christ. We need to let ourselves be evangelized by them.”<sup>49</sup>

Pope Francis emphasizes the roll of popular piety in evangelizing the educated and the well-to-do. “Expressions of popular piety have much to teach us; for those who are capable of reading them, they are a *locus theologicus* which demands our attention.”<sup>50</sup> For those incapable of reading expressions of popular piety, a vast *locus theologicus* and an encounter with the Holy Spirit remains outside our grasp – we miss, overlook, or ignore “a true expression of the spontaneous missionary activity of the people of God..., of which the Holy Spirit is the principal agent.”<sup>51</sup>

Popular piety may at times evade scholarly consideration because it is “spirituality incarnated... [and] discovers and expresses [its] content more by way of symbols than by discursive reasoning, and in the act of faith greater accent is placed on *credere in Deum* than on

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<sup>46</sup> Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano [CELAM], *Aparecida*, §259.

<sup>47</sup> Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano [CELAM], *Aparecida*, §263.

<sup>48</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* §198.

<sup>49</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* §198.

<sup>50</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* §126.

<sup>51</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* §122.

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*credere Deum*<sup>52</sup> (believing *in* God rather than believing *that* God exists). For all the people of God, popular piety presents the opportunity of an experience of living tradition, and “enables us to see how the faith, once received, becomes embodied in a culture and is constantly passed on.”<sup>53</sup> Popular piety is “an expression of supernatural wisdom, because the wisdom of love does not depend directly on the enlightenment of the mind, but on the internal action of grace.”<sup>54</sup>

These papal and episcopal doctrines are completely inconceivable in a Catholic Church that had not experienced Juan Dieguito and *Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*. As a divine presence, as a cultural force, as a deeply meaningful experience for many hundreds of millions of people, Guadalupe continues to matter because her story “has been consistently re-created in its faithful retelling by those for whom it has ultimate meaning.”<sup>55</sup> This is a textbook exhibit for *sensus fidei fidelium*, the sense of the faith on the part of the faithful. “Regardless of how theologians and dogmaticians explain it, for the people at large, she is the beloved maternal presence of God.”<sup>56</sup>

Moreover, Bishop Zumárraga and Juan Diego are placeholders for an eternal tension within the church: do theologians and the hierarchy define the faith, or do the people who practice the faith define it? Pope Pius X argued forcefully for the former in 1906: “The one duty of the multitude is to allow themselves to be led, and, like a docile flock, to follow the Pastors.”<sup>57</sup> Vatican II, on the other hand, made clear that the Juan Diegos of God comprise the church, whether as hierarchy, as folks in the pews, even (depending on one’s reading) as all people of good will. Pope Francis maintains that “the future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of

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<sup>52</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* §124.

<sup>53</sup> *Evangelii Gaudium* §123.

<sup>54</sup> Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano [CELAM], *Aparecida*, §263

<sup>55</sup> Elizondo, *Guadalupe, Mother of the New Creation*, 3.

<sup>56</sup> Elizondo, *Guadalupe, Mother of the New Creation*, 69.

<sup>57</sup> Pius X, Encyclical on the French Law of Separation *Vehementer Nos* (11 February 1906) §8., at The Holy See, [https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-x\\_enc\\_11021906\\_vehementer-nos.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/pius-x/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-x_enc_11021906_vehementer-nos.html).

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great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their ability to organize.”<sup>58</sup>

Imagining Guadalupe, Juan Diego, music and flowers, and tilma is a mystical journey loaded with the symbol, ritual, narrative, metaphor, poetry and music that Goizueta correctly identifies as “marginalized as unacademic and unscholarly”<sup>59</sup> in most church, theological, and academic circles. For those of us from the North Atlantic rational tradition, Guadalupe represents our worst fears realized, and so we marginalize her precisely because “most of the ‘traditional’ disciplines are grounded in cultural worldviews which are either antagonistic to other belief systems or have no methodology for dealing with other knowledge systems.”<sup>60</sup> Our imaginaries are not big enough to grasp her meaning, and so we repress her presence in the halls of power, even as her mysteries flourish among the people.

The music and stories from the oral traditions reveal the voices of peoples who lack any standing or currency in the imperial order. The music and stories hold those voices up as dignified and beautiful, and privilege the life of the colonized communities that are the source and subject of those voices. As they do so, Guadalupe speaks clearly: *¿Acaso no estoy yo aquí, yo que tengo el honor de ser tu madre?* Am I not here, I who have the honor of being your mother?

The stories tell anybody who is willing to listen: Guadalupe walks with, and Guadalupe is, those who cannot take life and survival for granted.

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<sup>58</sup> Francis, Address at the Second World Meeting Of Popular Movements (9 July 2015) §4, at The Holy See, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150709\\_bolivia-movimenti-popolari.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/july/documents/papa-francesco_20150709_bolivia-movimenti-popolari.html)

<sup>59</sup> Goizueta, “U.S. Hispanic Popular Catholicism as Theopoetics,” 261.

<sup>60</sup> Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 74.

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