

MEXICAN --- PHOENIX

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE:
IMAGE AND TRADITION
ACROSS FIVE CENTURIES

D. A. BRADING

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Image and typology

I

At the beginning of the fourth century, when Constantine the Great embraced Christianity as his imperial religion, his sister asked Bishop Eusebius of Caesarea, the church historian, to give her a likeness of Christ. But he refused, explaining that since Christ was both God and man it was impossible to represent him. In this opinion Eusebius echoed St Clement of Alexandria and Origen, whose insistence that the words of scripture were but outward signs of profound spiritual doctrine led them to scorn any attempt to paint, carve or sculpt figures of Christ or the Holy Trinity. With the spectacle of idolatry still enacted in all the temples about them, how could they approve the veneration of images?¹ In his passionate manner, the North African apologist, Tertullian, condemned all makers of images, no matter what their purpose, and compared these artists to actors and harlots, since to represent was to deceive, its evil purpose being to arouse the passions and incite spectators to idolatry or sin.² In these denunciations Christian theologians drew upon the Old Testament and in particular upon the Book of Exodus, where the ten commandments given to Israel began by stating:

I am the Lord thy God, who have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in the heavens above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.

In the Book of Deuteronomy, Moses reminded Israel that on Mount Horeb or Sinai, God had spoken in the midst of fire, so that only his voice could be heard, without any form or likeness being seen.³ Thereafter, throughout the Old Testament, the worship of man-made images was mocked and condemned as sinful folly. So too, in his Letter to the Romans, St Paul continued this denunciation of idolatry when he

condemned the Greeks, since ‘professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to the birds, and four-footed things and creeping things’.⁴ As heir to the Judaic dispensation, early Christians suffered martyrdom rather than worship or pay honour to Roman and Greek gods. And indeed, when the divinity of the emperors was proclaimed, many refused to offer the incense demanded by this civic cult and gladly went to their death.

It was thus not until the sixth and seventh centuries that the Christian Church began actively to promote the cult of the holy images, albeit in the form of painting rather than of sculpture or carving. This veneration had its roots in various practices. In the catacombs, Christians commemorated the dead by leaving votive tablets on which at times the departed were depicted as praying to Christ and the saints. The tombs of martyrs were especially venerated, and eventually these saints were represented. Equally important, the Eastern empire continued the Roman practice of a public display of statues and paintings of the emperors, who as Christians, were obviously no longer adored, but whose likeness was still accorded all due honour.⁵ This practice was justified by Christian theologians, since as St Basil the Great argued, ‘the honour given to the image is transferred to its prototype’. The reasoning behind this famous judgement was spelt out by St Athanasius when he declared: ‘in the image of the emperor is appearance and form, and in the emperor is the appearance which is in the image . . . whoever venerates the image venerates the emperor in it, for the image is his form and appearance’.⁶ Obviously, here were reasons enough to defend the veneration of paintings of Christ and his saints.

At much the same time there emerged the pious tradition that Christ himself had imprinted his likeness on a cloth sent to Agbar, king of Edessa, and that during his Passion a likeness remained imprinted on the towel offered to him by St Veronica. Then again, certain icons of the Virgin Mary were thought to have been painted by St Luke during her lifetime, albeit in idealized form, when she was invariably represented as a young woman with the Christ child in her arms.⁷ These originals of Christ and Mary were soon copied and the copies equally became the objects of veneration. It was not long before certain icons had the power of performing miracles ascribed to them, usually by curing their devotees of their illnesses and other infirmities. Once this became widely known, these icons became cult images, which is to say, they attracted pilgrims and were accorded especial devotion with, at times, confraternities formed in their honour. From this it was but a short step for icons to be acclaimed as the patrons of cities, especially since it had become the practice to dedicate churches to the Virgin Mary or to other saints. During Christian festivities such icons were at times carried through the streets of the cities they protected by their presence. Indeed, when the armies of the Byzantine empire sallied forth to do battle with the forces of Islam, they were accompanied by holy images.⁸

With the accession of the Isaurian dynasty in the eighth century, however, the emperors led a fierce campaign to eradicate all forms of sacred representation. Leo III (717–41) not only decreed the destruction of all icons, but also had mosaics in churches which depicted Christ, Mary and the angels replaced by simple crosses. His successor, Constantine V, justified the campaign by affirming that ‘anyone who makes an icon of Christ has failed to penetrate to the depths of the dogma of the inseparable union of the natures of Christ’, which was to say, that if Christ was indeed the second Person of the Holy Trinity, then it was both impossible and offensive to encompass his divinity in any likeness made of wood and paint.⁹ When a change of ruler brought about a return to traditional practice, the Seventh General Church Council, held at Nicaea in 787, strongly approved of the cult of icons:

like the figure of the honoured and life-giving cross, the revered and holy images, whether painted or made of mosaic or of other suitable material, are to be exposed in the holy churches of God, on sacred instruments and vestments, on walls and panels, in houses and by public ways; these are the images of our Lord, God and saviour, Jesus Christ, and of our Lady without blemish, the holy God-bearer, and of the revered angels and of any of the saintly holy men. The more frequently they are seen in representational art, the more are those who see them drawn to remember and long for those who serve as models, and to pay these images the tribute of salutation and respectful veneration. Certainly this is not the full adoration in accordance with our faith, which is properly paid only to the divine nature, but it resembles that given to the figure of the honoured and life-giving cross, and also to the holy books of the gospels and to other sacred cult objects. Further, people are drawn to honour these images with the offering of incense and lights, as was piously established by ancient custom. Indeed, the honour paid to an image traverses it, reaching the model; and he who venerates the image, venerates the person represented in that image.¹⁰

Although the iconoclastic fury was to return to haunt the Eastern empire, the decrees of Nicaea were accepted across the Christian world and constituted, so to say, the theological charter for the veneration of holy images in both the Latin and Greek Churches.

The most powerful defence of icons was mounted by St John Damascene (675–749), a Syrian theologian who ended his days in a monastery situated close to Jerusalem, then under Muslim rule. From this vantage point, he protested against emperors meddling in doctrinal matters, which were the province of apostles, prophets and bishops. In his treatise *On Holy Images*, he cited God’s commandment against idolatry in Exodus, only then to note that God had also instructed Moses to construct the Ark or tabernacle of the Covenant to house the tablets of the Law brought down from Mount Sinai. But this ark, upon which a gold mercy seat or throne was to be placed,

was flanked and overshadowed by two golden cherubs. When Solomon built the Temple at Jerusalem, the ark and mercy seat were placed in the inner sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, with the two cherubim still guarding it. Similar figures, together with those of lions and bulls, decorated the temple walls. It followed, so St John argued, that although the Law condemned the worship of material objects as idolatry, it did not forbid the representation of angels with gold and silver despite their spiritual nature.¹¹ Moreover, although Moses did not describe God save by fire and word, the prophet Isaiah saw God apparently seated on his throne, albeit obscured by the wings of six seraphim. Such was the Jewish veneration for the material symbols of their religion that, as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews recalled, the Tables of the Law, Aaron's miraculous rod, and a jar of manna collected in the desert were preserved in the Temple's inner sanctuary.¹² And indeed, in their synagogues the Jews continued to venerate the scrolls of the Law, the Torah, which were kept in a sacred ark or tabernacle.¹³

The emphasis on material signs was also justified by human psychology: 'since we are fashioned of both soul and body, and our souls are not naked spirits, but are covered, as it were, with a fleshly veil, it is impossible for us to think without using physical images'. Moreover, of all senses, so St John affirmed, sight was the noblest and that which most illuminated the soul. Writing at a time when books were read aloud rather than silently, he added: 'What the book is to the literate, the image is to the illiterate. Just as words speak to the ear, so the image speaks to the sight; it brings us understanding.'¹⁴ But to deny icons was not merely to hinder devotion and understanding; more gravely, it was to deny the Incarnation of Christ. By their blasphemous destruction of holy images, the iconoclasts denied the doctrine of the Council of Chalcedon (450) that Jesus Christ was 'one person with two natures', true God and true man. As St John explained, 'I worship Him who clothed himself in the royal purple of my flesh . . . the flesh assumed by Him becomes divine and endures after its assumption.' If Christ was fully human, then he could be materially represented and these images demanded veneration, since 'I do not worship matter; I worship the Creator of matter who took flesh.' At the same time, St John agreed with the iconoclasts that to portray the Almighty, to confine the uncircumscribed Godhead within an icon frame, would be an act of idolatry: 'If we attempted to make an image of the invisible God, this would be sinful indeed', an opinion which prevented Orthodox painters from depicting the Trinity save under the form of the three angels who visited Abraham.¹⁵

Not content with mere defence, St John drew upon neo-platonic philosophy to frame a theology of holy images. His starting point was the principle that if 'an image is a likeness . . . showing in itself what it depicts', it also 'reveals or makes perceptible those things which are hidden'. Which was to say, that since artists had an idea of their painting before sitting down to work, the painting possessed within itself something of that idea. And although there was a difference between a natural and an artificial

image, nevertheless, a logical relation existed between a son's likeness to his father and a portrait's likeness to the artist's model. If these premises be granted, then it was possible to construct what has been called 'The Great Chain of Images', which descended all the way from the Trinity to the lowliest icon.¹⁶ As St John explained, with the Holy Trinity, 'the Son of the Father is the first natural image of the invisible God'. But the Trinity, which dwelt in eternity, possessed 'images and figures of things He has yet to do, and the purpose of each of them were called predeterminations by holy Dionysius'. The third class of image was mankind, since as Scripture declared, man was made in the image and likeness of God. The fourth category of images was the descriptions of natural phenomena in the Bible, such as the sun, light and mountains, which could be interpreted as symbols of God and his power. There followed the fifth class, which consisted of the prefigurations of persons and events of Christian revelation which were found in the Old Testament. Finally, the sixth class comprised the material remembrances of past events, be they the words of scripture, icons, or objects such as Aaron's rod or the jar of manna. In all these categories of images, the divine power was in some measure revealed and, if the Holy Spirit dwelt within the saints, who were Christ's friends, so also he stayed close to their images and tombs. Thus it was not merely Christ's images which were to be venerated, but also the likenesses of his Mother, the saints and the angels. What could be more moving than the story of St John Chrysostom, who, in reading St Paul's epistles, had an icon of the apostle before him and who took the icon into his hands when he conversed with his beloved master?¹⁷

The implications of this neo-platonic theology of holy images were explored by St Theodore of Studios (759–826), a monk of Constantinople, who sought to counter the iconoclastic charge that a true image should have the same essence as its prototype. Which was to say, that whereas Christ was the natural image of his Mother, sharing the same human essence or nature, by contrast, an icon of Christ was his artificial image, its essence as a material object being radically different. To venerate such an object was to be guilty of idolatry. In response to these objections, Theodore reiterated the arguments of St John Damascene, but then drew a scholastic contrast between essence or nature on the one hand and likeness or form on the other. An icon was like the shadow of its heavenly prototype, or, to change the metaphor, it resembled a likeness stamped in wax: and thus in both cases its existence depended on the prototype. He affirmed that 'Christ is the prototype of his image . . . the artificial image is the same as its archetype in likeness, but different in essence . . . It is not the essence of the image we venerate, but the form of the prototype which is stamped upon it . . . the image has one form with its prototype; therefore they have one veneration.'¹⁸ It thus followed that 'although two in nature, the prototype and image are one in hypostatic likeness' and hence icons should command the same veneration as that accorded to Christ or Mary. These were indeed bold conclusions.

With such powerful theological defence, it was no wonder that the veneration of icons was restored across the Orthodox world. However, the iconoclastic campaign led to a strict regulation of the cult of images. Henceforth, in virtually all Greek churches Christ was depicted either in mosaic or painting as Pantocrater, the ruler of the universe, his image dominating the sanctuary from the high walls of the dome. So too, Mary was invariably portrayed as Theotokos, the Mother of God, with the Christ child in her arms, often accompanied by angels or saints, and located in the apse. It later became the practice to hang icons on the chancel screen which shielded the sanctuary from the faithful, and to carry these images in procession during the liturgy. At the same time individual images once more came to be venerated for the miracles they performed or for the protection they afforded, and hence attracted pilgrims and devotion. Moreover, despite the strict control exercised over the subject matter of icons, regional schools differed in their portrayal and during the eleventh century a new style arose which sought to arouse devotion through the illusion of life.¹⁹ Scenes from the life of the Virgin and Christ thus came to depict their love and suffering. When the famous Mandyion image of Christ was brought from Edessa to Constantinople in 944, it was acclaimed as 'a second Ark of the Covenant'.²⁰

Although St John Damascene was the last Greek Father to be honoured by the Latin Church with his own feast day, his abstruse theology of holy images was not adopted in the West. Instead, Rome chose to stress the didactic and devotional value of church paintings. Pope Gregory the Great reiterated the common view that 'the picture is for the simple man what writing is for those who can read'. In effect, an icon or mosaic was defined as a representation, the purpose of which was to assist the imagination and stir the devotion of worshippers whose minds should be firmly fixed on the heavenly originals of the paintings they saw.²¹ For all that, in Rome a much-venerated icon was thought to be the likeness of Christ that had been imprinted on St Veronica's towel, and the ancient icon of Mary kept in the church of St Maria Maggiore was reckoned to have been painted by St Luke. Both of these images were carried through the streets in processions and became the objects of fervent cults. Moreover, with the tragic capture of Constantinople in 1206, many icons were seized and brought back to Italy, where later they were also attributed to St Luke.²² Where the West came to differ from the East was in the construction of elaborate altarpieces in which painters vied to demonstrate their skill in portraying the suffering humanity of Christ and the Virgin.

In the Latin Church, however, it was the relics of martyrs and confessors which most attracted popular devotion. In the closing pages of the *City of God*, St Augustine (354–430) marvelled at the miraculous cures wrought at the tombs of martyrs in North Africa.²³ Quick to avert charges of idolatry, he defended this new cult by arguing that whereas pagans had erected temples to honour the cures performed by their idols, Christians had built memorial shrines in which the normal liturgy was performed, all prayer thus directed to Christ and the Trinity, with the martyrs merely named rather

than being directly invoked. It was thus in the fifth and sixth centuries that the cult of saints extended across the Western provinces of the former Roman empire, generally centred on the relics which were deposited in splendid shrines, often built by local bishops and at times housed within their cathedrals. Although the souls of martyrs and confessors were obviously in heaven, their bones were thought to possess a numinous power, a heavenly indwelling presence, which could cast out devils and heal the sick. Their tombs attracted numerous pilgrims; their lives and sufferings became the subject of pious biography, and the miracles enacted at their shrines were faithfully recorded. Martyred saints were adopted by cities as their patrons, and the celebration of their feast days became annual expressions of collective solidarity. These patrons were seen by the populace as heavenly guardians, whose protection was ensured by the presence of their relics. As was the case with icons, there was thus a general craving for the divine truths of Christianity to be firmly rooted in a tangible, material presence.²⁴

Whereas these early cults were usually confined to a particular city and its province, by contrast, in ninth-century Spain the discovery of the tomb of St James at Compostela led to that apostle's being proclaimed patron of Spain. Since at this time most of the Peninsula was occupied by Muslim rulers, his protection became all important, especially when it was affirmed that the saint had intervened at the battle of Clavijo, an action which soon led to his being dubbed the 'Moorslayer', and thus invariably portrayed on horseback, sword in hand. So powerful was the cult that Muslims compared the sanctuary to the Kaaba at Mecca and, although in 997 the caliph Almansor burnt the church at Compostela to the ground and carried off its bells, he left the tomb untouched. For their part, many Christians confused St James the son of Zebedee with St James the 'brother' of Christ and first bishop of Jerusalem. In any case, it was alleged that the saint had come to Spain to preach the gospel shortly after Christ's death and, although he returned to Palestine where he was martyred, his remains were brought back to Compostela.²⁵ With such a lineage, it was small wonder that the relics of Santiago Matamoros came to attract pilgrims not merely from Spain but from across Europe.

At some point, possibly in the tenth century, the cult of images was transformed when relics of martyrs and saints were deposited in cavities within wooden statues, which were then covered in gold foil and decorated with jewels. Among the first of these reliquary statues was the bejewelled figure of St Faith, venerated at Conques in France, which attracted pilgrims from afar and wrought many miraculous cures.²⁶ Obviously, relics continued to be worshipped, and both the bones of St Thomas à Becket, the martyred archbishop of Canterbury, and the bones of St Francis interred in Assisi attracted pilgrims in their thousands. But once reliquaries were shaped as images it was but a short step for statues and crucifixes to become objects of devotion in their own right. By the close of the Middle Ages, each country possessed shrines of

images, mainly statues but including some paintings, which had become famous for their thaumaturgic powers and which thus generated devotion which raised them far above the level of mere representations.²⁷ By this time, many of these shrines were managed by the religious orders who derived both prestige and handsome donations from the presence of these miraculous images. Unlike its Eastern counterpart, the Latin Church failed to exercise any rigorous control over the manner in which holy images were manufactured, and oddities abounded. Nowhere was this more the case than at Compostela, where the figure of Santiago placed above his tomb had movable limbs and a sword attached, which on one occasion was used to knight a king of Castile.²⁸

It was during the Middle Ages that the Eucharist also became an object of devotion. In 1215 the papacy formally defined the doctrine of the Real Presence, which was to say, that at mass the bread and wine were transformed by the words of consecration into the true body and blood of Christ. This definition was followed by the introduction of the feast of Corpus Christi in 1264 and again in 1317. By then members of the religious Orders, especially the Dominicans, were actively promoting the cult and the feast, for which St Thomas Aquinas composed prayers. By the fourteenth century the Eucharist was exhibited as a circular host, set in a jewelled silver or golden monstrance, often decorated with the rays of the sun, and placed on altars for worship or carried in processions. It later became common for churches to install tabernacles at the centre of their altars, where the communion hosts could be deposited. The permanent presence of the Eucharist in churches thus confirmed the sacred character of these buildings. In many ways, the tabernacle was the Christian version of the Ark of the Covenant, but whereas in Jewish synagogues the ark contained the scrolls of the Law, the Christian equivalent housed the sacramental sign of Christ's Real Presence.²⁹ Although the cult of the Eucharist sprang from the same desire for physical manifestation of the divine which had inspired devotion to icons, relics and statues, it differed in that devotion concentrated on a sign rather than an image and was derived directly from the central liturgy of the Church.

II

The first Christians affirmed that Jesus Christ came to fulfil scriptural prophecy. Both the gospels and the epistles interpreted his mission as Saviour by citing biblical precedent. He was thus defined as a second Adam sent to liberate humanity from the effects of man's first sin and as a Moses come to lead the new Israel out of Egypt. He was both the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and a Messiah of the house of David. The comparison with Moses, however, was transformed when Christ was defined as the Paschal Lamb, offered up in sacrifice so as to initiate a universal exodus. Thereafter, he

was described both as high priest and as sacrificial victim. Far from mere metaphor, these titles derived from a mode of theological reasoning later known as typology. Its premise was that Old Testament events could be interpreted as types or figures of New Testament events, the relation defined as prophecy and fulfilment. At its most profound level, typology was based on biblical history and thus established a living relation between the two Testaments. To assert that Christ was a second Moses not merely implied an exodus, but also promised a revelation which completed God's prior revelation on Mount Sinai.³⁰

With the inclusion of the Book of the Apocalypse in the New Testament, the intellectual reach of typological reasoning was projected onto the Christian future. Obviously, both the gospels and St Paul had preached the Parousia, the Second Coming of Christ, when he would reign in glory amidst the general resurrection of the saints. But in the last book of the Christian Bible this eschatological expectation was grounded in the apocalyptic visions of Daniel, Ezekiel, Isaiah and Zechariah. Christ was depicted as both a Davidic Messiah and as Paschal Lamb leading the new Israel into spiritual battle against Satan. In effect, typology became the basis of a theology of history in which Israel's ancient enemies, Babel, Sodom, Tyre and Babylon were invoked as figures of the Roman empire which was currently persecuting and martyring countless Christians. But despite the terrifying strength of Satan, manifest variously as a seven-headed dragon and as the harlot of Babylon seated on a beast, final victory for the new Israel was assured. The Parousia was seen as a new Jerusalem, a city constituted by the army of martyred saints, a city with twelve gates symbolic of the twelve tribes and apostles, a city which was both temple and spouse of the Lamb. In this revelation the Jewish apocalyptic tradition was renewed and given Christian significance and, although its vivid imagery was to yield diverse interpretations, its unmistakable message was that the epoch stretching from Christ's Resurrection until his Second Coming was to be distinguished by bitter conflict between Babylon and Jerusalem.³¹

In the Eastern Church, however, the typological reasoning of the Apocalypse failed to capture the attention of theologians who were more concerned to discern the spiritual meaning of scripture by applying criteria taken from Platonic philosophy. It was typical of their approach that St John Damascene should have included biblical types within his Great Chain of Images, placing them between those images in scripture which denoted Divine Power and icons and other sacred objects. The examples of types that he mentioned were of such material objects as the Brazen Serpent made by Moses and the Ark of the Covenant, the one taken as referring to Christ and the other to Mary.³² By and large, Greek theologians more employed allegory, which is to say, moral or spiritual interpretation than genuine typology. Indeed, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260–c. 340) declared that the first patriarchs had possessed the one true religion, worshipping God and adhering to the dictates of natural morality. By contrast, the Mosaic dispensation sprang from the need to restrain the

Jews from idolatry by severe punishments. The value of the Old Testament chiefly consisted in its prophecy of Christ, whose Incarnation fulfilled the promise inherent in God's creation, and this marked a renewal of patriarchal religion. The conversion of Constantine and the establishment of a Christian empire was hence interpreted as the fulfilment of biblical prophecies to Abraham that in his seed all nations would be blessed, all human history and Christ's Incarnation thus reaching their culmination.³³

All this was a far cry from St Augustine (354–430), who, in his short treatise *On Catechizing the Uninstructed*, followed the first apostles in giving neophytes an outline of biblical history, pausing at each stage from Adam to Moses, to explain its Christian significance.³⁴ It was in his *City of God*, however, that St Augustine drew upon Revelation, St Paul and the apocalyptic books of the Old Testament to frame a dualistic vision of history. The typological basis of his theology of history was elucidated when he wrote: 'In the Old Testament the New lies hid; in the New Testament the meaning of the Old becomes clear.'³⁵ He thus read scripture not merely to note historical events, 'but events with prophetic meaning'. Thus Noah's ark was taken as a figure of the Christian Church, the sure refuge in the universal wreckage of humanity, and, more pointedly, the quarrel between Esau and Jacob over Isaac's birthright was taken as the type of Christians supplanting the Jews. But such interpretations were but incidental to his transformation of the obscure eschatological prophecies of the Apocalypse into a fully developed providential history of the cosmic conflict between Jerusalem and Babylon, the heavenly and earthly cities. He boldly identified the sequence of empires described in the Bible – Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Macedon – as embodiments of the earthly city and hence all dominated by pride and lust for dominion. Nor did he shrink from affirming that 'the city of Rome was founded to be a kind of second Babylon'.³⁶ By contrast, the biblical patriarchs and prophets, not to omit King David, represented the self-sacrificing virtues of those dominated by love of God. The strength of this typology was further illustrated when St Augustine depicted the City of God as wandering through the world in perpetual pilgrimage, like Israel in the desert, dependent on God for its survival. It followed that he did not endorse the Eusebian glorification of the Christian empire, since he asserted that all exercise of political power was tainted by its origin in the earthly city and hence accompanied by 'painful necessities' far removed from the impulses of Christian love. At the same time, he sought to defuse apocalyptic expectations by insisting that all the prophecies concerning the Messiah and the kingdom of God had been fulfilled with Christ's Incarnation, Passion and Resurrection. Dividing the history of the world into seven ages in imitation of the seven days of creation, he declared that Christ had inaugurated the sixth age, the equivalent to the fifth monarchy of Daniel, and that it would last until Christ's Second Coming.³⁷

It was in the late twelfth century that the full implications of typological interpretation were explored anew by Joachim di Fiore (c. 1135–1202), a Cistercian abbot of

Calabria, who argued that the history of Israel offered a complete prefiguration of Christian history, with each sequence divided into seven ages. He revised St Augustine's chronology by declaring that the sixth and penultimate age was only about to begin, and was to be an epoch of unparalleled conflict and expansion of the Christian faith, marked both by the appearance of Anti-Christ and by the preaching of two new orders of spiritual men. Superimposed upon this traditional scheme of seven ages was a grand Trinitarian sequence in which the first stage was the Mosaic dispensation presided over by God the Father, followed by the second stage initiated by Christ, but which was to make way for the third stage of the Holy Spirit, soon to begin during the turmoil of the sixth age. What was important here was not so much the details of Joachim's complex schemes, which were illustrated in diagrammatic 'figures' included in his texts, but rather his intellectual premise and method. In essence, he affirmed that contemporary events possessed an inner spiritual significance and that it was possible to discern their meaning by typological exegesis of Old Testament figures and events.³⁸ It was a method which derived from St Augustine, but which broke with the African Saint by its application to contemporary events and the immediate future. As such, it obviously had political potential and indeed was soon applied for the magnification of both kings and popes.

The tendency to confer theological significance upon contemporary events was strengthened by the charismatic personality of St Francis of Assisi and the sudden emergence of the mendicant orders. By precept and example St Francis inspired thousands of Christians to abandon all worldly entanglements and to embrace 'Our Lady Poverty' as their social ideal. As pilgrims and mendicants, the early friars embodied St Augustine's vision of the City of God as a band of travellers forever strangers in the earthly city. Moreover, when it became known that St Francis had experienced the divine infliction of stigmata on his suffering body, he was venerated as a second Christ. After his canonization the church at Assisi was decorated with the famous paintings by Giotto, which depict the principal moments of his life, including the miracles he had wrought. It was St Bonaventure, the Franciscan Order's leading theologian and master-general, who identified St Francis as the angel of the apocalypse who opened the seal of the sixth age, thus clearly placing the saint within the general frame of Joachite prophecy.³⁹ In later years the Spiritual branch of the Order was to claim that St Francis had inaugurated the third stage, that of the Holy Spirit.

By the fifteenth century, Western Europe was torn asunder by warfare, the plague, and a schism caused by rival claimants to the papacy. These events generated a widespread sense of crisis which was often accompanied by a craving for radical renewal. Joachite prophecy often took a political form, with the advent of a world emperor or an angelic pope canvassed as heaven's solution for current ills. At the same time, the growing power of the Ottoman Turks, which was to lead to the fall of Constantinople in 1454, was interpreted as a sign of the Anti-Christ. In a treatise on the papal schism,

St Vicente Ferrer (1350–1413), a Valencian Dominican, cited the Book of Daniel’s vision of four beasts threatening Israel as a prefiguration of the four schisms which had afflicted the Christian Church, identifying them successively as the Jews, the Saracens under Mahomet, the Greeks at Constantinople who denied the pope’s authority, and lastly, the rival claimants to the papacy. In 1398 Ferrer was granted a vision of Christ flanked by St Francis and St Dominic, in which he was charged with the task of preaching repentance and preparing the faithful for the end of the world. He spent the remainder of his life in missions, forming confraternities and encouraging his followers to practise self-flagellation as their penitence. Towards the end of his life he wrote to Benedict XIII asserting that if the preaching of St Francis and St Dominic had achieved spiritual renewal, the Orders they founded had fallen into decay, leaving Christendom in ruin, so that the advent of Anti-Christ and the end of the world could soon be expected.⁴⁰ As can be seen, the application of Joachim di Fiore’s method, which is to say, the interpretation of contemporary events by scriptural figures, could lead to radically different conclusions.

III

In his defence of holy images, St John Damascene affirmed that in addition to scripture the Church drew on the unwritten tradition which was manifest in its liturgy. There was, for example, no scriptural instruction on how baptism was to be administered or as to the form of the Eucharistic celebration. So also, nowhere was there any reference to the Trinity in the New Testament, or any definition of Christ as ‘one person with two natures’.⁴¹ If such considerations were advanced to justify veneration of icons, how much more could they have been cited concerning the deep veneration of the Virgin Mary that then characterized the Christian Church. In this case, there was indeed scriptural justification. At the Annunciation the angel Gabriel told Mary that: ‘The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore that which is to be born of thee shall be called holy, Son of God.’ There was here a possible reference to the Book of Exodus, where we read that the cloud, symbol of God, covered the Ark of the Covenant with its shadow and ‘the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle’. So also, when Mary went to the hills of Judah to visit her cousin Elizabeth, she was greeted as another Ruth, which was to say, bearing the child of the house of David. Her reply, later known as the Magnificat, was a highly wrought text, filled with echoes of the Old Testament, in part based on the song of Hannah, the once barren mother who was to bear the prophet and high priest Samuel, but also on reminiscences of the prophetess Judith and the general tendency of prophets to address Israel as a woman.⁴²

In the first instance, devotion to Mary derived from her role in the scheme of salvation. It was in the second century that St Irenaeus (c. 130–c. 200), bishop of Lyons, developed the implications of St Paul's definition of Christ as the second Adam so as to include Mary:

for Adam had necessarily to be restored to Christ, that mortality be absorbed in immortality, and Eve in Mary, that a virgin become the advocate of a virgin, should undo and destroy virginal disobedience by virginal obedience.⁴³

Once Mary was thus identified as the second Eve, then obviously the way was open for devotion to grow and scripture to be ransacked to celebrate her as both Virgin and Mother. Generally described as sinless, she was soon thought to have been taken up to heaven after her death by Christ. But her most glorious title derived from the exigencies of the bitter theological disputes that centred on the precise terms in which Christ could be defined as both God and man. It was in order to defend the doctrine of the Council of Ephesus (431) that Mary was audaciously acclaimed as the Mother of God, in Greek, Theotokos, and in Latin, Deipara.⁴⁴ Henceforth, there could be no doubting her central role in the economy of salvation.

Like other theologians, St Augustine interpreted Mary's role as analogous to that of the Church and, indeed, saw her as the prototype of the Church. In her reply to the angel Gabriel: 'Behold the handmaiden of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word', Mary had acted, so to say, as the first Christian. Moreover, St Augustine asserted that the Church was also the mother of Christ, which was to say, that through the actions of its members it brought forth Christ into the world, much as Mary had given birth to Christ in the flesh. Both Mary and the Church were virgins, in their essence uncorrupted by sin, and both the Church and Mary were animated by the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵ At much the same time as St Augustine, in the fifth century, Mary was also identified as the Woman of the Apocalypse. For in the antithesis of Jerusalem and Babylon, the role of the Church, the new Israel, was presented in chapter 12 under the symbolic form of a woman with child threatened by Satan:

And there appeared a great sign in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown with twelve stars: and she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered. And there appeared another sign in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads . . . And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels prevailed not . . . And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness.⁴⁶

Although the woman was generally identified as the type or figure of the Church, as both the new Israel and the new Jerusalem, some theologians also came to identify her as the Virgin Mary. In a text later ascribed to St Augustine, a contemporary of the African Saint wrote:

In the Apocalypse of John the Apostle it is written, that the dragon stood before the Woman who was ready to be delivered, that, when she should be delivered, he might devour her. Now none of you is ignorant that the dragon is the devil, and that by the woman is signified the Virgin Mary, who, herself all-pure, gave birth to our Head all-pure; who also in her own person showed forth a figure of the holy Church. For just as she, in giving birth to her Son, still remained a virgin, so too does the Church in all time give birth to His members without losing her virginity.⁴⁷

One consequence of this identification was that Mary was seen both as a protagonist in the perennial war of Jerusalem and Babylon and as sign and symbol of the Church. All these scriptural titles of Mary could be thus cited as referring to the Church, so that devotion to Mary also entailed devotion to the Church, which was to say, to use the terms of a later period, the mystical body of Christ.

In the Eastern Church it was no coincidence that the chief advocates of the cult of images were those theologians who also exalted devotion to the Mother of God. In his sermons on the Assumption of Mary, St John Damascene affirmed that 'she found an abyss of grace which kept her double virginity undefiled, her virginal soul no less spotless than her body'. He taught the doctrine of the Greek Church that after Mary had been placed in her tomb by the apostles, where she lay for three days, Christ himself descended to raise her up to heaven, body and soul. Here was a doctrine, the Dormition, which was to be commemorated in countless icons and was to form a principal feast in church liturgy. But St John Damascene also applied to Mary any number of scriptural types or figures, in which holy objects of the Old Testament were all seen as prefigurations of Mary's role:

Thou art the royal throne which angels surround, seeing upon it their very King and Lord. Thou art a spiritual Eden, holier and diviner than Eden of old. That Eden was the abode of the mortal Adam, whilst the Lord came down from heaven to dwell in thee. The ark foreshadowed thee who kept the seed of the new world. Thou didst bring forth Christ, the salvation of the world, who destroyed sin and its angry waves. The burning bush was a figure of thee, and the Tables of the Law, and the ark of the testament. The golden urn and candelabra, the table and the flowering rod of Aaron were significant types of thee.⁴⁸

Obviously, what this plethora of symbols had in common was that all referred to Mary's maternal role in bringing Christ into the world. Other figures not mentioned in this passage were the ladder seen by Jacob in Bethlehem and the closed door of the



*Ill.^{mo} Excell.^{to} Viro Joanni Baptista
 Nomini tuo Ill.^{to} et Excell.^{to} Dñe qui nobilissimas
 Divi Lucæ imaginem Picturæ patrōni meritissime
 in pueri Iesus amplexu pingentem Lucam pinxit
 exemplar hæcæ meis ad-umbratum lineis, humillimi.*



*Colberto Regis a Secretis Status &c.
 Picturæ artes, et Academias protegis et exornas
 dico, et sacro Pinxit Lucas Desperam Virginem
 Raphael. diuinum sanè opus, diuina mens disinui
 deuotique animi mei monumentum.*

S. Langlois Roma. Gallie Academiæ alumnus

Plate 1 St Luke painting the Virgin Mary

Temple seen by Ezekiel. But of these figures, the most commonly repeated and the most powerful was the acclamation of Mary as the new Ark of the Covenant, with Christ in her womb as the equivalent of the Tables of Law. But she was also commonly described as the burning bush seen by Moses on Mount Horeb, since God appeared and spoke in the midst of fire without consuming the bush. Finally, the symbol of Aaron's calling as high priest had been that his rod alone among the rods of the tribes of Israel had flowered, a figure in which Mary was the rod and Christ the flower.

Here is no place to describe the ever-growing devotion to the Virgin Mary which characterized medieval civilization and which was expressed in countless prayers, poems, paintings and treatises. What requires emphasis, however, is that in the late Middle Ages particular images of Mary, mainly statues but including some paintings, became the objects of intense devotion and were venerated for the miracles performed in their sanctuaries. If some of these cult images were attributed to St Luke, others were thought to possess a miraculous, even a heavenly origin. Among the most spectacular of these Marian devotions was the Holy House of Loreto, a small chapel no more than thirty-one feet long and thirteen wide, built of rough stone and brick, which was assumed to be the self-same house in Nazareth where Mary was born and where the Annunciation and Conception of Jesus occurred. According to later accounts it was in 1291 that an angelic host had transported the house from Nazareth, first to Tersato in Dalmatia and then to Loreto, situated close to the Adriatic Sea at Ancona. Although there is evidence of devotion to a smoke-blackened image within this chapel since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it was only after the publication in 1472 of the narrative of its miraculous origin that it was recognized as the premier Marian shrine in Italy. In 1507 Pope Julius II placed the sanctuary under papal jurisdiction and thereafter commissioned leading artists to 'clothe' the chapel in a classical marble frame, decorated with skilfully wrought reliefs depicting the Virgin's life and accompanied by figures of sybils and prophets. In this Renaissance form the Santa Casa of Loreto was to attract countless pilgrims during the ensuing centuries, the devotion vigorously promoted by the Jesuits who established a college in the town.⁴⁹

Theological justification for the cult of Marian images was provided by Blessed Amadeus of Portugal (Joannes Menesius da Silva, 1431–82), a Franciscan visionary and founder of a reformed congregation of his Order in Italy. In his *New Apocalypse*, he revealed that the archangel Gabriel had confirmed to him the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception, thereby affording heavenly approbation for a dogma already sustained by Duns Scotus and other Franciscans. But it was his prophecy of the imminent advent of an angelic pope which attracted influential interest, since he foresaw that this pope would unite the Eastern and Latin Churches and inaugurate a new, transfigured epoch in the history of Christendom. It was in his eighth and last 'rapture' that Amadeus portrayed Mary informing the apostles that she would be 'bodily present' in her holy images until the end of the world, her presence made manifest

by the miracles she would perform through them. Although Amadeus' writings were condemned as heretical or misguided by orthodox theologians, in Spain several Franciscans defended him, and St Peter of Alcántara sponsored the publication of an extended commentary on his work, thereby diffusing knowledge of revelations which hitherto had been known only to those who had access to manuscript copies.⁵⁰

IV

Late medieval devotional excesses provoked the sharp criticism of Christian humanists such as Desiderius Erasmus (1466/9–1536), who condemned the popular practice of praying to individual saints for particular assistance, arguing that such forms of piety were 'not a great deal different from the superstitions of the ancients'. It was not so much the practices in themselves as the attitudes which inspired them that he condemned, since all devotion should be directed towards Christ, through whom men were led to God, abandoning material things in favour of the spiritual world. He asserted: 'Charity does not consist in many visits to churches, in many prostrations before the statues of saints, in the lighting of candles.' Instead of such practices, one should imitate the virtues of the saints and seek God in prayer. So also, 'when you venerate the image of Christ in the paintings and other works of art that portray him, think how much more you ought to revere that portrait of His Mind that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit has placed in Holy Writ'. In effect, Erasmus advocated a simplified, evangelical Christianity which would replace the complications of scholastic theology and popular devotions with a religion based on scripture and the teachings of the early Fathers. Although later condemned by the Counter-Reformation popes, the writings of Erasmus offered a model of Christian humanism that was destined to emerge again in Catholic circles in the late eighteenth century.⁵¹

With the Reformation, the cult of images was brought to an end in all parts of Europe where the new Churches prevailed. Protestantism was a religion of the word, be it heard as scripture, sermon or hymn, so that the ear and its apprehension, which Greek theologians had thought inferior to the eye and its vision, now gained primacy of esteem. In the event, the Reformation was fired by a 'revolutionary iconoclasm', in which mobs invaded churches and smashed images, altars and windows. The Mosaic injunction against idols was taken literally and church walls, once covered with scenes taken from the Bible, were whitewashed, and decorated only with the inscription of scriptural texts. Henceforth, there was to be no further practice of pilgrimage, no invocation of saints and their images, no more prayers to the Virgin Mary, and no more miracle-mongering and apparitions. Equally important, the Reformers condemned the whole system of allegorical exegesis of the Bible and sought to bring in a literal reading of scripture. However, although Luther at first doubted whether the Book of

the Apocalypse was canonical, the exigencies of Church politics soon led him to accept a revised form of typology in which the papacy was denounced as the Harlot of Babylon and as Anti-Christ. The Augustinian antithesis of Jerusalem and Babylon was adopted to express the difference between Protestantism and Catholicism. Indeed, Luther and other Reformers were persuaded that the end of the world was imminent and that the epoch in which they lived was to be characterized by the final battle between the new Israel and Anti-Christ. Among the more radical Protestants, such as the Anabaptists, the Joachite doctrine that the Age of the Holy Spirit had arrived or was about to arrive enjoyed wide circulation.⁵² In effect, the more Protestants relied on the Bible as their religious mainstay, the more inclined were they to accept the projection of typological interpretation into the present and the future.

The reaction of the Catholic Church to this assault was slow and hesitant. But at session 25 of the Council of Trent (1545–63), the traditional veneration of holy images was reaffirmed, albeit together with a warning against superstition and a demand for careful regulation by bishops of all cults of images and relics. The precise wording of the decree reflected traditional doctrine:

And they must also teach that images of Christ, the virgin mother of God and the other saints should be set up and kept, particularly in churches, and that due honour and reverence is owed to them, not because some divinity or power is believed to lie in them as reason for the cult, or because anything is to be expected from them, or because confidence should be placed in images as was done by pagans of old; but because the honour showed to them is referred to the original which they represent: thus, through the images which we kiss and before which we uncover our heads and go down on our knees, we give adoration to Christ and veneration to the saints, whose likeness they bear. And this has been approved by the decrees of councils, especially the second council of Nicaea, against the iconoclasts.

As can be observed, the classic defence of St Basil the Great was here incorporated into the governing statutes of the Counter-Reformation Church.⁵³ What has been less observed is that the works of St John Damascene and, to a lesser extent, St Theodore of Studios were repeatedly printed in Latin editions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵⁴ The effect of their influence was to modify the simple Tridentine doctrine of holy images as mere representations of heavenly originals.

The Council of Trent also reaffirmed the doctrine of the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, stating that:

After the consecration of the bread and wine, our lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is truly, really and substantially contained in the propitious sacrament of the holy eucharist under the appearance of those things which are perceptible to the senses.

It followed from this doctrine, which was best called transubstantiation, that all Christians should 'reverently express for this holy sacrament the worship of adoration which is due to the true God'. Thus, whereas images were to be honoured and venerated, the Eucharist was to be adored. And the Council commended the feast of Corpus Christi in which the Eucharist was carried in public procession through the streets.⁵⁵ It was thus destined to figure in the post-Tridentine calendar as a major feast, second only to the celebrations of Holy Week, and marked by processions in which all the institutions of the Church, the religious orders, the chapters of canons, and the confraternities, paraded through the streets.

The only typological theme which can be found in the Tridentine decrees arose from the Council's insistence that, contrary to the Protestant affirmation, Christ instituted the Eucharist as a rite of sacrifice:

For after celebrating the old passover which the whole people of the children of Israel offered in memory of their departure from Egypt, he instituted a new passover, namely the offering of himself by the church through its priests under visible signs, in memory of his own passage from this world to the Father, when he redeemed us by the shedding of his blood, rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us to his kingdom.

This was prefaced by the citation of the Letter to the Hebrews, where Christ was defined as a high priest of the order of Melchisedech, whose bloody sacrifice on the cross should be represented in the manner of the Last Supper.⁵⁶

To counter the Protestant tenet that their church was a new Israel liberated from a Babylonian captivity, the Catholic Church resolutely defended the institutions and practices of medieval religion. But it also sought to deploy the intellectual and aesthetic achievements of the Italian Renaissance to strengthen its prestige. Even before the Reformation, Julius II had not only covered the Holy House of Loreto with marble walls, but also initiated the destruction of St Peter's, a basilica which had been funded by Constantine the Great, in order to replace it with the majestic edifice designed by Bramante. Thereafter, all the resources of Renaissance architecture, painting and sculpture, later to be transmuted into mannerist and baroque styles, were employed to build and renovate churches across Catholic Europe. If Protestantism was a religion of the word, Catholicism remained, or became, a religion of the image. But there was a price to be paid for the adoption of this classical culture. Renaissance art, so it has been argued, robbed holy images of their religious power, since they became mere objects of aesthetic enjoyment. Virgins painted by Raphael or Murillo were admired for their beauty; they rarely induced prayer.⁵⁷ So too, in reaction to the Protestant emphasis on scripture, theologians presented the Catholic religion as the fulfilment of all humanity's quest to attain knowledge of the Godhead. Typology was abandoned in favour of

allegory, with the religion of antiquity, be it of Greece or Egypt, scoured for symbolic anticipations of Christian revelation.

Nowhere were the cultural trends which determined the religious destiny of the Catholic Church in this epoch more apparent than in the Company of Jesus. Its founder, St Ignatius Loyola (1491–1556), drew upon late medieval spirituality to devise his *Spiritual Exercises*, where in good Spanish fashion he enjoined the initiate to enlist in the service of Christ, the lord of the universe, in much the same spirit as a loyal subject might follow his king into battle against the infidel. But he was then called upon to picture in his mind's eye 'a vast plain embracing the whole region of Jerusalem, where the supreme Captain-General of the good is Christ our Lord: and another plain, in the region of Babylon, where the chief of the enemy is Lucifer'. In this grand Augustinian figure of the Two Cities, the battle was fought between 'the two standards', signifying the opposing values of riches, honour and pride as against poverty, shame and humility. In his 'Rules for thinking with the Church', St Ignatius also exhorted his Jesuit followers to maintain the devotional practices of medieval Catholicism by encouraging veneration of saints' relics, candles and holy images, the frequent hearing of mass and reception of communion, and the practice of pilgrimage.⁵⁸

In the seventeenth century, however, Jesuits such as Athanasius Kircher (1601–80) sought to reconcile neo-platonic, Hermetic speculation with scientific research so as to frame a cosmological synthesis in which the Catholic religion would be defined as the fulfilment of the entire philosophical and theological quest of humanity. The spirit of that enterprise was expressed in the declaration that 'there is no doubt that not only the prophets, apostles and other holy men of God, but also the Gentile poets, priests and prophets were inspired by this divine *numen* (the Holy Spirit) and made prophets of the birth of the Eternal Word in the flesh'.⁵⁹ In effect, complex Alexandrine allegory replaced any simple reliance on scriptural typology. Moreover, when the Jesuits came to defend the cult of images against Protestant attack, they had recourse to the works of St John Damascene, St Theodore of Studios and St Basil the Great. Although they followed St Ignatius in actively promoting devotion to these images as a medieval legacy, they also magnified and interpreted this cult by appeal to the neo-platonic theology of Eastern Church Fathers. Here is a theme we shall explore in Mexico.