Introduction

In 1557 an Englishman in Mexico, Robert Tomson, was arrested on charges of heresy. Over conversation at dinner, he had declared that in England the monasteries had been dissolved and that 'the images that were in their churches and other places were taken away and used no more', since their veneration was 'contrary to the expresse commandment of Almighty God, Thou shalt not make to thy selfe any graven image'. A Spaniard present replied that everyone knew that such images were not to be worshipped; but justified their presence in churches by asserting that 'they were books for the simple people, to make them understand the glory of the saints in heaven'. He further defended praying for the intercession of saints by the analogy of a royal court where it was always better to approach the king through the mediation of a favourite. To counter these arguments, Tomson simply appealed to scripture, where God, acting through the prophets and evangelists, encouraged all sinners to repent and seek his mercy. Had not Christ said: 'Come unto me all ye who labour and are over laden, and I will refresh you'? Angered by this response, a 'villanous Portugal' exclaimed: 'Basta ser Inglés para saber todo esto y más', which was to say, 'It is enough to be an Englishman to know all this and more.'[1] To punish his Protestant iconoclasm, Tomson was arrested and sent to Spain.

Only a year before this dangerous conversation, in September 1556, the Franciscan provincial in Mexico had bluntly criticized the archbishop, Alonso de Montúfar, for preaching a sermon in which he had commended devotion to *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, a painting of the Virgin Mary venerated in a chapel at Tepeyac, just outside the city. In their mission to the Indians of New Spain the Franciscans had taught the natives to worship God in heaven and not to adore images made from wood and stone. But the archbishop had now referred to certain miracles which had been performed at Tepeyac. There was thus the danger that the Indians might imagine that a mere painting had some divine power and hence return to idolatry. Although all record of this dispute disappeared from sight, not to enter the public domain until the 1880s, its occurrence indicated the tensions that surrounded the cult of holy images in

sixteenth-century Mexico. Indeed, some twenty years later, Bernardino de Sahagún, the most renowned of the Franciscans who studied Nahua language and religion, complained that the cult of Guadalupe afforded Indians a subterfuge for idolatry, since prior to the Spanish conquest they had come on pilgrimage from afar to worship Tonantzin, the mother of the gods, at her temple in Tepeyac, and continued to arrive at the Christian chapel to pray to that goddess since in Nahuatl the Virgin was also addressed as Tonantzin.[2]

It was another Englishman, Miles Philips, who wrote one of the earliest descriptions of the chapel at Tepeyac. A member of the expedition led by John Hawkins, in 1568 he was captured and taken to Mexico City, where before entry he saw:

> a very faire church, called our Ladyes church, in which there is an image of our Lady of silver and gilt, being as high, and as large as a tall woman, in which church, and before this image, there are as many lamps of silver as there be dayes in the yeere, which upon high dayes are all lighted. Whensoever any Spaniards passe by this church, although they be on horse backe, they will alight, and come into the church, and kneele before the image, and pray to our Lady to defend them from all evil; so that whether he be horseman or footman he will not passe by, but first goe into the Church, and pray as aforesayd, which if they doe not, they thinke and believe that they shall never prosper: which image they call in the Spanish tongue, Nuestra sennora de Guadalupe. At this place there are certain cold baths, which arise, springing up as though the water did seeth: the water whereof is somewhat brackish in taste, but very good for any that have any sore or wound, to wash themselves wherewith, for as they say, it healeth many: and every yeere once upon our Lady day the people used to repaire thither to offer, and to pray in that Church before the image, and they say that our Lady of Guadalupe doeth worke a number of miracles. About this Church there is not any towne of Spaniards that is inhabited, but certaine Indians doe dwell there in houses of their own countrey building.

Situated at the foot of a hill, the chapel marked the beginning of a causeway across the marshy lake into the island city of Mexico, and hence attracted the devotion of travellers. As a Protestant, Philips was more impressed by a silver statue recently donated by a wealthy silver miner, Alonso de Villaseca, than by the simple painting of the Virgin which adorned the sanctuary.[3] It was from the 'brackish' spring water that subsequent miracles were to come.

When Archbishop Montúfar encouraged devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe, he cited as comparable cases the veneration of images of the Virgin in the cathedral at Seville, at Zaragoza and Montserrat, and at Loreto in Italy. In so doing, he implicitly rejected the Franciscan vision of their mission as a revival of primitive Christianity, a Church stripped of medieval abuse and complication. Instead, he proposed that the clergy should promote devotions which aroused popular fervour in Europe. And

what better way was there to attract Indians than to create sanctuaries to house images endowed with the power of performing miracles? In Europe such sanctuaries were visited by countless pilgrims. It was before Our Lady of Montserrat that in 1522 St Ignatius Loyola spent a night's vigil before renouncing all worldly ambition by adopting pilgrim garb and becoming a hermit. So too, in 1581 the French humanist, Michel de Montaigne, spent three days at the Holy House of Loreto, where he offered a silver votive tablet and confessed that he had been deeply impressed by the sanctuary's 'show of religion'. As late as the eighteenth century, Benedict-Joseph Labre (1748–83), a flea-bitten pilgrim, visited all the principal images in Western Europe before settling in Rome.[4] As we shall see, during the colonial period the Church in New Spain created an entire network of sanctuaries which attracted pilgrims seeking spiritual comfort and cures of their ills, and thus emulated the Spanish pattern of devotion.

In Europe, most of the famous holy images derived from the late Middle Ages, even if pious legend often claimed that they had been carved or painted by St Luke. But the greatest of these figures had a miraculous origin ascribed to them. The Holy House of Loreto had been brought by angels from Nazareth, where it had served as the dwelling of the Holy Family. The wooden image of Our Lady of Pilar at Zaragoza had been left by the Virgin Mary herself, when she appeared to St James the Apostle during his mission to Spain. Obviously, the more impressive the spiritual credentials, the more elaborate was the cult which developed across the centuries. Moreover, in Spain, virtually all the leading images became the symbols of civic or provincial identity and thus attracted patriotic sentiment. In 1641 the Virgin of Pilar was acclaimed as patron of the city of Zaragoza, only then, in 1678, for the Cortes of Aragon to name her as patron of that kingdom. So significant had the cult become that, in 1681, work began on the construction of a new cathedral to house the image, a grandiose building which took a century to complete. It was in this period that sanctuaries vied to obtain distinctions from Rome. As far as can be ascertained, Our Lady of Loreto was the first of these holy figures to be 'canonized', which was to say, that in 1699 this Virgin was given a feast day with her own mass and office. Less than a generation later, in 1723, the Virgin of Pilar was similarly honoured, with her feast celebrated on 12 October.[5]

The New World was not slow to imitate Europe. Although it has been argued that the Renaissance robbed sacred art of its numinous quality by imposing the primacy of aesthetic values, in Spanish America any number of holy images, some imported from Spain, others made locally, aroused fervent devotion.[6] An intimation of the spiritual power of such figures can be observed in Peru, when in 1593 there arrived at the port of Callao a life-sized crucifix, a replica of the Christ of Burgos. The image was escorted by Augustinian friars in public procession to Lima, its progress accompanied by salvoes of cannon-fire and excited crowds thronging the streets. Once it was installed in the conventual church, the friars celebrated mass graced with the presence of the viceroy, judges of the high court and other dignitaries, many of whom promptly enrolled in

the confraternities raised to support the cult.[7] In 1574, the city council of Mexico named Our Lady of Los Remedios as its patron, a small saddle image which had been brought over by a conqueror, lost during battle, and then, thanks to an apparition of the Virgin Mary, discovered by an Indian. Only two years later the figure was carried in procession from its sanctuary just outside the city and placed in the cathedral to pray for the Virgin's help in the great plague that then afflicted the Indians. On a less dramatic occasion, in 1595 the image was brought to the cathedral to intercede for the arrival of the seasonal rains. So effective was its intercession that in the two following centuries the Virgin of Los Remedios was regularly carried through the streets with the aim of hastening the seasonal rainfall. In the course of the seventeenth century virtually every city in Spanish America came to possess its own patron saint, and every province a sanctuary with a miraculous image.

One of the most curious features of Catholic theology in this epoch was the divorce between devotion and doctrine. Confronted with the challenge of Protestant iconoclasm and charges of idolatry, the Council of Trent denied that holy images possessed any divine power and insisted that all the veneration paid to them was transferred to their heavenly originals. But during the sixteenth century there were any number of Latin editions of the works of the Greek Fathers of the Church, and not least among them, the treatises of St John Damascene and St Theodore of Studios, which defended the veneration of icons from the attacks of the iconoclasts of the seventh century. As we shall see, these Eastern theologians were keenly read in New Spain and their neoplatonic doctrines applied to celebrate the cult of Marian images. In effect, the absence of any positive Catholic theology on this devotion drove preachers and chroniclers to draw on the tradition of the Orthodox Church.

What Mexican chronicles reveal, however, is that there was indeed a Catholic doctrine of miraculous Marian images, but that it was to be found in a controversial, prophetic work, the *New Apocalypse*, written in Latin by Joannes Menesius da Silva (1431–82), a Franciscan visionary and reformer better known as Blessed Amadeus of Portugal. Widely known for his prediction of the imminent advent of an angelic pope and defence of Mary's Immaculate Conception, Amadeus also revealed that the Virgin had declared that to the end of the world she would be bodily present in those images through which she performed miracles; present in much the same way as Christ in the Eucharist.[8] Although Amadeus was denounced for heresy, in Spain the Franciscans defended his reputation and published commentaries on his revelations. In seventeenth-century Mexico both Franciscans and Jesuits accepted the doctrine that Mary was present in her sanctuaries where miracles were performed. And indeed, several Jesuit preachers applied the doctrine of transubstantiation to the image of Guadalupe, arguing that its paints and colours had been miraculously transfigured into the likeness of Mary, wherein she was perpetually present. Not for nothing were the sanctuaries which housed these cult images defined as spiritual fortresses, where

the faithful were protected from demonic assault by the real presence of the Mother of God.[9]

The application of such a doctrine was in part anticipated by Miguel Sánchez (1596?–1674) in his *Image of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Guadalupe* (1648), in which he informed his enthralled compatriots that the Mexican Virgin was a faithful copy made by miracle of the image of Mary seen by St John the Evangelist and described in chapter 12 of his Apocalypse. This was but prelude to a densely argued text in which Sánchez deployed all the resources of scriptural typology to magnify the Guadalupe, so that figures such as the burning bush and the Ark of the Covenant, which had been applied to Mary since the early Church, were taken as specific references to the Virgin of Tepeyac. At the same time, Sánchez provided the first published account of the Virgin's apparition to a poor Indian, Juan Diego, and the miraculous imprinting of her likeness on his cape. Here too, typology was invoked to elucidate the significance of these events, since the Indian figured as both the St James of Mexico, its San Diego, and more important, its Moses who brought the Guadalupe, the Mexican Ark of the Covenant, to Tepeyac, which by turns was described as the Mexican Sinai and Zion. A disciple of St Augustine, Sánchez was animated as much by patriotic as by religious sentiment, and his whole concern was to demonstrate that the Mexican Church owed its foundation to the direct intervention of the Mother of God, who thereby declared herself the special patron and mother of the Mexican people.[10]

The arguments of Miguel Sánchez can only be understood within the context of an hispanic culture where the Catholic monarchy of the Habsburgs was seen as chosen by divine providence to defend the Catholic faith from both Muslims and Protestants. Charles V was hailed as another David and Philip II as a second Solomon, especially since the latter's convent palace at Escorial was seen as the building which most resembled the Temple at Jerusalem. Moreover, the early Franciscans in Mexico had interpreted the conversion of the Indians both as a revival of the primitive Church and as divine compensation to the Church for the Reformation, since in precisely the same years when the rich, arrogant nations of Northern Europe fell into heresy, the poor, humble peoples of New Spain entered the fold. Confronted with such a powerful theological justification of the Catholic monarchy's dominion, the creole clergy embraced Sánchez' revelations as the means of providing their *patria* with an autonomous spiritual foundation. It was not the case that his book created the devotion to the Guadalupe, since, already in 1622, a handsome new sanctuary had been built to replace the chapel raised by Montúfar. Its importance lay in providing the theological rationale for the cult.

Such was the explosion of fervour that in 1695–1709 a majestic new church was constructed at Tepeyac, an edifice which in scale and splendour rivalled all but the greatest cathedrals of New Spain. In many provincial cities subordinate sanctuaries dedicated to the Guadalupe were built, usually situated *extra muros* at some distance from the

city, in replication of the relation of Tepeyac and the capital. The next development occurred in 1737, when Mexico City was devastated by an epidemic which drove thousands to an early grave. With no material remedy of any avail, the city council joined with the cathedral chapter to proclaim Our Lady of Guadalupe as the capital's principal patron. Other cities followed suit and in 1746 the image was acclaimed as the patron of the entire kingdom of New Spain. The euphoria of the creole elite which these events occasioned reached new heights when in 1754 Benedict XIV not merely confirmed the Virgin of Tepeyac as patron, but also endowed her with a feast on 12 December with its own mass and office. Since only Our Lady of Pilar had obtained a similar honour within the hispanic world, the Mexican Virgin could now claim to rival the most celebrated Marian images in Europe. In a sermon preached in 1748 on the last days of the world, Francisco Javier Carranza declared that although Anti-Christ would seize power in Europe in that epoch, in America Our Lady of Guadalupe would preserve the Catholic faith and thus ensure that both the pope and the king of Spain would flee to Mexico, thereby converting the city into the capital of a new, universal Catholic monarchy.

It was in the sermons preached in honour of the Guadalupe in the period 1661–1767 that creole orators drew especially on the Greek Fathers to exalt the 'Mexican Phoenix'. What was the Guadalupe but 'a portrait image of the idea of God', which was to say, a faithful likeness of Mary which the Almighty had conceived from all eternity? From this startling claim it was but a short step to assert that the Guadalupe was a portrait of the Virgin as she appeared in the flesh, but whereas the image of Mary which appeared in Palestine was present only for a few years, by contrast, her image in Mexico was destined to remain for ever. In the sermons preached before the assembled dignitaries in the sanctuary at Tepeyac, learned canons and Jesuits scaled the neo-platonic chain of images in audacious metaphors which trembled on the limits of orthodoxy, all designed to exalt the singular Providence which distinguished their country.

If the Mexican Church proved successful in obtaining Rome's approval of their national cult, it was in part because in the late seventeenth century a circle of learned clerics had laboured to substantiate Sánchez' revelations by obtaining juridical statements about the origin of Juan Diego and the antiquity of the tradition of the Virgin's apparitions. In their search for historical evidence they were immeasurably assisted by a simple but moving account of the apparitions written in Nahuatl, the principal native language of central Mexico, and published in 1649 by the chaplain at Tepeyac. It was soon accepted that this text derived from a manuscript written in the sixteenth century by Antonio Valeriano, a disciple of the Franciscans. A Spanish translation of this account, modified to suit contemporary taste, was printed and enjoyed considerable circulation. Here were grounds enough for Rome to approve the tradition. It was left to the eighteenth century, when talented artists competed to copy the Guadalupe,

to scrutinize the image and conclude that its incomparable beauty derived from a combination of painting techniques that could be described as miraculous.

In the very years when devotion to the Mexican Virgin appeared to command universal assent, in Europe the cult of holy images was dismissed as idolatrous or superstitious. Many of the philosophers of the Enlightenment were deists who rejected and ridiculed the Christian faith. The Scots thinker, David Hume, defined miracles as an impossibility, an affront to the laws of Nature, and wrote a natural history of religion in which he portrayed the Catholic cult of saints as a popular revival of pagan polytheism.[11] Equally important, orthodox Church historians deployed their erudition to demonstrate the falsity of many pious legends. So too, Benito Jerónimo Feijoo, a respected Benedictine abbot, questioned the value of pilgrimage, criticized the expectation of miraculous cures, and roundly condemned any number of 'vulgar errors' which afflicted the populace of eighteenth-century Spain. In effect, both historical criticism and scientific method were invoked to undermine the religious culture of baroque Catholicism. It was in 1794 that the chief cosmographer of the Indies, Juan Bautista Muñoz, presented a memoir to the Royal Academy of History in Madrid, in which he cited Sahagún's early criticism of the Guadalupe cult and concluded that the apparition narrative had no reliable historical foundation. Only published in 1817, this brief memoir was to be echoed by Mexican scholars later in the century.

A further portent of the change in the climate of opinion was afforded by a sermon preached by Servando de Mier, a creole Dominican, at Tepeyac in 1794, where he scandalized the congregation by asserting that not merely had St Thomas the Apostle preached the gospel in Mexico, but he had also left the image of Guadalupe inscribed on his cape, which thus had been venerated centuries before the Spaniards arrived in the New World. With this ingenious theory, Mier sought to by-pass contemporary doubts and to provide the Mexican Church with an apostolic foundation equal to that of St James in Spain. By this time news of the French Revolution had reached Mexico and inflamed men's minds in diverse ways. Many young creoles were stirred by the spectacle of Napoleon's conquests and the example of the United States, and hence silently espoused the cause of independence. Among devout priests, however, Carranza's prophecy was recalled and cited in sermons, so that as the Church in Europe suffered expropriation and the closure of monasteries, in Mexico expectations grew that the New Spain was destined to become a Catholic bulwark, the refuge for both the pope and the king of Spain.

It was in 1810 that Miguel Hidalgo, the parish priest of Dolores, called out the rural masses in rebellion against Spanish rule. By then French troops had already invaded the Peninsula, imposed Joseph Bonaparte on the Spanish throne, and launched an attack on the Church. The secular spirit of this era was best expressed when the image of Our Lady of Loreto was seized and despatched to Paris for deposit in the National Library as 'a celebrated monument of ignorance and the most absurd superstition'.[12]

So too, Pius VII was taken to France and obliged to witness Napoleon's coronation as emperor of the French. But in Spain, resistance to the French invasion was nowhere more intense than in Zaragoza, where friars and priests played a leading role during the siege of that city, when the populace chanted: 'the Virgin of Pilar says she does not want to be French, she wants to be Captain of the Aragonese people'.[13] Much the same patriotic spirit animated the Mexican insurgents, since for their banner Hidalgo gave them a copy of the Virgin of Tepeyac, so that they marched to the cry of 'Long Live Our Lady of Guadalupe.' The patron of New Spain was thus transformed into the symbol and flag of an insurgent nation engaged in civil war to achieve independence. Not all creoles favoured the rebels, and indeed the propertied classes supported the creation of a royalist army capable of containing popular depredations. In the event, Mexico obtained its freedom in 1821, when Agustín de Iturbide, a royalist colonel, launched a military rebellion against the anti-clerical measures of the Spanish Cortes. His seizure of power was hailed by preachers who thanked Our Lady of Guadalupe for uniting the Mexicans in pursuit of independence and who expressed their confidence that she would preserve their Church from the revolutionary excesses of Europe.

When Iturbide's short-lived empire was replaced by a federal republic, clerical apprehensions were soon aroused by the emergence of Liberal politicians intent on seizure of Church wealth. For their part, the clergy declared that the Mexican State had not inherited the patronage rights of the Spanish crown, so that until a concordat was agreed with Rome the government had no right to meddle in the nomination of bishops and canons. To strengthen their case, many priests now adopted an ultramontane theology, in which the papacy was defined as an absolute monarchy with powers of intervention throughout the Church. It was a theology that was to culminate in the proclamation of papal infallibility in 1870. Before then, however, the Mexican Church had suffered the onslaught of the Liberal Reform of the 1850s. In successive blows, the radical government expropriated all Church property, stripped the clergy of their legal privilege, dissolved the monasteries, secularized education, and finally separated Church and State. These measures were vehemently condemned by the bishops, who openly supported the conservative generals who opposed the Liberals. The result was a bitter civil war. The anguish experienced by the clergy during this conflict was nowhere more powerfully expressed than in the two sermons preached at Tepeyac in 1859–60 by Clemente de Jesús Munguía, the intransigent bishop of Michoacán.

When the bishops were expelled from Mexico they took refuge in Rome, where they were welcomed by Pius IX. It was then that Archbishop Pelagio Antonio de Labastida joined with the pope to plan the reinvigoration of the Mexican Church through the creation of new dioceses. Thanks to their residence in the Vatican the Mexican bishops became fully conscious of belonging to a universal Church and thereafter chose to despatch their most promising young priests to complete their education in Rome. So

too, it was during their time in Europe that they took cognizance of the sudden emergence of Lourdes as the leading Marian sanctuary and were able to observe how the French hierarchy took advantage of the railway system and the printing press to organize national pilgrimages and popularize the cult. If the papacy constituted the principle of authority on which their Church rested, it was Catholic France which offered Mexican bishops a living example of a renewal which encompassed both theology and devotion.[14]

During the long years when Mexico was ruled by Porfirio Díaz, 1876–1911, the Church slowly rebuilt its institutions and sought to re-establish its public influence. Inspired by the example of Lourdes, the bishops obtained permission from the papacy to crown the image of Guadalupe. In 1895 the entire month of October was given over to celebration as diocesan pilgrimages arrived at Tepeyac to hear mass and listen to sermons. The director of the project, José Antonio Plancarte, sent invitations to bishops across North America and the Caribbean, so that on 12 October, when the coronation was staged, twenty-two Mexican archbishops and bishops were joined by fourteen prelates from the United States and another three from Quebec, Havana and Panama. The album which commemorated the celebrations not merely offered a description of events, but also printed the texts of the sermons which were preached during the month. As was to be expected, the neo-platonic theology and sacramental pretensions of the baroque epoch had long since been abandoned; but by contrast the scriptural figures first advanced by Miguel Sánchez still attracted many orators. The spirit of the occasion was best expressed by the bishop of Colima, when he exclaimed that he had come to Tepeyac, 'the Mexican Zion', to scrutinize in the tablets of its laws the destiny of his country. So also, the renovated sanctuary was compared to the Temple at Jerusalem and the image of Guadalupe to the Ark of the Covenant. But preachers also asserted that the foundation of Mexico could be dated from the apparition of the Virgin Mary at Tepeyac, since she had then liberated its people from the bondage of idolatry and tyranny. Equally important, they saluted the Virgin as the foundress of the new, mestizo nation, since in her sanctuary she had reconciled Spaniards and Indians, uniting them in common devotion and faith. In this emphasis on the social role of the Guadalupe these preachers in part echoed the affirmations of Manuel Ignacio Altamirano, a radical who admitted that, for the Mexicans, 'in the last extreme, in the most desperate cases, the cult of the Mexican Virgin is the only bond which unites them'.

The revival of the Church was nowhere more manifest than in the flood of publications dealing with Our Lady of Guadalupe during the 1880s. Several of these treatises aimed to interpret the sixteenth-century chronicles and documents that had been recently printed for the first time. Some were merely panegyrical, designed to promote devotion. But there was also a great deal of controversy. In particular, the discovery and publication of the 1556 manuscript dealing with the dispute between Archbishop

Montúfar and the Franciscan provincial caused a stir, since here could be found the attribution of the Guadalupe image to an Indian artist named Marcos. Alarm in clerical circles deepened when it became known that Joaquín García Icazbalceta, Mexico's most respected historian, had concluded that the apparition narrative had been first recorded by Sánchez 116 years after the event, and that the universal silence of sixteenth-century chroniclers about the miracle meant that the tradition had no historical credibility. The fury of the 'apparitionists' knew no bounds and they savagely attacked not merely García Icazbalceta, a devout and conservative Catholic, but also the very Franciscans who had founded the Mexican Church for their silence or hostility to the Guadalupe cult. Yet further controversy was occasioned when it was found that the golden crown which had adorned the Virgin in her image since time immemorial had been silently erased.

The outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910 unleashed a wave of anticlericalism that eventually threatened to destroy the achievements of the late nineteenth century. Bishops were expelled from the country, priests persecuted and churches confiscated. The 1917 Constitution denied the Church all legal personality and forbade ministers of religion to intervene in education or politics. But, when the revolutionary State sought to curtail the number of priests and places of worship, the bishops placed the republic under interdict. In 1926–9 there ensued a bitter civil war in which the Catholic peasantry, especially in western Mexico, fought the federal army to a standstill. Rebel banners consisted of the figure of the Guadalupe under which was inscribed the slogan, *Viva Cristo Rey*, 'Long live Christ the King.' It was from the ranks of Cristero clerics that there emerged the campaign to beatify Juan Diego, thus offering the faithful a loyal Indian hero to offset the revolutionary nationalist emphasis on the pre-hispanic civilization and the contemporary native peasantry. When Church and State effected a silent reconciliation after the Second World War, the way was opened for the construction of a vast new basilica at Tepeyac, its cost in part covered by government subsidy, which was consecrated in 1976. With the arrival of John Paul II in 1979, Mexico assumed a new importance within the general scheme of the Catholic Church, and in 1990 its Church was rewarded with the beatification of Juan Diego.

During the twentieth century the previous debate over the 'historicity' of the apparitions continued unabated and new sources were periodically discovered, only later to be found wanting. But a new, theological emphasis became evident when the *Nican mopohua*, the Nahuatl text of the apparition narrative, became the object of sustained meditation. The effect of the Theology of Liberation, not to mention the Second Vatican Council, was to concentrate attention on the pastoral character of the dialogues between the Virgin and Juan Diego. By the 1990s, various translations in different languages had been made and the text was now seen to be, in some ill-defined sense, 'inspired', and thus constituted a Mexican gospel. If the 'option for the poor' led Mexican commentators to dismiss Sánchez as the exponent of baroque