

## The Virgin of Guadalupe in Byzantine Vesture: A Theological Analysis of the Hymnography of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe

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In 1999, the Byzantine Catholic Metropolitan Church of Pittsburgh added the commemoration of Our Lady of Guadalupe to its calendar. Celebrated on December 12, this feast recalls the Virgin Mary's apparition to St. Juan Diego in the sixteenth century, and the miraculous appearance of an image/icon of the Theotokos on a cactus-cloth poncho worn by the saint, now enshrined in the major basilica dedicated to the Virgin in Mexico. At first glance, the adoption of this new feast from the Roman rite appears to present a problem for the Eastern Catholic Churches, who, on the basis of several Vatican documents, have been asked to recover their "ancestral traditions" and to purge their rite from Latinizations, in the spirit of Pope Pius X's dictum addressed to early Russian Catholic missionaries, "nec plus, nec minus, nec aliter."<sup>1</sup> What, then, is the purpose of adding this seemingly Western feast to the calendar of an Eastern Church, if such an addition violates explicit principles of liturgical reform for Eastern Catholics?<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Stadnik, "Nec Plus, Nec Minus, Nec Aliter: A Brief History of the Russian Byzantine Catholic Church and the Russian Catholics," *Nec Plus.docx* (Academia.edu), 1999, [https://www.academia.edu/38444720/Nec\\_Plus.docx](https://www.academia.edu/38444720/Nec_Plus.docx).

<sup>2</sup> "[Eastern Catholics] should attain to an ever greater knowledge and a more exact use of [their liturgical heritage], and, if in their regard they have fallen

Against this interpretation, I would like to offer the Byzantine office composed for the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe as an example of the organic progress and flourishing of the Byzantine tradition in North America.<sup>3</sup> Liturgical hymnography being the privileged locus of Byzantine theology, in the hymnography of this feast one sees a felicitous engagement of the Byzantine liturgical tradition with the apparition of the Mother of God on the hill of Tepeyac, in present-day Mexico City. The office itself contributes fresh theological and missiological significance to the Virgin of Guadalupe, Patroness of the Americas, from an Eastern Christian perspective. To support this appraisal, I will proceed in three steps. First, I will discuss the history of how the feast came to be included in the calendar of the Byzantine Catholic Metropolia. Second, I will examine the sources that lie behind the liturgical office: the *Nican Mopohua* (the most widely read early account of the apparition), the patristic tradition of exegesis, and the tropes of Byzantine hymnography. Third, I will offer some conclusions about what the text can contribute to further theologizing about the Patroness of the Americas.

### 1. *Inclusion on the Calendar*

Pope John Paul II declared December 12 as the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe during his homily given at the Basilica

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short owing to contingencies of times and persons, they should take steps to return to their ancestral traditions.” *Orientalium ecclesiarum*, 6. See also *Unitatis redintegratio*, 14–16; *Instruction for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions of the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1996), paragraphs 20–21, *passim*.

<sup>3</sup> See *Orientalium ecclesiarum*, 2: “for it is the mind of the Catholic Church that each individual Church or Rite should retain its traditions whole and entire and likewise that it should adapt its way of life to the different needs of time and place.” On principles of organic development in Eastern Catholic development, see for example, *Instruction for Applying the Liturgical Prescriptions*, 12: “Any renewal, in fact, should be coherent and agree with sound tradition, in such a way that the new norms do not appear as an extraneous body forced on a composite, but blossoming as though spontaneously from already existing norms.”

of Our Lady of Guadalupe on January 23, 1999.<sup>4</sup> This was largely in response to a request made by the Bishops during the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops, held in November and December of 1997. Metropolitan Judson Procyk of Pittsburgh was present at the occasion and reportedly came back from Mexico moved by the experience. In a meeting with his theological consultants, he expressed his desire to join the American Roman Catholic Church in adding the December 12 feast to the Byzantine calendar.

The metropolitan's openness to introducing a feast in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe can be attributed to two factors. First, John Paul II understood Our Lady of Guadalupe largely as a symbol of the initial and continued evangelization of the Americas: speaking with the American bishops, he described her as an image of the "first and new evangelization."<sup>5</sup> This squared well with Metropolitan Judson's own

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<sup>4</sup>*Homily of John Paul II: Apostolic Journey to America; The Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico City, Saturday, 23 January 1999*, The Holy See, 1999, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1999/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_19990123\\_mexico-guadalupe.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1999/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19990123_mexico-guadalupe.html).

<sup>5</sup> "Throughout the continent, from the time of the first evangelization, the presence of the Mother of God has been strongly felt, thanks to the efforts of the missionaries. In their preaching, the Gospel was proclaimed by presenting the Virgin Mary as its highest realization. From the beginning – invoked as Our Lady of Guadalupe – Mary, by her motherly and merciful figure, was a great sign of the closeness of the Father and of Jesus Christ, with whom she invites us to enter into communion.

The appearance of Mary to the native Juan Diego on the hill of Tepeyac in 1531 had a decisive effect on evangelization. Its influence greatly overflows the boundaries of Mexico, spreading to the whole Continent. America, which historically has been, and still is, a melting-pot of peoples, has recognized in the *mestiza* face of the Virgin of Tepeyac, in Blessed Mary of Guadalupe, an impressive example of a perfectly inculturated evangelization. Consequently, not only in Central and South America, but in North America as well, the Virgin of Guadalupe is venerated as Queen of all America.

With the passage of time, pastors and faithful alike have grown increasingly conscious of the role of the Virgin Mary in the evangelization of America. In the prayer composed for the Special Assembly for America of the Synod of Bishops, Holy Mary of Guadalupe is invoked as "Patroness of all America and Star of the first and new evangelization." In view of this, I welcome with joy the proposal of the Synod Fathers that the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother and Evangelizer of America, be celebrated throughout the continent on December 12. It is my heartfelt hope that she,