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SANTO TORIBIO: THE RISE OF A SAINT

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of Arts and Humanities

University of Denver

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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by

Thomas G. Evans

August 2011

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#### ABSTRACT

Santo Toribio (1900-28) was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church in 2000 as a martyr of Mexico's bloody *Cristero* Rebellion. He enjoyed a modest local following for decades after the Rebellion as many of the other *Cristero* martyr-saints did. However, around the time of his canonization, a new identity began to emerge different from that of martyr; he became the patron saint of immigration. For believers, Santo Toribio helps mitigate the criminal nature of this act by showing God's approval and blessing. He places the pain and social distortion of Border crossing in Roman Catholic contexts of holiness and divine intervention. This thesis begins to catalog and analyze the nature of Santo Toribio's unofficial patronage.

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## INTRODUCTION

Hundreds of Mexican migrants die every year as they attempt to evade capture by U.S. authorities. Hikers often stumble upon these poor souls in various conditions of decomposition. Coroner facilities all across the U.S./Mexican Borderlands<sup>1</sup> are filled with the remains of these unknown individuals who unsuccessfully tried to find their way into the United States.<sup>2</sup> Yet, most actually make it, in large part due to so-called “coyotes” that are paid to deliver migrants to various locations in the North. Many groups and individuals in the U.S. also try to help the effort, often delivering water and food. Many Americans have been prosecuted for this.<sup>3</sup> In recent years, a Mexican man has been reported to be performing both these functions, but, surprisingly, from the grave.

Saint Toribio Romo (1900-28) was canonized by the Roman Catholic Church in 2000 as a martyr of Mexico’s bloody *Cristero* Rebellion.<sup>4</sup> Santo Toribio, as he is

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S./Mexican Borderlands refers to the area adjacent to the 2,000 mile political border between the United States and Mexico. This thesis adds to the already extensive research from many fields that documents how the two historically-, culturally-, linguistically-, and economically-different sides of the Border interact, come into conflict, and hybridize.

<sup>2</sup> M. J. Hinkes, “Migrant Deaths Along the California–Mexico Border: An Anthropological Perspective.” *Journal of Forensic Sciences* 53 (2008). Hinkes describes how U.S. policy often pushes migrants to take more risky paths to the United States through the desert which results in more deaths and more unidentified bodies.

<sup>3</sup> For example, some members of the humanitarian group *No More Deaths*, a ministry of the Tucson Unitarian Universalist Church ([www.nomoredeaths.org](http://www.nomoredeaths.org)), have been arrested, but are usually only charged with littering. Their website keeps a tally of migrant deaths from year to year.

<sup>4</sup> In Mexico, the term *la Cristiada* is the term generally used by historians whereas people in popular conversation usually refer to the people, or *los cristeros*. Strictly translated this would be rendered “those of Christ” but within the popular intent of the words, it would more closely follow the English phrase

popularly known, enjoyed a modest local following for decades after the Rebellion as many of the other *Cristero* martyr-saints did.<sup>5</sup> However, around the time of his canonization, a new identity began to emerge different from that of martyr; he became the patron saint of immigration. These new stories of Santo Toribio were entirely different from the historical accounts of his death at the hands of government officials. Historically, he died like scores of other priests and lay Catholics during that time. Because of celebrating the Eucharist and otherwise performing priestly duties during the presidency of Plutarco Calles, Father Toribio Romo and his fellow priests were hunted down and killed. Twenty-five of the *Cristero* martyrs have been canonized as Saints in the Roman Catholic Church with an additional thirteen being considered for canonization. Up until the point of his canonization, Santo Toribio was treated like one of the many martyrs. He was mentioned in books and articles in a similar manner to other Mexican martyrs but mostly in a subordinate way. Around the time of his canonization, however, the new immigration-themed stories began to emerge and Santo Toribio's popularity skyrocketed.<sup>6</sup> These stories are passed through oral tradition or through their publication in faith-promoting books and pamphlets. The typical Santo Toribio folk story has three parts, according to Mateo Sanchez, who states:

First, Santo Toribio Romo anonymously helps migrants cross the border without being detected by the Border Patrol. Second, after successfully making it over the border, the migrants wish to repay Toribio. In return,

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"Soldiers of Christ." Throughout this paper, I will refer to *la Cristiada* as the *Cristero* Rebellion, as historian Jim Tuck refers to it.

<sup>5</sup> In the text, I will refer to him alternately as *Santo Toribio* when describing his posthumous veneration and as *Romo* when referring to his historical life.

<sup>6</sup> The actual dates of the rise of his popularity are unclear in the current literature and the present work only makes a few contributions to this understanding. I will discuss this issue briefly in the conclusion.

Toribio only asks them to pay a visit to him in Santa Ana de Guadalupe [his hometown] once they are established in the U.S. Finally the story ends with the migrants going back to Mexico in search of Toribio to thank him, only to be informed by Toribio's distant relatives in Santa Ana de Guadalupe [that he had been dead for decades].<sup>7</sup>

These stories abound throughout Mexico and the United States. Yet, it is unclear exactly why Romo himself, a pre-existing religious figure, has emerged as the Patron of Immigrants for border-crossing Mexicans, especially since he was part of a group canonization and is not recognized for any specific acts he made as an individual. Like other saints of this group canonization, Santo Toribio has a shrine in his hometown in central Mexico, but, by the nature of his unofficial patronage, his presence is growing throughout Mexico and the United States. Santo Toribio is being venerated throughout the U.S./Mexican Borderlands and even as far north as Chicago, IL.

Ultimately, this thesis will answer the question: Why did Santo Toribio rise rapidly in popularity apart from the other saints of his group canonization? I find that the psychological stress and physical displacement created by immigration leads many to adapt alternate, "non-official" religiosity, which is a Catholic-centric version of Luis León's "religious poetics."<sup>8</sup> This creates a tension within the institutional Church as higher level clergy (i.e. Bishops and Archbishops) never directly involve themselves with the recognition and propagation of Santo Toribio as a heavenly benefactor of migrants while an increasing number of lower level clergy (i.e. parish priests and scholar priests) do. Consequently, the veneration of Santo Toribio in this way does not have explicit

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<sup>7</sup> Mateo Sanchez, *The Meanings of Mexican Immigrant Devotion to Santo Toribio Romo, Patron Saint of Immigrants* (MA thesis, Claremont Graduate University, 2005). 15-16.

<sup>8</sup> Discussed primarily in Chapter 5 of this work, this theory is the subject of León's 2004 book *La Llorona's Children: Religion, Life, and Death in the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands* (Los Angeles: University of California Press).



Church sanction, but this division within Church hierarchy can occur with many issues, especially with the veneration of certain individuals.<sup>9</sup> However, this answer is also bound up in the nature of the new rules of the Roman *curia* (and Pope John Paul II) that allowed group canonizations, the disparate action between different levels of Roman Catholic clergy, and the personal reasons that individuals choose to venerate Santo Toribio. Santo Toribio becomes the culmination of traditional Catholic practice that appropriates individuals as aesthetic, cultural, and religious embodiments of social contexts and pressures, or saints.<sup>10</sup>

## PREVIOUS LITERATURE

This thesis (and its future trajectory) will fill a hole in the current literature and is a necessary start to the transborder study of this largely overlooked, but theoretically- and socially-important Saint. There are only two dedicated works to this Saint and, like the present work, are master's theses. Another work, a book discussed below, offers a theory of Mexican migration and utilizes Santo Toribio in one of its chapters. Aside from these

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<sup>9</sup> Another issue where this division is important is the rise and fall of "liberation theology," a theological movement within Latin America that encourages socially-engaged interpretations of Christian scriptures. Though extremely popular among many priests and their followers, Pope John Paul II heavily criticized and sanctioned those who advocated it within the Church. I suspect that the use of Santo Toribio as a patron of migrants by some Mexican and Mexican-American priests is due to their inability to use liberation theology as a means to combating social injustice in the areas where its influence was forcibly removed by Church officials. I will explore this connection in a future work. For a brief case study of this issue, see Jennifer Scheper Hughes, "Narco-Violence and the Failure of the Church in Mexico," *Religion Dispatches*, September 2, 2010. Accessed September 11, 2010, [http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/culture/3232/narcoviolence\\_and\\_the\\_failure\\_of\\_the\\_church\\_in\\_mexico](http://www.religiondispatches.org/archive/culture/3232/narcoviolence_and_the_failure_of_the_church_in_mexico).

<sup>10</sup> Here the capitalized *Saints* refers to officially canonized persons within the Roman Catholic Church. This process is discussed, in part, in Chapter 2 of this work. Roman Catholic Saints can be seen under the umbrella of the holy people and otherwise venerated (and un-capitalized) *saints*. The English use of this word in this more general sense stems from the cultural power of Roman Catholicism in the Western world, but represents the tendency for individuals in many religious and spiritual traditions to be held up as ideal teachers and/or models of behavior.

three works, there are only fleeting references in other writings.<sup>11</sup> The first, by Fernando Guzmán Mundo, is entitled *Santo Toribio Romo: Un Símbolo Regional Polisémico*.<sup>12</sup> Guzmán describes Santo Toribio, to use the English translation of his subtitle<sup>13</sup>, as “A Regional, Polysemous Symbol,” that has different meaning to three groups of people who venerate him, namely migrants, Catholic hierarchy, and those who live in the area surrounding his shrine.<sup>14</sup> He states that “each has their particular manner of appropriating the symbol. This appropriation is a game of negotiation, opposition, and alliances between them.”<sup>15</sup> I will build upon this basic idea of negotiation and alliance, but a transnational understanding of Santo Toribio requires less regional understanding and more understanding of the source of his very existence as a symbol. This source is the Catholic canonization process. Tourism plays a large role in the rise of Santo Toribio, but Guzmán fails to see that one of the primary reasons he is even writing about Santo Toribio is because he has become transnational and, thus, more famous than he would have otherwise been. This transnational attribute is not due to his nature as a *Cristero*, though some try to emphasize this fact as they negotiate his extracanonial, or unofficial,

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<sup>11</sup> Specifically these are works from Vanderwood (2004), Urrea (2004), de la Torre (1992), Borden (2003), Fernández (2007), and Thompson (2002). I will analyze these, as appropriate, throughout this thesis.

<sup>12</sup> Fernando Guzmán Mundo, “Santo Toribio Romo: Un Símbolo Religional Polisémico” (MA thesis, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2002). Because of naming convention and custom in the Spanish-speaking world, I will refer to this author’s maternal last name, Guzmán, when referencing his work.

<sup>13</sup> All translations in this thesis are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>14</sup> Guzmán uses the term *alteño* to describe the residents around his shrine even though the term itself refers to those from the region known as *los altos de Jalisco* which includes a much larger area of land than described.

<sup>15</sup> Guzmán, 6.

status as a border crosser.<sup>16</sup> As will be discussed throughout this thesis, Toribio's mysterious appropriation as a Border Saint is not contingent upon the polysemous nature of his purely Mexican veneration. Yet, the scholarly rigor and meticulous nature of Guzmán's thesis will serve all future scholars who study Santo Toribio.

Mateo Sanchez's thesis, entitled *The Meanings of Mexican Immigrant Devotion to Santo Toribio Romo, Patron Saint of Immigrants* analyzes the place of the saint in the devotion of several members of a family, all immigrants in the United States.<sup>17</sup> Unlike the "polysemy" that occupies the thesis of Guzmán, Sanchez is not concerned with the institutional nature of Santo Toribio's canonization or his complex regional heritage.<sup>18</sup> He finds that the saint "represents *legitimacy and power* to the Mexican immigrant devotees who navigate through the U.S. in a general climate of fear."<sup>19</sup> The personal nature of the interviews yields great results in understanding how the symbol of a Border saint operates in such a politically- and socially-hostile environment. These findings can explain *why* Santo Toribio is increasing in popularity because of what he means to adherents. The wonderful descriptions of this meaning will be used throughout this work to give some context to my findings, but the present work is concerned more with *how* this devotion travels, what it means in the context of the Borderlands, and what it means

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<sup>16</sup> "Official" and "Unofficial" are terms that privilege the Roman Catholic Church's view of who is a saint and who is not. I will still use them often throughout this thesis because of the unique veneration of Santo Toribio where this official legitimacy is an important part of his overall story. Mostly, I seek to analyze religious behavior and theory through the concepts of "Lived Religion" and "Popular Religion," discussed below.

<sup>17</sup> Mateo Sanchez, *The Meanings of Mexican Immigrant Devotion to Santo Toribio Romo, Patron Saint of Immigrants* (MA thesis, Claremont Graduate University, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Sanchez mentions the necessity of exploring these issues in greater depth (61), but was apparently unaware of Guzmán's thesis at the time of his writing.

<sup>19</sup> Sanchez, 57.

to the Roman Catholic Church. Whereas Guzmán sees this saint at his point of origin and Sanchez sees him in his innovative role on the other side of the Border, I wish to begin inquiry into the process as a whole.

Sociologist John Fitzgerald has already made certain steps in this “transnationalization” of Santo Toribio. Fitzgerald authored a book entitled *A Nation of Emigrants: How Mexico Manages its Migration* where he analyzes the Catholic Church and its changing role in Mexican national identity.<sup>20</sup> Though an excellent analysis of the many social factors of immigration, he does not theorize or describe the veneration of Santo Toribio itself, but instead uses Santo Toribio as a metaphorical description of the history of Mexican migration. He sees irony in present uses of the saint because Romo and his Archbishop vehemently decried immigration to the United States.<sup>21</sup>

Like the two theses described above (but unlike Fitzgerald), I will isolate Santo Toribio as a phenomenon unto itself. I will show how his veneration is not only a reflection of these processes, but is shaping and informing some of the ways that Catholics on both sides of the Border see the Church’s role in U.S./Mexican immigration. One aim of the present work will be to update certain elements of the previous two theses, but its main goal is to theoretically link their work into a single theory of the transnational nature of the *cultus* of Santo Toribio Romo. Another aim is to simply document the rise of Santo Toribio Romo in this early stage of transnational veneration. Both these theses begin with the premise that Santo Toribio is the Patron Saint of

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<sup>20</sup> David Fitzgerald, *A Nation of Emigrants: How Mexico Manages its Migration* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Fitzgerald, 71-73.

Immigrants and provide little background to this “folk canonization.” These disparate vignettes of Santo Toribio in parts far removed from each other point to a bigger process that requires more research. This thesis represents the first step in understanding Santo Toribio as a whole and not as an isolated religious figure in Santa Ana de Guadalupe and in isolated pockets in American immigrant communities.

## METHODOLOGY

I will place Santo Toribio betwixt two scholarly fields: the study of the U.S./Mexican Borderlands and the study of Roman Catholic saints.<sup>22</sup> For this investigation, I will rely mainly on three scholarly tools that come from history, ethnography, and hagiography. These are conceptual tools that do not necessarily constitute mutually exclusive realms within disciplines or practices, but, for my purposes here, have provided a glimpse into the interactive cultures of colonial government, religion, revolutionary foment, postcolonial government, and modernity. Santo Toribio, as Guzmán indicates, is polysemous, and therefore cannot be constrained to one particular view or theory of religion. Religion (and Santo Toribio) can be seen in cultural competition, human performance, institutions, and memory.<sup>23</sup> This complexity requires a multidisciplinary approach, outlined below.

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<sup>22</sup> My primary course of study in the first stage of my graduate education has been the U.S./Mexican Borderlands, specifically relating to Latino/a studies, Chicano/a studies, and Mexican religious history. As such this thesis is skewed heavily within that realm of discourse. However, a number of works about the study of Roman Catholic saints through the centuries were influential as I approached the subject of Santo Toribio since my first ethnographic forays into central Mexico. My background in both areas, particularly in the realm of saints and sainthood, remains incomplete, but I feel my experience in the literature and in the field constitute a useful and scholarly beginning to this work.

<sup>23</sup> For an analysis of these concepts as they pertain to religion and to his “religious poetics”, see León, 16-17.

History is often a contested discipline, but it is an essential part of most scholarly analyses. The three works described above all use the work of historians to varying degrees and I will be no exception. Also, each utilizes specific elements of political and religious history of Mexico to emphasize their specific areas of concern with the study of Santo Toribio. I will use several primary sources to emphasize the ideological battles during the *Cristero* Rebellion that gave rise to Santo Toribio's martyrdom and his place in Mexican religious identity. I will also use the work of several historians, but even the ethnographic and hagiographic sources discussed below rely heavily on the collection of historical sources and their interpretation.

Ethnography, according to Clifford Geertz, is an anthropological tool that interprets social discourse in a way that makes it "perusable," or subject to a lasting and useful analysis.<sup>24</sup> This endeavor can include "establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, [and] keeping a diary," but most importantly it must include an "intellectual effort" to analyze the system of small-scale cultural symbols and inscribe them for future use.<sup>25</sup> Informed by Geertz, the work of Luis León focuses on the hybridized symbols that arose when pre-Columbian religion met colonial, European Catholicism.<sup>26</sup> León sees these symbols throughout the historical record but also through the course of fieldwork on both sides of the Border.<sup>27</sup> As such,

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<sup>24</sup> Paul Bohannan and Mark Glazer, *High Points in Anthropology* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1988), 544. Here I paraphrase Geertz's "three characteristics of ethnographic description."

<sup>25</sup> Bohannan and Glazer, 549.

<sup>26</sup> León draws from many other theorists besides Geertz, like Foucault. In fact, in one instance, León disputes the general approach that Geertz takes to religion as being its own sphere of influence (243).

<sup>27</sup> León uses Foucault's concept of genealogy to analyze these enduring symbols. This is discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

León's theory is particular attuned to the study and conditions of cultural and physical movement back and forth across the U.S./Mexican Borderlands and, thus, to this present study of one such symbol.

Therefore, I use the ethnographic tool as it has been constructed within anthropology, but mostly as it is seen, mirrored, and channeled in the field of Religious Studies. This is accomplished not only through León's work, but from the concepts of "Lived Religion"<sup>28</sup> or "Popular Religion"<sup>29</sup>. Along these lines, I will also use the term "popular religion" (or just the qualifier "popular") in this thesis to describe generally the "unofficial" religious practices surrounding Santo Toribio.<sup>30</sup> The centrality of León's work to this thesis also serves as a foil to the heavy influence of "American" meaning "from the United States" instead of the geographically "North American" milieu of the veneration of Santo Toribio, which crosses political and cultural designations. The analysis in this thesis is heavily centered in material culture, specifically items that were observed and/or purchased from vendors throughout Mexico and the United States. A *Los Angeles Times* article uses a quote from a vendor at a popular religious shrine in Tijuana

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<sup>28</sup> David D. Hall, *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997). Here Hall describes this concept as a method of "doing American religious history" that is rooted in extra-historical disciplines such as sociology, literary analysis, cultural studies, and ethnography (vii). He notes that this endeavor can be "explicitly ethnographic" and goes on to cite Clifford Geertz as one of the "lines of inquiry" upon which lived religion builds (vii, ix).

<sup>29</sup> Lippy states that "scholars of American religion have become ever more attuned to the ways in which the religiosity of ordinary people is by no means restricted to formal institutions and their doctrines and practices. Rather, the religiosity or spirituality is is much more amorphous and expressed in diverse ways. Association with an organized religion or even acceptance of specific beliefs coning from a particular religious tradition may be only a part of the religion of the people themselves" (xiii).

<sup>30</sup> This is also in line with León's use of this designation. Unofficial is useful when describing the behavior of Catholics in opposition to their clergy, but the wider term is more descriptive in general. There is a drawback, however, due to alternate meanings of popular which carry the stigma of being somehow flippant or non-authoritative.

who, when asked why he carries products that bear the image of the controversial saint *Jesus Malverde*, answered “they want him, so I stock him.”<sup>31</sup> At this same shrine, almost ten years later, I was told the same thing about Santo Toribio. This material demand for religious merchandise is one of the many defining characteristics of Mexican religion.<sup>32</sup> Yet, my ethnographic pursuits also include the “webs of significance”<sup>33</sup> that surround these items, which often include the locations and dates when where they were purchased, the theological nature of the content of the item (i.e. books, booklets, and pamphlets) or of the item itself (i.e. rosary).

Writings about the history and pious exploits of the saints can be analyzed within an anthropological or historical framework, but the study of saint writing, or hagiography, has historically been its own domain. Hagiography is also the contextual study of hagiographers, which is roughly analogous to historiography being the contextual study of historians. In this way it is similar to ethnography.<sup>34</sup> Weinstein and Bell describe this dynamic process in the following manner:

Questions about saints and their societies have been asked by and answered before, occasionally by admiring companions and hagiographers, more frequently and systematically by modern biographers

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<sup>31</sup> Anne-Marie O’Connor. “Mexico’s Mix of Folklore and Faith,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1997, 1.

<sup>32</sup> León, 123. Jeffery Thies states that “The Mexican Catholic seeks to express his/her spirituality in concrete, often visible ways.”

<sup>33</sup> Bohannon and Glazer, 532. Geertz states that “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture as those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”

<sup>34</sup> Catholic scholar Lawrence S. Cunningham describes hagiography as “a bewildering complex field of folklore, mythology, legend, and fantasy” (1985, 151). Similarly, Mary-Ann Constantine describes this type of relationship as “constant and complex ideas and influences moving in both directions through numerous channels” (200).



and historians who collected, sifted, and analyzed the surviving vitae and other documents of the hagiographic record.<sup>35</sup>

These authors distinguish between medieval hagiographers, those who wrote often embellished stories of the lives of saints, and modern historians, who presumably take a neutral stance. In this thesis, I will analyze the modern writings of the life of Santo Toribio which are becoming increasingly embellished as time marches forward. According to Charles W. Jones, this type of analysis can reveal a “macrocosmic imagination through observation of a microcosmic image.”<sup>36</sup> The themes in Santo Toribio’s hagiography deal directly with the politics of canonization and the politics of immigration.

I have been employing these methods since I began formally studying and investigating Santo Toribio in January 2007. A grant from Brigham Young University’s Office of Research and Creative Activities (mentored by Professor Alonzo Gaskill of the School of Religious Education) allowed me to spend an extended amount of time in the region around Santo Toribio’s main shrine in Santa Ana de Guadalupe, Jalisco, Mexico.<sup>37</sup> It also allowed me to begin investigating the presence of Santo Toribio in various towns along the Border from El Paso/Cuidad Juarez to Tijuana/San Diego. Other factors

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<sup>35</sup> Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell. *Saints and Society* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Weinstein and Bell, 2.

<sup>37</sup> These interviews were conducted anonymously from June 2007 to August 2007 after approval from the Institutional Review Board at Brigham Young University.

allowed me to spend extended amounts of time in Tijuana, San Diego, Los Angeles, Salt Lake City, and Denver, all of which were important in understanding this saint.<sup>38</sup>

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1 documents the historical *Toribio Romo* whose actions in life and his bloody death resulted in his canonization as a Saint in the Roman Catholic Church. His earthly life was spent as a parish priest, social reformer, and martyr of Mexico's *Cristero* Rebellion. This conflict arose as President Plutarco Calles (1877-1945) enforced anti-clerical laws which resulted in regional military opposition of largely Catholic groups to government forces. I will emphasize the ideological battles of the opposing sides, as seen through speeches and official pronouncements that reached large audiences.

Chapter 2 briefly explains how Sainthood has operated within the Church throughout time and the newer changes that facilitated the group canonization that included Santo Toribio. This chapter will focus on the "official" place of Santo Toribio within the Church. The subordinate (and often nonexistent) place of Santo Toribio within this official literature gives no indication of his unofficial investiture of fame and patronage.

Chapter 3 will discuss much of the hagiographic material currently at work shaping Santo Toribio's myth and function in the U.S./Mexican Borderlands. After his official (and bureaucratic) canonization, a popular movement of veneration of Santo Toribio arose that responded to his official status and, unlike other saints of the

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<sup>38</sup> Family members living in Mexico and southern California and my residence in Utah and then Colorado allowed me opportunities to continue observing the place of Santo Toribio in and around these locations. They were varied enough to constitute this beginning thesis, but a more systematic approach will be required in the future to understand this saint in greater depth.

U.S./Mexican Borderlands, is enhanced through a synergistic relationship between popular and official Roman Catholicism.

Chapter 4 will show that the Border stories attributed to Santo Toribio do not come out of a religious vacuum. Catholic theologians on both sides of the Border have responded to the immigration crisis by using existing theology and applying it to the Border. Santo Toribio effectively completes this process in a theological sense by creating a logical Catholic ending to an issue by raising up a figurehead, canonizing him, and allowing him to become part of the public consciousness.

Using a preexisting theory of the Borderlands (León's religious poetics, mentioned above), Chapter 5 shows that Santo Toribio fits squarely into the ongoing, cyclical nature of religion in the Borderlands. The peculiar, interstitial nature of Santo Toribio as official and unofficial can be described within a large Catholic framework, but it must be placed within its context as a product of the U.S./Mexican Borderlands. Using three of León's symbols of Borderland religiosity, I will show that the veneration of Santo Toribio continues to grow at a rapid pace as evidenced by the increasing presence of his image in *botánicas*, or popular healing centers, his association with Guadalupe, and in the "religious transnationalism" already present throughout much of history.

## CHAPTER 1 THE *CRISTERO* REBELLION

On the heels of the well-known Mexican Revolution came the little-known conflict between the Mexican government and the Roman Catholic Church known as the *Cristero* Rebellion (1927-29). This conflict arose due to increasingly hostile actions from federal and state government that ultimately led to what historian Robert Quirk calls a “Church strike” where the central Catholic leadership shut down Churches and suspended all worship activity.<sup>39</sup> This extreme act by Church officials followed years of political and economic maneuvering by each side to stabilize the country after the long and divisive Revolution. On one side, President Plutarco Calles, serving from 1924 to 1928 and himself a Revolutionary General, saw the Church as an opportunistic institution that needed to be drastically changed in order to function in the new Republic. On the other side, the Church saw Calles as the figurehead of the new socialist threat that was emerging throughout the world. More importantly, it interpreted Calles’ actions through the Church’s harrowing origins in the late Roman Empire when thousands were butchered and killed for their emerging faith. This conflict was especially difficult in Romo’s native state of Jalisco. Jim Tuck states that the area where Romo was born has a

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<sup>39</sup> Though not explicitly part of his historical narrative, Quirk names Chapter 6 of his book *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church: 1910-1929* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973) “The Church Strike.”

deeply rooted Catholicism that is “European, peasant, clannish” and “uncompromising about faith.”<sup>40</sup> Quirk states:

Priests and laymen labored side by side to create a united national revolutionary force capable of toppling the regime of Plutarco Elias Calles. They embraced the banner of Christ and banner cry, “Viva Cristo Rey.” Their enemies dubbed them “Cristeros” or “Christers,” and it is by this name that the Catholic revolutionaries came to be known. At the end of 1926 it remained to be seen whether armed revolt, however just the cause, could succeed where spiritual weapons, legal action, economic boycott, and external agitation had failed.<sup>41</sup>

This chapter will document the ideological struggle that led to the death of Toribio Romo and to his veneration and canonization. Though the *Cristero* Rebellion has little to do with his current veneration in the U.S./Mexican Borderlands, his history and position as a *Cristero* martyr were essential in securing him the initial fame for a folk veneration to rise.

Toribio Romo was born in 1900 in a Mexico resting between its many revolutions. Romo was born into an indigent Mexican family in the state of Jalisco. Far away from the secular and social aspirations of the elite in Mexico City, Romo was raised by a devout Catholic family and likewise became devout in his youth. He was so devout, in fact, that from an early age he decided to become a priest. Influenced by an uncle who became a priest, he moved with his sister to the neighboring town of Jalostotitlan to attend a religious school for preparation before his formal studies in the adjacent seminary of San Juan de los Lagos.<sup>42</sup> Becoming a priest was not particularly unusual in

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<sup>40</sup> Tuck, 13.

<sup>41</sup> Quirk, 187.

<sup>42</sup> Aside from parish records, the main source of history concerning the life of Romo comes from a biography that his brother Roman Romo wrote following his death. The most recent edition is available at his shrine and contains no publication information. Guzmán and Fitzgerald both critique the common

that place and time, but this decision would ultimately lead to a martyr's death. Due to the decisions of the future Mexican President (who was a 23 year old schoolteacher at this time) and the future Pope John Paul II (who would be born Karol Wotyla twenty years later) Toribio's death would result in his institutional immortality as a Saint in the Roman Catholic Church. Whereas "the State had the advantage of sheer physical power," the Church had the spiritual tradition and ritual precedent for their great loss to become an extraordinary gain when the dust of the Rebellion had settled.<sup>43</sup>

### *RERUM NOVARUM*

Growing up in revolutionary Mexico, Romo must have often reflected on class relations, power structures, and Jesus of the Gospels' own revolutionary message. A similar reflection forced upon many Mexicans by their tumultuous times and negotiation of rising ideas associated with modernity, though not often religious in nature, was part of a much wider effort around the world. The rise and success of Marxist ideals in the mid-19th century resulted in the acceptance and adaptation of these principles around the world in political and institutional ways, Mexico notwithstanding. Recognizing the need for social change, but fearing the Godless doctrines of socialism that Communism engendered, Pope Leo XIII distributed an encyclical entitled *Rerum Novarum* which set

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version of his history in various ways, but until now no modern biography has ever been written about Toribio Romo Gonzales.

<sup>43</sup> Quirk, 149.

down the Church's position on the perceived growing "menace" of socialism.<sup>44</sup> The introduction, in part, reads:

That the spirit of revolutionary change, which has long been disturbing the nations of the world, should have passed beyond the sphere of politics and made its influence felt in the cognate sphere of practical economics is not surprising. The elements of the conflict now raging are unmistakable, in the vast expansion of industrial pursuits and the marvelous discoveries of science; in the changed relations between masters and workmen; in the enormous fortunes of some few individuals, and the utter poverty of the masses; the increased self-reliance and closer mutual combination of the working classes; as also, finally, in the prevailing moral degeneracy.<sup>45</sup>

The Pope opposed land reform, communal properties, and many of the tenets that the framers of Mexican politics at this time were trying to implement. But interestingly, Mexico was in a similar state of "revolutionary change." He continues:

The discussion is not easy, nor is it void of danger. It is no easy matter to define the relative rights and mutual duties of the rich and of the poor, of capital and of labor. And the danger lies in this, that crafty agitators are intent on making use of these differences of opinion to pervert men's judgments and to stir up the people to revolt.<sup>46</sup>

Living in the middle of one example of this type of ideology-laden revolt, this discussion was not easy for Romo. He came of age in a land of constant armed skirmishes and multiple charismatic leaders fighting multiple overlapping revolutions.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Leo XIII, *Rerum novarum*, Encyclical letter on capital and labor, Vatican Web site, May 15, 1891, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html).

<sup>45</sup> *Rerum novarum*, sec. 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Rerum novarum*, sec. 2.

<sup>47</sup> Most recognize the Mexican Revolution as beginning in 1910 when Madero began an uprising against the President Diaz and ending with the Constitution of 1917. Any unity against Diaz eventually dissolved and multiple leaders lead armies for multiple ideological goals. Purnell describes many of the economic and political factors that lead to popular support for the various causes (1999). Quirk, like others, characterizes the time period from 1910 to the end of the *Cristero* Rebellion as the "Mexican Revolution,"

Many of the buildings in the area around where Romo grew up still have the bullet holes from these various times of armed combat.<sup>48</sup> Yet, his Catholic faith and his belief in the Pope grounded him in the solutions. *Rerum Novarum* gave Romo the means and the empowerment to be able to negotiate the tricky politics of his day.<sup>49</sup> James Murphy states that:

Toribio was chairman of a student group that met to study that encyclical, and these seminarians did more than just read the pages of the text. They organized classes for workers in the town, opening their minds to the social teaching of the Church. Years later this interest in social justice would get Toribio Romo in trouble with his superiors.<sup>50</sup>

Despite being from the Pope himself, the calls for labor reform proved too difficult for many of the affluent Catholics of the area who often were local benefactors. Yet the anti-socialist, revolutionary strains in this document were empowering something even larger than class struggle.

The Mexican Revolution came to a tentative end in 1917 with the adoption of a Constitution. Unresolved tensions quieted temporarily through enough military and ideological unity among the Revolution's main actors to create the new legal document and a new government. This new government, responding to centuries of Catholic abuses

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and describes the Catholic Church's role in many of the events during this extended period of time and documents the clash of "rival philosophies (24).

<sup>48</sup> I observed these personally as locals proudly shared details about the specific skirmishes that caused them.

<sup>49</sup> Quirk describes the Catholic philosophical reasoning of *Rerum Novarum* as grounded in medieval Thomistic logic that would deal with worker's rights in a way that led away from the liberalism and socialism of the day (13). The encyclical served as the basis for the "National Catholic Labor Confederation" that actively promoted Catholic-centric social and economic reform, often under threat of physical violence from opposing labor groups (127).

<sup>50</sup> James Murphy, *The Martyrdom of Saint Toribio Romo: Patron of Immigrants* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2007). This booklet is analyzed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.



of power, was entirely secular and, in many cases, anti-Catholic. This occurred around the same time that Romo entered the local seminary for his priestly training. The Constitution was a groundbreaking act influencing other revolutionary Constitutions around the world, but which set an important precedent in Church-State relations in Mexico for decades to come. Several articles of the new Constitution severely curtailed the free practice of religion.<sup>51</sup> These proved to be devastating to the Church.

Luckily for Romo and the millions of other devout Mexican Catholics, the first few Presidents of Mexico after the Constitution did not actively enforce these provisions. Mexico was (and is) so overwhelmingly Roman Catholic that these constitutional articles were mostly an act of anti-religious revolutionary foment in those who have actively fought in the revolution.<sup>52</sup> He was free to minister largely as he saw fit, that is, until the Presidency of Plutarco Calles. A Socialist, atheist, and Freemason, Calles was opposed to the Roman Catholic Church and its dominant place in Mexican life. Calles saw the Catholic Church as the prime object of Mexico's lack of social and economic progress. Calles once stated that:

The enemies of my government may be classified in three groups: the Roman Catholic clergy, various political groups and the reactionary forces which see, in a rupture of relations with the United States, an opportunity to gain their own ends and who would pretend to regard the withdrawal of recognition in the light of an approval by the United States of their activities against this government and its institutions. What has already happened is that the Catholic clergy has incited various groups of fanatics

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<sup>51</sup> Purnell states that "revolutionary anticlericalism and agrarianism were both incorporated into the Constitution of 1917," which included Article 27 that declared all land, even church land, as property of the central government (49).

<sup>52</sup> The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, a Roman Catholic policy institute, states that approximately 90% of Mexicans are baptized Roman Catholics. See Bryan T. Froehle and Mary L. Gautier, *Global Catholicism: Portrait of a World Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), pg. 81. This number was likely higher during the *Cristero* Rebellion.

to rebellion. Outbreaks have taken place in some parts of the country, which the government is energetically punishing.<sup>53</sup>

Calles saw the clergy as enemies of the state. Calles, as a General, Governor, and President, sought throughout his public service to bolster Mexico's economy through the nationalization of public resources and through its secularization. The Church was considered an impediment to both of these goals. Calles once said that the Church created "an incongruous mixture of oil and holy water and the irritation of Big Business."<sup>54</sup> For Calles, this big business, not an economically-minded religious power, was good for Mexico. In an address, Calles drew more attention to this "incongruous mixture" as he stated:

There the churches distinguish between their religious and their political attitude and conduct, while in Mexico from the Independence to the present direct interference of the Catholic church in various manners in temporal and political matters has been a constant historical problem [...] a certain small percentage of Catholics of good faith, but who are not capable of seeing clearly to the bottom of things or into the entanglements of the Church intrigues, all of the Catholics of Mexico who are good Mexicans, make a definite and perfect distinction between their religious duties and the obligation which is urged upon them to approve of, and participate in, the temporal or political activities of their unworthy shepherds.<sup>55</sup>

Calles, like many other Mexican Revolutionaries, saw Catholicism through the political and economic dealings of its leaders, which were often self-serving. Lay Catholics, however, saw the Church through a grand tradition as the embodiment of Christ's teachings and the source of much of their Mexican pride. Yet, the increased enforcement of the Constitution led to more federal and state anti-Catholic legislation

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<sup>53</sup> Plutarco Elias Calles, *Mexico Before the World* (New York: The Academy Press, 1927), 168.

<sup>54</sup> Calles, 11.

<sup>55</sup> Calles, 130.

and regional acts of Catholic repression. These skirmishes and eventual full-out war would lead to tens of thousands of deaths and carve out a new spiritual space for the Church in Mexico.

### *INIQUIS AFFLICTISQUE*

The main Roman Catholic response from Rome was resolute, bold, and framed within the grandiose history of Christendom. In 1926, Pope Pius XI issued the encyclical entitled *Iniquis Afflictisque* against the actions of the Mexican government.<sup>56</sup> The Pope saw the Calles government as the latest, and sinisterly effective, demonic project of secularization as indicative of the erasing of Mexico's "past glories."<sup>57</sup> This past glory included large amounts of political, social, and economic power, as Calles and others despised, and the Church still sought to maintain. The Pope tied the current state in Mexico to the glorious past of Catholic faith. He continued:

If in the first centuries of our era and at other periods in history Christians were treated in a more barbarous fashion than now, certainly in no place or at no time has it happened before that a small group of men has so outraged the rights of God and of the Church as they are now doing in Mexico, and this without the slightest regard for the past glories of their country, with no feelings of pity for their fellow-citizens.<sup>58</sup>

Pope Pius XI sees Christian persecution through the lens of the martyrs of old.

This ancient ideal and practice that has been renewed afresh throughout Christian history

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<sup>56</sup> Pius XI, *Iniquis afflictisque*, Encyclical letter on the persecution of the Church in Mexico, Vatican Web site, November 18, 1926, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_18111926\\_iniquis-afflictisque\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_18111926_iniquis-afflictisque_en.html).

<sup>57</sup> *Iniquis afflictisque*, sec. 2.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*

is what ultimately catapulted Toribio Romo Gonzalez into *Santo* Toribio Romo.<sup>59</sup> The Pope continues by saying, “They have also done away with the liberties of the majority and in such a clever way that they have been able to clothe their lawless actions with the semblance of legality.” Pius also invokes a then current event essential to Catholic religiosity. He states:

Last month on the occasion of the beatification of many martyrs of the French Revolution, spontaneously the Catholics of Mexico came to Our thoughts, for they, like those martyrs, have remained firm in their resolution to resist in all patience the unreasonable behests and commands of their persecutors rather than cut themselves off from the unity of the Church or refuse obedience to this Apostolic See.<sup>60</sup>

The most important figures in Catholic history are usually saints. And furthermore, those that have died in service of God and their fellowmen are usually afforded more esteem. Quoting the biblical Ezekial, the Pope later states that “the bishops, priests, and faithful of Mexico have organized resistance” and “set up a wall for the House of Israel, to stand in battle.” This organized resistance took many forms, some violent, some pacifist, but a strong quasi-unified effort was made by vast throngs of Catholics throughout Mexico to oppose government intervention into the free practice of their faith.

## DEATH

Many Catholics took up arms against the government. Papal and episcopal support were encouraging, but many religious leaders and theologians further solidified Catholic support in the form of religious newspapers and other periodicals that couched

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<sup>59</sup> Throughout this work I will refer to Toribio Romo’s title as the Spanish *Santo* rather than the English “Saint.”

<sup>60</sup> *Iniquis afflictisque, sec. 4.*

the war in religious terms and heavenly obligation. President Calles stated, in reference to *Cristero* leadership, that “the ones who will suffer the consequences, as the really responsible trouble-makers carefully keep themselves under cover.”<sup>61</sup> Most priests fled to large cities to hide from the conflict while a small number took up arms. A contingent continued to minister despite the legal suspension of all Church services. Those who continued to perform Mass and the other Catholic sacraments became the target of government squads.

In 1927, at the height of the Rebellion, Romo was among one of these priests who was hunted down and killed. He was in hiding at the base of a canyon near the town of Tequila (northwest of Guadalajara) when local government authorities discovered his activities and stormed into his house and shot him, first in the hand, then in the face. They carted his body out of the canyon and made the journey to the center of Tequila where they threw his body onto the steps of the city’s church.

Toribio’s death, and the deaths of many others, fueled the flames of change on both sides. The Calles government changed under internal and external threats and renewed itself under the banner of a new political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party. This party would go on to rule Mexico until 2000. For the Catholics, the war and its subsequent impositions would strengthen the allegiance of many to the universal notion of the Catholic Church. This led to the beginning of individual veneration of many of the *Cristero* martyrs of this conflict, including Romo.

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<sup>61</sup> Calles, 165.

## **CHAPTER 2 THE RISE OF A MARTYR-SAINT**

The Constitution of 1917 had symbolically demoted Mexican Catholicism to a subordinate role in Mexican politics, but the *Cristero* Rebellion is what sealed its fate. After the war, Catholic-run schools were forbidden and priests could not leave Churches wearing their ceremonial clothing, among many other sanctions.<sup>62</sup> But more importantly, Catholics lived in fear of the government who had beaten them into submission. After the social and religious shock of the *Cristero* Rebellion, Mexican Catholics sought solace in the grand, universal and unifying tenets of their newly subordinated form of Catholicism. This chapter will analyze some of the hagiographic literature that documented the *Cristero* martyrs with emphasis on the place of Romo. The rise of the importance and esteem of the *Cristero* martyrs is not only due to the tragic events of the war, but also due to the papacy of Pope John Paul II. Through the canonization process and its religious significance, the brutal, often ignominious deaths of the *Cristero* martyrs were given a cosmic meaning that set the stage for Romo's rise to fame.

### **CROSSING EARTHLY BORDERS**

Cunningham proposes that saints are what facilitate the individual Catholic's approach to God and Jesus Christ. He states that beyond "the story of the institutional and empirically retrievable church" lays "the story of our saint, not of our doctrines; of

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<sup>62</sup> Jean Meyer, *La Cristiada* (Mexico City: Libros de Contenido, 1993), 163-174.

people, not of ideas.”<sup>63</sup> Andrew Greeley similarly states that saint’s lives “are stories of God’s love.”<sup>64</sup> Weinstein and Bell discuss this issue in regard to medieval saints, but their description can be applied to our day. They state:

The holy man or woman strains to transcend material existence and to attain a direct personal relationship to divinity. The saint is one who takes literally the invitation to follow Christ and seek perfection. Saints were dutiful sons and daughters of Mother Church, at times ever her saviors, but their spiritual hunger could not be satiated by the everyday nourishment offered by the sacraments, the routine of the monastery, or the ministrations of the priest. Sainly piety was personal, direct, unworldly, and extraordinary.<sup>65</sup>

By design, the *Cristero* saints manifest this same piety.<sup>66</sup> Yet, saintly canonization is not some sort of revelatory experience by the Pope or other Church leaders, but a process of determining that certain individuals are definitely capable of interceding with God. The canonized are not a comprehensive list of those who are potentially worthy of intercession with God within the Roman Catholic worldview, but they are those that have been rigorously found to be committed to such a role in the afterlife through earthly miracles and interventions on behalf of the living faithful. In theory, canonized saints only form part of the “communion of saints,” which by definition is the entire Church.<sup>67</sup> Yet those who have died and found worthy are closer to God and can see earthly life

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<sup>63</sup> Lawrence Cunningham, *The Catholic Experience: Space, Time, Silence, Prayer, Sacraments, Story, Persons, Catholicity, Community, and Expectations* (New York: Crossroad Press, 1985), 151.

<sup>64</sup> Andrew M. Greeley *The Catholic Imagination* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), 38.

<sup>65</sup> Weinstein and Bell, 239.

<sup>66</sup> Guzmán states that, of the Mexican martyrs who were beatified, only those who were not involved in armed conflict in any way were canonized (83). In this regard, Cunningham states that “canonizations are pedagogical by their very nature” (122).

<sup>67</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 269. Emphasis mine.

through their own mortal sojourn and in their new part of God's heavenly kingdom. The Roman Catholic Catechism states that:

Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness . . . They do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus . . . So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped.<sup>68</sup>

The Church tries to limit veneration to only those who have gone through the process of canonization. Through this process, the Saints function as if they were such a body on par with the scriptures, holy and unchangeable. This impulse and the subsequent ecclesiastical institutions that were created to manage it were at work in the very beginnings of Christianity but went through various stages until being formalized in the late Middle Ages.<sup>69</sup>

#### MARTYRDOM IN THE CHRISTIAN TRADITION

Martyrdom became an essential part of the emerging Christian worldview and continued to be throughout the Church's development. The beginning of this process and, indeed, the beginnings of solid Christian identity, start with the bloody and dramatic accounts of Christian martyrdom in the late Roman Empire. Throughout history, most Christians—including the many divergent varieties that history has produced—have looked to these primal Christian times and seen their times as a return to the origins of Christianity and the mythic martyrdom that most forms of Christianity have looked to and continue to look to as a source of truthful validation and courage throughout the

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<sup>68</sup> Catechism, 271. Brown characterizes this concept as more “upperworldly” than “otherworldly” (2).

<sup>69</sup> Cunningham, 36-39.



centuries.<sup>70</sup> As we saw in Chapter 1, this included the Pope and his Mexican flock during the turbulent times of the *Cristero* Rebellion. The Protestant Revolution, another watershed moment in Christianity, saw uprisings and wars that similarly could be seen and interpreted through a hermeneutic of Christian martyrdom. In a classic example during the English Revolution (an extension of the larger Protestant impetus), John Foxe wrote the classic “Book of Martyrs” that appropriated martyrdom for a new generation of Christians. Even some modern groups who reject most traditional elements of Christianity still see the martyrs as their spiritual ancestors.<sup>71</sup>

Though all modern Roman Catholics are instructed to act as “*witnesses of the Gospel*,” martyrdom is still considered something sacred and out of the ordinary.<sup>72</sup>

Concerning martyrs, the Catechism states that:

*Martyrdom* is the supreme witness given to the truth of the faith: it means bearing witness even unto death. The martyr bears witness to Christ who died and rose, to whom he is united by charity. He bears witness to the truth of the faith of the Christian doctrine. He endures death through an act of fortitude.<sup>73</sup>

Dying for the faith, therefore, validates the truthfulness and legitimacy of the Catholic Church and ties the martyr directly to the earthly example of the central figure in Christianity, Jesus of Nazareth.

Saintly relics that gloried in the body and the gruesome transformation that death often brought to the body and its separable parts quickly became an important part of

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<sup>70</sup> Catechism, 2474.

<sup>71</sup> Examples include Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

<sup>72</sup> Catechism, 653.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

Christianity. Weinstein and Bell write that “the relics of the martyrs and saints beneath every altar were eloquent testimony to the power of popular religious needs.”<sup>74</sup> But this practice is often seen in the modern world, as well. For instance, a statue now stands in front of the Church where Romo’s body was flung from a cart after being killed. Immediately many saw Romo as a martyr and collected his blood, bits of his clothing, and the rope that bound him.<sup>75</sup> These relics, like many others, throughout Christian history are held as sacred to their owners or in the churches where they are housed. Santo Toribio is buried in at least seven places, each one revered by pilgrims and tourists. A small bone fragment from each canonized *Cristero* martyr is housed in a glass shrine in the Basilica of Guadalajara.

#### TWENTIETH CENTURY MARTYRDOM

The twentieth century saw more bloodshed than any other century in recorded history.<sup>76</sup> The mass devastation changed the face of world politics and resulted in a change of consciousness for many who experienced these horrors. Yet, as in other eras, this horror could be placed in the context of religious violence and given religiously significant meaning. Pope John Paul II, who assumed the Papacy in 1978, saw the theological and practical benefits of Saints, especially local saints. In the early 1980s, he changed certain aspects of the canonization process that sped up the proceedings and

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<sup>74</sup> Weinstein and Bell, 208.

<sup>75</sup> Diócesis de San Juan de Los Lagos, *Heroes de la Fe: Defensores de la Libertad Religiosa* (San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Mexico: Edimasio, 2006), 202. This volume, produced by the Diocese of San Juan de los Lagos in Jalisco, Mexico, document the lives, deaths, current veneration, and the relics associated with most of the *Cristero* martyrs.

<sup>76</sup> Robert Royal. *The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century: a Comprehensive World History* (New York: Crossroad Press, 2000), 5.

shifted a great deal of the work to local dioceses and archdiocese where the saintly nominees resided or were honored in some way.<sup>77</sup> Also, he directed that groups could be canonized, instead of just individuals. This led to an unprecedented number of canonizations during his time as Pope. By some accounts, Pope John Paul II canonized more Saints than the Popes of the previous 1,000 years.<sup>78</sup>

In 1992, after travelling to Rome to witness the beatification of a group of 24 of the *Cristero* martyrs and being blessed with an object that contained many of the martyrs bones, Pulido Cortes claims to have been cured “completely, immediately and permanently” of fibrosystic mastopathy, a disease which afflicted her breasts.<sup>79</sup> With this, the Archdiocese of Guadalajara began investigating the possibility of the martyrs’ canonization. Two additional miracles were documented from two non-*Cristero* Mexicans who were also beatified. These twenty-six individuals were grouped together administratively and their case was forwarded to Rome and they were canonized in 2000.

#### THE POPULAR *CRISTERO* SAINTS

Each *Cristero* martyr has a local hometown devotion and many, like Romo, have an additional devotion where they were killed. But the regional culture of oral history and pilgrimage site in the period before the canonization of Santo Toribio resulted in a group of *Cristero* martyrs rising to prominence. Three martyrs - all beatified, but only one of

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<sup>77</sup> These new rules were part of the Apostolic Constitution entitled *Divinus Perfectionis Magister* ( released on January 25, 1983. Text available at <[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/apost\\_constitutions/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_apc\\_25011983\\_divinus-perfectionis-magister\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_constitutions/documents/hf_jp-ii_apc_25011983_divinus-perfectionis-magister_en.html)>.

<sup>78</sup> Philip Zaleski. “The Saints of John Paul II.” *First Things* 161 (2006), 30. This is also echoed by Cunningham (121).

<sup>79</sup> Guadalupe Pimentel, *Santos Martires Mexicanos* (Guadalajara: San Pablo, 2006).

them fully canonized - have traditionally been the most recognizable faces from the *Cristero* era; they are Anacleto Gonzales, Miguel Pro, and Cristobal Magallanes.

Miguel Pro was shot by firing squad after yelling the phrase “*Viva Cristo Rey*” a common cry during the Rebellion.<sup>80</sup> However, what is more memorable was his pose; his arms were outstretched in a manner reminiscent of Christ dying on the cross, and the fact that this moment was photographed for future generations to see. Pro continues to show himself as the dominant martyr in many texts. For example, Robert Royal’s book *The Catholic Martyrs of the Twentieth Century: A Comprehensive World History* the chapter concerning the Mexican martyrs is entitled “*Miguel Pro and the Mexican Tragedy.*” Due to some of his controversial statements and actions, Pro has only been beatified and is not included in the *Cristero* group canonization.<sup>81</sup>

Anacleto Gonzalez is the hometown hero in Tepatitlan, which is located twenty miles outside of Guadalajara, but, due to his civic activism and his writings he rose to prominence within Mexico as a popular *Cristero* theologian. A main thoroughfare of his hometown of Tepatitlan (Jalisco, Mexico) is named after Anacleto. It boasts two different statues of him. In fact, the town itself is commonly regarded as the unofficial capital of *Los Altos de Jalisco*, the heart of the *Cristero* Rebellion.<sup>82</sup> Yet now, on the main highway that enters the city, a billboard now boasts, not Gonzalez, but Santo Toribio, advertising the touristic points of interest in *Los Altos*. Many suppose that due to Gonzalez lack of

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<sup>80</sup> This roughly translates as “Long live Christ the King.”

<sup>81</sup> Kenneth L. Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), pg. 151. Here Woodward indicates that this could be due to Pro’s involvement with a group that advocated armed revolt, though Pro himself did not necessarily participate.

<sup>82</sup> Jim Tuck, *The Holy War in Los Altos* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1982), 165.

priestly (and therefore holy) status, he remains only a *beato*, like Pro, and not a fully recognized Saint.

Father Cristobal Magallanes eventually became the titular head of the group canonization of the *Cristero* martyrs likely due to his early death in the conflict. All the official declarations of canonization from Rome read “Cristobal Magallanes and 24 companions.”<sup>83</sup> This official leadership role results in many interpreting his personal history through the context of his titular supremacy.<sup>84</sup>

The continued fame of other *Cristeros* still persists, however. In an upcoming English-speaking film entitled *Cristiada* only Anacleto Gonzalez Flores, Jose Sanchez del Rio (a young martyr outside of the canonized group), and a fictionalized version of Miguel Pro are featured. Toribio’s regional fame is contingent upon his links to local tourism and diocesan memory but his international fame is contingent upon immigration. As we will see in Chapters 3 and 4, this fame is rising despite not being grounded in institutional Roman Catholicism. Even Sanchez’ thesis frequently refers to the canonization of Santo Toribio without mentioning the group context.<sup>85</sup>

## HAGIOGRAPHY

The fame of these exploits and the local fame of other martyrs resulted in their spiritual notoriety spreading throughout Mexico, then regionally in Latin America. Decades before these post-canonization accounts of the *Cristero* martyrs, Guillermo Havers published an account of important individuals in Mexican Roman Catholic

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<sup>83</sup> One of these declarations is available at <[http://www.vatican.va/news\\_services/liturgy/documents/index\\_notifications\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/documents/index_notifications_en.html)>.

<sup>84</sup> Personal interviews. June 15, 2007. Pulgueros, Jalisco, Mexico.

<sup>85</sup> Sanchez, iv and 11.

history which naturally included the *Cristero* martyrs.<sup>86</sup> His book clearly shows the dynamic nature of popularity among the participants. Seventeen small chapters include the stories of individual martyrs, including Gonzales and Pro. Santo Toribio is named in a list of fifty “Other Martyred Priests”, which includes future “head saint”, Cristobal Magallanes.<sup>87</sup> This clearly shows the eventual fame of Toribio was not contingent upon his popularity in the interim years between martyrdom and canonization. Based on his titular supremacy, some hold the view that he is indeed the leader of the martyrs. Yet, paradoxically, Havers’ book relegates Magallanes to the same place as Santo Toribio with a brief three line description that does nothing to show his future prominence.

The central piece of Santo Toribio’s hagiographic literature is a biography written by his younger brother, fellow priest Roman Romo Gonzalez, in the late 1940s. This biography was the primary source of material about Romo between his death and any official recognition by the Church. Roman Romo was an active parish priest in Guadalajara in an area where many from his (and his brother’s hometown) of Santa Ana de Guadalupe have moved. The younger Romo kept his memory alive, but immigration was never a part of his story during this period.

The legacy of Pope John Paul II has been profound around the world, but in Mexico in particular. This Pope, above all others, holds a special place in the heart of Catholic Mexico due to his visits and his iconic words to his Mexican flock. Yet, his impact on Mexico, especially with regard to Santo Toribio, is most felt in his changes to

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<sup>86</sup> Guillermo María Havers, *Testigos de Cristo en México* (Estado de México: Ediciones Promesa, 1986), 103-179.

<sup>87</sup> Havers, 179-183.

the process of canonization and the place of Sainthood in his theological thought. Many devotional books are written in the United States that try to capture the universal spirit of the ministry of this Pope, especially through his regional canonizations.

Most general works of modern saints or American saints contain almost nothing about Toribio, save for his name. In *John Paul II's Book of Saints*, Bunson and Bunson offer a general history of the *Cristero* Rebellion with a general list of attributes of the martyrs.<sup>88</sup> O'Malley tells the story in *Saints of North America* by using Cristobal Magallanes as the *Cristero* archetype because he “exemplifies the spirit of the martyrs.”<sup>89</sup>

Between 2000 and 2006, four books were published in Mexico commemorating the canonization of the 25 Martyrs. These books are important because they demonstrate the official shift to the wording of the liturgical calendar, which reads “Saint Cristobal Magallanes and Companions.” Bunson and O'Malley treat the Martyrs in this same liturgical manner, but these books establish the preeminence of Magallanes, at least in name, to the Mexican audience. In his treatment of Santo Toribio, Fidel Gonzalez emphasizes the young age at which he was ordained a priest and other notable achievements of Toribio.<sup>90</sup> This is, however, in the context of the remarkable achievements of the dozens of other martyrs. Gonzalez includes Anacleto Gonzalez and many other martyrs outside of the group of the twenty-five fully canonized.

## CONCLUSION

With respect to the Catholic dissidents, President Calles stated:

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<sup>88</sup> Matthew Bunson and Margaret Bunson, *John Paul II's Book of Saints* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2007).

<sup>89</sup> Vincent J. O'Malley, “Saints of North America,” (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2004).

<sup>90</sup> Fidel Gonzalez, *México, Tierra de Mártires* (San Pedrito, Jalisco, Mexico: San Pedro, 2003).

But it is my opinion, which I am certain will be borne out very quickly by the developments, that this scheme of the Catholic agitators to which I refer will have no effect upon the economic or social life of the country, and will constitute a definite proof of the weakness of these people.<sup>91</sup>

Though they fought hard, they were indeed weak in terms of the overall outcome of the war. Yet, as we have seen with the saintly figures who arose in the aftermath of the Rebellion, they were not weak in their resolve to keep living their Catholic faith. As Mexico changed politically through the century, the faith was able to be lived more fully. For reasons we will explore in the rest of this thesis, Santo Toribio is rising above the rest of the martyrs of the *Cristero* Rebellion, mostly due to his unofficial role as a heavenly protector of undocumented immigrants. Yet, as the hagiography above shows, there is no basis for this innovation within official Catholic thought.

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<sup>91</sup> Calles, 122.



### CHAPTER 3 THE RISE OF A BORDER SAINT

Based in Mexico City, the True Catholicism Society (*Sociedad El Verdadero Catolicismo*) distributes hundreds of pamphlets that can be found in the entrances of Catholic churches throughout Mexico. These instructional pamphlets emphasize certain Catholic doctrines or aspects of religious life that parishioners may be in need of. One pamphlet, entitled “The Traditions of the Church and popular traditions,” criticizes the tendency in Mexican religion to rely on practices that the institutional Church does not sanction. The author, Priest Pedro Herrasti, writes at the conclusion of the pamphlet:

We need to distinguish clearly between the tradition of the Church, as important as the Bible, from the traditions and customs that abound in our communities and that in many cases do not have any religious sense sometimes becoming completely likely to fall into superstitions, replacing God, his power, and mercy that puts hope in silliness and trickery.<sup>92</sup>

Herrasti describes Catholics donning wrestling masks during Catholic feasts days, drunkenness after Catholic sacraments, like baptisms or weddings, pagan traditions with Catholic veneers, and the mixing of “ancient Indian traditional from before colonial times” which includes ceremony directed toward multiple gods.<sup>93</sup> This tension between the official and unofficial is a common theme in Mexican religiosity. Many, like those of

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<sup>92</sup> Pedro Herrasti. *La Tradición de la Iglesia y las tradiciones populares* (Mexico City: La Sociedad EVC, 2006), 12.

<sup>93</sup> Herrasti, 11-12. Espín points out that the emphasis on Tradition (capitalized) and tradition, which comes from the Council of Trent, which signify doctrine and daily practices, respectively (Quoted in Christian, 6).

the True Catholicism Society, see the pure forms of Catholicism, unfettered by local or indigenous innovation and cultural excesses, as the necessary way to keep close to God.<sup>94</sup>

B. Marie Christian states that it is precisely the mixture of the old and the new that makes it powerful. She states that “regardless of the desires of officialdom and the considerable pressure for assimilation” that culturally-nuanced forms of Catholicism protect group identity, but “Over the centuries, Church and culture have become intertwined in complex ways that continue to provoke comment from the institutional Church up to the present day.”<sup>95</sup> The difference between official and unofficial is important to understand as we observe Santo Toribio rising in prominence. Modern religious symbols in Mexico rarely come to prominence within the institutional bounds of the Church. Yet, the place of Santo Toribio’s patronage comes from a dialogue between the official and the unofficial that is generally approved of, whether explicitly or implicitly, by clergy.

This chapter will use various forms of hagiography and various types of commercialized material culture to document the rise of Santo Toribio as an unofficial patron of immigrants. After a brief discussion of popular saints and their place in Mexico, three locations in Mexico will be analyzed in this chapter, though other locations in the United States will be analyzed in subsequent chapters. Two writings from the U.S. will then serve as paradigms in describing the changing place of Santo Toribio as he moves from a relatively minor martyr to a prominent Border Saint that still enjoys the trappings of institutional glory. Though fully expounded upon in Chapter 5, this chapter will trace

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<sup>94</sup> O’Connor quotes a Tijuana Catholic priest as describing another folk veneration, this one of Juan Soldado (described below) who says “The Church views it as something closer to a superstition, or a false gospel, than an authentic religious movement” (1).

<sup>95</sup> B. Marie Christian, *Belief in Dialogue: U.S. Latina Writers Confront Their Religious Heritage* (New York: Other Press, 2005), 4.

the spiritual benefits of hybridizing catholic forms of religion with more relevant culturally needs. Sanchez and Guzmán both refer to Santo Toribio as a Patron of Immigrants but offer geographically-limited evidence. This chapter constitutes a first step in documenting and attempting to explain this unique phenomenon.

## POPULAR SAINTS

The case of Santo Toribio is a new take on an old and, in some ways, ancient practice. Popular canonization and popular hagiography have been around for a long time. Popular hagiographies have included “songs, stories, and drama, in popular art, in gesture and ritual.”<sup>96</sup> Weinstein and Bell differentiate between the Saint as a historical person whose life inspired others (which then led to institutional canonization) and the distinct process of veneration, or “cult of the saint”. They state:

The cult of the saint was something else again; in a sense it was everything that the saint was not. Originally intended to honor the martyred heroes of the church’s persecution by the Roman state, saints’ cults continued to edify the faithful with Christian ideals. But already in the age of the martyrs, veneration was mixed with supplication, and the spiritual power of the saints came to be manifested in their material remains. In popular piety the very meaning of the saint’s life turned upside down: the physical remains of those who had transcended material existence were collected as talismans against the vicissitudes of worldly life. Where saints had regarded their bodies as reservoirs of sin and mortal enemies of the spirit; their remains were treated as vessels of miracle. The saint who had spent a lifetime resisting the importunities of the world became a dispenser of worldly favors.<sup>97</sup>

Canonization itself is not a guarantee that even self-identifying Catholics will venerate a Saint over one that has not been canonized. This “popular piety”

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<sup>96</sup> Mary-Ann Constantine, “Saints Behaving Badly: Sanctity and Transgression in Breton Popular Tradition.” In *Celtic Hagiography and Saints’ Cults*, ed. Jane Cartwright. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), 200.

<sup>97</sup> Weinstein and Bell, 239.

can occur inside or outside the bounds of canonization and—especially in the case of Mexico—can even be completely outside of the Church. Popular saints are ubiquitous in Mexico. For example, *Juan Soldado* is believed to be an unjustly executed soldier who blesses those trying to cross the border, much like Santo Toribio.<sup>98</sup> The highly acclaimed *Jesus Malverde* has become a patron to drug traffickers.<sup>99</sup> *Santa Teresita* and *El Nino Fidencio* were Northern Mexican healers who are still venerated many years after their deaths.<sup>100</sup> *Santisima Muerte* enjoys a strong following in Mexico City as a granter of riches and giver of life.<sup>101</sup> In many areas, syncretic forces work to blend pre-Columbian veneration with Roman Catholic veneration. In Southern Mexico and Northern Guatemala for example, *San Simon/Maximon* is completely and unapologetically dualistic in nature, much like many of the icons used in *santeria* and *voudou*.<sup>102</sup>

Unofficial veneration oftentimes deals with issues that orthodox or mainstream Catholics would call “pure religious flapdoodle.”<sup>103</sup> This will not immediately be a problem as Santo Toribio is compared to other folk saints, but as the action of local

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<sup>98</sup> León briefly discusses the veneration of Juan Soldado in Tijuana (pgs. vii-viii, 158, 254). For a complete treatment of the history of Juan Soldado, see Paul J. Vanderwood, *Juan Soldado: Rapist, Murderer, Martyr, Saint* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>99</sup> For research on Jesus Malverde, see Kristin Gudrun Jonsdottir, “Voces de la Subalternidad Periferica: Jesus Malverde y Otros Santos Profanos de Mexico” (Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University, 2004). A chapter dedicated to the history of these saints can be found in James S. Griffith, *Folk Saints of the Borderlands* (Tucson: Rio Nuevo Publishers, 2003), 65-90.

<sup>100</sup> León discusses the current veneration of these saints in Chapter 4 of his book on these saints (127-162). Griffith gives their overall histories in Chapters 3 (43-64) and 7 (127-144) of his book.

<sup>101</sup> This saint is highly popular in Mexico City, but can be seen throughout the Borderlands.

<sup>102</sup> Jim Pieper, *Guatemala's Folk Saints* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002).

<sup>103</sup> Finley, Mitch. *Heavenly Helpers: St. Anthony and St. Jude* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 3.

Catholic leadership is examined later, the line between what is sanctioned and what is not sanctioned becomes blurry. Santo Toribio is unique among folk saints because, first and foremost, he is an officially canonized saint of the modern Roman Catholic Church. “Unofficial” folk saints can be a source of pride among adherents to a particular cult. Often folk saints are venerated using a mixture that involves official practices such as the rosary, novenas, and local shrines. There may be “folk” practices that involve official saints that are particular to a certain town, but these lie within the liturgical discretion of a local Catholic official. With few exceptions, the folk saints of Mexico and their adherence lie completely outside of Roman Catholic control. Many times, there is systematic effort to stop adherence to individual folk saints. Mexican clergy largely do not condone the veneration of people outside of the canon among their parishioners. Despite being so steeped in Roman Catholic liturgical thought, the growth of the veneration of Santo Toribio since 2000 has included many elements of popular Catholicism and, moreover, is becoming defined by these developments.

#### SANTA ANA DE GUADALUPE

Santa Ana de Guadalupe is a tiny Mexican hamlet with a few hundred inhabitants, mostly farmers, located between Jalostotitlan and San Miguel el Alto in Jalisco, Mexico.<sup>104</sup> It is located on several acres around a central hill of moderate size atop which sits the small chapel, nicknamed *La Mesita*, that contains the ossuary box of Santo Toribio.<sup>105</sup> The rest of the city sits uneasily around this central shrine. It has housed the

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<sup>104</sup> Despite its size, Santa Ana de Guadalupe is a fully functional town complete with private residences, farmhouses, small grocery stores, and even a local branch of Alcoholics Anonymous.

<sup>105</sup> The little chapel is about 150 by 200 feet made from stone with a pinkish hue.

majority of the remains of Santo Toribio Romo since the mid-1950s, but not until the canonization of 2000 did it have any touristic worth to Mexican Catholics as a pilgrimage destination. Parish buildings were built around *La Mesita* to accommodate the popularity, including a separate area for confessions.<sup>106</sup> A large rectory was also built to the east of this complex. Two gift shops were built, one directly west of the church and a small one to the south. In 2009, the dirt road into town was paved in cement.

During the week, Santa Ana de Guadalupe is quiet. On Saturdays, it is busy. All the shops that line the one street into town open up to the many visitors. The two large parking lots at the bottom of the hill on either side of the street fill up throughout the day. However on Sundays, the situation is quite different. The road into town completely fills up and parking is hard to find. Dozens of tour busses fight for space in the town and in its outskirts. In the last decade, the site has become increasingly larger through a series of modernization projects and construction of increasingly larger buildings to accommodate the large influx of visitors.<sup>107</sup>

The extreme popularity of Santo Toribio's shrine as a tourist destination may explain a major portion of his preeminence among his official equals (and his heavenly superior *San Cristobal Magallanes*) in Santa Ana de Guadalupe and other areas in the vicinity. The hagiographic literature that is sold at the shrine of Santo Toribio in Santa Ana de Guadalupe turns Santo Toribio into an unofficial leader among official equals. Magallanes name is often replaced, rendering it "Santo Toribio Romo and 24 Martyr

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<sup>106</sup> Confessions and masses are offered all day long on weekends.

<sup>107</sup> Through the several years that I regularly visited the shrine, I saw many of these projects in construction. The nearby John Paul II Museum, that houses *Cristero* martyr memorabilia, had a model of what the construction would look like when it is finished. I have not been back to see the progress.

Companions”. In addition, his large picture is placed in a prominent place in the center of the cover with much smaller portraits of the other Saints surrounding him. His biography is first, whereas his biography is usually towards the end of other collections of martyr biographies, in accordance with the chronological order of their deaths.

Another booklet sold at the shrine is a comic book, intended for children, that tells the story of Toribio’s life. It is based on Father Roman Romo’s biography of his saintly older brother, but begins with a typical Santo Toribio Border story. Neither this story nor any similar border story appeared in the biography, which was published in the years immediately following his martyrdom. An updated comic book became available for purchase at the shrine which discussed the Rebellion itself in more detail and corrected some historical omissions from the first. The shrine of Santo Toribio at Santa Ana de Guadalupe is a parish church with a parish priest and is in every way an “official” extension of the Roman Catholic Church. Yet, it is clear the image of Santo Toribio that it conveys is not a perfectly official one.

The most popular form of Santo Toribio prayer cards that can be found throughout the Borderlands can also be found, and likely originate, in Santa Ana de Guadalupe.<sup>108</sup> Here, as in other places, the cards are identical on the front but have two alternate forms on the back.<sup>109</sup> One contains a general prayer that identifies Santo Toribio as a martyr and asks for his intercession with God. The other is an immigrant’s prayer

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<sup>108</sup> A unknown company (with the inscription “GG”) produces these cards which bear the common image of Santo Toribio on the front with his name and were found in literally every city that had Santo Toribio merchandise. Another almost identical version is found at the main shrine in Santa Ana de Guadalupe which has slightly larger dimensions and features the additional words “Ruega por nosotros” (pray for us).

<sup>109</sup> The shops, bookstores, and *botanicas* (discussed in Chapter 5) that carry these cards often differ as to which version is available for sale.

that asks for protection for the family that is being left behind, the ability to overcome the challenges of physically crossing the Border, and the ability to continue strong in the Catholic faith once across the Border.

This “official hybridity” comes in less dramatic forms, as well. Two books describe the life of Santo Toribio in the context of many other martyrs, but display him in interesting prominence on the cover.<sup>110</sup> Both books contain the exact same story, word for word, and both place his portrait in the highest place on the cover. Being a publication of his home Diocese may explain this, but the other martyr from the Diocese, Pedro Esqueda, is not next to him on one of the covers.<sup>111</sup>

The transnational nature of Santo Toribio is becoming increasingly evident even at this quasi-official pilgrimage location. For instance, a devotional candle available for purchase in Santa Ana de Guadalupe that features the title “Protector del Emigrante” was produced by Mystic Products in Los Angeles, CA.<sup>112</sup> Aside from this, many ex-voto material contains, not only Border Crossing experiences, but bilateral activities of every kind, including military service.

## SAN JUAN DE LOS LAGOS

Located about 40 miles northeast of Santa Ana de Guadalupe lies the bustling city of San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco. Second only to the Basilica of Guadalupe near Mexico

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<sup>110</sup> Diócesis de San Juan de Los Lagos, (2002), (2006).

<sup>111</sup> A different, but equally telling example occurs on the Guadalajara Archdiocese website. The website designer inexplicably places Santo Toribio at the bottom of the list of martyrs. Many Catholic officials in the area simply do not know what to do with him. See <<http://arquidiocesisgdl.org.mx/Martires/index.php>>.

<sup>112</sup> Another interesting example is a small bust of Santo Toribio for sale in Santa Ana de Guadalupe and San Juan de los Lagos that is made in China. A future study should look to the commercial sources of Santo Toribio merchandise.



City in terms of popularity, San Juan de los Lagos is crossroads and repository of Mexican religious culture, both official and unofficial. In fact, many tourists that visit Santa Ana de Guadalupe only go there because it is part of the tour to San Juan de los Lagos. The icon of the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos surged in popularity in the early 20th century after several miraculous healings were reported. A Papal visit and blessing in the 1980s further solidified its status as an essential part of Roman Catholic religiosity in Mexico.

The sheer magnitude of tourism here draws multiple regional variations in the types of material culture available and in the persons that are venerated. For example, El Niño Fidencio, a popular Border saint from the north, is displayed through a series of devotional cards. Jesus Malverde, the famous patron of drug traffickers (discussed below), is found in abundance in every media imaginable. Toribio is also found in abundance. In some shops he is found alongside other Cristero martyrs, in some he featured as alone, but alongside the popular saints, mentioned above. As a shrine of immense popularity and dedicated to another, San Juan de los Lagos functions distinctly from Santa Ana de Guadalupe but it reflects the transnational nature of Santo Toribio, while propelling it further.

## TIJUANA

Tijuana is home to ideas, influences, and people from various areas around Mexico. In this way it much like San Juan de los Lagos, but being one of the major Border cities, the Santo Toribio phenomenon plays out differently. At the Juan Soldado shrine, near the Border, Jesus Malverde, a popular saint from Sinaloa, figures prominently among the merchandise of Juan Soldado, Santo Toribio and Guadalupe. For

example, I found two leather amulets that seem to be marketed toward two different audiences; both are the same size, shape, have the same colored stitching, and were available in a variety of colored leather housings. Yet, one pictured *Jesus Malverde* superimposed upon a painting of Guadalupe appearing to Juan Diego, and the other pictured him superimposed upon an image of a Mexican flag with marijuana leaves to his side.<sup>113</sup> Also for sale was a rosary, Catholic prayer beads often used inside church buildings, with images of *Jesus Malverde*. These images were laminated onto the large beads that typically remind an adherent to recite the “Our Father” prayer.

Yet, Santo Toribio’s presence is different here. Even in the midst of this flagrantly unofficial merchandise, his *Cristero* nature is unknown even in a place far removed from that conflict in popular memory. Free flyers were present in 2006 at one of the two stalls in front of the cemetery that houses the main Juan Soldado shrine. These featured the stylized drawing of the standard Romo portrait under which was name, dates of birth and death, and his commemoration as only a martyr with no mention of any miraculous border actions, despite being only several hundred feet away from the Border. Also in 2006, there was a handmade piece of art with a “Driver’s Prayer” meant for commercial truck or taxi drivers to attach to the inside of their windshields via an included suction cup, with Romo’s standard portrait glued on the front.<sup>114</sup> The picture of Romo was hand cut, as evidenced by the irregular pattern around the circumference of the oval, glued onto the back side of the CD with the original copyright information present around the

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<sup>113</sup> August 07

<sup>114</sup> This was a repurposed America Online CD with the prayer mechanically printed on the data side. This was on a vendor cart only several hundred feet away from the San Ysidro Border crossing in 2006. No Santo Toribio merchandise has been available in that similar area in my subsequent visits.

edge and part of the title to the sides of Romo's image. The presence of a Santo Toribio School and the fleeting material in the surrounding area might indicate a Catholic attempt to circumnavigate Juan Soldado as a patron of immigration. Theologically and ecclesiastically there is no need for a *Cristero* martyr being in Tijuana, especially one that never left Jalisco.<sup>115</sup>

#### BEGINNINGS OF LEGITIMIZATION

Like most hagiography, ancient and modern, increased popularity leads to increasing pressure on historical details on events in the particular saint's life and actions. For instance, the primal Border story of Santo Toribio's contact in the desert can reference Tequila instead of Santa Ana de Guadalupe. The authors and storytellers that use this variation are found around Tequila and mostly involved with tourism. Thus, regional pride and economic incentives can regionalize and otherwise personalize stories of famous individuals, despite official or quasi-official versions of events.

In the United States, one Catholic booklet is retelling the Toribio myth through an American lens. James Murphy's *The Martyrdom of Saint Toribio Romo: Patron of Immigrants* shows a few important characteristics that can occur with this unofficial hagiography.<sup>116</sup> First, the title is a grand example of the official juxtaposed with the unofficial. The title is even more significant when considering the booklet only has a few brief passages that mention Santo Toribio's border exploits. The back cover of the

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<sup>115</sup> The presence of Santo Toribio in Tijuana seems to be waning. Additional research, particularly interviewing local clergy, needs to be done to see if anyone is or has been promoting the Saint.

<sup>116</sup> James Murphy, *The Martyrdom of Saint Toribio Romo: Patron of Immigrants* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2007). This booklet can be found wherever Roman Catholic stores desire it or from the Liguori website, but I have observed it in various places in the United States, including Los Angeles, CA and at a Trappist Monastery in Huntsville, UT.

booklet states, with reference to Santo Toribio, “Rarely does the life of one person impact us so deeply that we are forced to reflect on the meaning of our own life”. This and other passages portray Santo Toribio as a very important individual in Mexican religious history and not the “one martyr out of many” of previous literature. It is also important to note that Murphy uses a story that up until the 2007 publication of the book was attributed to Anacleto Gonzalez.<sup>117</sup> “Official” and seemingly orthodox stories are still prone to mistakes and embellishments depending on the reliability of the sources.

Murphy’s booklet serves as a first uneasy step into negotiating the place of Santo Toribio as an unofficial patron of immigrants and an official part of the group canonization. Like the Tequila variation of the Border story, any mistakes on the author’s part are due to a retelling with an agenda. Murphy’s book is similar to other devotional material in the Borderlands that places the immigrant story uneasily and as almost a *non sequitor* within the context of official and/or more universally accepted forms of Catholic devotion. A novena entitled “Santo Toribio Romo: Patron de los Inmigrantes” (Patron of Immigrants) places in a quasi-liturgical setting.<sup>118</sup> Like Murphy’s work the name implies that his life or his canonization has something fundamentally to do with immigration, but the content does not.

#### RETROACTIVE CONTINUITY

In perhaps the pinnacle of Santo Toribio’s modern hagiography, Perez-Rodriguez (a Roman Catholic priest) and Arias create a fictional dialogue with Santo Toribio where they rewrite the historical story of his life within the context of immigration, despite the

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<sup>117</sup> Murphy, 19.

<sup>118</sup> I found this booklet in Ciudad Juarez in August 2008. It had no publication information.

fact that Santo Toribio never left the state of Jalisco during the twenty-eight years of his life.<sup>119</sup> In this fictional dialogue, Santo Toribio himself talks about his apparitions on the border. When the narrator asks how he could possibly know how to relate to migrants, Toribio recounts his early life, his studies, and his life as a priest in terms of his “migration”. The authors link his separation from family, persecution, and eventual death as reasons that qualify Toribio Romo for being a Patron of Immigrants.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter shows various examples of the veneration of Santo Toribio outside of the strictly official versions of Santo Toribio. These range from slight differences in the official record, such as Romo’s usurpation as the head saint of the group canonization, to wholly innovated differences, such as his prominence as the “Patron of Immigrants.” To some this notion of officiality is important, but to others it is not. This artificial distinction between the official and the unofficial is not meant to be a permanent way of looking at Santo Toribio but is a transitional view that will be discarded once Santo Toribio can be seen in light of better theoretical models in the following chapters. This tension is important to document, however, as Santo Toribio gains popularity in strict Catholic contexts for reasons that are in harmony with the institutional framework that supports him.

One Catholic commentator states that saints “care about us, and they are so intimate with the Divine Mystery that they cannot but act in loving concord with the

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<sup>119</sup> Miguel Arias and Arturo Perez-Rodriguez. *Saints of the Americas: Conversations with 30 Saints from 15 Countries*. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2007).

Divine will”.<sup>120</sup> Could this “Divine Mystery” include notions of unjust political borders? Does Santo Toribio act as a “heavenly coyote” because it is the will of God? Whatever the answer to that may be, Santo Toribio’s folk stories fill a need of modern Catholic discourse, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

It seems that modern hagiography should be free from the errors that plagued the medieval hagiography, yet in practice it is “a meeting place for myth and experience, for learned and popular culture.”<sup>121</sup> The stories of modern saints’ lives benefit from the new technology at our disposal, but Santo Toribio’s hagiography shows that religious innovation and oral folklore will continue to find their way into “the official”. In many ways, the cult of Santo Toribio resembles the cult of the saints before the Roman Catholic bureaucracy sufficiently developed to begin the process of institutional canonization.<sup>122</sup> Mexican Catholics need a saint who legitimizes and sacralizes their economic and political plight. Jalisco acts as the center of Mexico’s faithful heritage of martyrs. *Los Altos de Jalisco* acts as a center of religious pilgrimage and an area from which many citizens immigrate to the United States for economic reasons. The varying ways that Santo Toribio’s story enters the Mexican psyche reflect these conditions and these needs. The case of Santo Toribio shows that John Paul II’s group canonizations can take on a life of their own and challenge previous notions of folk religiosity.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Mitch Finley, *Heavenly Helpers: St. Anthony and St. Jude* (New York: Crossroad Press, 1994), 5.

<sup>121</sup> Weinstein and Bell, 238.

<sup>122</sup> Cunningham states that “There was nothing like the formal canonization process in the first millennium of Christian history,” but that veneration was from the “ground up” and developed spontaneously, usually without interference from local clergy (2005, 22).

<sup>123</sup> Pope John Paul II is extremely popular in Mexico, even after his death. In the Summer of 2008, I observed that John Paul II merchandise was on sale in all places that sold religious wares in various parts of

## CHAPTER 4 THE BORDER AS SHRINE

By design, Olvera Street in Los Angeles, CA is a veritable mecca of Mexican-American culture. Despite any contrived machinations on the part of city government for its creation and tourist appeal, its many shops and carts draw from all corners of Chicano/a and Latino/a art, religion, and all other cultural aspects of the long history of the Border, including Santo Toribio. The varied presence of Santo Toribio at Olvera Street sheds light into how his veneration in official and unofficial spheres is developing in the United States and how this, in return, affects Mexican veneration. Two stories from different vendors there illustrate these tendencies.

In one shop, like many others, a complex maze of tables and racks were present with an abundance of knick-knacks, pictures, and statues. Also like many others, this one was overtly religious and included prayer cards, statues, and booklets of Santo Toribio. This particular vendor had been introduced to Santo Toribio on the Border itself while crossing in the deserts of California. She stated that the man she hired to guide her across the Border, her *coyote*, had given it to her and instructed her that Santo Toribio helped Border crossers. At a different shop, another woman had a drastically different story. She

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the states of Jalisco and Michoacán, but only one store had Pope Benedict XVI merchandise. John Paul items typically carry two famous quotes from the Pope's speeches in his many visits to Mexico: "Mexico, land of martyrs" and "Mexico, always faithful." His visits to Mexico paved the way for a normalized State-Church relationship and his memorable, praising quotes has left an indelible impression on Mexicans that effect the memory of those he canonized in their land.

was introduced to Santo Toribio only weeks earlier while on vacation in Mexico. A friend had taken her to Santa Ana de Guadalupe, Romo's main pilgrimage site, where she purchased several items for herself and many more to sell at her stand in Los Angeles. She was still participating in (legal) Border crossing to bring her merchandise. Despite these different scenarios both women were selling Santo Toribio merchandise as "the Patron of Immigrants."<sup>124</sup>

Both these scenarios lie in contrast to the old Catholic mission that lies to the North of Olvera Street. The gift shop also features Santo Toribio, but not explicitly as the patron of anything. A series of key chains, devotional booklets, and images portray him largely in an official light, or in other words as a martyr and as part of the larger canonization. Two booklets stand out from the other merchandise. One simply tells the story of the life of Romo in surprising detail compared to its small size, yet no mention is made of Border crossing.<sup>125</sup> A novena booklet, itself in the interstitiality of official and unofficial, sets a nine-day prayer cycle to a combination of vignettes from the life of Romo.<sup>126</sup> It briefly offers a migrant prayer asking for the intercession of Santo Toribio after invoking the "Litany of Saints" and in the midst of other specific prayers. Yet, this small prayer shows that the Church itself is implicitly allowing migrant Catholics to recognize him as their patron. This chapter will show that the U.S./Mexican Border, not

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<sup>124</sup> This experience also demonstrates complex variations on the way that knowledge of Santo Toribio (usually coupled with some sort of veneration) is transmitted. Sanchez explains that those he interviewed were introduced to Santo Toribio either before or after their Border crossing, never in the process (11).

<sup>125</sup> It has no publication information, but most likely comes from Mexico because of the prominence of the Mexican elements of Toribio and it is in the Spanish language.

<sup>126</sup> Novenas are prayer books that have no official function within the Church, but are frequently found throughout Mexico, even in churches. They consist of a nine day cycle of readings and prayers and can be dedicated to any particular saint or religious idea.



Santa Ana de Guadalupe, is increasingly becoming the center of devotion to Santo Toribio. This is primarily due to the vacuum of a visceral figure that can offer a living seal of reality on the increasingly complex and deadly act of crossing the Border. There is no dearth of theological reasoning and innovation concerning the place of the Border, as I will discuss below, but there is no Saint that can intercede with God. This implicit recognition of Santo Toribio will be discussed in more detail. Saints and their special powers are essential to the Catholic imaginary.

### CATHOLICIZING THE BORDER

During Romo's life, the U.S./Mexican Border was seen as a divide between Catholic Mexico and the Protestant United States. This is still largely true, but the religious ideology that surrounded this concept in Romo's home diocese of Guadalajara led to an official policy to discourage immigration to the United States on purely religious reasons.<sup>127</sup> After the Catholics loss in the *Cristero* Rebellion and the subsequent governmental reforms that solidified the socialist and largely anti-Catholic PRI party to rule for over 70 years, this idea of a religious border gave way to the geopolitical reality of a political border. It had always been a political border, of course. Contested and despised since the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, the U.S./Mexican Border itself served as a man-made colonial division of contiguous ecosystems, physical features, and culturally-bound people. But this shift in Catholic consciousness, created a space where the divine could show how much more powerful the force behind the Church was than the petty squabbling of man. An actual biblical exegesis of the migrant situation will be

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<sup>127</sup> Fitzgerald, 79-80.

discussed further below, but how does this ideological change square with the politics of what is surrounding the Church?

As in *Rerum Novarum*, modern Catholic theologians apply ancient Christian doctrines and the centuries of tradition to the many complexities and theological possibilities of modernity. Over the last few decades an increasing number of Catholics are doing this to the U.S./Mexican Border. This is not part of some sort of new thought but stems from a preexisting (and continually emerging) paradigm of theological work by Catholic authors that centers on Mexican migration. The works in this section are not about Santo Toribio in particular, but they demonstrate this Border theology at work. Not only does Santo Toribio fit into a large Roman Catholic framework, but also into a very specific, regionally-oriented milieu of Catholic Border theology.

From Mexico, several works highlight the impulse to see current migrations in the context of Biblical accounts of migration. In the book *La solidaridad con los migrantes* (Solidarity with Migrants), Jesuit scholar Javier Saravia writes that Jesus Christ was a “migrant in a foreign land” and that he “crossed and broke through borders in order to reunite men and women, communities and countries, overcoming impediments and barriers: nationality, race, gender, customs, creeds.”<sup>128</sup> Saravia uses Jesus’ parable of the Good Samaritan to paint a picture of modern Pharisees, Levites, and Samaritans who act as wholly good or evil agents in the battle over the lives of migrants. The word Hebrew, he suggests, comes from a root that implies “gypsy” or “marginalized.”<sup>129</sup> Therefore, all

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<sup>128</sup> Javier Saravia. *La solidaridad con los migrantes: En la vida y en la Biblia* (Mexico City: Buena Prensa, 2004), 9.

<sup>129</sup> Saravia, 12.

of Christendom stems from migratory injustice that requires a fundamental introspection about how we are dealing with the modern marginalized. Saravia analyzes the political antecedents that lead to the current humanitarian crisis in Mexico, specifically, but also the whole of North and South America.

Manuel Gomez' book *Una mirada a la migracion mexicana* (A Look at Mexican Migration) is a handbook for lay Catholics and clergy that "offers a general look at the phenomenon of migration from the perspective of Christian (Catholic) social teaching."<sup>130</sup> Like Saravia, his goal is to bring solidarity between migrant and fellow Christian non-migrant, but preceded by a "sensitizing" to the problem and a "commitment" to act in some way to help.<sup>131</sup> There are many biblical allusions, but he appeals more to teachings from Pope John Paul II and his many statements about immigration and current research and demographics of Mexican immigration.

These two booklets offer an increasingly narrowed point of view of Mexican Catholicism and immigration, but two booklets found in various locations around Mexico provide an ecclesiastical sanction of invoking God in quasi-liturgical devotion and in personal devotion on behalf of migrants. A booklet entitled *Via Crucis del Emigrante*, authored by the Mexican Conference of Catholic Bishop's Committee on Migrants and officially approved by the Bishop of Ciudad Juarez, places Jesus' suffering in direct

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<sup>130</sup> Manuel Gómez Granados, *Mirada a las migraciones en México: Un punto de vista desde la doctrina Social Cristiana* (México, DF: Instituto Mexicano de Doctrina Social Cristiana, Asociación Mexicana de Promoción y Cultura Social, A.C., 2003), 7.

<sup>131</sup> These are the principle guidelines of Gomez' plan of action and subsequently how he organizes his book.

comparison to the suffering migrant.<sup>132</sup> It does this by taking the familiar practice of praying at the Stations of the Cross in Roman Catholic Churches and offering commentary that corresponds to the prayers being uttered. Another smaller booklet entitled *Adoracion al Santisimo por la Intencion de los Migrantes* (Worshipping the Most High on behalf of Migrants), with the exact same official credentials as the first booklet utilizes the order of certain elements of the Roman Mass and Catholic Sacraments which are then likewise interspersed with commentary about the physical and spiritual vicissitudes of migration to the United States.<sup>133</sup>

On the American side, theologian and priest Daniel Groody stands out as a leading voice in the theology of the Border. Groody believes that there is an ‘integral link between social justice and the liturgy and in particular between the option for the poor in the Eucharist.’<sup>134</sup> Because of this he has developed “a sociotheological hermeneutic of a complex reality” where he tries to sort through the myriad voices to discern “what God has to say.”<sup>135</sup> Groody stays in the tradition of using Biblical precedent as some of the authors above, but he strikes off on his own and uses the language of the Catholic Eucharist to describe metaphorically what the migrants are going through. This interpretation uses official Church language and not more generalized pre-Church themes

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<sup>132</sup> This booklet is self-published and contains no publication date. However, a message from a Bishop in the Introduction places its publication after 1985.

<sup>133</sup> Likewise, this booklet is self-published and contains no publication date. However, a similar message from a Bishop in the Introduction places its publication after 2003.

<sup>134</sup> Daniel G. Groody and Gioacchino Campese. *A Promised Land, a Perilous Journey: Theological Perspectives on Migration* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

<sup>135</sup> Groody, 300.

to innovate, but to innovate within appropriate frameworks of Catholicity. Groody describes a Mass that he organized on both sides of the Border. He writes:

This liturgy was a time not only to remember all the saints and all the souls of history but also the thousands of Mexican immigrants who died crossing over the border in the last ten years. [...] To give expression to our common solidarity as a people of God beyond political constructions, the two communities joined altars on both sides of the wall. Even while Border Patrol agents and helicopters surrounded the liturgy and kept a strict vigilance, lest any Mexicans cross over, people sang, worshipped, and prayed.<sup>136</sup>

In this Catholic worldview, the political border is of no real consequence in the eternal perspective. Yet Groody's movement "beyond political constructions" is not an attempt to liberate the devout Catholic from the earthly reality of those constructions; it is merely a spiritual thought exercise of the future vindication of the oppressed faithful and their union with those who are not oppressed. Groody and the other theologians mentioned above use the Border a place for theological reflection and actively contribute to a Catholicism that can safely accommodate immigrant saints. Yet in contrast, Santo Toribio is the agent of an active God who is keenly interested in the well-being and safety of the oppressed faithful as they defy the very Border Patrol agents and helicopters of Groody's Mass.

#### IMMIGRANT PRAYER BOOKS

Immigrant Prayer Books, which look much like the "official" booklets described above, can be found in many locations through the Borderlands. More importantly, they are increasingly featuring Santo Toribio. Most of these prayer books, save for one, are not dated, but I will classify them for purposes of comparison by the pictures that are

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<sup>136</sup> Groody, 299.

featured on their covers. Their place of origin juxtaposed to their places of availability and their content tell a story.<sup>137</sup> Yet their purpose and function is clear. All contain counsel and admonition from the Bishop of San Juan de los Lagos to continue to be faithful Catholics on the journey northward and continue in prayer and supplication to God and to other heavenly figures.<sup>138</sup> All contain specific prayers that can be uttered by those facing the various (and specific) vicissitudes of border crossing: namely, leaving family, travelling North, crossing without documents, losing a job, being jailed or deported, moments of confusion, looking for work, and not being able to attend Mass. All contain a “Migrant Rosary” that appropriates the sufferings and mysteries of Christ as a source of understanding the sufferings and (existential, political, and social) mysteries of migration, much like the literature mentioned above. And finally, all contain spaces for contact information of the person and their parish priest in Mexico. Most have additional space for a handwritten message from the parish priest to help them on their way.

One set features the complete picture of the Virgin of Guadalupe, from the sanctuary near Mexico City, with slightly different crops and colorization. Yet, one was found in San Miguel el Alto, Jalisco, and one was found in Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, almost a thousand miles apart. Guadalupe is an essential part of Catholicism in Mexico and often is used in conjunction with border crossing. More importantly, this suggests

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<sup>137</sup> Of the five varieties, three carry the “imprimatur,” or approval, of the Diocese of San Juan de los Lagos. Only two have publication dates. One prints 1997, although it appears newer in condition, style of binding, and it carries the picture of Santo Toribio Romo. Another, that appears older, prints 2007 and states that it is the “Second Edition.” Due to content of the various booklets and the descriptions below, it is likely that not all of these booklets were actually produced in San Juan, but are copies of “officially” printed ones.

<sup>138</sup> More regionalized versions may exist but my research until this point was limited to Jalisco. I would predict however that Jalisco would be more representative of this type of migrant devotional literature because of its number of migrants and its central place within the path to the North, evidenced by the literature being found far north of San Juan de Los Lagos.

that these booklets are travelling towards the Border whether through commercial marketing or in the possession of migrants themselves.

Another set features the Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos.<sup>139</sup> Unremarkably they were both found in the San Juan region, but their visual representations are striking. Both feature different renderings of the Virgin of San Juan superimposed over images of the Border fence that separates the United States and Mexico.<sup>140</sup> Though the content of the book connects Catholic religiosity with the physical and political act of crossing the Border, these images make these connections crystal clear. The power of the universality of the Catholic Church with all of its historical, cultural, and colonial significance is placing its stamp of approval on the social condition of its faithful. In this way, it can be seen as a metaphorical altar where the immigrant's faith is rewarded by Heavenly blessings.

The reverse side of one of these booklets features Santo Toribio and his home chapel in Santa Ana de Guadalupe. This appropriation can be seen through the lens of much devotional literature that emphasizes Romo because he comes from that particular Diocese. Yet, without actually printing the words "Patron Saint of Immigrants," the Diocese demonstrates some sort of acceptance of Romo as a Border Saint. This important, but still hierarchal, nod to Romo gives way to the next set of booklets that feature Santo Toribio on the front with Guadalupe on the back. Despite his privileged place on the front of the book and the seemingly-subordinate position of the Virgin of

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<sup>139</sup> The Virgin of San Juan de los Lagos can be seen all over the United States in botánicas and in grocery stores in devotional candles

<sup>140</sup> One is a photo with vivid desert scene with no visible people, while the other is a digitally enhanced photograph with eight individuals, male and female, climbing the Border fence.

Guadalupe in the back, the text is largely the same. Thus, there is no mention of Santo Toribio anywhere in the booklet itself. Still produced by the same Diocese, the Virgin of San Juan is completely removed from the visual aesthetics of the cover, but she is still invoked in the prayers on the inside. However, significant additions are made to the supplementary material at the back of the devotional booklets which contain selected discourses from Pope John Paul II and Saint John Baptist Scalabrini, the European Saint often associated with European immigration. Like the devotional prayer books that portray Guadalupe on its cover, the alternate prayer book with Santo Toribio is also available in Ciudad Juarez on the Border.

#### THE BORDER AS A (LITURGICAL) SHRINE

The rise of Santo Toribio creates a situation where the pain and social distortion of Border crossing is placed in Roman Catholic contexts of holiness and divine intervention. Migrants become modern martyrs among the flames of geopolitical injustice. But, as always, the Church is there to console, counsel, and place these painful issues within contexts in which God can be a part. Yet, the true nature of Santo Toribio's Border exploits is brought into focus; he, acting alone, is not official and can, therefore, not be named along with any act of Border crossing. Yet, the sheer cultural force of his rise makes it almost impossible to not use him on the literature. This creates a highly unusual condition where Church leaders are condoning the use of Santo Toribio without even acknowledging his presence. If they were to acknowledge his presence it would be unofficial. With the seal of approval from the ordinary Bishop of San Juan de los Lagos, an unofficial use of Santo Toribio would be not only be a faux pas, but a breach of the limits that Church has set for centuries. The future of the non-ordinary Border thought is



uncertain, but with ordinaries mirroring the theological content of unofficial interpretations, it is likely to succeed and become more pervasive in the religiously-charged discourses on immigration. If Bishops ever make reference to Santo Toribio, his fame will likely increase even more. This is unlikely, however, because crossing that line of non-Vatican sanction is to make explicit the unspoken truth of Santo Toribio's unofficiality.

Though this topic can be self-contained within Catholic thought, the reality is much more complex and dynamic. An appeal to a larger theory is needed to understanding exactly why Santo Toribio seems to be spreading in so many locations and in so many ways. As the situation in Olvera Street and San Juan de los Lagos shows, the Church needs Santo Toribio, even if it does not explicitly state the need. His very presence is testament to the saintly needs of the people being responded. Even if not officially condoned as a Patron of Immigrants, his presence can be tolerated in official venues and not immediately rejected because of the sheer fact that he is a Saint and a martyr of the faith. Conversely, Santo Toribio works better with the Church. Without this tenuous sanction in art and devotional literature, his veneration would not have as many venues, and thus, less opportunity for his veneration to spread

The sources of most of the material culture associated with Santo Toribio seem to originate from Santa Ana de Guadalupe, or at least the area directly around it. Thus, the movement of Santo Toribio merchandise is geographically centered and is spread northward. Yet, any merchandise that is intended for spiritual nourishment by Border crossers is really contingent upon the political and social realities of the Border. Items that contain single prayers, like the prayer books, all can be used anywhere for personal

edification and communion with God but always in reference to the Border. By making immigration a spiritual issue, the Border begins to function as a shrine itself.

The phrase “I pray for the intercession of Santo Toribio,” found inside or on the back of the majority of the material culture analyzed in this and previous chapters, itself says a lot about the processes and context in which the popularity of Santo Toribio is playing out in the Borderlands. It surely reflects his nature as a universal Saint, but it speaks more to the Mexican tendency to break down the walls of the Church and use an official symbol in a way that befits the immediate, material needs of the venerator. Ultimately, in the Borderlands, this intercession is for crossing the Border.

## CHAPTER 5 SANTO TORIBIO AND RELIGIOUS POETICS

Luis León writes that, in the Borderlands, “religion is a tool to invert justice and injustice and to rewrite the religious, cultural, and mythical maps in ways that privilege those outside the official cartography of history.”<sup>141</sup> The previous chapter showed that the institutionally unofficial Santo Toribio inverts justice on the Border and serves as a shifting symbol of the place of the Border in Catholic imaginary and in institutional priorities. So how should we see Santo Toribio? Is he a fluke that should be ignored as a slight aberration from the institutional dominance of the Church or is his symbol something more powerful?

Religion, in its most semiological simplicity, “is a system of symbols that are constantly contested, negotiated, and redefined.”<sup>142</sup> Yet the Border is a meta-symbol, especially in the more recent history of the Borderlands, but especially in the “extended history” that goes all the way back to the beginnings of the colonial enterprise. León’s book *La Llorona’s Children: Religion, Life, and Death in the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands* describes the border in much the same way that the preceding chapters do, that is, as a series of political and cultural machinations with roots in Spanish Colonialism and the rise of rival (yet still colonial) forms of statecraft. He states:

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<sup>141</sup> León, viii.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*

The United States-Mexican borderlands is home to a distinct grand pattern of the eternal return: it is a place constituted by multiple crossings and mixings. Hence, its religious expressions reflect the tensions and ambiguities of a place in constant (r)evolution.<sup>143</sup>

The religious family tree of the Borderlands and the innovative processes that it spawns is called “religious poetics.” León established this central thesis by stating:

Though its analytical and practical tactics are mobile and transferable, religious poetics is a product of the extended history of the borderlands – spiritual advances and returns. Like the myth of La Llorona, symbolic narratives in Chicano culture are continually adapted and shaped to their places – their spatial and temporal locations – to confront, explain, and resolve moral, cognitive, and material issues that might otherwise immobilize movement.<sup>144</sup>

This thesis up to this point has shown how Santo Toribio confronts, explains, and resolves the issues of physically, socially, and spiritually dangerous Border crossings.

This chapter will continue to use the official-unofficial dichotomy, but it will also begin to unravel it and place Santo Toribio in the active, innovative, and never-settled life of the Borderlands. I will place the transnational phenomenon of Santo Toribio into the context of León’s religious poetics. I will argue that the institutional tug-of-war we have seen with the appropriation of Santo Toribio is form of religious poetics, even within these strictly Catholic functions of bureaucracy and doctrinal rigidity. Using some of León’s guiding points as structure, this chapter will place Santo Toribio within religious poetics. This will mostly occur as Santo Toribio fits into the existing symbols but will

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<sup>143</sup> León, vii.

<sup>144</sup> León, 20.

also briefly entertain the shifts in power that might cause some of these symbols to change.

## DESCENDING SYMBOLS

León alternately describes religious poetics as “various social strategies and tactics, through fragmented genealogies of borderlands religious products, focusing on the body, space, and time.”<sup>145</sup> This line predicts a future work that will take religious poetics even farther, but what is this genealogy? According to Foucault, it is “an analysis of descent.”<sup>146</sup> He states that “Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity...it is to discover that truth or being does not lie at the root of what we know and what we are, but the exteriority of accidents.”<sup>147</sup> These “accidents” form traits, concepts, and symbols that can be analyzed. My goal is here is not to flush out all the intricacies of this descent with regard to the body, as León does, but to use the product of León’s work as a guide for the study of Santo Toribio. The result of León’s genealogical investigation leads to the “religious products” mentioned above. I will focus this chapter on three of the most fundamental symbols and concepts that the Borderlands produces: Guadalupe, healing, and religious transnationalism.<sup>148</sup>

## GUADALUPE

One of the central tenets of León’s religious poetics is the mythic apparition of the Virgin Mary outside of colonial Mexico City and the event’s historical trajectory into the

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<sup>145</sup> León, 268.

<sup>146</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 83.

<sup>147</sup> Foucault, 81.

<sup>148</sup> These topics are not meant to encapsulate León’s work. Important elements to León’s work such as the rise of Protestantism on the Border will not be included in the present thesis.

modern day. The earthly benefactor of this apparition, Juan Diego, is becoming increasingly popular as well due to his 2000 canonization and intimate connection with the Guadalupe narrative.<sup>149</sup> With regards to Toribio this occurs from his origins in the *Cristero* Rebellion to his current Border narrative. For example, In *Iniquis afflictisque* (from Chapter 1), Pope Pius XI concludes his mournful and fiery letter against the Mexican government with the following invocation:

One thing more remains for Us to do, Venerable Brothers, namely, to pray and implore Our Lady of Guadalupe, heavenly patroness of the Mexican people, that she pardon all these injuries and especially those which have been committed against her, that she ask of God that peace and concord may return to her people. And if, in the hidden designs of God that day which We so greatly desire is far distant, may she in the meantime console her faithful children of Mexico and strengthen them in their resolve to maintain their liberty by the profession of their Faith.<sup>150</sup>

This consolation did not come only in the form of Guadalupe, but from a litany of other saints, including Santo Toribio. Yet, as the government changed in 2000 so did the relation of the government with religion. The President, Vicente Fox, knelt at the altar before Juan Diego's *tilma* and prayed to Guadalupe.<sup>151</sup> A far cry from the words and action of Calles, this moment was the culmination of political, religious, and cultural developments in Mexico over the previous 70 years. But, as León and others document, Guadalupe is as much cultural as religious and her changing narrative reflects the continually innovation that Mexican religion can take. This innovation is essential to the religious poetics of the Borderlands. León states that "these narratives capture the essence

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<sup>149</sup> When asked if they knew the names of any of the other *Cristero* martyrs, visitors to Santo Toribio's shrine frequently answered Juan Diego, even though, despite the same year of canonization, he was centuries removed from them.

<sup>150</sup> *Iniquis Afflictisque*, sec. 31.

<sup>151</sup> León, 9.

of religious poetics from the various social-economic-political levels from which they arise.”<sup>152</sup> Like most aspects of the history of Mexico, Guadalupe is invoked whenever a movement or event needs to be nationalized or sacralized.<sup>153</sup> The spread of Santo Toribio’s merchandise reflects this legitimization-through-Guadalupe. Throughout the Borderlands, Santo Toribio is often pictured with Guadalupe. In Santa Ana de Guadalupe this can be seen in a variety of merchandise from devotional cards and scapulars to key chains. One in particular has Santo Toribio on one side and Guadalupe on the reverse.<sup>154</sup> One scapular, similarly, has an embroidered Guadalupe on one side of the length of cord with an embroidered representation of Santo Toribio on the opposite side.<sup>155</sup> This connection to Guadalupe extends to even non-Mexican figures such as Mother Theresa of India and Padre Pio of Italy who can both be seen in artistic combinations with her.<sup>156</sup>

Yet, this legitimization or even just association can be seen with others as well. In Tijuana, Santo Toribio is sometimes associated with Juan Soldado. One keychain sold near his shrine features the standard picture of Juan Soldado with a colorized version of the standard Toribio portrait on the reverse.<sup>157</sup> A rosary with Jesus Malverde at the center

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<sup>152</sup> León, 13.

<sup>153</sup> Concerning the power of Guadalupe, León writes, “Guadalupe, captivated the mind of Los Angeles, the center of world fantasy, not only moralizing Mexican and Latina/o Catholic presence in Los Angeles but *sacralizing* it - a triumph of hyper-reality characterizing current public imaginaries” (4-5).

<sup>154</sup> I purchased this particular keychain in August 2008.

<sup>155</sup> The pictures are a stylized embroidery of the most common picture of Santo Toribio and a similarly sized representation of Guadalupe’s head taken from the original icon in Tepeyac. This was also purchased in August 2008.

<sup>156</sup> Items such as these are available in various shops in Santa Ana de Guadalupe, San Juan de los Lagos, and Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>157</sup> I purchased this in December 2006.

has one more handcrafted addition made in Tijuana after the item was received in delivery.<sup>158</sup> In the largest bead, where the traditional announcement of the purpose of the rosary is usually reiterated, a hand cut icon of Juan Soldado's picture is roughly cut to match the shape of the bead. In a more "official" appropriation, like Guadalupe, a picture of an aged and sickly Pope John Paul II giving a blessing is superimposed upon along with Santo Toribio's head and neck (possibly to show his priestly collar) in front of *La Mesita*, his principal shrine. Guadalupe, however, is always the most potent and ubiquitous figure throughout the veneration of Santo Toribio. In almost every piece of material culture described in this thesis and countless others not described, Guadalupe is invoked through name or image.

## HEALING

Folk healing, or *curanderismo*, is a perfect place for the official-unofficial nature of Santo Toribio. León states that it "is a synthesis of pre-Tridentine Catholicism and Spanish-Moorish medicine, combined with ancient Mesoamerican medicine and religion."<sup>159</sup> Though it cannot currently be determined to what extent Santo Toribio is being used in these rituals, his presence can be seen in the focal point of modern, urban healing, the *botánica*. These stores often carry items derived from the icons of Afro-Caribbean religion, causing Hector Avalos to call them "a santería supermarket."<sup>160</sup>

Botánicas in Denver, CO, Salt Lake City, UT, Los Angeles, CA, Ciudad Juarez,

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<sup>158</sup> The original came, presumably, from Sinaloa where his central shrine is located. I learned the benefit of enlisting native speakers during the course of this ongoing investigation and hope to return to Tijuana to get better answers. With better tactics, I hope to get clearer answers with regard to the material culture surrounding these points of veneration.

<sup>159</sup> León, 131.

<sup>160</sup> Avalos, 36.



Chihuahua, and Guadalajara, Jalisco offer Toribio merchandise. Moreover, Santo Toribio is beginning to be named as the primary actor in these healing processes as the titular head of some of these *botánicas*.<sup>161</sup>

León describes one *botánica*, in particular, in his book. *La Sagrada Corazón*, in Los Angeles' Boyle Heights neighborhood and states that:

Many saints are sold at the *botánica*, including especially Saint Francis, Santo Niño de Atocha, San Martín de Porres, and Santa Bárbara. Included among the small images of saints are also replicas of the Buddha, Shangó and Elegua from *santería*, and numerous Hindu deities. There are also various Latin-American manifestations of the Virgin Mary, including Los Lagos, Cobra, Caridad, Zapopan, and especially Guadalupe. Perhaps the most striking and even prominent saints are those not officially recognized by the Catholic Church, including San Simón and Juan Soldado. At *Sagrado Corazón*, these saints share equal space and authority with the official Catholic saints.<sup>162</sup>

As early as March 2011, Santo Toribio is now included among these saints at *Sagrada Corazón*. Yet this presence is not as grandiose and prominent as the saints that León mentions. Santo Toribio is relegated to a few small prayer cards on a large wire rack in the back of the store. They are similar in size and appearance to the many other saint cards that surround his cards which indicates that these are part of a marketed set from a Catholic printing house in Mexico. The waxing or waning presence of Santo Toribio at *Sagrada Corazón* and similar places may be an important barometer in the study of his veneration. *Sagrada Corazón* is only a few miles away from Santo Toribio's ubiquity at Los Angeles' Olvera Street. If his presence increases in this small *botánica*, it may indicate that

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<sup>161</sup> Two *botánicas* in California, one in Modesto and one in Fresno, use Santo Toribio's name in their titles.

<sup>162</sup> León, 158.

commerce is the driving force behind Santo Toribio's fame in the United States. If it decreases, then that may indicate that his veneration is more erratic and based more in the random movements of individual migrants. Either way, future comparisons between his use in different *botánicas* will help shape the burgeoning inquiry into this new saint.

## RELIGIOUS TRANSNATIONALISM

The designation “borderlands” is inherently transnational, but the effects of the *Cristero* Rebellion and the larger forces that caused that conflict pushed Guadalupe and the Mexican religion she represented to the North. León traces the movement of Guadalupe veneration and how it set the stage for a transnational identity of Guadalupe, but still points out the gendered, ideological, and other innovative uses of her as a symbol of *mexicanidad* (Mexican-ness), but as a multi-faceted one with Mexicans who have different social and psychological needs. Los Angeles is a natural focal point for such efforts, but León and others document the rise of other transnational centers, as well. The Pilsen neighborhood in Chicago is one such example. It plays prominently in many scholar's work regarding other transnational figures and cultural phenomenon, such as the Day of the Dead and the Santo Nino de Atocha, a popular form of the Christ Child.<sup>163</sup>

As shown in the preceding chapters, Santo Toribio inhabits Los Angeles in his official and unofficial forms. Recently, and likely in accordance with the work of authors mentioned in previous chapters, he has taken a prominent role in the institutional

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<sup>163</sup> For examples of the transnational characteristics of these, respectively see Regina M. Marchi. *Day of the Dead in the USA: the migration and transformation of a cultural phenomenon*. (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009) and Juan Javier Pescador, *Crossing Borders with the Santo Niño de Atocha* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009).

workings of the Chicago Archdiocese, but as always, in an uneasy way. The newest reorganization of the Diocese's Migrant Services bears the name "Saint Toribio Romo Immigrant Center."<sup>164</sup>

## POSTCOLONIALITY

After the colonies themselves were overthrown and the two centers of colonial power fought for control of the vast amount of land in North America, the Border itself began to emerge. This brought the new challenges. Stevens-Arroyo states that "Catholicism's representatives told Latinos that they should imitate an immigrant's gratitude for opportunity in a new home rather than nurture resentment against an invading U.S. imperialism."<sup>165</sup> The "immigrants" mentioned here are European immigrants not the later Mexican immigrants that Santo Toribio supports. But this "paternalistic look" continues today and can be seen in the culture surrounding Santo Toribio.

The Church officially recognizes two patrons of immigration. Both are European and, specifically—like the vast majority of Popes since the beginnings of Christianity—are Italian. Saint Frances Cabrini spearheaded efforts in North (and to some extent, South) America to minister to Italian Catholics who often lacked education, healthcare, and Italian-centric religious instruction. Despite her distinguished career, the second saint, Scalabrini, was her superior, who, according to the official record, urged her to travel to the Americas. The San Juan booklet mentioned in the previous chapter that cites

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<sup>164</sup> Their website can be found at <<http://www.archchicago.org/DPLF/ToribioCenter/ToribioCenter.aspx>>.

<sup>165</sup> Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo. "Pious Colonialism: Assessing a Church Paradigm for Chicano Identity." In *Mexican American Religions: Spirituality, Activism, and Culture*, ed. Gastón Espinoza and Mario T. García (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 66.

Scalabrini and John Paul II, while ignoring Santo Toribio, is reminiscent of the Church's long history of favoring European-American Church culture over the historically distinct Spanish-Mexican. It additionally ignores the actual female immigrant saint who lived and died in the "New World."<sup>166</sup>

Yet, as Stevens-Arroyo points out, "the systematic application of the concept of colonialism to the churches is a relatively new area of investigation."<sup>167</sup> León's work does not directly come to bear on the changing concepts of immigration within the Church. The same types of ordinary clergy that are unable to recognize Toribio as the Patron of Immigration are fighting an unprecedented battle for immigrants' rights. Many debate the reasons for this voracious battle, but the organized and systematic effort of Bishops in this matter, at least in this small way, cuts across the grain of the larger push for Americanization, Europeanization, Catholicization, and other universalizing procedures active in the Church throughout history.<sup>168</sup> Santo Toribio's place is not highly contested but rests in the (male-centric, Eurocentric, and) complicated bureaucracy of Rome. This is, at least in a small way, still a form of colonialism, perhaps just not an active form.

A colonial-subjugated past does not necessarily preclude movement towards a future unencumbered with degradation, humiliation, and psychological damage. Yet, even if some sort of "best case scenario" were to play out in the Borderlands the past

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<sup>166</sup> The history of Scalabrini and Cabrini can be found in many works, but a useful analysis in the context of battling spiritual and political ideologies can be found in Chapter 2 of D'Agostino's *Rome in America* (2004), entitled "The Transnational Symbolic Contest for Rome."

<sup>167</sup> Stevens-Arroyo, 57.

<sup>168</sup> Critics argue that this is done to garner favor from "traditional" Mexican Catholics to keep their faith alive in the United States as secularism and negative publicity ravage the Church in the United States.

would never be erased and would always be a cultural base from which new religion and poetics could flow. Thus, León's framework, grounded in the spiritually and culturally past of the Borderlands, can be applied in many ways that his original work does not specifically flesh out. There could perhaps be some future mass departure from these primal symbols, but it is highly unlikely. The case of Santo Toribio shows that the Church only has power to act universally *through* a regional symbol. As Toribio's Border myth was constructed and as it develops in the hands of non-ordinary clergy, it reinforces the universality of the Church but still in a distinctly Mexican context.

#### RELIGIOUS POETICS OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM

León states that the thesis of *La Llorona's Children* and underlying motivation of religious poetics:

[...] is that in the Mexican Americas, religious belief and practice are continuously redefined by devotees of various traditions that started in and were transformed by, brought to and found, throughout the borderlands as a creative and often effective means to manage the crisis of everyday life.<sup>169</sup>

Avalos describes two tensions that afflict Latino/a Catholicism in relation to the dominant European-American varieties.<sup>170</sup> First, he describes two simultaneous (and often contradictory) impulses to be strong, "traditional" Catholics and be anti-clerical, or opposed to the local clergy.<sup>171</sup> Second, "Vatican II de-emphasized the cult of the saints, but many Latinas/os continued pre-Vatican II practices in this regard."<sup>172</sup> As seen in the

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<sup>169</sup> León, 5.

<sup>170</sup> Avalos actually describes a whole host of problems that Latino/a Catholics face, but I use the two that are pertinent to this paper and to theorizing Santo Toribio within religious poetics. See Avalos 57-64.

<sup>171</sup> Avalos, 57-58.

<sup>172</sup> Avalos, 59.

sources mentioned throughout this thesis (including León), this creates a “common socio-historical theme” of “negative experiences that Latinas/os encountered as they attempted or were forced to become part of the churches controlled by Euroamericans when former Spanish territories became part of the United States.”<sup>173</sup> Santo Toribio, despite the grand work he does on the Border, is a white member of the Roman Catholic clergy.<sup>174</sup>

These dichotomous tensions, however, usually reveal a complicated inner life of constant negotiation of the colonial past, the political present, and the changing nature and function of religion. Santo Toribio represents a Catholicism that is clearly appealing to many of those who go North. But even those who stay put find solace in this unofficial saint without knowing the full extent of his unofficiality. One man I interviewed in his home in Arandas, Jalisco, Mexico, stated that Santo Toribio’s first miracle was helping someone cross the Border, referring to the three miracles necessary for canonization.<sup>175</sup> Here the idea of the official nature of Santo Toribio is blended with the Border innovation.

With regard to the cult of saints, whatever changes that the Second Vatican Council imposed upon local, cultural veneration of saints was undone through the

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<sup>173</sup> Avalos, 60. For a fascinating case study of a local iteration of this ongoing tension, see Jennifer Scheper Hughes, *Biography of a Mexican Crucifix* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2010). Here Hughes, describes the veneration of an icon of Jesus that incited fighting between the local Catholic laity and a new religious order that took control over the church where it was housed.

<sup>174</sup> A priest that Guzmán interviews states that “people prefer Father Toribio [over Father Pedro Esqueda, from the same region] because he is more representative of *alteños* (residents of *Los Altos de Jalisco*), he is the typical physical, white, slender, tall, blue-eyed *alteño*” (109). Race is important to León’s religious poetics and the larger field of Latino/a and Chicano/a studies. Future work about Santo Toribio must investigate this issue in depth. A possible question could include: Are certain immigrants drawn more to Toribio because of his physical appearance? I have observed all types of people from various parts of Mexico venerating Santo Toribio, but a larger, more comprehensive study might find otherwise.

<sup>175</sup> This interview occurred on June 22, 2007.

reforms of John Paul II early in his pontificate. These allowed the Bishops, and by extension, the local laity, to have more input into the process. But even with the structure that comes with a bureaucratic, Roman Catholic canonization, the *vox populi* or “voice of the people” have their say in Mexico. And not only in Mexico, but as Cunningham and Weinstein and Bell have shown, for a very long time. León states that “Poetic, creative religious practice does not occur only at the boundaries of institutions, but within, parallel to, and sometimes in direct conflict with established traditions.”<sup>176</sup>

#### RELIGION, LIFE, AND DEATH IN THE BORDERLANDS

The subtitle of León’s book, “Religion, Life, and Death in the U.S.-Mexican Borderlands,” emphasizes the important place of religion in the story of pre-Columbian, colonial, and modern in North America. Santo Toribio, a religious figure, is the next stage in the story. He embodies the tension between the postcolonial story and the continued colonial presence as seen in the colonality of power. The after effects of the colonial system are just another colonial system. The balance of power has shifted to a hidden colonization of wealth and resources, creating the imbalance that creates immigration and consequently creates Santo Toribio as a crosser of this imbalance, or border.<sup>177</sup> And it is essential in understanding the contested and uneasy nature of his relationship with the institutional Church. But, like Toribio and because of the processes of which he is the vanguard, the Church is also trying to find its way as it struggles with its past and its uneasy place within modernity.

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<sup>176</sup> León, 5.

<sup>177</sup> For more information about the colonality of power, see Walter Mignolo’s book *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Religion is the power that negotiates one's life in between these shifting but always dominates power structures. Religion is the force gives meaning to death, gives hope in trying to temporarily avoid death, and, sometimes causes death. Santo Toribio initially gives meaning to life and death in service of the Church, but then, taking a dramatic shift, begins to religiously give meaning to the migrant who must migrate due to forces that the Church had a hand in creating. Ultimately though, life, especially in the Borderlands, is material. León states that:

In the border transformations wrought as sources of spiritual strength in the material world, the composition of religious essences is elaborated, extended, and perhaps overdeveloped to include the material world in one continuous loop, rather than as a discrete realm completely distinct from the spiritual, each with its characteristic rhythms, textures, and rules.<sup>178</sup>

Two examples show how this spiritual materialism operates within the veneration of Santo Toribio; one is mythic, one occurs in the real world. The first is a video that is sold at Santo Toribio's shrine in Santa Ana de Guadalupe portrays a group of migrants trying to avoid capture by the U.S. Border Patrol who are in pursuit.<sup>179</sup> One of the members of the group, heavy with child, falls behind and a concerned husband slows down while the rest of the group moves on terrified at the prospect of being caught. The woman goes into labor and the panicked couple pray that all will turn out well, when Santo Toribio arrives. He is not exactly portrayed physically, but as a blurry series of sharp cuts from an unrecognizable actor in a bright mystical light. The baby is delivered and the couple makes it successfully to the Border.

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<sup>178</sup> León, 122.

<sup>179</sup> Santo Toribio Romo: Patron de los Emigrantes, DVD. Mexico City: Cine Video Fama, date unknown.



In the second, author Luis Alberto Urrea describes a coyote, or the “lowly guides” that help migrants cross the Border for often exorbitant fees. One in particular, named Jesus, thought of himself as Pancho Villa, Che Guevara, or any similarly famous revolutionary leaders as he illegally and heroically crossed the Border and defied U.S. officials. Being one of these outlaw coyotes made him “macho” and gave him a material wealth that he theretofore not experienced in life. Urrea describes that he:

...had money. He had a [home]. He had a good-looking [girl] to play house with. He had dangerous men watching his back. He had a cell phone. He had songs being sung about him on the radio and in the cantinas. He even had a patron saint of illegals watching over his endeavor.<sup>180</sup>

At the current time, the international nature of Santo Toribio is consistent and singular. Yet, through the lens of religious poetics, this is exactly “what the people want.” Santo Toribio exists in the Catholic imaginary as it is applied to the Border. Though not directly tied into the oldest religious forms in the Borderlands, Santo Toribio expresses the repressed needs of a people subjugated and forced to make “eternal returns” to the center of their cultural and spiritual existence. *La Llorona, the titular figure of León’s* book, is a painful figure that haunts those of the Borderlands with memories of the subjugation that gave rise to their culture, while Santo Toribio feeds and nourishes them in their continuing suffering. Santo Toribio, as León would describe, “invert[s] justice and injustice and [rewrites] the religious, cultural, and mythical maps in ways that privilege those outside the official cartography of history.”<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Luis Alberto Urrea, *The Devil’s Highway: A True Story* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2004), 77-78.

<sup>181</sup> León, viii.

## CONCLUSION - THE RISE OF A SAINT

One day, while walking through a thrift store in Denver—far from Santa Ana de Guadalupe, far from Jalisco, and far from Olvera Street and the Pilsner neighborhood—I saw Santo Toribio staring back at me.<sup>182</sup> Amidst the myriad items for resale in that section of the store was a large framed picture of Romo standing in contrast to the old family photos, comic posters, and old, discarded picture frames. I purchased the picture (of course) and while paying, the cashier asked me, “Who is that?” My mind swirling with various historical, theological, ecclesiastical, and other theoretical explanations, I uneasily muttered, “He was killed by the Mexican government in the 1920s.” This seemed to satisfy the curiosity of the cashier.<sup>183</sup> Yet as this thesis shows, the rise of Santo Toribio involves distinct processes of Mexican and American politics, Roman Catholic thought and practice, and the diasporic actions of individual Mexicans. The presence of Santo Toribio is increasing across Mexico and the United States at a rapid pace. From the sacred tomes of activist priests and quasi-official prayer manuals of Mexican bishops to the profane hands of *coyotes* and racks of *botanicas* and thrift stores, the rise of this saint is an important reflection of not only the continued march of pre-modern Catholic ideals in the modern world, but also of a distinct space and time of the world. Santo Toribio

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<sup>182</sup> This occurred on April 16, 2011.

<sup>183</sup> I use this story for moving the literary narrative along, but the presence of a large picture of Santo Toribio – a 14 x 11 mass-produced printing in a sturdy black frame using the most common picture of Romo superimposed with a halo – shows that his presence is growing away from Border towns.

inhabits the U.S./Mexican Borderlands and gives shape to its unique double-colonial history.

In the small time that I have been paying attention to his presence in the United States and Mexico, the popularity of Santo Toribio has grown rapidly. It does not grow because he is a *Cristero*, although that helps in certain circumstances. It does not grow because he is a martyr, although that helps in certain circumstances. His popularity grows because he is the patron saint of immigration. In conclusion, I offer some remarks about the rise of this socially and religiously important saint and the future of this work.

#### SAINTHOOD AND IMMIGRATION

Weinstein and Bell describe “two worlds of sainthood” where “those rival republics of temporal becoming and spiritual being between which saints moved as dual citizens.”<sup>184</sup> This conceptual dual citizenship in sainthood is spontaneous, but for migrant Mexicans, political dual citizenship is not. Santo Toribio simultaneously arises as a paradigmatic, pre-modern Catholic saint but who functions in a modern context of globalization. He is a Mexican man who has surpassed the limitations of the nation state (and earth itself), but still remains Mexican. As Dioceses around the United States become increasingly hospitable, both materially and theologically, to Mexican migrants, they can remain Mexican and assimilate as the majority of previous migrants did. *Santo Toribio* never left his home state of Jalisco in life, yet he posthumously ministers to a displaced flock of Mexican Roman Catholics at the Border and throughout the United States. As ancient and modern hagiography shows, there is a lot of space within Catholicism to innovate, but there are still official ways of doing things. Despite the

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<sup>184</sup> Weinstein and Bell, 1.

unprecedented activity of institutional Catholicism in the immigration war, most ordinary leaders simply cannot cross bounds that have been set for centuries. In some Catholic discourse, “the question of the nature of sainthood is agonized over.”<sup>185</sup> With regard to their study of medieval saints, Weinstein and Bell also state:

We divided this book into two parts to emphasize the two worlds of sainthood. First we observed men and women reaching out toward spiritual perfection; then we saw believers seeking advantage from the merits of the saints. This division reflects a paradox.<sup>186</sup>

This work (and other work) clearly demonstrates this same tendency with regard to Romo. He lived a pious life which led to Roman Catholic ministry. This piety, coupled with historical circumstance, led to his martyr death. Immediately, within minutes of his death, his memory and body were seized upon symbolically by others. First it was the *tequilenos*, then the *alteños*, and eventually it was the Church. Then, inexplicably, he became the patron of countless numbers of migrant Mexicans. Fitzgerald points out the irony of this while Guzmán and Sanchez describe their shifting nature. But as the authors above point out, this process has played out for centuries. The people, aside from the aims and goals of Church hierarchy, have certain social and psychological needs that can be religiously mitigated by a physical embodiment of their struggles. Santo Toribio, like many before him, serves as a visceral link between earth and heaven that sacralizes an earthly problem and offers a heavenly approbation of the struggle.

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<sup>185</sup> Greeley, 39.

<sup>186</sup> Weinstein and Bell, 239.

The rise of *Santo Toribio* creates a situation where the pain and social distortion of Border crossing are placed in Roman Catholic contexts of holiness and divine intervention. Catholic priest and theologian Orlando Espín refers to this process as an epistemology of suffering.<sup>187</sup> This new context de-centralizes his veneration from any primary, institutionalized religious centers, however. The actual center of Santo Toribio's veneration is physically and metaphorically the Border itself, not his traditional pilgrimage site in the small Mexican hamlet of Santa Ana de Guadalupe.

#### IMMIGRATION AND THE CHURCH

Immigration itself is not a new process but the U.S./Mexican context is very new and is increasingly being reinforced by the universal cosmology of Roman Catholicism. The tension of the official and the unofficial is usually a power play between clergy and laity, but the place of Santo Toribio also signifies the hesitancy of the Catholic Church to fully commit itself to the existential, interstitial crisis of immigration. It commits its full theological might to the problem, but the additional Catholic signifiers are slowly emerging from the lower ranks of Catholic clergy. It is a difficult position for the Church. Not only must it give patronage to someone who never migrated, but it must tear him out of the group context in which he was canonized.

His historical importance as part of a group of faithful Catholic martyrs is contingent upon the terrible serendipity of a resurgence of the importance of martyrdom in the 20<sup>th</sup>—also, in concert with a Pope who saw martyrdom and sainthood as an important evangelizing tool in the world at large. Because of a unique mixture of politics

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<sup>187</sup> Espín, Orlando O. 1997. *The Faith of the People: Theological Reflections on Popular Catholicism*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), 166-169.

and religion, Santo Toribio's rise is distinct. Yet, it is not wholly different from many other saints. With his official sainthood in place, Mexican religiosity then stepped in and appropriated Santo Toribio for the specific needs of the day. The ministerial and ecclesiastical vacuum created by mass immigration of Roman Catholics from Mexico pushed this already canonized and "folk-canonized" Saint into a hybrid state where those of any persuasion in the official/unofficial divide can effectively use him.

In many places, Guadalupe "is bigger than Jesus."<sup>188</sup> Yet among certain individuals for specific issues related to immigration, Santo Toribio reigns supreme. As the forces of immigration continue to push back and forth across the Border, so does veneration of Santo Toribio. Specifically, as León explains, "to confront, explain, and resolve moral, cognitive, and material issues that might otherwise immobilize movement."<sup>189</sup> Yet, locally in the U.S./Mexican Borderlands, Roman Catholics have become one of the dominant voices in immigration. This affects U.S. political discourse concerning the very nature of Santo Toribio's patronage.

## IDENTITY

But why Toribio Romo Gonzalez? Why not any of the more popular Cristero martyrs?<sup>190</sup> Why not the titular head of the canonization? Why not focus on Guadalupe herself? It is not clear, but it most likely has to do with Romo's principal location in central Mexico. Jalisco is at a crossroads of secular culture, religious culture,

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<sup>188</sup> León, 12.

<sup>189</sup> León, 20.

<sup>190</sup> It is currently unclear how "popular" the saints named in Chapter 2 remain. I presented some context with regard to their continued popularity in light of Santo Toribio, but the area of Mexico where the martyrs are from is large and it is likely that Santo Toribio does not "reign supreme" everywhere.

merchandise, and immigration. A 1992 article by Mexican anthropologist Renee de la Torre, eight years before the canonization of Santo Toribio, does not mention anything regarding immigration.<sup>191</sup> She states that immigration was on no one's mind with regard to Romo during this period, in fact, some thought of him as a special saint for children.<sup>192</sup> Some future study may uncover this mystery.

If an answer can even be found this late in the development of the *cultus* of Santo Toribio, it will need to base itself back in Guzmán's polysemy, which I purposefully put aside for this thesis. These topics include migratory politics (between nations and between Mexican and American states), poverty and migration, geography and migration, local migration culture, etc. David Fitzgerald has authored many articles and books and edited several books that dissect these issues, but there are literally hundreds of such studies in existence authored by many scholars. Though likely not the work of a single scholar, seeing the emerging patterns in this large body of literature might aid in understanding Santo Toribio, particularly in the United States. If there is some regional impetus (i.e., in the form of originators of the border myth), looking at the complexity of Mexican migration might yield results in understanding the true, primal rise of Toribio as an international figure. Yet, this exercise is necessary anyways to understanding the complexity of how Santo Toribio is venerated. This thesis shows that there is no single method of transmission of his story. People are introduced in their local religious upbringing, as they travel to other religious sites, as they cross the Border, and after they

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<sup>191</sup> de la Torre, Renée. "Toribio a Los Altares." *Siglo 21*, March 6, 1992.

<sup>192</sup> Personal interview with author. June 15, 2008.

cross the Border. This thesis begins to catalog and analyze the nature of Santo Toribio's unofficial patronage that others take as a given.

## OTHER SAINTS

This thesis specifically deals with one saint, but it can be seen as the beginning of understanding of the rise of modern saints, still deeply rooted in the past but responding to modern problems. Future studies of Santo Toribio could compare him to other saints around the world. The reforms of Pope John Paul II on local practices of sainthood created global changes. His theological and practical emphasis on saints and sainthood has created similar situations around the world where purely local saints are taking hold of the imagination of new generations of Catholics. How are the thousands of other canonizations of 20th century martyrs playing out around the world? Are there emerging leaders of the many group canonizations, like in Mexico?

Santo Toribio has achieved a cohesive set of rituals, patterns of transmission, and central myth that other saintly systems, like the veneration of the Santo Niño de Atocha.<sup>193</sup> But unlike this saint, his history is relatively new. Future studies could be placed within the context of other saints, their histories, their veneration, and their hagiographies for possible clues into how this new veneration will develop and how it will fit into existing paradigms. Catholic bookstores and folk botánicas seem to have more direct effect on the spread of the cult of Santo Toribio. His legend includes numerous musical albums (partially or completely dedicated to him), films, and a large

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<sup>193</sup> Juan Javier Pescador, *Crossing Borders with the Santo Niño de Atocha* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009). Here, Pescador masterfully describes the long and complicated rise of the Santo Niño de Atocha.



amount of pictures. As these products find their way from Mexico to the United States and as his social-theological veneration grows, so will this religious merchandise.

#### SANTO TORIBIO: PATRON OF IMMIGRANTS

Priest Eduardo C. Fernández asks, “What happens once these Mexicans start coming to U.S. parishes often not equipped to accommodate these newcomers?”<sup>194</sup> The widespread and continually enlarging veneration of Santo Toribio is one of the many answers to this question. In the context of León’s religious poetics and the ongoing tension between laity and clergy in the U.S./Mexican Borderlands, “Clearly, the notion that U.S. Catholics are immigrants on the road to Americanization does not accurately capture the Mexican American experience.”<sup>195</sup> D’Agostino explains that “For each foreign-language group, the American Church built national parishes that employed national symbols to create solidarity with the Church” which included “flags, paintings, statues, architectural designs, language, dialect, songs, [and] holidays.”<sup>196</sup> For Mexican Catholics in the United States and Mexican-American Catholics, this was not true, at least not until recently. Along these lines, Santo Toribio religiously represents a national symbol of Mexico. Yet, this symbol is not a flag or some other item of material culture. It is the physical act of crossing the Border into the United States which has become a

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<sup>194</sup> Fernández, Eduardo C. 2007. *Mexican-American Catholics*. New York: Paulist Press. ix. Fernández mentions Santo Toribio in one passing sentence with a reference to Juan Soldado. A future work should make direct comparisons between the nature, size, and demographics of each veneration. Based on the observations and interviews during the course of this investigation so far, I would argue that Juan Soldado is not a “Border specialist,” or at least not to the extent that Santo Toribio embodies.

<sup>195</sup> Timothy Matovina and Gary Riebe-Estrella. *Horizons of the Sacred: Mexican Traditions in U.S. Catholicism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 3.

<sup>196</sup> Peter D. D’Agostino, *Rome in America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

strong cultural symbol within Mexico. This act is against the law and Santo Toribio helps mitigate the criminal nature of this act by showing God's approval and blessing.

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