

With zeal matching that of the Spaniards seeking wealth through discovery, mining, or agriculture, the first missionaries worked feverishly to salvage the souls of people they considered to be indigenous heathens. In 1521, twelve Franciscan missionaries (a number sent in honor of Jesus and his loyal disciples) walked into Mexico City. Cortés expressed their significance when he received them by dropping to a knee and kissing the hems of their robes. Evangelization under the Franciscans resulted in mass baptisms and giving Spanish names to indigenous peoples. All the major religious orders soon sent missionaries to compete in these evangelization campaigns. Once Ignatius Loyola and his followers organized the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits (as they were called) swarmed into Mexico to convert and educate the native peoples as well. Leaving aside the niceties of the Roman Catholic faith, the missionaries rushed to save souls by baptism, signaling conversion. Only the Dominicans approached conversion from the opposite position, delaying baptism until the prospective convert had some knowledge of the catechism.

The long-standing efforts included the use of dramatic performances, dances, and fiestas to make biblical and Christianization stories come alive in the indigenous imagination. How much the indigenous peoples appropriated Spanish Catholicism and used it as a cover to continue their own beliefs and how much the indigenous and European religious practices resulted in some combination of both religions remains unclear. Certainly some Indians identified the Christian Trinity and saints with the Aztec gods, and church leaders reported the continuation of Aztec religious practices, even some sacrifices. One hypothesis argues that indigenous peoples mastered a system of parallel religious practices and the ability to switch codes of behavior as it was necessary. Whatever the situation, the population of Mexico became and remains, at least in name and outward practice, Roman Catholic.

The most dramatic and enduring event of the evangelization era was the miracle, if one is a believer, of the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The legend reports the appearance of the Virgin to an

indigenous shepherd boy, Juan Diego. Juan Diego reported it to Archbishop Juan Zúmarra, who dismissed it as the hyperactive imagination of a recent convert and asked for indisputable evidence of the miracle. The Virgin appeared three more times to Juan Diego, and twice more the archbishop rejected the story. During the Virgin's fourth appearance, she had the boy take roses wrapped in her cloak to the archbishop. The cleric opened the cloak to discover not the roses Juan Diego expected but instead the image of the Virgin emblazoned on the cloak. The Virgin in this avocation appeared with physical features similar to the indigenous peoples, with coarse dark hair, dark eye color, and dark pigmentation.

Following this appearance on December 12, 1531, the cult surrounding the Virgin of Guadalupe grew slowly for a few years and then became more important. Today skeptics point to some evidence that the cloak was painted with indigenous pigments by a member of the Indian painters' guild called Pablo. Nevertheless, now the Virgin is the patron saint of Mexico and of Latin America. The image of the Virgin, along with the eagle, is the ubiquitous and popular symbol of Mexico.<sup>13</sup>