

The Role of Ritual in Efforts to Decolonize the Catholic Church: The Guadalupe Pilgrims and the Aztec God-Bearers

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This essay is an attempt to listen to those for whom academic theology has been an exclusivist community unable or unwilling to consider their insights and has delegitimized their ways of reaching the Divine. By comparing the pilgrimage ritual of the Guadalupanos to that of the so-called Aztec God-bearers, the role of the body, and not only words and written language, comes to the surface as a valid expression of theological thought which contemplates the relationship of humans to the Divine.

Keywords: Guadalupe, Mary, Aztec, Mexico City, ritual, pilgrimage, decolonial

Every year, devotion to Our Lady of Guadalupe includes a pilgrimage of millions of Catholics to the Hill of Tepeyac in modern day Mexico City. There now stands a basilica dedicated to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Inside hangs the *tilma* of St. Juan Diego with the appearance of the Virgin Mary imprinted on it. Many of the rituals that take place to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe, both in Mexico City and beyond, have an emphasis on the material dimension. *La Virgen de Guadalupe* is an embodiment of the transcendent, an eruption of the transcendent on Earth.¹ She blurs the line between transcendent and earthly and, instead, creates a dynamism, which becomes a “fluid duality.”² Although the Catholic Church does not teach that Mary is a deity or a member of the Trinity, her role as Mother of God is a potent symbol and is intimately related to the Trinity. Guadalupe’s people are devoted to her as a mother concerned with the well-being of her children.³ One of the most physically notable rituals here is the carrying of images and icons of *La Virgen* on one’s back while making the pilgrimage from one’s own hometown to Mexico City. This ritual, when taken seriously and studied thoroughly, presents us with a possibility of decolonization.

Decolonial thought is born from the struggle by global social movements for liberation in their resistance against systemic violence caused by decades of colonialism and neocolonialism. Decolonial theology resists more specifically the forms of hegemonic religion which have contributed to this system. Raúl Zibechi refers to present-day capitalism as an “extractive society,” which supports “accumulation by plunder,” and sustains cycles of violence against colonized bodies.⁴ He refers to it as a society and not just an extractive economy because this violence is available in all aspects of society, not just the economy. In religious communities, those who are deemed unworthy—the poor, the marginalized—are left out of the power wielding circles and their practices are considered heterodoxy. Those who determine the boundaries of orthodoxy gain social and political power (accumulation) at the expense of these bodies and the sacredness of their practices (plunder). José De Jesús Legorreta Zepeda, in the same number of

¹ Virgilio Elizondo, *Guadalupe: Mother of a New Creation*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997) 125.

² Sylvia Marcos, “Mesoamerican Women’s Indigenous Spirituality: Decolonizing Religious Beliefs.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 25, no. 2 (2009): 25–45. <https://doi.org/10.2979/FSR.2009.25.2.25>.

³ *Ibid.* 73, 129.

⁴ Raúl Zibechi, “Accumulation Through Robbery and Systemic Violence.” *Concilium*, no. 384 (2020): 15

Concilium, speaks of “an ecclesiology of emergent communities.” He explains that this theological analysis of religious community is aimed at “recognizing and making visible [the] diverse communities inhabited by the divine *Ruah* [Holy Spirit].” Theologically, the sites where communities have resisted absolute power of religion become “sites of epiphany,” according to Legorreta Zepeda.⁵ They are emerging, therefore, because they give way to new ways of thinking past the violence of the modern age. The history of the Roman Catholic Church has meant that it has become a religious home to generations of both the colonizer and the colonized. That diversity of experiences, however, that has been homogenized by years of extractive religion. The task of decolonizing the Roman Catholic Church’s ecclesiology is a serious one and cannot be left to a case of inevitability.

According to Debora Tonelli, decolonial theology will require dialogue between parties of colonized and colonizers. It is a process that works towards reconciliation of the past, which is important, but also has a constructive goal of building new identities and creating new roles for all people.⁶ The role of ritual in this dialogue is one of paramount importance that assures that power structures are able to be overcome. Non-written or traditionally textual ways of communication help us stretch, bend, and perhaps eventually break Western categories of epistemology. This essay is therefore an attempt to recognize the diversity of experiences, especially of those for whom the Roman Catholic Church has been a force of “accumulation by plunder”. By comparing the ritual of the Guadalupanos to that of the so-called Aztec God-bearers, the role of the body, and not only words and written language, is acknowledged as a valid and understandable expression of theological thought which contemplates the relationship of humans to the Divine.

The Role of the Ritual

Historian of religion Jennifer Scheper Hughes makes a comparative observation between two rituals: that of the Virgin-carrying pilgrims and that of the Aztec *teomamaque*, or God-bearers.⁷ These Azteca peoples, she explains, also carried relics of their deities on their backs when making their way from their original homeland.⁸ They are religious leaders and priests who became walking altars whose responsibility it was to carry bundles given to them by the *teteo*, or gods, on their backs. What we know about these *tlaquimilolli* (sacred bundles) that they carried derives mostly from artistic depictions of migrations that make up the mythology of the Aztec people.⁹

⁵ José De Jesús Legorreta Zepeda. “Diverse Communities Inhabited” *Concilium*, no. 384 (2020): 86

⁶ Debora Tonelli, *Decolonial Theology and Changing the Global Church* (Georgetown University Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, September 23, 2020).

<https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/decolonial-theology-and-changing-the-global-church>

⁷ Jennifer Scheper Hughes, “God-Bearers on Pilgrimage to Tepeyac: A Scholar of Religion Encounters the Material Dimensions of Marian Devotion in Mexico” *Religion and the Arts* 18, no. 1–2 (January 2014): 156–83.

⁸ A note on language control: I will use, interchangeably, the words Azteca and Mexica peoples because here we are not discussing in detail the ethnography of the peoples, although they are different terms. Nahuatl is also a term often used to denote those who speak Nahuatl, beyond just the Aztec peoples whose myths are discussed here.

⁹ Hughes, “God-Bearers on Pilgrimage to Tepeyac.” The term *tlaquimilolli* (sacred bundles) has been borrowed from Dr. David Carrasco.

We know that these sacred bundles were reserved for the priests, and granted a sort of prestige, honor, and status to the Aztec *teomamaque*.

It is my further argument that understanding ritual, necessarily through an interdisciplinary lens, is a key part of decolonizing the Catholic Church—because ritual comes from those for whom theology is not an intellectual endeavor, but a way of life, a practice of being. Here Alfred Schutz’s understanding of religion—not as theoretical, but as practices existing in a social world, is important.¹⁰ Rituals are theology performed not as a theoretical pursuit, but as a social one. They are inherently relational and are, therefore, ways that whole communities become aware of their own reality as a people instead of as individuals.¹¹ James Jasper puts it like this: “Rituals are embodiments, at salient times and places, of the beliefs of a group.”¹² Ritual gives access to a shared belief system that draws on the multiple, simultaneous realities of its participants and is a form of self-communication. If theology is, therefore, to engage the realities of those for whom academic theology is neither possible nor attractive, ritual is key and ethnographic study becomes a primary source of understanding religion. Lived religion and the study of it receives some primacy.

The two rituals—of the Guadalupanos and of the Aztec god-bearers—have striking resemblances. A comparative study of the theology that they reveal helps us to make sense of both their uniqueness and similarities. According to Catherine Cornille, comparative theology helps a theologian understand her own theology better and build on it from a place of interconnectedness with other people and faith traditions.¹³ In this way, comparative theology is uniquely equipped as a form of decolonial theology because it takes the Catholic theologian beyond herself and her official teachings to encounter without judgment the sets of beliefs that make up other community’s understandings of self. It allows her to critique the study of her own religion in aspects that might be deemphasized or entirely occulted without comparison. This gives her tools to challenge hegemonic epistemologies or methodologies. In doing this, the goal is to construct one’s own theology with a broader understanding of multiple relevant insights.

The body is an essential part of ritual and therefore becomes a place of knowing oneself and God/Other. In the pilgrimage ritual, Guadalupan devotees never erase their own bodies, but rather, as Hughes writes, “the body of the devotee becomes fused with the body of the Virgin.”¹⁴ In this way, even in the pain and sacrifice of carrying a heavy weight on their back, they do not humiliate or belittle, but give due weight to their bodies as *worthy*—not simply of dignity, but of responsibility and of a certain power. Their bodies not only matter, they are sacred.

¹⁰ James V. Spickard, “Experiencing Religious Rituals: A Schutzian Analysis of Navajo Ceremonies.” *Sociology of Religion* 52, no. 2 (1991): 191–204. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3710963>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² James Jordan, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements*. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998), 184.

¹³ Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*. First edition. (Hoboken: Wiley, 2020)

¹⁴ Hughes, “God-Bearers on Pilgrimage to Tepeyac,” 168.

Comparison

Unlike the altar of the Day of the Dead, the practice of the Guadalupanos is not an example of syncretism—as it is difficult, perhaps impossible (although it is beyond the scope of this study to say so definitively) to trace a direct line from the *teomamaque* to the Guadalupanos. Still, Hughes’ poignant observation acts as a comparison between the pre- and post-colonial society. The similarities of these two rituals are both physical or material *and* theological in nature. The two rituals take place in the same geographical location: now present-day south-central Mexico and its capital city—a region now dramatically different in both physical and political status, with the largest shift coming after the arrival of Europeans. Our Lady of Guadalupe is an iteration of a localized patroness, specifically for the Mexican, and eventually Latin American, people. She is carried from one place to another place where the Divine has given a sign of their participation in the people’s history. The *teomamaque* too migrated from their place of origin with localized gods searching for a sign of the Divine. The starkest contrast is of course that the people who once bore the deity on their back as religious leaders, priests, and mystics in their community are now those who suffer the most brutal consequences of the global capitalist system. Tenochtitlan, which was the center of the vast Aztec Empire, now lies in the shadow of the “dark side of democracy.”¹⁵

The city at the center of the Aztec Empire is said to be a model of the city from which the Aztecs’ ancestors came to it from—Aztlán. According to the legend, the Azteca people emerged from the Seven Caves to settle in Aztlán.¹⁶ However, upon offending their deity Huitzilopochtli by cutting down a forbidden tree, they were forced to leave Aztlán in search of a new land that would be shown to them by a divine signal. That divine signal came for the Mexica people in the form of a cactus growing out of a rock and an eagle perched on that rock.¹⁷ Tenochtitlan’s origin story is therefore a story of migration, of banishment from a people’s origins to a land that is promised to them, to a land where the Divine communicates something to them.

In the depictions of multiple migration stories, we find evidence for the *teomamaque* and their *tlaquimilolli*—these sacred bundles the god-bearers carried with them. These sacred bundles were made up of the posthumous remains of deities including ashes, bones, and clothing.¹⁸ The importance of the *tlaquimilolli*, according to historians of religion Molly Bassett and Guilhem Oliver, is difficult to overstate.¹⁹ Both of these authors point to the observations of Franciscan missionary Andrés Olmos, as told by his colleague Geronimo de Mendieta, regarding the Aztecs’

¹⁵ Phrase borrowed from Michael Mann’s study on ethnic cleansing and violence on a global level titled *The Dark Side of Democracy*.

¹⁶ David Carrasco, *A Very Short Introduction: The Aztecs*. (London: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19. This is, of course, recognizable as the image on the modern-day Mexican flag.

¹⁸ Molly H. Bassett, “Wrapped in Cloth, Clothed in Skins: Aztec Tlaquimilolli (Sacred Bundles) and Deity Embodiment,” *History of Religions* 53, no. 4 (2014): 381.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

great reverence for these bundles, which seemed to be filled with stone figures and sticks, material from the revered Earth.²⁰

Although it has been difficult for scholars to pinpoint more precisely what Olmos was referring to in these bundles, the use of them in several important rituals tells us that they were important; their origin myths tell us more about why that is as well. The mytho-history of the Mexica people told the story of self-sacrificing gods who would leave behind relics for their devotees that they might use them as a sign of their friendship. In at least one narrative, gods bartered with their own lives to convince the sun to move across the sky. Their clothes were left behind and used to wrap up their bones, hearts, and ashes into sacred bundles. The goddess Itzpapalotl’s *tlaquimilolli* contained a shiny white flint which was said to have been carried into battle by the god Mixcoatl, and is responsible for his great victory. Under the reign of Moctezuma, in about 1398–1469, after an attack on a rival peoples, the bundle was trapped in the burning temple of Mixcoatl. There are a series of exchanges begging for the embodiment of the deity. A warrior runs in to save the bundle of relics from the burning temple. Not only do these stories emphasize how important these sacred bundles are, they also reveal something about the importance of their carriers, the *teomamaque*.²¹

Oliver says that at least one of the important functions of the *tlaquimilolli* was that they gave the *teomamaque* a connection to their deities. He uses the example, firstly, of the bundle of Huitzilopochtli, already mentioned above, which spoke through the *teomamaque* to the people as they made their way out of Aztlan. The bundle of Tezcatlipoca also consisted of a wrapped mirror, which guided specifically the Tetzcoacan peoples in what is said to have been a human voice.²² Bassett writes that, “In a very real sense, the composite materials of *tlaquimilolli* both constituted the teotl’s [the god’s] body and made it recognizable.”²³ She writes further that they “emerged in the immediate aftermath of the gods’ sacrificial deaths, and insofar as they contained hearts, stick bodies, and skins tied in the teotl’s clothing, they represented the god and regenerated his/her life in the community.”²⁴ The Aztec god-bearers, therefore, transformed their bodies into platforms through which gods spoke to their peoples. The connection of the community with the deity depended on the carrying of these sacred bundles, controlled by the *teomamaque*, for the sake of the entire community.

In 1519, the *teomamaque* and the great Aztec Empire, an empire known for its brutality against other neighboring peoples, met its most lethal threat in the form of the Catholic Spaniards. Those who make their way to the Basilica in Mexico City every year, along with many others around the globe, believe that it was only 12 years after the Spanish invasion, in 1531, that *La Virgen* appeared to a man by the name of Juan Diego, an Aztec and a recent

²⁰ Ibid. Bassett quotes here the documents of Geronimo de Mendieta, who is referring to Andrés de Olmos. The text is only now being recovered and is not readily available. If it were, I would quote from it more extensively and with more context.

²¹ Bassett, “Wrapped in Cloth.”

²² Guilhem Oliver, “The Sacred Bundles and the Coronation of the Aztec King in Mexico-Tenochtitlan,” in *Sacred Bundles: Ritual Acts of Wrapping and Binding in Mesoamerica*, ed. Julia Guernsey and Kent Reilly III (Barnardville, NC: Boundary End Archaeology Research Center, 2006).

²³ Bassett, “Wrapped in Cloth,” 399.

²⁴ Ibid., 384.

convert to Catholicism. The canonization of Saint Juan Diego by the Catholic Magisterium in 1990 by Pope John Paul II was not a novelty, but simply a verification for the Mexican peoples of their closeness to God. Hispanic Theologian Virgilio Elizondo explains that the attention the Guadalupe has gotten in theology and by the Church in more modern times is by no means what makes her powerful. Instead, the mythology “is powerful because it lives in the minds and the hearts of the people.”²⁵ It is this that propels so many people a year to walk from hundreds of miles away with icons on their backs.

Alinka Echeverría photographed the pilgrims making their way up to Tepeyac. While they were walking, she set up her equipment on the trail off to the side and asked permission to photograph the pilgrims against a white backdrop. She named the series of photographs *The Road to Tepeyac*.²⁶ The collection provides a unique view of the material aspects of the ritual because, as Echeverría pointed out to an interviewer, the white backdrop does not allow the viewer to objectify the pilgrim. Instead, the starkness of the image against the backdrop focuses the viewer on the icon itself and sets up the body of the Guadalupano as an essential requirement to view the sacred object.²⁷

The pilgrims, much like the *tlaquimiloli* of the *temoamaque*, carry their sacred bundles for hundreds of miles to Tepeyac. The pilgrims bind, decorate, and mold together images of their Blessed Mother. They tie the icons to themselves using rope, thus binding their bodies with the photo or statue of Guadalupe, sometimes including photos of loved ones. The line between the devotees’ body and their sacred bundle thus becomes blurred. The question, for Christian Cajoule in the introduction to Echeverría’s piece, becomes, “Are they anything other than what they wear on their backs?”²⁸ They are not subdued or in a position of being dominated in this way of mixing their body with that of the Virgin’s, Hughes asserts. Rather, they have made present the Divine, reached towards the transcendent, and attached it to themselves.

Not only is the Virgin represented, her presence is indeed felt and known. Much like the *teomamaque* people, whose sacred bundles speak to them, bringing life to the voice of the *teteo* in the community, the Guadalupe too becomes a member of the community. The way the entity itself becomes not a representation of, but indeed the presence of, the Virgin is difficult for the western, European imagination, Hughes argues. However, she asserts further that it is a phenomenon that—when put in the context of the Mexican devotional practices of the *imágenes peregrinas* (pilgrim images) and the *virgenes viajeras* (the traveler virgins), it becomes even more powerful.²⁹ Our Lady of Zapopan, for example, travels from the Basilica of Guadalajara to the church of Zapopan, an 8 kilometers trip. The wooden statue makes its way as a pilgrim itself. Furthering Hughes’ argument outside of the Mexican Marian ritual practices, Robert Orsi’s book *Madonna of 115th Street* tells of a Virgin statue whose migration from one place to another is

²⁵ Virgilio Elizondo, “Mary and the Evangelization in the Americas,” in *Mary, Woman of Nazareth*, ed. Doris Donnelly (New York: Paulist, 1989), 160.

²⁶ Alinka Echeverría, “The Road to Tepeyac.” Alinka Echeverría, www.alinkaecheverria.com/new-page.

²⁷ Laura E Pérez, “On the Road to Tepeyac, Guadalupe’s Got Their Back” (September 13, 2016), Zocalupublicsquare.org.

²⁸ Christian Caujolle. *Sur le Chemin de Tepeyac*. (Paris: Actes Sud, 2011).

²⁹ Hughes, “God-Bearers on Pilgrimage to Tepeyac,” 177

not simply a symbolic idea, but indeed makes present the Blessed Mother. For the Italian immigrants in Orsi’s book, the Madonna made her way from Italy, but then participates in the festa where she is carried from the basement around the block of the neighborhood and finally ends up on the altar of the main Church. This is not merely a representation of a journey, but is indeed a journey itself, which the Virgin takes alongside the immigrants from the *mezzogiorno* to Harlem.³⁰ In this same way, posits Hughes, the Virgin of Guadalupe is present and animated with a sacred spirit, becoming a co-pilgrim, a co-participant in the journey. The pilgrims, who have become walking altars, find companionship in her, and the eruption of the transcendent is not merely metaphorical or representational, but indeed real and tangible.

Towards a More Fluid Duality

This ritual therefore breaks down dualisms between abstract and real, transcendent and concrete. More specifically, it allows for what Sylvia Marcos refers to as “fluid duality.” She explains this as a cosmic vision of indigenous spirituality. Incorporating indigenous spirituality, which she gains insight on from women in Mexico, means understanding things not in opposition with one another, but in dynamic relationship with one another.³¹ The pilgrims are doing just that when they knot the ropes which connect them to their patroness. Nothing about this ritual is dualistic, but allows for flowing and flexibility and is based on a worldview which does not see the transcendent world as apart or distinguishable from their own reality. The deity comes along with them, becomes present and incarnate among the community. In a form of self-communication, then, of both the Aztec spiritual leaders and the pilgrims alike, there is an understanding of themselves as partners of the deity. The importance of their bodies in all of this is not diminished, but increased. Their bodies are requirements for the presence of the deity. In the face of mass devaluing of bodies, the pilgrims resist the erasure of their own bodies and instead partner it with the Divine.

These devotees of Guadalupe give a vision of theology which is not primarily written texts or spoken in words or merely doctrinal. This ritual is a theological articulation that emphasizes the embodiment of devotees as walking altars. Indigenous theologian Eleazar Lopez Hernandez, a Catholic priest present at the most recent Synod on the Amazon explains, “At the first level, theology is life, ritual and witness.”³² Devotion to Guadalupe raises the question Lopez Hernandez articulates: “How we keep evangelization from becoming the ‘spiritual conquest or reconquest’ of our peoples which seeks to tie them to a particular social model that is deemed explicitly or implicitly Christian?”³³ Guadalupe, an undeniably effective “tool” for evangelization, for these pilgrims, has become not a conquest of their spirits, but rather an acknowledgement of their bodies. Guadalupe creates for them a world where they are not

³⁰ Robert A. Orsi, *The Madonna of 115th Street: Faith and Community in Italian Harlem, 1880–1950*. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

³¹ Marcos, “Mesoamerican Women’s Indigenous Spirituality.”

³² Eleazar Lopez Hernandez, “Teutlatolli: Speaking About God—Indigenous Theology and Roman Catholicism,” in *Crosscurrents in Indigenous Spirituality*, ed Guillermo Cook (New York: Brill, 1997), 152.

³³ *Ibid.*, 143

violently forced into categories of unworthiness and needed to be “saved”, but rather they exist in the liminal of worthy, and yet still human, partnership with the Mother of God.

A Listening Church

At this recent Synod on the Amazon, the Bishops acknowledged the colonizing ways of a Church whose contact with indigenous people often meant not only conversion, but indeed *attempted* erasure of cultures and populations. The formula the bishops from the Pan-Amazon region, whose dioceses are populated with Catholics of indigenous origins, gave is helpful here: unlearn, learn, and relearn.³⁴ This unlearning stage must require a deconstruction of theological norms which solely prize official doctrinal documents and written texts as well as create oppositional duality, rather than fluid duality.

Argentine theologian Carlos Schickendantz interprets the Second Vatican Council in light of the turn to decolonial theology. By his analysis, the Council was in fact mostly a European endeavor and therefore has serious limitations in its ability to include other forms of theology, like the *teología india* that Lopez Hernandez is doing.³⁵ Yet, the reception of the Council was also an act of serious decolonization for some across the globe. The Council spurred the centering of the small base communities in Latin America, for example, which decreased a reliance on the hierarchy, and instead lay leaders of communities, together with their communities, became the proclaimer of the Gospels. Holding these in tension, Schickendantz uses French theologian Christoph Theobald’s emphasis of the Council as a pastoral undertaking to explain that when pastoral ministry is the focus, we find that the Council predisposes the Church to serious listening.³⁶ The Council, according to Schickendantz, through the document of *Gaudium et Spes* especially, requires an inductive method, moving from the particular to the universal.³⁷ It is therefore the needs of individual communities and the rituals they perform which come to enlighten the path forward of the whole Church.

Pope Francis has emphasized a listening Church in many ways. “Synodality”, a word he has used to try to sum up a vision of Church that is more participative, requires dialogue. In order to dialogue with the pilgrims of Guadalupe, an understanding of ritual as deeply important is required. Listening cannot just be speaking in a structured format of the Synod of Bishops. Synodality cannot just be welcoming folks to Rome, but rather must follow folks from their hometowns through the pilgrimage, into the basilica, and back to their everyday lives.

The theology Guadalupean pilgrims are doing is a primary theology; the theology I am doing right now, is secondary. Using their bodies, emphasizing the material, the devotees retain an autonomy and control the communication of their own connection to deities. To put it

³⁴ Synod on the Amazon. *The Amazon: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology* (October 26, 2019), §81.

³⁵ Carlos Schickendantz, “¿El Vaticano II Al Servicio de la inculturalidad y de un giro decolonial? Un proyecto intercontinental en desarrollo,” *Perspectiva Teológica* 52, no. 3 (2020): 661–79

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Carlos Schickendantz, “Una elipse con dos focos,” in *Teología de los signos de los tiempos latinoamericanos* (Santiago de Chile: Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2013), 37–62

clearly, we, as academic theologians, cannot *presume* what the dialogue will look like or what will be said. Instead, by studying ritual we begin to understand that there is a dialogue to be had and that it is one that empowers rather than degrades or further dominates. That is precisely the role of decolonized thought. It is not merely recognizing dignity, but it is, as Carlos Mendoza Alvarez writes in the *Concillium* dossier on decolonial theology, the imagining of a “different possible world.”³⁸

The reckoning with the colonial positions and practices of the Catholic Church requires a reconciliation. Theology must neither ignore the pre-colonial society nor romanticize it. A critical engagement is necessary to be able to understand how the religion, culture, and value of the pre-Hispanic peoples inform our own understandings. This type of research also depends heavily on other disciplines, particularly anthropology and ethnographic approaches. The work of many indigenous theologians has begun to help us do that. Marcos’ claims about cosmic visions, which are different than the one the Church intends to impose, create a framework from which to begin to create a Church and a Christianity which is not centered on domination, but resistance to the devaluing of bodies. Dialogue must come with serious acknowledgements about the power structures that set these parameters.



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³⁸ Carlos Mendoza-Álvarez and Thierry-Marie Coureau. "Editorial", *Concillium* no. 384 (2020): 7