

Preface

There can be no doubt that devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe is one of the preeminent religious phenomena of recent history. Originating in Mexico in the seventeenth century, it has spread throughout the world. The Mexican people have forged an almost mystical relationship with the *Virgen Morena*, or Dark Virgin. "Mexico was born at Tepeyac" is how this is often phrased. This devotion is based on the story of the appearances of the Virgin Mary to an indigenous neophyte named Juan Diego in which the Virgin directed him to have a church built on the site of the apparitions, the hill of Tepeyac. Yet this simple and poignant story has been at the center of a firestorm of controversy that began in the seventeenth century, reached a fever pitch in the last quarter of the nineteenth, and continues unabated to our own day. In all of this, there has been a high cost in personal tragedy, ruined careers, and an often unedifying spectacle of churchmen in strident disagreement.

This present study grew out of a previous one by this author on the history and sources of the tradition of Our Lady of Guadalupe, published in 1995.¹ Part of the preparation for that book involved research into the famed letter that the Mexican historian Joaquín García Icazbalceta wrote to the archbishop of Mexico, Antonio Pelagio de Labastida y Dávalos, in October 1883. As so frequently happens in historical studies, one point of research led to another until, by a strange concatenation of circumstances, the author found himself personally involved in the contemporary phase of the controversy. It will also be obvious that in the first chapter of this work there is a great deal of dependence on his earlier book on the origins and sources of the Guadalupe devotion. This was unavoidable, and it is hoped that the reader will not find it tiresome. It was the author's original intention to write the history only of the nineteenth-century controversy. It quickly became apparent that that was only one part of a continuum.

Though the term "controversies" in the title is given in the plural, it is

the author's belief that there has been only one controversy, one that began in the seventeenth century and has continued substantially unchanged to the present day. Its history can be divided into five more or less distinct stages. The first began in 1648 with the publication of Miguel Sánchez's account of the apparitions. In this stage, the objections to the account were implicit, that is, they had to be reconstructed from the defenses that apologists wrote. The second stage began in 1794 with the first public attack on the apparition story, the dissertation that the priest Juan Bautista Muñoz presented before the Royal Academy of History in Madrid. Muñoz's critique had great impact, and its basic line of argumentation has been followed by anti-apparitionists to this day. In this stage most apologies for the apparitions were directed against Muñoz. The third and increasingly bitter stage can be dated from the composition of García Icazbalceta's letter in October 1883 until 1896. This came to include not only the historicity of the account but also the question of Roman approval of it and the coronation of the image. The fourth stage, called "An Uneasy Calm" in this study, lasted from 1896 until 1982. It was less polemical and involved the publication of histories and popular works both for and against the traditional account. The fifth stage can be said to have begun with the campaign for the beatification of Juan Diego in the early 1980s. This stage became most virulent after 1995 with the publication of the views of Monseñor Guillermo Schulenburg Prado, the abbot of Guadalupe. It eventually centered on the campaign to prevent or at least postpone the canonization of Juan Diego.

A major difficulty in the composition of this work, specifically with regard to the period from 1883 to the present, has been the author's inability to consult all the sources he would have liked. The volatile nature of the dispute and the deep feelings it has aroused have prevented him from having access to many vital documents. When he applied to the archive of the Basilica of Guadalupe in April 2003, he was told that no one was being granted access because the archive was being restructured and also because there was no priest or canon supervising the archive. "Restructuring" was the same answer he had received in 1991 when he was working on his first Guadalupe book. Also, it is not immediately clear why the supervision of a priest or canon is necessary for the archive to function. When Leo XIII opened the Vatican Archive to researchers, he is reputed to have said that the Church had nothing to fear from the truth. Unfortunately, that enlightened approach has not yet been fully accepted.

This story is necessarily written from the viewpoint of the author's research and experience. It is clear that he brings his own perspectives to bear on this study, most particularly in the account of the canonization controversy. As much as possible he has striven to let the facts speak for

themselves. The full story will never be told until all the documents in diocesan archives and in the Vatican have been consulted, an eventuality that will not come about for many years. For this reason also, a disproportionate number of references are to newspaper and journal articles. The Guadalupe controversy of the past century and a quarter has been largely fought out in the media, primarily the press. In recent years, this has also included radio, television, and wire services, but even now the press has been the principal forum, especially for defenders of the tradition. Thus, the story of the controversy is necessarily incomplete.

As the author did his research, he was unprepared for the intensity, even viciousness, of the dispute and the stridency of its tone. This has not been a sterile argument over historical or theological minutiae, confined to the esoteric world of scholars and churchmen. It reaches to the depths of national feeling and identity. "Without Guadalupe we would cease to be Mexicans."² There is much about this that is sad and disconcerting. Tragically, Our Lady of Guadalupe, in addition to all her other meanings for the people of Mexico, is also a sign of contradiction.

It should be noted that the word *cultus* is used throughout this study in relation to devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe. The English word "cult" has taken on somewhat sinister connotations in recent years, whereas the Latin *cultus* refers to any act of worship or religious devotion in general. Most commonly, it refers to acts of public devotion or prayer.

All translations from Latin and Spanish are the author's. The translation and publication of the letters in Appendices 2 and 3 are made with the kind permission of Señor Luis Guillermo Robles of Random House Mondadori, in Mexico. The author also wishes to express his deep appreciation to friends and colleagues who have sent him materials from around the world and given him needed help and encouragement: Professor Susan Schroeder of Tulane University, New Orleans; Professor W. Michael Mathes; Señora Carmen Boone de Aguilar; Professor John Frederick Schwaller of the University of Minnesota, Morris; Licenciado Oscar Philibert; Professor Iván Escamilla González; Doctor Magnus Lundberg; Canon José Martín Rivera; Señor Angel González and the staff of the Biblioteca Miguel Lerdo de Tejada in Mexico City; Señor Liborio Villagómez and the staff of the Biblioteca Nacional at the National and Autonomous University of Mexico; the staff of the Biblioteca Lorenzo Boturini Benaduci at the Basilica of Guadalupe; and the staff of the Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. A special word of thanks is due to Monseñor Guillermo Schulenburg Prado, twenty-first and last abbot of Guadalupe.