

12-20-2020

## Timothy Matovina, Theologies of Guadalupe: From the Era of Conquest to Pope Francis - Review

Nancy Pineda-Madrid  
*Loyola Marymount University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/jhlt>

---

### Recommended Citation

Pineda-Madrid, Nancy "Timothy Matovina, Theologies of Guadalupe: From the Era of Conquest to Pope Francis - Review," *Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology*: Vol. 22 : No. 2 , Article 10. (2020) :199-203  
Available at: <https://repository.usfca.edu/jhlt/vol22/iss2/10>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Hispanic / Latino Theology by an authorized editor of USF Scholarship: a digital repository @ Gleeson Library | Geschke Center. For more information, please contact [repository@usfca.edu](mailto:repository@usfca.edu).

Timothy Matovina. *Theologies of Guadalupe: From the Era of Conquest to Pope Francis*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019. 221pp. \$29.95 Hardcover. ISBN: 978-0-19-090275-9.

*Theologies of Guadalupe* is a singular work in historical theology and a must-read for any scholar of Latinoax theology, Guadalupan theology, or the history of Latin American theology. It is the first book to offer a review of historical theologies of Guadalupe from the mid-seventeenth century to the early twenty-first century. Like all of Matovina's books, it is thoroughly researched. In addition to its rich theological offerings, it includes an examination of devotional practices, artistic representations, and evolving social concerns. Arguably, this book may be read as volume two of an overarching project focused on the historical interplay of devotional practices and theological readings. While this interplay is foundational to both volumes, volume one, *Guadalupe and Her Faithful: Latino Catholics in San Antonio, from Colonial Origins to the Present* (2005), is primarily a scholarly study of devotional practices, and this volume is markedly focused on theological contributions. Both works make evident that faith and devotion precede the search for theological understanding.

In Matovina's words, "The primary purpose of *Theologies of Guadalupe* is to examine the way theologians have understood Guadalupe and sought to orient her impact in the lives of devotees. Illuminating the foundation of those theological reflections, this book also assesses the spread of Guadalupan devotion over nearly half a millennium as Guadalupe's faithful interacted with their loving mother and expanded the sphere of her influence" (2-3).

Matovina organizes the book's chapters in two parts, "Foundational Works," and "An Evolving Tradition." "Foundational Works" includes two chapters. The first examines Miguel Sánchez's *Imagen de la Virgen María* (1648), with primary attention to its exploration of

salvation. The second chapter examines Luis Laso de la Vega's *Huei talmahuiçoltica* (1649) and its contribution to evangelization. Contemporary Guadalupan theologies almost always build on Laso de la Vega's work because, to date, it has been much more influential than Sánchez's extraordinary contribution. Throughout Part Two, "An Evolving Tradition," Matovina clarifies how the contributions of Sánchez and Laso de la Vega inform all subsequent theological readings of Guadalupe. Three chapters make up Part Two, each focusing on a different historical period: first, the colonial period; then independence and the emergence of the Mexican nation; and finally, the contemporary period. Their respective theological themes are divine providence, covenant, and liberation.

*Theologies of Guadalupe* is a work in the French theological tradition of *ressourcement*. Without a return to the sources, contemporary theologies of Guadalupe are, to a degree, flying blind. Matovina's book makes available historical resources that help theologians and students understand more holistically the contours and roots of Latin America's contribution to requisite themes such as salvation and evangelization, among others. Without Matovina's work, theological readings of Guadalupe (and other themes) will be more limited in their perspective and worth. This volume also offers carefully nuanced readings of historical figures. For example, it critiques the all too common reduction of Sánchez to his *criollo* background, noting that "rarely do readers of Sánchez accentuate that he was a pastor and theologian renowned for his knowledge of Saint Augustine and other church fathers" (17).

This book addresses head on the recent scholarly disputes concerning the historicity of the apparition's origins (as well as Juan Diego's), then rightly turns readers' attention to the far more significant question: "How did the Guadalupe cult rise above all others and emerge from a local devotion to become a regional, national, and then international phenomenon? Put in

simplest terms, why Guadalupe?” (4). This question orients the whole volume. Contrary to previous claims, Guadalupe’s rise was a protracted ascent.

This book invites a transformation in readers’ Guadalupan imagination. Most contemporary theologies of Guadalupe assume that a liberationist vision was central to the Guadalupe tradition from its inception. Such is not the case. Each chapter of the book exemplifies a distinctive reading of Guadalupe, each one born of a given social historical context. The third chapter, for example (“Divine Providence: Sermons in Colonial Society”), clarifies how interpretations of Guadalupe in this period overwhelmingly advanced support of the socio-political status quo.

Among other strengths, this book pays serious attention to the contributions of Latina women theologians in the contemporary period. It also makes clear the historical role of Franciscans, Jesuits, and Dominicans, as well as bishops and popes, in the evolution and reception of the Guadalupe tradition. Each chapter includes and examines works of art, primarily paintings, that express and advance this tradition throughout its history.

*Theologies of Guadalupe* makes amply evident how different historical moments and contexts drew forth divergent theological readings of Guadalupe. As I read Matovina’s book, Paul Ricoeur’s insights kept echoing in my mind: symbols bear a surplus of meaning; symbols give rise to thought; symbols are inherently polyvalent. Even though Matovina’s goal for this book did not include a critical study of a hermeneutics of religious symbols, this volume makes clear the need for this kind of work in relation to Guadalupe. Matovina rightly notes that “theologians disagree about which changes [Guadalupe] urges her faithful to enact. . . . While varied perspectives on Guadalupe marked previous eras . . . the contestation of contemporary understandings of Guadalupe is even more extensive. . . . Competing parties vie for a

hermeneutical edge in delineating and channeling her potency” (185-186). Indeed, and this begs the question, how are we to judge the relative adequacy of varied interpretations of Guadalupe? What should be the goal of the endeavor to clarify the meaning and significance of this richly potent symbol?

This exceptional book should be required reading for scholars, graduate students, and educated lay persons wanting to understand Catholic theology today. As always, reading Matovina’s work is not only educational but also a pleasure.

*Nancy Pineda-Madrid*

*Loyola Marymount University*

*Los Angeles, California*