

THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM DECODED

3rd Ed.

Volume 4

**Our Lady of Guadalupe and The Star of Bethlehem
And Conclusion**

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starofbethlehemdecoded.com

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PART FIVE

THE CODEX GUADALUPE ASTRONOMICAL

We come now to the most controversial part of this book. It is in fact controversial not for just one reason, but for three: First, and most obviously, any claim that there is a link between the Star of Bethlehem and the event known in the Roman Catholic Church as the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe must necessarily be controversial due to the strong emotional reaction and strong opinions which any such claim must give rise to.

Second, and no less obviously, these two events are so unrelated to each other that it must come as a shock that they could somehow possibly be related to each other at all. For it is certainly the case at present that no one either within or outside of the Roman Catholic Church has ever suspected that there even could be a link between these two events.

Third, as was noted previously, during our discussion about the conception of Jesus, there is a major equipment issue pertaining to the accuracy and validity of the astronomy computer program which I used, and this is the part where that issue most strongly comes into focus.

I. My Religious Background

Keeping that in mind, allow me to begin by sharing a bit about my own religious background so that you may come to know how my own personal views of a potential connection between these two seemingly unrelated things came to develop, and so that you may properly assess the extent to which my own personal thoughts (“experimenter bias”, in the parlance of scientific inquiry) may or may not have affected my assessment of the facts and of the spiritual dimensions of this.

I was born into and raised in a very traditional Roman Catholic household in the 1950s and '60s. I was baptized in the now-closed Little Flower parish on the South Side of Chicago, where my family lived for my first four years, and I was raised in Queen of All Saints parish on the northwest side.

My father had spent his first year of schooling after eighth grade exploring the possibility of becoming a priest, and in his adult years he was an active member of the Knights of Columbus (mostly the Fr. Ryan Council), a Roman Catholic organization which seeks to defend the Pope, and which is commonly referred to as “the KCs”. In fact, for a little while, he had been a member of another council of the KCs, the same council of which the late Congressman Henry Hyde---a leading pro-life advocate, and author of the “Hyde Amendment”¹---had been a member. As to my mother (who died during my sophomore year high school), she was active in the Altar and Rosary

¹ <https://www.hli.org/2021/08/hyde-amendment-under-attack/>

Society of our local parish, and I remember seeing her kneeling down at her bedside in prayer every single night before she would get into bed. We always had a picture of whichever Pope currently reigned on the wall in the living room. Myself and my three siblings each had eight years of Roman Catholic elementary education and four years of Roman Catholic high school, and my sister graduated from a Roman Catholic college. When I was in fifth and sixth grades I sang in the choir. And of course, I also went through the ceremonies associated with one's First Communion and Confirmation.

It therefore came as a bit of a surprise both to myself and to those around me when I began to question Roman Catholicism quite seriously, starting after freshman year high school. By the start of senior year I had no definite opinion one way or the other as to whether Jesus really was the Son of God, or whether He really had died for our sins and had risen from the dead, though in the back of my mind, I strongly suspected that this was the case. I would describe myself during that time as being a deist² rather than a Christian.

Just before Christmas of my senior year, however, while I was on a retreat sponsored by my Roman Catholic high school, I came to the realization that Jesus could not have had the love and concern for people which He quite obviously did have and yet also, at the same time, be a liar, and at that, a liar about the most important thing about Him: His divinity. I likewise realized as well that nobody else could have come along after Him (if supposedly He was not divine) and made up all the things which we have read about Him, while at the same time also deliberately misleading people about Jesus with respect to so important an issue as His divinity; for there again you would have to have one or more persons espousing a message of unconditional love for people while simultaneously being maliciously deceptive to the very people whom they supposedly loved.

This would be especially malicious deception since it would be the case that if anyone were to believe this supposedly false story during the reign of the ancient Roman Empire, they could then be executed for their belief. Now, how could somebody (Jesus, or anyone else) be genuinely loving toward people and yet also at the same time knowingly lead them to their deaths by the sword, by crucifixion, or by being thrown to the lions because he had deliberately misled them with a lie?

Granted, perhaps some person or another could have been so deceptive toward unsuspecting people for the sake of personal, worldly gain, such as riches or power, etc. However, with the exception of Judas Iscariot and John³ (the only apostle who had stayed with Jesus and His mother through thick and thin during His trial and crucifixion), all of the apostles died a martyr's death, though each of the others easily could have avoided execution during the first decades of Christianity by publicly denouncing Jesus and saying that their claim that He had risen from the dead was nothing more than a myth. And certainly, none of Jesus' followers during the first century A.D. gained any riches or power as a result of their testimony about Jesus.

At that point I became firmly convinced that Jesus really was who He had said He was all along. And as I considered all of this while I was deep in thought one evening during that retreat, in my mind I pictured Jesus coming through the front door of my house (ripping the door off its hinges,

² <https://www.thefreedictionary.com/deist>

³ <https://web.stanford.edu/group/ncbc/forwards/apostles.htm>

coming into my house, and then standing right in front of me, specifically) and then very gently and very calmly telling me that if I wanted Him to stay, He would stay (even though at that point, I had never even heard of Revelation 3:20,⁴ known in the Roman Catholic Bible as Apocalypse 3:20⁵).

I felt at that point I had a choice to make, for I felt that unless I asked Him to stay, He would take my silence as meaning that I did not want Him to stay. I did want Him to stay, however, and so in my heart, I thanked Him for staying as my way of saying, “Yes,” to Him, and as my way of showing Him also that I believed that He would keep His word, and that He really would stay. At that point, I pictured the door of my house materializing back into place behind Him, fully closed, as He continued to stand there before me, and I have been a Christian ever since.

Following graduation from high school, someone whom I had known in the high school astronomy club, a person who had graduated two years ahead of me, came back from college to Chicago for the summer. As it turns out, he was then attending the same university which I had planned to attend: the University of Arizona. Over the course of the previous year he had started walking with the Lord, and during the summer that I graduated from high school he led me into having a walk with the Lord, too.

When classes began at the university in Tucson the next semester, he then led me to various fellowships, some of which greatly enhanced my walk with the Lord. I attended church virtually every Sunday morning, and Sunday School before the services, as well as the Sunday evening and Wednesday evening church services, and also Bible studies in between. By the time I was done with my first semester of undergraduate studies I probably knew more about the Bible than I knew about chemistry. (And in fact, my grades reflected that, since I had spent so much of my study time with my nose in the Bible instead of in my text books.)

In the course of all that I completely rejected everything about Roman Catholicism which differs from Protestant evangelical teachings. I even got to the point where I took a particular passage of Scripture which the Apostle Paul wrote---saying that Satan may disguise himself as an angel of light, and his servants as servants of righteousness⁶---and applied that passage to Mary, and I told people that the various apparitions of Mary (for example, Our Lady of Guadalupe) were actually apparitions of Satan in disguise. (That wasn't something which I was taught in the Protestant fellowships; it is simply something instead which I myself had concluded on my own.)

Now, that particular belief of mine didn't last very long, fortunately, and soon I simply took the less dramatic position of saying that if something didn't match up with Scripture, then it was irrelevant as to whether the error was made up by man or by Satan; for error is error, no matter what the origin thereof may be. And as I have also recently come to realize, the statements which Our Lady of Guadalupe reportedly made aren't nearly as controversial as I had at first assumed. (More on that later.)

⁴ <http://biblehub.com/nasb/revelation/3.htm>

⁵ <https://biblehub.com/drb/revelation/3.htm>

⁶ II Corinthians 11:14-15; http://biblehub.com/niv/2_corinthians/11.htm

Within recent years, shortly before I started studying the Star of Bethlehem, I did a little studying about Our Lady of Guadalupe just out of curiosity. (I don't recall for certain why I started to do so, but perhaps I was influenced by the fact that I lived for so many years in Tucson, which has a largely Mexican population.) After a little while I began to wonder if perhaps this one event may have entailed an actual apparition of the mother of our Lord after all; and in the back of my mind, I suspected that it did, though I didn't actually come out and say so, for I did not want to be responsible for leading people into a false teaching if in fact the story was just a myth. Such was the state of my thoughts about Our Lady of Guadalupe when I began my studies on the Star of Bethlehem.

What I learned as I studied the Star of Bethlehem left me stunned, however, not simply because of the many fascinating aspects of that study itself which I have already covered in this book, but also because of the fact that in the process of studying this topic, I simply stumbled upon certain facts which have left me even further stunned: For I have come to see a connection between the Star of Bethlehem and the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The thing is, nobody either inside or outside of the Roman Catholic Church has ever seen a connection between these two events, or has even suspected that there could be one.

Before I go into the details of the connections between these two things, allow me to share with you the basic, underlying story about Our Lady of Guadalupe, and then we shall look at the various arguments which have been made in support of, and in opposition to, the claim that the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe is basically true. Once that is done, we shall then consider the astronomy of the matter, which of course is where the link between this apparition of the mother of our Lord and the Star of Bethlehem lies.

II. Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Basic Story

For those who are not familiar with the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe, it goes like this:^{7,8} Around sunrise on December 9, 1531 A.D. (on the Julian calendar),⁹ a man named Juan Diego was walking in an area which, at the time, was just north of Mexico City. (Today, in fact, that place is within the boundaries of Mexico City.) Juan Diego was heading to Roman Catholic Mass. It is reported that he heard the beautiful sound of songbirds as he was walking along at the base of a hill known as Tepeyac Hill, and at the hill he encountered the mother of Jesus as she would have appeared at some time around age 14 (by his estimate).¹⁰ She spoke to him in his native Nahuatl language, the language of the Aztecs. She reportedly told Juan that she was the mother of Jesus, and that he was to tell the local bishop (Juan de Zumarraga) that she wanted a building to be built for her on that spot. Just exactly how she worded that statement is not entirely clear. Most versions of the story today say that she told Juan she wanted a temple to be built to her, although at least one source, *The Primitive Relation*, which was written in 1573, says that she referred to the building

⁷ <http://catholicism.org/brmichael-guadalupe.html>

⁸ Smith, Jody Brandt. *The Image of Guadalupe: Myth or Miracle?* Pp. 5-6. Garden City. Doubleday, 1983. Print.

⁹ This would correspond to December 19th on the Gregorian calendar, which we use today. (The Gregorian calendar came into use in 1582 A.D.)

¹⁰ <https://www.summitlighthouse.org/mother-mary-our-lady-of-guadalupe/>

as being more simply a “dwelling” or a “house”, rather than a temple.¹¹ The author of *The Primitive Relation*, apparently a certain Juan de Tovar, is believed to have translated it from an earlier source, the writings of a certain Juan Gonzalez, who is believed to have been the interpreter for Bishop Zumarraga when Juan Diego spoke to the bishop about the apparition of Mary.¹²

She also appeared separately to Juan Diego’s uncle, Juan Bernardino, and told him how she wished to be called; this is commonly translated as Our Lady of Guadalupe. But it is not entirely clear whether she meant *coatlxopeuh*, a Nahuatl word meaning “one who crushes the serpent” or Guadalupe, a reference to a village in Spain, or perhaps to both equally. The pronunciation of these two words, as it turns out, is essentially the same. For full discussion of this, see: <https://www.sancta.org/nameguad.html>.

As to a serpent, this was one of the principal gods of the Aztecs.¹³ As to the Spanish village of Guadalupe, the Spanish name Guadalupe derives from the Arabic term *waddi-al-luppen*, the exact meaning of which is not clear, though it may mean “hidden river”.¹⁴ Now, as it turns out, according to legend, a statue of a dark-skinned Virgin Mary was buried near the Spanish village of Guadalupe in order to hide it from the Muslim Moors when they invaded Spain from Africa; and early in the 14th century, a man herding cattle saw a vision of Mary, who told him to dig at that spot, and the statue was then recovered.^{15,16}

Since she was speaking to Juan Bernardino in Nahuatl, some might assume that she principally meant *coatlxopeuh* (“one who crushes the serpent”); however, for reasons which we shall consider later herein, I believe it is likely that she deliberately called herself by a term that can be thought of equally as being either *coatlxopeuh* or Guadalupe.

In any event, Juan did as Mary wished, but the bishop did not believe him. Juan went back later that day to where he had seen Mary and told her of the bishop’s unbelief, and he suggested to her that she entrust the message to someone else, a more worthy person. However, she told Juan to go back himself the next day and say the same thing to the bishop. So Juan did go back the next day (December 10th), but still the bishop did not believe Juan; and this time he asked Juan to go back and ask the lady whom he had supposedly seen for a sign that Juan was telling the truth. Juan went back later that day and told Mary what the bishop had said; Mary told Juan to come back to her the next day to receive the sign which she would provide.

However, the next day (December 11th), Juan did not show up at the place where Mary had been---or at the cathedral, either---because his uncle had suddenly become severely ill, and Juan stayed with him to care for him. Juan’s uncle asked him to get a priest, because he thought he was dying.

¹¹ Smith, Pg. 137.

¹² Smith, Pg. 136.

¹³ <https://www.ancient.eu/Quetzalcoatl/>

¹⁴ <https://www.worldhistory.org/Quetzalcoatl/>

¹⁵ <https://aleteia.org/2017/06/29/is-guadalupe-a-mexican-name/>

¹⁶ <https://www.sancta.org/nameguad.html>

As it turns out, Juan's uncle was still alive the next morning (December 12th) as Juan went to find a priest. He tried to walk around the place where he had met Mary, because he felt embarrassed about the fact that he had not gone back to her or to the bishop the previous day, and he did not wish to see her at that time. But she met him along his alternate path anyway, not far from where he had first seen her. She was not angry with him; instead, she was sympathetic about his uncle. In fact, she said that his uncle would be healed, and not die. She then instructed him to go to the top of Tepeyac Hill, which they were not far from, to pick flowers. Juan went up the hill and, much to his astonishment, roses were in bloom in that arid place on a cold December morning.

Juan picked as many flowers as he could hold in his apron, also known as a tilma. When he got back to Mary at the bottom of the hill, she rearranged the roses in his tilma as he held it open before her and told him to bring them to the bishop. He held his tilma closed-up against his chest. When he arrived at the cathedral, the bishop's servants apparently made him wait a long time before admitting him. When they finally let him in, he unfolded his tilma in front of the bishop and the roses poured out onto the floor. And there, on Juan's tilma, was an image of Mary herself.

The building which Mary had requested was quickly built, and the bishop decided to make it a chapel. And in the wake of this event, as we shall soon consider in detail, nearly all of the native Aztec Indians were converted to Christianity.

III. The Physical, Historical, And Spiritual Aspects Which Support, And Those Which Operate Against, Acceptance Of The Story Of Our Lady Of Guadalupe

Before we go further, the next thing we should consider is a little-known fact: The Roman Catholic Church does *not* make personal spiritual experiences ("private revelations") such as this story a matter of doctrinal faith.^{17,18} Rather, the *only* thing which the Roman Catholic Church might do with respect to a personal spiritual experience is to make a statement as to whether it is acceptable to believe a report about a personal spiritual experience, such as the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Catholic Church assigns different levels of approval for private revelations, according to all the factors surrounding the alleged revelation.¹⁹

Most people---in fact, even the overwhelming majority of Roman Catholics themselves---think that to the contrary, the Roman Catholic Church supposedly makes it a matter of doctrinal faith that the mother of Jesus did appear to a man named Juan Diego in Mexico in the year 1531 A.D. Again however, it is to be emphasized that it is instead the case that the only thing which the Roman Catholic Church says about this event---or any other personal spiritual experience, such as a few of the other claimed apparitions of Mary---is that if anyone really believes that Mary appeared to Juan Diego in 1531, they may do so without contradicting the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

¹⁷ <https://www.catholic.com/tract/private-revelation>

¹⁸ <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/answers/discernment-of-private-revelation-apparition-21328>

¹⁹ <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/answers/discernment-of-private-revelation-apparition-21328>

Now of course, the overwhelming majority of practicing Roman Catholics do in fact believe that Mary appeared to Juan Diego in 1531. Likewise, probably every pope since that time seems to have believed it on a personal level as well; but again, this is not a matter of Roman Catholic doctrinal faith.

To all of that I would add that I myself now also believe that this was an actual appearance of Mary to Juan Diego, though my belief system does remain essentially Protestant evangelical, as has been the case with me since age 17. As a matter of fact, until just very recently, I had not attended Mass since I was in high school (half a century ago), with the rare exception of weddings, funerals, and a few other occasions, and I had not been to Confession since high school (or possibly even elementary school). This ran squarely contrary to what the Catholic Church says is required of Catholics. However, I did not refrain from attending Mass or going to Confession out of any disrespect for the Roman Catholic Church, but rather, such practices on my part arose out of my doctrinal disagreements with the Roman Catholic Church (including the doctrines that attendance at Mass, and going to Confession, are supposedly required of me or of anyone else).

Moving on, the reason it is important to emphasize that the Roman Catholic Church does not make a belief in this apparition to Juan Diego a matter of doctrinal faith is simply this: It means that therefore, just as a matter of logic (all theology aside for a moment) it is certainly not necessary for anyone (either Catholic or non-Catholic) to believe that Mary said either this, that, or some other thing to Juan Diego which we commonly hear about in the telling of this tale. Roman Catholics themselves are permitted by the Vatican to believe that she said just some of the things she is reported to have said, or none of the things she said, or all of the things she said; they are even permitted to believe that this event did not even happen at all.

Furthermore, the tale of Our Lady of Guadalupe is not Scripture, nor does the Roman Catholic Church itself claim that it is Scripture, or on the same level as Scripture. Neither did Juan Diego say, "Thus saith the Lord," when he told of his experience, or anything like that. So if even a fully-practicing Roman Catholic finds something objectionable about the supposed statements of Mary to Juan Diego, then that person may freely disbelieve those statements or ignore them, and yet still believe any other part of the story about this event without violating any tenet of the Roman Catholic Church in doing so.

The significance of all this (particularly for Protestants) lies in the fact that the question of whether the mother of our Lord did in fact appear to Juan Diego in 1531 is not inextricably linked to the question of what (if anything at all) she may or may not have said to Juan Diego. And that, in turn, means that if one does not believe that Mary would have said some specific thing that she reportedly told him, the larger question of whether she did in fact appear to him at all remains a separate, independent question; that is, one can believe that she did indeed appear to him, yet at the same time not believe that she said any particular thing which she is reported to have said to him, without contradicting one's self.

So even if one were to discount everything she supposedly told him (or some of those things), one would still be faced then with the distinctly separate question of whether she did or did

not appear to him at all in the first place, regardless of what she may or may not have said. Before we go any further though, let us look at some of the commonly stated things which some people say tend to disprove the idea that Mary really did appear to Juan Diego.

A. The Physical Aspects Of The Tilma

Any discussion of the physical aspects of the tilma must begin with a look at the research of Dr. Philip Serna Callahan, who was a professor of entomology²⁰ at the University of Florida, and who had been a painter since age 12.²¹ In May of 1979, Prof. Callahan, along with Prof. Jody Brandt Smith-

--who was then a professor of philosophy and aesthetics at Pensacola Junior College (now known as Pensacola State College)---were allowed to examine the tilma outside of its protective covering for three hours.

Prof. Callahan studied and photographed the tilma under infrared light and then published the results he obtained and the conclusions he drew (after first stating the methodology and equipment he used)²² in a book entitled *The Tilma Under Infra-Red Radiation*.²³ With respect to that book, allow me to note here that a PDF file of it is available from an organization known as CARA; see <https://cara.georgetown.edu/>.

Disclosure: It is to be kept in mind as we consider the published results of Prof. Callahan's research that he was a devout Roman Catholic, and that he received Communion according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church just before examining the tilma.²⁴

1. The Physical Evidence Which Operates Against Acceptance Of The Story Of Our Lady Of Guadalupe

That being said, let us now consider certain findings which Prof. Callahan made and certain conclusions which he drew from his study which support the idea that at least certain portions of the image on the tilma were painted on by human hands (or if not, were at least enhanced later on by paint applied by someone). After having examined the image on the tilma extensively, he wrote,

Even a cursory examination of the painting shows that the gold of the sunburst, the stars and the trim of the blue mantle, are cracking with time. The gold

²⁰ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/entomology>

²¹ Callahan, P. (1981). *The tilma under infra-red radiation. An infrared and artistic analysis of the image of the Virgin Mary in the Basilica of Guadalupe*. CARA Studies On Popular Devotion Vol. II, Guadalupan Studies No. 3. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA), pg. 7.

²² Callahan, pp. 4-6.

²³ Callahan, P. (1981). *The tilma under infra-red radiation. An infrared and artistic analysis of the image of the Virgin Mary in the Basilica of Guadalupe*. CARA Studies On Popular Devotion Vol. II, Guadalupan Studies No. 3. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA).

²⁴

http://www.miraclehunter.com/marian_apparitions/approved_apparitions/guadalupe/article_11.html

sunbeams that surround the figure are in very bad shape with large areas where the gold has fallen off.²⁵

From this observation Dr. Callahan then concludes,

- that these details of the painting were added by human hands long after the original painting was formed;²⁶

After stating in detail certain other observations which he made, Dr. Callahan goes on to say the following:

- that the moon and the tassel were added to the painting before the background sunburst but after the original body was formed;²⁷
- that they were put on by human hands since they are not only cracking but are also, from the artistic viewpoint, not well done nor in keeping with the obvious beauty of the rest of the body and garments;²⁸

²⁵ Callahan, pg. 7.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Callahan, pg. 9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

- that the gold and blue edges of the mantle were added--as were the gold stars---by human hands and were late 16th or early 17th century;²⁹
- that the angel and Aztec tilma fold were added after the moon and tassel at the waist and probably at the same time, but before the sunburst, black border and white background;³⁰
- that the base of the robe covers the base of the moon so [it] was certainly added to the originally formed robe;³¹
- that ... all of this area is deteriorating with time and was added by human hands;³²
- that the blue lower fold of the mantle was added and at the same time as a hand-hold for the angel;³³
- that these human additions, since they are not protected by varnish, will probably continue to deteriorate with time.³⁴
- that the hands have been modified to foreshorten the fingers and convert the original formed hands from elongated fingers to shorter Indian fingers;³⁵
- that the gold bracelet and fur cuffs have been added to fit the Gothic pattern;³⁶
- that the background is of a fresco technique, and the angel is of tempera;³⁷

²⁹ Callahan, pg. 10.

³⁰ Callahan, pg. 13.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Callahan, pg. 14.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Callahan, pg. 17.

In closing on this point, allow me to say that one can find many articles and statements online which likewise are intended to disprove the miraculous nature of the tilma, though I have found only one which deals with things not covered by Dr. Callahan's investigation. Yet even the claims of that article itself have their doubters, and so further investigation is indeed warranted.³⁸

2. The Physical Evidence Which Supports Acceptance Of The Story Of Our Lady Of Guadalupe

a. The Findings Of Dr. Callahan

Dr. Callahan made certain statements which do, on the other hand, support acceptance of the actual main part of the image on the tilma as being miraculously produced. Those statements pertain to the artistic importance of four specific aspects: first, sizing; second, an underlying sketch; third, the use of varnish; and fourth, the physical attribute of iridescence.

Sizing, first of all, is a term in the art world.³⁹ It relates to the need to prepare the canvas or other material which will be used for a painting in order to make the surface uniformly smooth. Bear in mind that the tilma is made of cactus fibers, which would be anything but smooth. Granted, the surface of the cactus fibers on which this particular image appears is in fact relatively smooth (although the reverse side is coarse, as it would naturally be). But in any event, as Dr. Callahan observed (as we shall see in a moment), the tilma itself is unsized.

This is remarkable. Sizing was part of the Renaissance art technique, which enjoyed wide popularity in Europe. The Renaissance art technique started to become popular in Spain about one hundred years before the image on the tilma was created.⁴⁰ Dr. Callahan comments on it, as follows:

The techniques of Renaissance painting are neither mysterious nor lost in the sands of time. Renaissance techniques are documented in several of what might best be termed medieval “how-to-do-it” books. The most intriguing and illuminating of these is *Il Libro dell’Arte* (*The Craftsman’s Handbook*) by the great 15th century artist Cennino d’Andrea Cennini. This Italian text has been translated into English three times. The 1933 translation by Daniel V. Thompson, Jr., Yale University, is still in print (Dover Publishers, Inc., N.Y.).^{41, 42}

After a brief discussion of Renaissance technique, Dr. Callahan adds this:

³⁸ <https://www.texasmonthly.com/articles/quite-contrary/>

³⁹ <https://www.liveabout.com/sizing-in-painting-4021697>

⁴⁰ https://www.ancient.eu/Renaissance_Art/

⁴¹ Callahan, pg. 23.

⁴² The reader is reminded that the book in which Dr. Callahan made this comment about it still being in print was itself published in 1981, and so this might no longer be true today.

It is extremely unlikely that any 15th or 16th century artist would attempt such a realistic and subtle portrait without first of all drawing the features in charcoal. To do so would not only border on the artistic impossible, but it would violate all the tenets of Renaissance craftsmanship.

On the left side of my composite (A)⁴³ I have placed an example of a small underdrawing directly on the sized canvas. This demonstrates what must certainly be the first order of layering for such a portrait. *There is no underdrawing on the tilma.* Charcoal lines would most certainly show through around the edge of the figure in the infrared photographs if an underdrawing were present.⁴⁴ [emphasis in the original]

Following a brief discussion of the image itself, Dr. Callahan continues, as follows:

The fur tassel and the hands (Fig. 11) have been outlined *over* the pink pigment of the robe. These lines, therefore, are *not* underdrawing lines. Furthermore, these lines are rendered in black paint, not charcoal. [emphasis in the original]

In regard to sizing, the area (C) immediately under the neck and especially around the fur tassel (Fig. 11), is extremely thin- layered. The fabric shows through in considerable detail. The interstice between the cross fibers is evident. *There is no sizing over the fabric.* [emphasis in the original]

According to Cennini (1437), Renaissance sizing was made of skin from the necks of goats, sheep parchments, and clippings of these parchments. The clippings were washed, soaked for a day, and then boiled until all “three parts are reduced to one.”⁴⁵

After a further discussion of other sizing materials (such as cheese and lime), Dr. Callahan then says, with respect to Renaissance techniques for using them on paintings generally,

⁴³ Here Dr. Callahan makes reference to a composite work of his, one which appears on the cover of his book. This composite work of Dr. Callahan is reproduced in the Appendix of this book. (With respect to this image specifically, in the Appendix, find DR. CALLAHAN'S COMPOSITE WORK.)

It depicts the image on the tilma, with the right half of the image of Our Lady being depicted as it is presently seen on the tilma, and with the left half of Our Lady being depicted as Dr. Callahan believed it to have been in its original form. To the left of this is a smaller depiction of the image of Our Lady as it might appear in the form of a charcoal sketch, if an artist would have made such a sketch.

This sketch, and various other aspects of the image on his cover, are labelled with various letters (*i.e.*, A,B,C,D), and these are referred to within Dr. Callahan's book (such as the letter "A" here), as we shall see herein.

⁴⁴ Callahan, pg. 24.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

Clear size (without whitening) was also used as an outer glaze to protect the pigments of tempera and oil paintings. A varnish was then placed over the paintings as the final protective layer.

We may understand from the above descriptions that a typical Renaissance painting should consist of *three to four* under and overprotective coats. [emphasis in the original] They are:

1. the clear sizing (glue) which is put on first to impregnate the wood or fibers (undercoat);
2. gesso sottile which is a thin smooth hard whitened layer used to cover the sized canvas (undercoat) and further fill the interstices;
3. clear thin hot size (sometimes omitted) over the paint pigments; which are themselves bound with egg white (tempera); and
4. a protective varnish outercoat.

Both the visible and infrared photographs show that on the inexplicable portion of the body garments, face and hands, there is *no under or over* preparation of any type. [emphasis in the original]

Even a superficial examination of Figs. 4, 9, 13 and 16 demonstrates that the fibers under the body and face are unsized (D), whereas the surrounding sunset burst and gold clouds (B) are layered and the interstices of the tilma cloth so filled with fresco that they are crossed with cracks and in places exhibit a decided “scratched” effect.⁴⁶

Dr. Callahan also discusses what may be the most unusual property of all concerning the tilma: its iridescence. Iridescence is the word used to describe the tendency of certain things to appear to change color or hue according to the angle from which they are observed or according to the lighting which is used to view them.⁴⁷ Dr. Callahan was familiar with this phenomenon from his studies in entomology.⁴⁸

As he points out, iridescent coloring is not achieved in the way that coloring is normally achieved. For it is not created by the absorption and reflection of light by the molecules of the pigments, as is normally the case (in a painting, for instance), but rather it is created in a different way entirely: by interference with the wave front of light, such as by diffraction⁴⁹ or

⁴⁶ Callahan, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁷ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/iridescence>

⁴⁸ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/entomology>

⁴⁹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diffraction>

refraction⁵⁰ which may be caused by microstructures on the surface of the iridescent object. A related phenomenon is pearlescence; pearlescence in the finish on cars is an example of this, and it is created by the use of certain ceramic crystals which are placed within the paint mixture, and it is not caused by the actual coloring agent of the paint itself.⁵¹

On the topic of iridescence itself Dr. Callahan wrote,

One of the truly marvelous and unexplainable techniques utilized to give realism to the painting is the way that it takes advantage of the unsized tilma to give it depth and render it lifelike. This is particularly evident in the mouth (Fig. 15B) where a coarse fiber of the fabric is raised above the level of the rest of the weave and follows perfectly the ridge on the top of the lip. The same rough imperfections occur below the highlighted area on the left cheek and to the right and below the right eye (Fig. 15C). I would consider it impossible that any human painter could select a tilma with imperfections of weave positioned so as to accentuate the shadows and highlights in order to impart such realism. The possibility of coincidence is even more unlikely.

As shown in infrared Figs. 13 and 14, the eyes and shadows around the nose are simple dark lines that are not underdrawn but are a part of the face pigment. Close to the painting the highlights of the eyes are subdued to the extent that they appear nonexistent. The black of the eyes and hair cannot be iron oxide or any pigment that turns brown with age for the paint is neither cracked nor faded with age. The truly phenomenal thing about the face and hands is the tonal quality which is as much a physical effect from light reflecting off the coarse tilma as it is from the paint itself.

It is a simple fact that if one stands close to the painting the face is very disappointing as far as depth and coloring are concerned. At a distance of six or seven feet, however, the skin tone becomes what might best be termed Indian-olive (gray-green) in tone. It appears that somehow the gray and “caked” looking white pigment of the face and hands combines with the rough surface of the unsized tilma to “collect” light and diffract from afar the olive-skinned hue. Such a technique would be an impossible accomplishment by human hands. It often occurs in nature, however, in the coloring of bird feathers and butterfly scales, and on the elytra⁵² of brightly colored beetles. Such colors are physically diffracted colors and do not depend upon absorption and reflection from molecular pigments but rather on the surface- sculpturing of feathers or butterfly scales. The same physical effect is quite evident in the face and is easily observed by slowly backing away from the painting until the details of the imperfections in the tilma fabric are no longer visible. At a distance where the pigment and surface sculpturing blend together, the overwhelming beauty of the olive-colored Madonna emerges as if by magic. The

⁵⁰ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/refraction>

⁵¹ <https://www.carwow.co.uk/guides/glossary/car-paint-types-guide>

⁵² <https://www.yourdictionary.com/elytron>

expression suddenly appears reverent yet joyous, Indian yet European, olive-skinned yet white of hue. The feeling is that of a face as rugged as the deserts of Mexico, yet gentle as a maiden on her wedding night. It is a face that intermingles the Christianity of Byzantine Europe with the overpowering naturalism of New World Indian. A fitting symbol for all the people of a great continent!⁵³

The thing is, until just recently, no artist had ever been able to produce an iridescent painting. Then, in 2013, artist Franziska Schenk in the United Kingdom created an iridescent painting.^{54, 55} As it turns out, she produced iridescence in the same way that the tilma does; that is, she produced iridescence by layering her work, which allowed her to make it a combination of pigmented and structural colors. (As we shall see in a moment, Dr. Callahan said that the pigmentation of the colors is semitransparent, so that one can see the underlying cactus fabric itself right through the pigments.) What this means with respect to the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe is that by making use of the very thin layer of pigments and the structural aspects of the underlying tilma, the image of Mary on the tilma stands as the only work of art which had ever exhibited iridescence prior to the year 2013.

Dr. Callahan's detailed discussion of the image on the tilma is also accompanied by the following conclusions:

- that the blue of the mantle appears to be original and of unknown semitransparent blue pigment; and⁵⁶
- because the blue pigment is of even density and not faded, it is inexplicable.⁵⁷
- that the original hands are of an unknown pigment and are inexplicable.⁵⁸
- that the entire face is of unknown pigments and that they are blended in such a manner as to take advantage of the light-diffraction qualities of the unsized fabric and impart the olive-skinned hue to the skin,⁵⁹
- that this technique utilizes the rough imperfections of the tilma weave to impart great depth to the painting;⁶⁰

⁵³ Callahan, pp. 14-15.

⁵⁴ <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/schenk-franziska-iridescent-nanopaints/>

⁵⁵ <http://franziskaschenk.co.uk/science/the-art-of-iridescence>

⁵⁶ Callahan, pg. 10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Callahan, pg. 14.

⁵⁹ Callahan, pg. 15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

- and furthermore, that the face is of such beauty and unique execution as to render it inexplicable in terms of present day science.⁶¹
- that there is no visible evidence that any part of the painting is in oil or water color; although overall the body and face appear to be tempera, it is unlikely that they are tempera in terms of the true definition of that word;⁶²
- and finally that the artistic technique applied to the body and face is inexplicable.⁶³

Dr. Callahan also made the following statement in his summary:

My close study of the infrared photographs has led me to the following conclusions:

1. The original figure, including the rose robe, blue mantle, hands and face (as depicted in Fig. 1, on the front cover) is inexplicable. In terms of this infrared study, there is no way to explain either the kind of color pigments utilized, or the maintenance of color luminosity and brightness of pigments over the centuries. Furthermore, when consideration is given to the fact that there is no underdrawing, sizing, or over-varnish, and that the weave of the fabric is itself utilized to give the portrait depth, no explanation of the portrait is possible by infrared techniques. It is remarkable that after more than four centuries there is no fading or cracking of the original figure on any portion of the agave tilma, which---being unsized---should have deteriorated centuries ago.⁶⁴

b. The Claims Of Others Regarding The Tilma Which Support The Story Of Our Lady Of Guadalupe

In addition, prior to the study of the tilma by Dr. Callahan, Dr. Richard Kuhn, who won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1938,⁶⁵ and who became the head of the Chemistry Department at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Heidelberg,⁶⁶ said that the pigments used to create the image were not

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Callahan, pg. 17.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Callahan, pg. 18.

⁶⁵ <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/chemistry/1938/kuhn/biographical/>

⁶⁶ <https://www.womenofgrace.com/blog/?p=61694>

from any known plant, animal, or mineral source.^{67, 68} And in 1946, the tilma was examined under a microscope by Dr. Manuel Tortolero of the Institute of Biology of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), and he found no trace of any brush strokes on the parts he examined.^{69, 70}

Also, certain persons have made various other claims, such as how the stars shown on Mary's cloak supposedly precisely match the stars which were in the sky at the time that she appeared each morning to Juan Diego,⁷¹ how the pattern on Mary's robe supposedly shows a map of Mexico,⁷² and how they believe that a close-up examination of Mary's eyes shows the reflections of certain persons who may have been in the room at the time when Juan Diego showed his tilma to the bishop.^{73, 74, 75}

As to the stars on Mary's cloak matching the stars which were in the heavens on each of those mornings, we should first of all keep in mind that, as we have just seen, Dr. Callahan concluded that they were added by a human artist. As to the possibility that the human artist was divinely guided in doing so (either unwittingly, or consciously), all I can say is that I have examined the pattern of stars on her cloak and compared it to the stars which were in the heavens at that time, and I do agree that one can definitely see some match-up between the two. But I'm afraid that I am unable to go farther than that with my conclusions because of the insufficiency of data on that point. This is due to the fact that the stars which we see on Mary's cloak are all of uniform size; thus, we cannot know what the relative brightness of each star to each other is supposed to be, and so I am unable to discern whether the pattern on her cloak really does match the grouping of stars which were in the heavens on those mornings.

As to the image of Mary supposedly showing a map of the Mexican landscape beneath the heavens on those mornings, I have found nothing in my research which illustrates the point, and from my own observations, I have been unable to detect anything on the image on the tilma which would support that claim, although I do allow for the possibility that such might indeed be the case.

As to Mary's eyes showing the reflection of one or more persons who may have been in the room when Juan Diego showed Bishop Zumarraga his tilma, this topic was dealt with by the previously-mentioned Dr. Jody Brandt Smith, who was present with Dr. Callahan when Dr.

⁶⁷ <https://www.magiscenter.com/the-science-or-lack-thereof-behind-juan-diegos-tilma/>

⁶⁸ <https://quinersdiner.com/2012/12/12/our-lady-of-guadalupe-for-atheists/>

⁶⁹ https://books.google.com/books?id=suA2DAAAQBAJ&pg=PA268&lpg=PA268&dq=tortolero+%22institute+of+biology%22&source=bl&ots=FCG2rAOktC&sig=ACfU3U0tWyvgJLCxh1_La5pahhF-RBi-2ZQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjrh_Ky6a_hAhUkU98KHZkzBSoQ6AEwEHoECAoQAAQ#v=onepage&q=tortolero%20of%20biology%22&f=false

⁷⁰ <https://www.arcaneknowledge.org/catholic/guadalupe13.htm>

⁷¹ <http://infallible-catholic.blogspot.com/2012/04/miraculous-image-of-our-lady-of.html>

⁷² <http://infallible-catholic.blogspot.com/2012/04/miraculous-image-of-our-lady-of.html>

⁷³ <https://cruxnow.com/faith/2014/12/12/four-awesome-facts-about-our-lady-of-guadalupe/>

⁷⁴ <http://www.sancta.org/eyes.html>

⁷⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b_mhXe7pvsM

Callahan examined the tilma. Dr. Smith, a Protestant, wrote a book about the tilma,⁷⁶ and the book includes photographs of computer-enhanced images of Mary's eyes, which are generally better-quality images than one can find online about the same topic.⁷⁷ These photographs do indeed seem to show faces of various persons; but then again, it is to be remembered that these photographs are, after all, simply photos of computer-enhanced images. Therefore, without a detailed examination of Mary's eyes on the tilma itself by qualified researchers from diverse backgrounds in terms of their spiritual beliefs, it would be difficult to go any farther than to simply say that, if these photographs do in fact fairly and accurately represent what can be seen in Mary's eyes, they could then be said to have no more than perhaps some tendency to support the idea that they are in fact reflections of persons who were in the room when Juan Diego opened his tilma in front of the bishop.

Absent any such study by qualified researchers of various faiths, however, I'm afraid I can say no more than that, for I have no expertise in computer enhancement techniques. I am therefore unable to comment on whether the computer enhanced images were prepared in accordance with the usual, accepted techniques for doing so, or whether those techniques could even be capable of presenting us with reliable images in any event, no matter how well done.

More importantly, however, Dr. Smith discusses in some detail the reports of certain other researchers concerning the extraordinary claim that Mary's eyes exhibit what ophthalmologists call the Purkinje-Sanson effect in human eyes, which is named after the two researchers who apparently discovered this aspect of the human eye independently of one another, at roughly the same time.^{78, 79} This pertains to the fact that when one examines a human eye, up to four reflections can be seen on the different surfaces of the cornea and lens.⁸⁰ Dr. Smith discusses three of these.⁸¹ He writes,

In its simplest form, the Purkinje-Sanson law states that whenever we see any object, the object is reflected in each eye, not once but in three different places. This threefold reflection is caused by the curvature of the eye's cornea. Two of the reflections are always right side up and one is always upside down. Depending on the angle at which the object is seen, the three reflections occur on different parts of the eye, because of the differing angles of curvature of the cornea. The curvature also causes the reflected images to be distorted in a varying degree.

On May 26, 1956, Dr. Torroella sent the following letter to Carlos Salinas:

If we take a light source and put it in front of the eye ... we see the cornea, the only part of the eye which can reflect an image in three

⁷⁶ Smith, Jody Brandt (1983). *The image of Guadalupe, myth or miracle?* Doubleday & Co. Garden City, N.Y. (print)

⁷⁷ Smith, Jody Brandt (1983), photographs 21 and 24.

⁷⁸ <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100355364>

⁷⁹ Smith, Jody Brandt (1983), pg. 80.

⁸⁰ <https://www.yourdictionary.com/elytron>

⁸¹ Smith, Jody Brandt (1983), pg. 80

places [images of Purkinje-Sanson]: the front surface of the cornea, and both front and rear of the lens surfaces, immediately behind ... The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which has been given to me for study, contains in the cornea these reflections ... In the images in question, there is a perfect collocation in agreement with this [principle], the distortion of the figures even concurring with the predicted curvature of the cornea.

In other words, in the eyes of the Virgin of Guadalupe, not only is the cornea curved but it is curved exactly the way the human eye is curved. The location of the reflections, which can be seen in both eyes, conforms exactly to what occurs in the living eye. One is near the temple while in the other eye the reflection is near the bridge of the nose. Thus the images are said to be “collocated”--- that is, they are located where they would have to be in order to conform to the way our eyes work together to perceive a single object.

Dr. Torroella’s findings were corroborated by another ophthalmologist, Dr. Rafael Torija-Lavoignet, who invited me to his office to discuss the conclusions he had reached on examining the painting twenty-five years earlier. He gave me a copy of a statement published in 1956:

When the ophthalmoscopic light is directed to the pupil of the human eye, one sees a luminous reflection
... Lighting the pupil of the eye of the Image of the Virgin, there appears the same luminous reflection ... impossible to obtain on a simple surface, and moreover on one opaque, as [is] the said painting ... I, with the aid of the ophthalmoscope, proceeded to examine the eyes of diverse paintings, even of photographs (in each case, they were of readily distinguishable persons), but I found no reflections in any of them.

Two years later, September 20, 1958, Dr. Torija published his study of the Purkinje-Sanson effect as exhibited in the Guadalupan painting. The “human bust” reflection is readily visible, he states, especially in the cornea of the right eye. “In addition to the human bust,” continues Torija, “there are two luminous reflections, which together correspond to the three images of Purkinje-Sanson.”

Dr. Torija explained to me that it is necessary to dilate the eye in order to perceive the second of the three reflections. After making precise measurement of the three face reflections he saw in the right eye of the Virgin, Dr. Torija concluded that they conformed perfectly with the requirements of the Purkinje-Sanson Law.

In his published study he states that “the human bust image reflected ... in the cornea is not an optical illusion caused by some irregularity in the weave of the ayate [cactus cloth].” Dr. Torija makes clear to me that he was not denying that there might

be an imperfection in the weave, but that the way that the eye of the painting reflected the light of the ophthalmoscope was exactly the way the curvature of the human eye reflected the same light. In other words, whether the reflections in the eye of the Virgin are caused by an irregularity in the coarse cactus cloth is essentially irrelevant.⁸²

Now, taking all of the statements of these various researchers together, I myself conclude that the tilma itself nearly cries out for further study, as I mentioned above. So much could be learned, apparently, about which features really are additions to the tilma and which ones are not. We might also be able to learn the extent (if any) to which the observations of the Purkinje-Sanson effect can be reproduced, and if so, we might also be able to derive an explanation for seeing this effect in Mary's eyes.

As a closing note on the topic of physical evidence, allow me to note that for approximately the first 116 years of its existence, the tilma was uncovered.^{83, 84} Tilmas of this nature (*i.e.*, cactus-fiber tilmas) would normally last only about 20 years,⁸⁵ or perhaps 60 years with proper care.⁸⁶ Yet this one---which again, is unvarnished⁸⁷---has lasted nearly 500 years now; it is still in excellent shape, and the colors of its original parts are unfaded.⁸⁸

B. The Historical Aspects Of The Tilma

1. The Historical Evidence Which Operates Against Acceptance Of The Story Of Our Lady Of Guadalupe

a. Our Lady Of Guadalupe As Syncretism (A Copycat Religion)

Some have also tried to disprove the story about Our Lady of Guadalupe altogether on the grounds that the image on the tilma is nothing more than an attempted Christianization of ancient Aztec mythology. Now, history does in fact record instances in which various civilizations took the gods of a neighboring people and gave them the attributes of their own culture and their own gods. This is a process known as syncretism.⁸⁹ The most obvious instance of this in Western culture entails the ancient Romans' copying of the gods of ancient Greece and giving those gods Roman names.

⁸² Smith, Jody Brandt (1983), pp. 80-82.

⁸³ <https://mtncatholic.com/2014/12/11/4-literally-awesome-facts-about-our-lady-of-guadalupe/>

⁸⁴ <https://quinersdiner.com/2012/12/12/our-lady-of-guadalupe-for-atheists/>

⁸⁵ <https://holyfamilycc.net/169>

⁸⁶ <https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/the-amazing-truth-of-our-lady-of-guadalupe.html>

⁸⁷ Callahan, pg. 18.

⁸⁸ Callahan, pg. 18.

⁸⁹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/syncretism>

i. The Similarity To Aztec Mythology

Many people today believe that the similarity between certain aspects of the image on the tilma to certain aspects of Aztec beliefs and culture point to the conclusion that the whole story surrounding the tilma is just an elaborate instance of syncretism. For instance, first of all, this alleged apparition of Mary took place on a hill where the Aztecs had had a temple to a goddess known as Tonantzin, meaning “our great mother”. (The Spanish Conquistadors had destroyed this temple before the apparition of Mary to Juan Diego.)⁹⁰

Second, the fact that Mary is shown in front of the sun (and therefore, in the minds of the Aztecs, more powerful than the sun) is thought of as supposedly incorporating Aztec theology into the story of Mary’s apparition, because the sun was the Aztecs’ most important god. (That being said, it should also be said, as noted above, that Dr. Callahan discovered that the sunburst surrounding Mary was added after the fact.)

Third, the various types of flowers seen on her cloak had various symbolic meanings to the natives, and this fact is likewise said to mean that the image is simply a product of Aztec mythology switched over to Christianity.

Fourth, her dark complexion, similar to that of the half-Spanish/half- native children (known as *mestizos*), who were sired by the Conquistadors, is said by some people to be an attempt to blend Christianity with the native culture.

Fifth, her unbraided hair is also said by some to be an attempt to blend Christianity with the native culture, because the native married women braided their hair, and so Mary’s unbraided hair is consistent with the claim that she was a virgin. (Note: here it is to be remembered that when Mary gave birth to Jesus, she and Joseph were betrothed to each other. In the culture of ancient Israel, this was a stage in which they were married to each other---in technical, legal terms---though they had not yet gone through the last formalities of finalizing their union, and it would not yet have been proper for them to consummate the marriage. So in essence, it was a more formal relationship between them than simply being fiancés, and if a man were to put aside his betrothed, he would have to give her a formal statement of divorce, the same as if they had already gone through the last formal ceremonies of finalizing their union.⁹¹)

Sixth, her hands are joined together in a similar manner to that of at least some of the depictions of the native goddess Tonantzin. Some people have said that she could also be thought of as clapping her hands while dancing, which is how the natives prayed. All of this is likewise said to be an attempt to blend Christianity with the native culture. . For detailed look at the similarities between the image of Mary and Aztec mythology, see: <https://www.oerproject.com/en/oer-materials/oer-media/html-articles/origins/unit6/religious-syncretism-in-colonial-mexico-city>.

⁹⁰ <https://theyucatantimes.com/2021/12/tonantzin-the-deity-behind-our-lady-of-guadalupe/>

⁹¹ https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/477321/jewish/Kiddushin-Betrothal.htm

ii. The Similarity To Roman Catholic Imagery

Those who dispute the authenticity of the image also point to the similarities between it and various Roman Catholic images of Mary. For instance, as we saw above, there is a story that Mary had appeared previously to a man near the town of Guadalupe in Spain and told him where a buried, dark-skinned statue of her could be found.⁹² Also, long before the discovery of America, there was a statue in Madrid that was reported to have been brought there by St. James. This statue, known as The Virgin of Almudena, has been preserved, and it shows Mary surrounded by sun rays and standing upon a crescent moon.⁹³ (Bear in mind however, that---as noted above---Dr. Callahan found that the sun rays and crescent moon were added after the fact, so it would certainly not be surprising if the person who added them were in fact copying those parts, at least, from the statue of of Almudena.)

Others have pointed out that the image on Juan Diego's tilma bears a noticeable resemblance to an image of Mary in Spain known as *Virgin of Mercy*,⁹⁴ and that it furthermore bears a striking resemblance to the image of Mary which was displayed on the banner of Hernan Cortes, the Conquistador who had conquered the Aztecs ten years earlier.⁹⁵ On the basis of all of this, some conclude that the image of Mary on Juan Diego's tilma, being as similar as it is in certain ways to these other images, together with the fact that she said she was Our Lady of Guadalupe (*Coatlaxopeuh*), is said to be part of an attempt by the Catholic friars who were in Mexico in the 1500s to blend their own Catholic imagery with ancient Aztec beliefs.

With respect to all of this, let me first of all say that, upon consideration of the aforementioned images and statue, plus the fact that Juan Diego identified the woman he spoke with as Our Lady of Guadalupe, I cannot believe that all of this is simply a coincidence. Too many things come together at the same time to allow for me to draw such a conclusion. I believe that it therefore must be the case that either the image was deliberately produced by a man who was trying to impress his audience with the Aztec and Catholic imagery, or else God arranged to have the image come out this way (the original parts, at least) in order to get the attention of both the natives and the Spaniards and cause them to believe that this is a work of God. Before we jump to any conclusions though, we must consider these facts from all relevant angles.

b. Was The Image Painted By A Native Artist?

Some have pointed out that during an official inquiry into the origins of the image in 1556 (25 years after the apparition of Mary is said to have taken place), certain statements were made which claimed that a native artist (Spanish name: Marcos Cipac de Aquino) had painted the image "yesteryear",⁹⁶ and that this supposedly proves that the image is fake because the people of that era

⁹² <https://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/our-lady-of-guadalupe-spain.html>

⁹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgin_of_Almudena

⁹⁴ https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bonanat_Zaortiga_-_Virgin_of_Mercy_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg

⁹⁵ <https://www.meisterdrucke.us/fine-art-prints/School-Spanish/1082662/The-original-banner-of-Hernan-Cortes.html>

⁹⁶ <https://skeptoid.com/episodes/4201>

presumably would have known for certain one way or the other whether it was fake or genuine. What is more, these statements were made by Franciscan priests, which of course carries with it the suggestion that since its authenticity was doubted by Catholic priests, then it must be fake, for surely (supposedly), Catholic priests from that era in Mexico would not have spoken against its authenticity unless they were convinced that it was fake. We shall get back to this issue and consider it in detail below.

c. Does The Paucity Of Written Statements About The Tilma Prior To 1556 Prove That It Did Not Exist Earlier?

Some have also said that the paucity of statements about the tilma and Juan Diego prior to 1556 points to the conclusion that the image was not produced until sometime around 1556, and that the person Juan Diego is simply a fictitious character.⁹⁷ For instance, it is reported that the bishop to whom Juan Diego showed the tilma, Bishop Juan de Zumarraga, was a prolific writer, yet in none of his writings prior to his death in 1548 did he ever mention the tilma, nor Juan Diego. From this it is argued that surely then, Bishop Zumarraga knew nothing of the tilma, and that Juan Diego did not really exist at all. We shall likewise have to get back to this issue and consider it in detail below.

2. The Historical Aspects Which Support Acceptance Of The Story Of Our Lady Of Guadalupe

a. A Rebuttal Of Syncretism: The Significance Of Probative Value

With respect to the question as to whether the similarities between the image on the tilma and certain aspects of Aztec and Roman Catholic beliefs point to the conclusion that the tale of Our Lady of Guadalupe, plus Juan Diego's tilma itself, are simply part of an elaborate hoax, and an example of syncretism, we should note that it is also the case that these similarities are equally used by Roman Catholics to argue that God intentionally had Mary appear in this manner as a means of communicating to the native people in a way which would allow the natives to understand that she was from God; simultaneously, the similarity of the image to that which the Spaniards were familiar with from Spain is supposedly a sign from God to the Spaniards themselves that this was indeed a genuine appearance of the mother of Jesus, and that Juan Diego had been telling the truth all along.

So who is right? Those who disparage the stories of the supposed appearance of Mary because of these similarities with Aztec mythology and Spanish art, or those who say that God intentionally had Mary appear this way for a very good reason?

Well, when you come right down to it, the fact that the image of Mary appears this way has no more tendency to prove that this image of her is a fake than it has to prove that the image really was miraculously produced.

Think about it: If someone had painted this image and fraudulently wished to pass it off as being from God, such a person might use native Aztec imagery in the painting to impress the native people and imagery from Spanish art about Mary to impress the Spaniards in Mexico. On the other hand, if God ordained the creation of this image, then it would not be surprising if God intentionally loaded it with Aztec imagery as a way of getting the attention of the native people and persuading them that this was from God in a way that they could relate to and easily understand, and that it was likewise loaded with imagery from Spanish art about Mary in order to gain the acceptance of the Spanish priests and Conquistadors.

So where does that leave us? Well, here's what it means: It means that in order to judge

⁹⁷ <https://skeptoid.com/episodes/4201>

whether this image of Mary is genuinely from God or not, we must move on and look to other things--to other aspects of the story---to help us understand whether this image really is from God or not. For the fact that the image of Mary contains certain aspects of Aztec myth and Roman Catholic imagery truly has no more tendency to point to one conclusion (*i.e.*, that the image is fake) than it has to point to the exact opposite conclusion (that the image is genuine).

In the language of the Law of Evidence, when it comes to the issue of whether the image on the tilma was miraculously produced or is simply a fraud, the fact that there is so much overlap between the image on the tilma and Aztec mythology and Roman Catholic imagery has “no probative value”⁹⁸ in support of either of these two conclusions. And so, once we have concluded, independently of any consideration of the Aztec and Roman Catholic imagery, whether this image is or is not from God, the fact that it contains Aztec and Roman Catholic imagery can then presumably be known and considered in its proper context. For a more detailed look at the concept of probative value, in the Appendix find “PROBATIVE VALUE”.

There is at least one conclusion, however, which we can draw from all of this at the moment: As I said, one could hardly draw the conclusion that all of these similarities between the image on the tilma and Aztec and Roman Catholic imagery are simply coincidental. (Study the imagery which I have made reference to in the footnotes if you doubt me.) To the contrary, either God or man had to have intentionally put all of this together in this manner. As for myself personally, I believe that it is a combination of both: Dr. Callahan has pointed out that certain portions of the image were produced by man, whereas others are inexplicable; and it is these latter portions, I believe, which were created by God. Furthermore, since the man-made portions correspond so well with the natural state of the cactus fibers, it could be the case, as Dr. Callahan implies, that the human artists may have been divinely guided in order to make them come out the way they did.⁹⁹

b. A Rebuttal Of The Idea That The Image Was Painted By Marcos de Aquino

In considering whether the image was painted by Marcos de Aquino, or by any other native artist, let us consider in more detail now the fact that one or more Roman Catholic priests of the Franciscan Order said that Marcos had painted it. The thing is, their claim that it was fake was not accepted by certain other Catholic priests who were likewise present there at the time, priests who belonged to the order known as the Dominicans. The Franciscans had arrived in Mexico first, in 1523 and 1524,¹⁰⁰ and the Dominicans arrived there two years later (five years before Mary appeared to Juan Diego).¹⁰¹ Now, although the Dominicans freely accepted the idea that the image had been miraculously produced, this same idea contradicted the Franciscans’ theology. For the Franciscans, being mindful of the aforementioned similarity between the image on the tilma and Aztec theology, were of the opinion that the tilma was simply reviving Aztec beliefs in Christian

⁹⁸ <https://vaclaimsinsider.com/what-evidence-has-probative-value/>

⁹⁹ Callahan, pp. 14-15.

¹⁰⁰ <https://mexicocityperambulations.blogspot.com/2016/05/the-spiritual-conquest-franciscans.html>

¹⁰¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Catholic_Church_in_Mexico

form: in other words, that this was just syncretism.¹⁰²

Consequently, the Franciscans could not accept the authenticity of the tilma without contradicting their own religious interpretation of the story behind the tilma, for they feared that the natives' revering of the image on the tilma simply constituted pagan idol worship in revived form. And perhaps for many of the Aztecs, this unfortunately really might in fact have been true, and the Franciscans may have properly picked up on this, thereby complicating any attempt at an impartial consideration of the matter by the priests or by any outside observer. For any such syncretism would tend to obscure the actual underlying question of whether Mary did in fact appear to Juan Diego, the syncretism of some Aztecs notwithstanding.

Now, this is not to say that the Dominicans were impartial in their assessment of the tilma, either. For the Dominicans were glad to see the rate of mass conversion to Christianity among the Aztecs that the tilma caused. But it is to say this much, at least: that the Franciscan account cannot be thought of as being an impartial account. And so one must look to see if the Franciscan account can be corroborated independently.

That being said, with respect to whether the image on the tilma had indeed been painted "yesteryear", it is reported that Marcos de Aquino painted a picture of Mary on a cactus canvas in response to a request of the local bishop (the successor to Bishop Zumarraga, to whom Juan Diego had presented the tilma). The painting which de Aquino is said to have produced showed Mary with dark skin, with her hands held together in prayer, and with her head bowed, in 1555, just before the aforementioned inquiry.¹⁰³ Marcos is said to have entitled his painting *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, and this has been offered as evidence that the image on the tilma is the very same image which Marcos painted in 1555.

In response to that, let me say first of all that anyone who wishes to suggest that the main portion of the tilma was painted by any human artist will have to keep the results of Dr. Callahan's study of it in mind; and the conclusion that a human artist had painted the image on the tilma, in light of Dr. Callahan's work, which we considered above, would be quite a challenge, if I may be permitted to indulge in understatement. Second, it is unclear from the context of the statement that the image was created yesteryear as to whether those who made such statements meant that the tilma supposedly had literally been made the year beforehand specifically, or whether they simply meant that the image had been made at least somewhat more recently than in 1531.

As to Marcos entitling his painting *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, it should certainly come as no surprise that if the story about Mary appearing to Juan Diego is true, then anyone from that era in Mexico would be inclined to give the name *Our Lady of Guadalupe* to a painting of Mary. After all, just look up the phrase *Our Lady of Guadalupe* online right now, in our own day and age, and see how many artistic representations of the image on the tilma, and variations thereof, can be found on display or for purchase. Please also note that each of them is likewise entitled *Our Lady of*

¹⁰² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Diego

¹⁰³ <https://skeptoid.com/episodes/4201>

Guadalupe. Given the fact that we ourselves today have so many artistic representations of the tilma which are entitled *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, why should we be surprised if Marcos de Aquino entitled one of his own works *Our Lady of Guadalupe*?

Furthermore, as we have already seen, the image on the tilma is of a most extraordinary character. We might therefore ask, “Where are the other paintings of at least roughly equal craftsmanship that Marcos de Aquino would have made, probably both before and after the image on the tilma was created?” Well, in fact there are no known works of art like the one on Juan Diego’s tilma, and there apparently are not even any reports of any works of art ever having shown similar, extraordinary craftsmanship, even though such works would probably have been noteworthy, and perhaps (over time), worth a fair amount of money.

In other words, if the image on the tilma was created by a human artist, it stands alone as an example of that artist’s skills. And that right there does at least suggest that neither Marcos de Aquino, nor any other human artist, somehow became a “one-hit wonder”¹⁰⁴ by painting such an extraordinary and unique image on the tilma.

i. The Best Physical Proof Of All

Perhaps the greatest physical proof of whether the image is genuine or not, though, lies in the fact that for almost 500 years, everyone and anyone has been free at all times to try to make another image just like it on a cactus-fiber tilma. And yet no one has. So to skeptics and scoffers who say that the image is not genuine, I simply say,

“Very well, then. Go ahead and make another one just like it, with the exact same properties which this one has, using the techniques which were available in the 1500s. Then that way, you can at least prove that it may have been possible in some way, somehow, for an artist to have made the image back then. But if, in the end, you find that you are unable to produce an image just like this one on a cactus-fiber tilma, would you kindly allow for at least the possibility that this was divinely and miraculously made? For after all, the fastest way---the easiest way---to prove that this image could have been made by an artist would be to make one yourself.”

To quote an old saying, “Put up, or shut up.” And conversely, the fastest way---the easiest way---to prove that the critics are wrong is to point out that despite the fact that making a duplicate tilma would be of such very great value and importance to them in any attempt to debunk the whole story about Our Lady of Guadalupe, no one has in fact done any such thing in all this time; and if they have even made any attempt to do so, they have so far been conspicuously silent about it. And that is where things stand today.

With that in mind, allow me to add this thought: In 2031 we shall reach the 500th anniversary of the visit by Mary to Juan Diego. That being the case, allow me to challenge anyone right now who

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/one-hit%20wonder>

wishes to debunk the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe to produce---as quickly as is reasonably possible, using the techniques which were available in the 1500s---a duplicate of the image on a cactus-fiber tilma, an image which would be just as good of an image as can be seen on Juan Diego's tilma, one which has all of the qualities of that tilma and of the image of Mary which were described by Dr. Callahan. (The parts which Dr. Callahan said were added after the fact by human artists may be left out.) Then let them have this duplicate sit unprotected from the open air in a chapel- like structure near the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and let it also be exposed to smoke from numerous candles, along with the heat and humidity of that environment. For as I noted above, for the first 116 years of the existence of the image, it was unprotected and open to the elements.¹⁰⁵ Then let's see what happens. For it would be interesting to see what condition this new tilma, and particularly the image itself, would be like by the time we reach the 500th anniversary of the appearance of Mary to Juan Diego in 2031.

That being said, I will state here that I think that by that point, this new tilma would probably be in very poor shape, and likewise the image on it. Now, to those of you who still insist that the image is a fake, that is my challenge to you.

Deal with it.

c. A Consideration Of What Writings About The Tilma Which One Might Expect To Find From Before 1556, And Whether One Of Them Does In Fact Predate 1556

i. The Significance Of The Lack Of Any Mention Of The Tilma Or Juan Diego In The Writings Of Bishop Zumarraga

The argument that the absence of any mention of the tilma or Juan Diego in the many writings of Bishop Zumarraga is something which indicates that the entire story is a hoax is an argument which touches on a couple of important points. First of all, as we have seen, an open dispute arose between the Franciscans and the Dominicans as to whether the image was a fake or not. Consequently, Bishop Zumarraga (who was a Franciscan),¹⁰⁶ as the bishop of all those on both sides of the argument, might have felt it necessary to refrain from making personal comments of his own during the midst of such squabbles (for the sake of maintaining at least the appearance of impartiality between the two factions), squabbles which apparently arose after the bishop himself and so many people had already accepted the miraculous nature of the image, despite the bishop's own order of priests opposing him.

The argument that the absence of any mention of the tilma or Juan Diego in the many writings of Bishop Zumarraga is a thing which indicates that the entire story is a hoax is an argument which also touches on yet another important point of the Law of Evidence. To put it in laypersons' terms, under certain circumstances, the absence of evidence can be evidence of absence. In other words, under certain circumstances, the absence of any evidence that some particular thing may have

¹⁰⁵ <https://quinersdiner.com/2012/12/12/our-lady-of-guadalupe-for-atheists/>

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/philosophy-and-religion/roman-catholic-and-orthodox-churches-general-biographies/juan-de-zumarraga>

taken place can itself be taken as being evidence that the alleged event did not in fact take place at all.

To give an example, consider a situation in which an attorney for company ABC wishes to introduce into evidence a document from company XYZ which contains no entry about company XYZ ever having shipped its product to company ABC, which it was contractually obligated to do. If the document which company ABC wishes to introduce into evidence is a compilation of the complete shipping records of company XYZ from that time period, then the absence of evidence in that document of the product ever having been shipped to company ABC does itself constitute evidence that the product never was in fact shipped.

In other words here, the absence of evidence (in the record book) would constitute evidence of absence (*i.e.*, it would constitute evidence that the product was never shipped). By contrast, if the document which company ABC wishes to introduce as evidence is simply the grocery list of the president of company XYZ, then certainly the document will not be admitted into evidence, for the president's grocery list is not some place where one would ever expect to find a notation of the product having been shipped. And so the fact that the grocery shopping list contains no record of company XYZ ever having shipped the product would be meaningless.

With that in mind, the next point we must consider is the question of who has the burden of proving what. As it turns out, if anyone claims that the absence of a statement in a document is evidence that some particular thing did not take place, then it is the person who makes that assertion who has the burden of establishing that the document is a place where one would in fact expect to find such a statement in the first place; and so, correspondingly, the other party (in this case, company XYZ) does not have the burden of proving that the document is not a place where one would look for such a statement.

With that point in mind, let me now note that I have been unable to find any statement by those who seek to discredit the report about Juan Diego and the tilma which would tend to establish that any of the writings of Bishop Zumarraga would be a type of writing where one would expect to find a statement about Juan Diego or the tilma. Furthermore, we must consider this as well: The fact that a particular document is the type of place where one might possibly find a particular statement under at least some circumstances does not, by itself, establish that the document is the type of place where one would necessarily find the statement all the time.

For instance, consider some hypothetical book about the American Revolutionary War. The central political focus of the American Revolutionary War was of course the Declaration of Independence, which was written by a team led by Thomas Jefferson (the main author of the Declaration), and which was signed on July 4, 1776. So then, could the fact that a lengthy, scholarly book about the American Revolutionary War which does not mention the Declaration of Independence, or its main author, Thomas Jefferson, be taken to mean that the Declaration of Independence did not exist, and that Thomas Jefferson was a fictitious character?

By itself, no, of course it could not, for two reasons. First, a lengthy, scholarly book about the American Revolutionary War might focus on just one aspect of the war, such as the economic

impact on the British Empire as a whole and on the American colonies specifically, and the book might not concern itself directly with the political aspects of the war at all. So in order to be the type of place where one might expect to find a statement about the Declaration and Thomas Jefferson, the book would have to devote at least some attention to the political aspects of the war.

Second, the fact that the Declaration of Independence was in fact brought into existence by a team led by Thomas Jefferson and was signed on July 4, 1776 would be so well known to the readers of the book that no mention of the Declaration and Mr. Jefferson would be necessary in order to make a point about the economic impact of the war; thus, it would be pointless to make any mention of the Declaration or Jefferson in the book, anyway. And so normally, one would not even expect to find any statement in the book about the Declaration of Independence or Jefferson in a book devoted only to the economic aspects of the war.

Now, with respect to the story about Juan Diego and the tilma, for reasons which should be clear from all that is above, the story of Mary appearing to him, if true, would have been of spectacular interest among all those whom Bishop Zumarraga would have had as readers of anything he may have written. And so under ordinary circumstances, it hardly would have been necessary for him to mention the tilma or Juan Diego in the absence of some specific reason to do so; in fact, to the contrary, it presumably would have been pointless for him to do so, and this might have unnecessarily inflamed quarrels between the Franciscans and the Dominicans had he done so.

So if anyone wishes to produce the bishop's writings as being evidence that the story about the tilma and Juan Diego were made up long after the fact, then let such a person come forward with a complete set of the writings of Bishop Zumarraga. And let such person also state, with a sound analysis based upon the facts, just exactly why it is that Bishop Zumarraga would have even wanted to make mention of Juan Diego and the tilma in at least one of those particular writings in the first place, especially given his need to present himself as the impartial bishop of all those on both sides of the debate.

ii. The *Codex Escalada*

Technically, a codex can be any writing on paper, papyrus, or other such material which is bound in the form used in modern books instead of in the more primitive style of a continuous scroll. As a practical matter, however, the word codex is customarily reserved for books published in modern book format which were hand written many years ago.¹⁰⁷ It is also the case that, less commonly, the word codex on occasion has sometimes been used nonetheless to describe a document which is one continuous scroll rather than in separate pages, such as one such document which we shall examine now in detail: the Codex Escalada.^{108, 109}

Prior to 1995, there had been no known document dating from before 1556 which made

¹⁰⁷ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/codex>

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.myguadalupe.com/blog/the-codex-escalada-of-1548>

¹⁰⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Escalada

mention of Juan Diego or the image on the tilma. In 1995, however, a Spanish Jesuit priest, Father Xavier Escalada, who was living in Mexico, received a codex (in scroll form) from certain persons who, at first, reportedly wished to remain anonymous.¹¹⁰ At the time, Fr. Escalada was writing an encyclopedia on the topic of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and he published the codex itself in 1997. The persons who gave him the codex eventually revealed their identities, and in donating it to the Archbishop of Mexico, they requested that the codex be named the *Codex Escalada*, in honor of Fr. Escalada, and this request of theirs was granted.

The *Codex Escalada* has “1548” written on it, which may be a reference to the year 1548; that being said, I should note that no specific indication as to what the number 1548 is supposed to refer to is given. It depicts an image of Our Lady of Guadalupe and makes reference to a person named Cuauhtlatoatzin (“Talking Eagle”), the Aztec name of Juan Diego.¹¹¹

Some have said that the timing of the discovery of this codex, and the essential information which it gives to establishing the historical accuracy of the existence of Juan Diego and the apparition itself, is too fortuitous for one to believe that the codex is genuine.¹¹² For the publishing of the codex in 1997 came between the beatification¹¹³ of Juan Diego in 1990 and his canonization (elevation to sainthood) in 2002;¹¹⁴ and his historical existence would have to have been established in order for him to be canonized.

With respect to such objections, however, two things in particular should be kept in mind: First, the reader should consider the extensive investigations which have been made of the *Codex Escalada*. And although there remains some room for doubt about some of the details concerning its origin, one must consider whether ample reason has been found nonetheless to verify its authenticity on the whole (as I myself believe).¹¹⁵

Second, it is entirely understandable that the interest in the cause of Juan Diego concerning his possible elevation to sainthood (canonization) during that time could have produced an honest desire among those who were in possession of the codex to make their own special contribution to his cause, and thus, this could have led them to release to the world something which previously had been a closely-guarded family heirloom of great value.

Although some still contend that the codex is not authentic, and do in fact publicly say so,¹¹⁶ it is the case nevertheless that in the wake of the many investigations as to its authenticity which have already been completed, there so far seems to be no one, as far as I can tell, who has taken up the cause of these skeptics with any serious, verifiable attempt to disprove its authenticity.

¹¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Escalada

¹¹¹ <https://the-american-catholic.com/2014/12/12/our-lady-of-guadalupe-miracles-facts-and-fancy/>

¹¹² <https://skeptoid.com/episodes/4201>

¹¹³ <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/dictionary/index.cfm?id=32114>

¹¹⁴ <https://www.coraevans.com/blog/article/the-canonization-process>

¹¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Escalada

¹¹⁶ <https://skeptoid.com/episodes/4201>

C. The Spiritual Aspects Of The Story Of Our Lady Of Guadalupe

1. The Spiritual Aspects Which Operate Against Acceptance Of The Story Of Our Lady Of Guadalupe

Some may say that the abandonment of infant sacrifice by the Aztecs upon their rejection of Aztec paganism was good, but that the baptisms of the Aztecs don't count as real baptisms, anyway. For although it may seem strange to some, there is one line of thought which says that Roman Catholics cannot be Christians. That idea is usually based on several things, but principally (though not entirely) on the first five chapters of the Apostle Paul's epistle to the Galatians.

An epistle (pronunciation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX0I36kYZpU>), for those who are not familiar with that term, is a word based on the Greek word for a certain type of letter of correspondence.¹¹⁷

Ancient Galatia itself was an area which, on today's maps, would be found mostly in central Turkey.¹¹⁸ The Apostle Paul founded several churches in that area. At one point he felt compelled to write to the new Christians in Galatia, and his epistle is now known as the Book of Galatians. It is found in the New Testament of the Bible.

The Apostle Paul wrote this epistle because the Galatians had a problem. After Paul had left the area, some other persons came along and told the new Galatian Christians that in order to be saved, they not only had to believe in Jesus, but they also had to observe all of the old customs and traditions of Judaism as well. Many of the Galatians were persuaded by these teachings, and the Apostle Paul was furious over this, for their liberty in Christ was thereby compromised, and if salvation were to be the product of the Law of Moses, then the significance of Jesus' dying on the cross and then rising again would be thereby minimized.

Interestingly enough, the wording of these verses in the traditional Roman Catholic version of the Bible, the so-called Douay-Rheims Bible (DRB), is not significantly different from that found in the King James Version (KJV), which is the traditional Protestant version of the Bible. To illustrate the point, here is the wording in both translations of the verses from Chapter One which (along with certain other verses from the first five chapters) form the central topic of this controversy, starting with the traditional Roman Catholic translation, and followed by the traditional Protestant translation:

6 I wonder that you are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ, unto another gospel. 7 Which is not another, only there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach a gospel to you besides that which we have preached to you, let him be anathema. 9 As we said before, so now I say again: If any one preach to you a gospel, besides that which you have received, let him be anathema. (Gal 1:6-9; DRB)

¹¹⁷ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/epistle>

¹¹⁸ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Galatia>

Here is the King James Version of that exact same passage:

6 I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: 7 Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. (Gal 1:6-9; KJV)¹¹⁹

As we can see, there is no substantive difference between these Protestant and Roman Catholic translations of Galatians 1:6-9.

Now, those who say that Roman Catholics cannot be Christians will be quick to point out that the Roman Catholic Church says that in order to be saved, you not only need to believe in Jesus, but that you must also, among other things, attend Mass every Sunday (or “Mass in Anticipation” on Saturday evening) and on every Holy Day of Obligation (e.g., Christmas), as well as perform other acts and observe certain omissions. For those who are not familiar with the details of Roman Catholicism, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that if you miss Mass on any of those occasions through disregard of your supposed obligation to attend Mass (*i.e.*, through some fault of your own), you will not go to heaven unless you confess this sin to a Catholic priest before you die. Those who say that Roman Catholics cannot be Christians then declare that this teaching of the Roman Catholic Church---that one must perform certain acts in order to be saved---is too similar to the Galatian heresy of gaining salvation through one’s accomplishments for anyone to conclude that Roman Catholicism can be counted as true Christianity, and that therefore Roman Catholics cannot be real Christians. With respect to that, what also comes into play here is the many statements by the Apostle Paul about salvation by faith, mainly in the Book of Romans, yet most notably from the epistle he wrote to the Ephesians:

8 For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, for it is the gift of God; 9 Not of works, that no man may glory. (Eph. 2:8-9; DRB)¹²⁰

In response to that, I would say two things. First of all, read the Book of Galatians very carefully. Notice that all throughout the Book of Galatians, the Apostle Paul addresses those Galatians who had fallen into this heresy as fellow believers. He addresses them as persons who are within the Household of Faith, and not as unbelievers. He is extremely upset about the fact that they have been deceived, but he does not address them as though they were non-Christians, persons who needed to be converted to Christianity. He simply wanted them to recognize the error into which they had fallen and to return to the Truth.

So that right there shows us that even those who had fallen into the Galatian heresy at least

¹¹⁹ <https://biblehub.com/kjv/galatians/1.htm>

¹²⁰ <https://biblehub.com/drb/ephesians/2.htm>

possibly could be Christians (and as I say, it is clear that the Apostle Paul considered them to be such). And this, I think, negates the idea that Roman Catholicism is too similar to the Galatian heresy for any Roman Catholics to be Christians.

Second, I would not say that someone is a Christian simply because he or she is a Roman Catholic any more than I would say that a Protestant is a Christian simply because that person happens to belong to a Protestant church. The Roman Catholic Church will disagree with me about whether Roman Catholics are automatically Christians; for the Vatican does teach that if you are a baptized Roman Catholic, then you are a Christian automatically. Personally, I cannot believe that that is true, for the question of whether one is a Christian depends on one's relationship with Christ Himself rather than with a specific organization (e.g., the Roman Catholic Church); conversely, however, neither can I believe that someone cannot be a Christian simply because the person is in fact a member of the Roman Catholic Church.

2. The Spiritual Aspects Which Support The Story Of Our Lady Of Guadalupe

Let us now look at some of the spiritual aspects of the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe which support the idea that this story about Mary appearing to Juan Diego is true, at least in substantial part. In considering this question though, let us first consider the question of why God would send Mary to appear to anyone at any time for any reason.

On the face of things, it does not even seem to make any sense that God would do such a thing. After all, there is no precedent for such a thing in the Bible. And if God were to send anyone at all to evangelize, would it not be more likely that Jesus Himself would have appeared in a glow of light, just as the Apostle Paul had encountered Him, or that He would have sent one of His apostles instead of Mary?

a. The Need For The Apparition Of Mary

If God did send Mary to Juan Diego, the most likely reason would have been that there was an extremely great need for her, and likewise a great potential for good to be gained by her appearing. In that light, first of all, consider this: Cortes and his fellow Conquistadors had conquered the Aztecs in 1521, and the first missionary priests had arrived in that area in 1524, seven years before Mary is said to have appeared to Juan. The Conquistadors mistreated the natives, however. They continued the Aztec practice of slavery (which was also common in Europe at the time) and took their women for concubines. They despised the children, the *mestizos*, whom they had sired by these women. They treated the Indians and the *mestizos*, even their own *mestizo* children, as less than human. As for the priests, they did not speak the native language, whereas Juan Diego said that Mary spoke to him in his native Nahuatl language, the language of all of the natives.

Consequently, by the time Mary appeared to Juan Diego, only a relative handful of the natives had converted to Christianity. Furthermore, the natives who did not convert to Christianity still commonly practiced infant sacrifice, even though the Spaniards had outlawed this. And their religious beliefs didn't limit human sacrifice to infants. For just prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, the Aztecs had slaughtered thousands of people in sacrifices to their gods in a period just four

days,¹²¹ and they engaged in ritualistic cannibalism.¹²²

However, the moment the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared, the Aztecs underwent a mass conversion to Christianity. In the next ten years, about eight to nine million of the nine to ten million natives renounced their pagan gods and received baptism.¹²³ Human sacrifice came to a screeching halt among those who had converted, demonstrating that the people themselves did not want to engage in the practice, but believed that they had to do so anyway because of their pagan religion. The moment they found out that their religion was false, however, they abandoned such sacrifices.^{124, 125}

Now, in order to comprehend the rate at which conversions took place once the image went on display, let us do a little math. In order to baptize eight million people within the span of ten years, one would have to baptize 800,000 persons per year for ten years straight. In order to do that, one would have to baptize almost 67,000 persons per month for ten years straight. And in order to do that, one would have to baptize over 2200 persons per day, every single day, for that entire ten-year stretch.

If, however, one were to baptize for only six out of every seven days instead of doing so every day of the week, one would have to baptize about 2500 persons per day. And to do that, if one baptized people for 14 hours out of every 24 hours during that period, one would have to baptize about 178 persons per hour. To do that, one would have to baptize about 3 persons per minute. In other words, in order to baptize 8 million persons in ten years, one would have to baptize one person roughly every 20 seconds, 14 hours per day, 6 days per week, every week of every year, for 10 years straight.

I do not know of any evangelistic rally, any modern-day crusade, or any mission outreach in the entire history of Christianity which even comes remotely close to matching that record. Jesus said, “Ye shall know them by their fruits.” (Matt 7:16a; KJV)¹²⁶ And mass conversions on this scale, together with the complete and immediate abandonment of infant sacrifice, speaks volumes about whether this was a move of God or not, the likes of which the world still has never seen, even to this day.

Now that is, in fact, why I originally began to suspect that this may have been a genuine appearance of the mother of our Lord even before I began to study the Star of Bethlehem. For acceptance of the claim that this was a true appearance of her would be consistent with the admonition of our Lord to “know them by their fruits”, whereas a rejection of the claim that this was a true appearance of her would then at least tend to work against what Jesus had said.

¹²¹ <https://www.intellectualtakeout.org/blog/84000-slaughtered-four-days/>

¹²² <https://www.history.com/news/aztec-human-sacrifice-religion>

¹²³ https://www.goshennews.com/news/lifestyles/catholic-corner-tilma-sparks-aztecs-great-conversion/article_c2363f3d-b684-5e26-abe9-6481d1737b46.html

¹²⁴ <http://madisoncatholicherald.org/news/around-diocese/4564-guadalupe-apparitions.html>

¹²⁵ <https://stillromancatholicafteralltheseyears.com/our-lady-of-guadalupe/>

¹²⁶ <https://biblehub.com/kjv/matthew/7.htm>

i. Whose Idea Was It For Mary To Appear?

All of this leads to another interesting question: Was it the case that God sent Mary to the Aztec Indians by having her appear to Juan Diego, or was it perhaps the case instead that Mary came to us because she herself had come up with the idea, and had requested permission to come? If the latter explanation is true, this would explain why there would be no precedent in Scripture for this, for we certainly would not have heard anything about Mary in the Old Testament; and in the New Testament, not only was Mary probably still on earth when the New Testament was started, but also (and probably more importantly), the evangelistic work of that era was being greatly fulfilled by the apostles (particularly the Apostle Paul) and by their assistants, anyway. So there would be far less need for her or for anyone else from heaven to appear while the New Testament was being written.

We should also consider that with respect to both the Old Testament and the New Testament, no other person besides Mary was ever so close to the Second Person of the Godhead (Jesus) as she was, and so it should come as no surprise if it were the case that her request to come down to evangelize would be honored even if no one else's request to do so would have been, had they even thought to ask. In that light, consider John 2:1-11¹²⁷ when it comes to her ability to persuade Jesus and move Him to act on an idea which she herself had come up with when probably no one else could have convinced Him to do so. And given the fact that she probably had as pure of a heart of a mother as any woman ever had, it would likewise come as no surprise that she should take it upon herself to step forward boldly before the Throne of Grace and make a request such as this to save so many little ones.

And as to why she would have asked for permission to come, I can think of no finer example of a loving mother than she must have been. And given the obvious, nearly-instantaneous halt to the practice of infant sacrifice and other child sacrifices which her visit produced, I would not be surprised at all if this should prove to be the basis for her asking for permission to do this, for heaven probably would have revealed to her that this would happen if she would intervene.

b. The Other Person In The Image On The Tilma

We commonly think of the tilma as containing an image of Mary. That is true, of course; but is she the only one who is shown there? By that, I do not simply mean the angel at the bottom, which, as Dr. Callahan noted, was probably added by a human artist after the fact.¹²⁸ Rather, what I am referring to is something pertaining to the subtle meaning of the flower in the midst of Mary's robe.

The flower is a jasmine flower, which the natives called *nahui ollin*, the flower of the sun.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ <http://biblehub.com/nasb/john/2.htm>

¹²⁸ Callahan (1981), pg. 13.

¹²⁹ <http://www.olgaustin.org/symbolism.shtml>

They considered this flower to be a symbol of divinity and the center of the cosmic order.¹³⁰

This flower has four petals. To the natives, this represented the four movements of the sun (*i.e.*, the four seasons) as well as the four main points of the compass (north, south, east, and west), all of which were united in the center, which was considered to be a fifth element, one which gave it balance and equilibrium; the four petals also symbolized the four past eras of that culture, and the fifth element (the center) symbolized the birth of the Fifth Sun.¹³¹ With that in mind, it is worth noting that this flower, which is the only one of its kind on Mary's robe,¹³² is directly over her womb, and thereby suggests that she herself, a woman from heaven, is pregnant with the lord of the universe.

We have also seen previously that the ribbon shown around her waist was a native symbol of pregnancy.^{133, 134} Now, as Dr. Callahan pointed out, the ribbon was added after the fact by a human artist.¹³⁵ But there must have been some reason that the native artist felt that he could take the liberty of painting the ribbon, a symbol of pregnancy, on this highly revered image, and it would stand to reason that the thought of doing so came to him because of the presence of the four-petal flower shown over her womb. That being said, let us also keep in mind that Dr. Callahan noted that the robe itself, which the jasmine flower is part of, is part of the original image, and was not added to the image after the fact.¹³⁶

It is also worth noting that the day on which Juan Diego presented the tilma to Bishop Zumarraga, December 12th, was the day of the winter solstice that year, when the sun would appear to be reborn to start life anew. (Bear in mind that the Julian Calendar was still in use at the time, and the day on our modern, Gregorian Calendar---*i.e.*, the calendar that we use today---which would correspond to December 12th in 1531 would be December 22nd.)

So then, properly considered, the image on the tilma is not simply an image of Mary; rather, it is instead an image of two persons: Jesus and Mary. Keep this point in mind, for it shall be an important point to remember as we now consider the astronomical aspects of the tilma pertaining to the Star of Bethlehem.

¹³⁰ <https://www.michaeljournal.org/articles/roman-catholic-church/item/our-lady-of-guadalupe>

¹³¹ <https://www.patriarchministries.com/2021/12/10/tos188-5-our-lady-of-guadalupe-and-the-aztec-calendar/>

¹³² <https://spiritualdirection.com/2013/12/11/juan-diego-lady-guadalupe-part-ii-iii>

¹³³ <https://thecatholicspirit.com/special-sections/travel-and-pilgrimages/unveiling-the-image's-hidden-meaning/>

¹³⁴ <https://www.womenofgrace.com/blog/?p=61699>

¹³⁵ Callahan, pg. 8.

¹³⁶ Callahan, pg. 18.

IV. The Astronomical Connections Between Our Lady Of Guadalupe And The Birth Of Jesus

A. The Cathedral And The Birth Of Jesus

At this point one might say, “Well, all of that is interesting. But what does any of that have to do with the Star of Bethlehem?” In response to that, allow me to share the following astronomical aspects in which these two events appear to have some connection.

As we do so, we now come to the part in which the reliability of the computer program is squarely placed in issue: *i.e.*, as mentioned in our discussion of the conjunction of Jupiter and Venus in June of 2 B.C. and Our Lady of Guadalupe. With that in mind, let me note that the latest version of Starry Night shows different positions for the planets than an earlier version, the one which I used originally, and which I shall also effectively use now for my discussion herein; for one can make an adjustment in the latest version to reflect the settings which were present in the earlier version, which is what I did. Later on we shall consider that discrepancy in detail and which version of Starry Night (if either one of them) can be trusted.

That being said, let us consider what Larson said about the significance of the conjunction of Jupiter and Venus in June of 2 B.C. As I discussed earlier, he noted that this came nine months after Rosh Hashanah in the year 3 B.C. (the start of the year 3759 on the Hebrew calendar), which is when he and I and many others think that Jesus was conceived (albeit on different days on the Julian calendar). Now, from my lifelong interest in astronomy, as I researched this conjunction of Jupiter and Venus in June of 2 B.C., I became quite naturally curious as to where one would have had the best view of this conjunction, which presumably would be the point on Earth where the two planets would be directly overhead, if one were to look straight up.

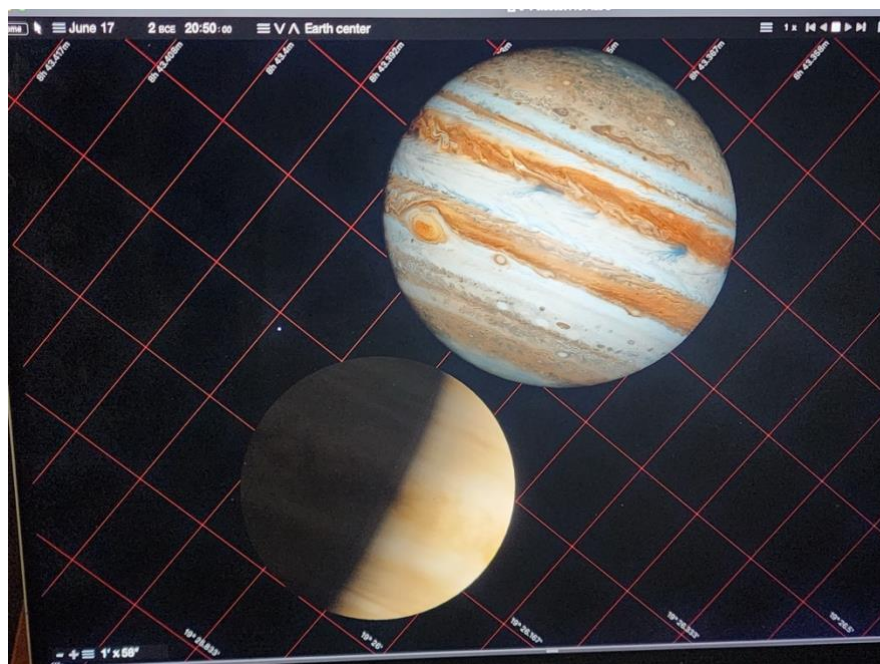
From Starry Night I knew that as Jupiter and Venus appeared to move closer and closer together, the two planets would be low to the western horizon as seen from Bethlehem. From this I deduced that the two planets would have been directly above some spot on Earth far to the west of Bethlehem when they finally came closest together. And with that, my curiosity got the best of me. And so, like the Magi before me, I decided to follow the Star to see where it would lead.

Now, the actual task of finding the exact spot on Earth beneath the mid- point between Venus and Jupiter when they appeared to be closest together, and at their combined brightest, entails using a detailed application of certain aspects of observational astronomy. For the sake of those who wish to ascertain that I have used those techniques correctly, and for the sake of those also who wish to learn more about this fascinating aspect of astronomy, I shall state the details of that task.

However, since these finer points of astronomy are themselves a bit off- topic from this book as a whole, my statement on point shall be in the Appendix; therein find ASCERTAINING THE SPOT ON EARTH BENEATH JUPITER AND VENUS AT THEIR CLOSEST APPROACH. Suffice it to say for the moment that the spot on Earth directly beneath the mid-point between the position of Jupiter and the position of Venus when they were at their closest to each other, and at their brightest

combined magnitude, is to be found at approximately Latitude 19 degrees 26 minutes 15.0 seconds North, Longitude 83 degrees 30 minutes 58.8 seconds West.

This mid-point position between the two is about 175 miles southeast of Cancun, Mexico, 150 miles southeast of the island of Cozumel, 175 miles southwest of the western tip of Cuba, and 225 miles west of George Town in the Cayman Islands in the Caribbean Sea. This would have been at about 20:50:00 UTC (2:50:00 P.M., as seen from that site).¹³⁷ And as we saw before, this is what the two planets would have looked like through a telescope if one had been at that spot when they did come closest together, with the glare of daylight removed:



Jupiter (top) and Venus (below) at their apparent closest approach, June 17, 2 B.C. (Note: Venus is placed just slightly off-center here so that its center of brightness is aligned with that of Jupiter's.) Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.

As I looked at the spot directly beneath them on a map, two things struck me: First, their corresponding latitudes on Earth were noticeably close to the latitude of the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe; and second, since this was to the east of present-day Mexico City, the rotation of the Earth would soon bring them into a position which would be at least within close proximity to the Shrine.

¹³⁷ Note: Again, for emphasis, these calculations are done using Standard Time, since Daylight Savings Time (which would be in effect in June in our own era) did not yet exist. Thus, in modern times (using Daylight Savings Time), this would be 3:50:00 P.M. That site, I should also note, is in the same Time Zone today as Mexico City.

But how close? I wondered. I looked at the Shrine on Google Earth and noticed that the latitude of the Shrine (19d 29m N) is just north of the latitude which these two planets were over at their closest approach. But I also knew that at each moment, the planets are constantly in motion against the background of stars due to their orbits and earth's orbit around the sun, and that this motion not only changes their orientation east and west against the background of stars, but also in terms of their north and south position (at least, just slightly so). So I wondered just exactly how much closer to or farther from the latitude of the Shrine their position in the heavens would be by the time the Earth would rotate to where the planets would be in direct line with the longitude of the Shrine.

As it turns out, at that moment in time, the mid-point between the planets had just a tiny tendency to move to the north, but not enough for it to pass over the Shrine on that day. Nonetheless, I still could not help but be struck by how tantalizingly close to the latitude of the Shrine they would come. So I asked myself if there might be anything just a short way to the south of the Shrine that might possibly be of any significance in exploring this topic.

As I continued my search with satellite imagery, I looked to the very center of Mexico City. And there, in the middle of the city, lies the modern cathedral of the Archdiocese of Mexico City of the Roman Catholic Church.

I found that to be quite interesting, for I knew from the story of Our Lady that three times during Our Lady's visits, Juan Diego visited the bishop at the cathedral which was in existence in 1531. But I didn't know the relationship between the modern cathedral and the one which had been present in 1531, so I decided to do a little investigating.

As it turns out, the modern cathedral sits on the location of the original cathedral, which was in fact the one being used in 1531.^{138,139} At that point I felt the sensation that I might be on to something, just as I had felt when it first occurred to me that I had discovered a means by which it would be possible for the Magi to have followed the Star from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.

So I decided to see where Earth's rotation would carry the two planets across the face of the Earth as they came into position over Mexico City. I found that at 56 minutes and 53 seconds after Jupiter and Venus would have appeared at their closest as seen from the place directly beneath the mid-point between them, the mid-point would have moved to a position immediately east of the site of the original and modern cathedrals, at Longitude 99 degrees 7 minutes 48.9 seconds West,¹⁴⁰ Latitude 19 degrees 26 minutes 1.29 seconds North (19d 26.037m N). This would be at 21:46:53 UTC (3:46:53 P.M. Standard Time, 4:46:53 Daylight Savings Time, in Mexico City).

¹³⁸ <https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/mexico/articles/mexico-citys-metropolitan-cathedral-history/>

¹³⁹ <https://www.tripsavvy.com/mexico-city-metropolitan-cathedral-guide-4156912>

¹⁴⁰ The equations used and the values used in those equations to determine the positions and motions of Jupiter and Venus are given in the Appendix; therein find THE POSITIONS OF JUPITER AND VENUS WITH RESPECT TO THE CATHEDRAL.

One second later, the mid-point would have moved directly across the grounds of the cathedrals, to a point immediately west of there, directly over Longitude 99 degrees 8 minutes 2.85 seconds West (likewise at Latitude 19 degrees 26 minutes 1.29 seconds North):



The position beneath the mid-point between Jupiter and Venus, illustrated by the horizontal red line in the middle (going from right to left), from 21:46:53 to 21:46:54 UTC on June 17, 2 B.C. The twin bell towers of the cathedral can be seen just above the left side of the line, and the dome of the cathedral can be seen above and between them. The northern edge of the Plaza de la Constitucion can also be seen across the street along the bottom (to the left of center, below the left side of the line and the bell towers). The large red box (which the left half of the red horizontal line goes through) marks the boundaries of the present grounds of the cathedral.

Image from Google Earth Pro: <https://google-earth-pro.en.softonic.com/mac>

For a look at how I drew this conclusion, in the Appendix find: THE POSITIONS OF JUPITER AND VENUS WITH RESPECT TO THE CATHEDRAL.

Let us now see what the alignment of Jupiter and Venus themselves would have looked like in 2 B.C. as the mid-point between the two of them passed over the spot where the cathedrals would be built just over 1500 years later. That was during the afternoon in Mexico, but here we see how the two planets would have appeared at that moment in time, with daylight removed, if we had looked straight up at the zenith through a telescope from the grounds of the cathedral:



Jupiter and Venus at the zenith as seen from the grounds of the future Roman Catholic cathedral in Mexico City at the time when Jesus was apparently born.

Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.

Even during daylight, I should note, Jupiter and Venus would have been visible anyway while they were still at their closest (provided that the skies that day were not cloudy) because even Venus alone would have been visible with the unaided eye during daylight due to its brightness (*i.e.*, magnitude -4.33), let alone with the extra brightness of Jupiter added to it.

To some it may seem odd that Venus would have been visible even during broad daylight. But if one has perfect seeing conditions---such as a pollution-free, desert environment, as was the case in Mexico City at the time---Venus can sometimes be seen even in broad daylight. In fact, I distinctly recall seeing Venus in the early to mid-afternoon every day over the course of a couple of weeks during one year when I was in the Pharmacy program at my alma mater, the University of Arizona. The reason I could see it, I should add, is that I knew precisely where to look, which is absolutely essential if one is to make a daytime naked eye sighting of Venus. (And in fact, unless Venus is also near its absolute brightest, it still would not be visible even then.)

With respect to the appearance of Venus and Jupiter over the skies of Mexico City in 2 B.C., if it had been night time at around the time of this event, you would have seen each of the two individually when they appeared to separate. Now, although it is the case that ordinarily, the human eye can discern the space between two objects if they are separated by about 1 minute of arc¹⁴¹ (and in some cases, probably less than that),^{142, 143} the case is different with respect to two points

¹⁴¹ <http://filmicworlds.com/blog/visual-acuity-is-not-what-the-eye-can-see/>

¹⁴² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naked_eye

¹⁴³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phases_of_Venus

of light, such as is the case in astronomy.

The reason is that if an object such as a star or planet subtends an arc which is less than 1 minute of arc in diameter, the mind of a person with normal vision (*i.e.*, 20/20 vision) will automatically expand its diameter out to the minimum size which the person can perceive, anyway: *i.e.*, about 1 minute of arc for those with normal vision (20/20), or just slightly less than that for those with exceptional vision.¹⁴⁴ And as seen from earth, Jupiter and Venus always have a diameter less than 1 minute of arc, so they will each appear to have a diameter of about 1 minute of arc nonetheless to a person with 20/20 vision.

Since there must also be 1 minute of arc separating the two objects for the gap between them to be discernable to a person with vision such as that, this means that from the center of one planet to the center of the other must be roughly 2 minutes of arc in order for a person with 20/20 vision to see any separation between them.¹⁴⁵ This will vary according to how good the eyesight of the observer is, of course, and also according to the wavelength of the light and the diameter of the observer's pupil.¹⁴⁶

At this exact moment in time, as can be seen on *Starry Night*, it is the case that from the grounds of the future cathedral, Jupiter and Venus were separated by almost exactly two minutes of arc. Since it was in fact daylight at that moment in what we now call Mexico, and since Jupiter was noticeably dimmer than Venus,¹⁴⁷ you most likely would not have been able to see Jupiter by itself after it appeared to separate from Venus. But when the two did separate, you would have noticed Venus becoming noticeably dimmer (just slightly) due to the fact that the light coming from Jupiter would no longer have been combined with the light coming from Venus.

To put this in perspective, let us look at this from a global point of view. The mid-point between Jupiter and Venus at the time when they appeared to separate away from each other did not cross over some point on the opposite side of Earth from the cathedral. Nor did it pass over some point on the same side of Earth as the cathedral at a place that was far removed from the cathedral. Likewise, it did not pass over a different part of the continent of North America, or over South America, or over an ocean.

For that matter, it did not pass over a different country from Mexico, or a different place within the country of Mexico other than present-day Mexico City; in fact, the mid-point between the two planets did not pass over a different part of Mexico City other than the part where the cathedral lies. Instead, as we can see in the photo, the grounds of the cathedral lie within the boundaries of this box drawn in red, and the red line which crosses through the box shows the location directly beneath the apparent mid-point between the two planets as the mid-point crossed overhead from 3:46:53 to 3:46:54 P.M., at the time when the separation between the two planets

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.rocketmime.com/astronomy/Telescope/MaximumMagnification.html>

¹⁴⁵ <https://www.rocketmime.com/astronomy/Telescope/MaximumMagnification.html>

¹⁴⁶ <https://books.google.com/books?id=u43MTFr7-m8C&pg=PA54-v=onepage&q&f=false>

¹⁴⁷ According to *Starry Night*, Jupiter was at magnitude -1.77 (minus one point seven seven) and Venus was at magnitude -4.33 (minus four point three three)

would have become noticeable on Earth by the dimming of the combined image of the two.

Now, all that being said, do you see the poetic imagery that is involved here? When Mary gave birth to Jesus in Bethlehem in 2 B.C., and mother and child started to separate away from each other, Jesus came forth from the midst of Mary and then lay at her feet. Thousands of miles away, at that very same moment, as the two planets appeared to separate away from each other in the skies over present-day Mexico City, the mid-point between Jupiter and Venus---the king and the mother---passed directly over the midst of the grounds where the cathedral would one day stand. And then, just over 1,500 years later, it would come to pass that as Juan Diego opened his tilma in front of the bishop right on those very same grounds, the roses would come forth from the midst of the image of Mary---an image showing her pregnant with Jesus---and the roses would then lay there at her feet, just as Jesus had come forth from the midst of Mary herself and had lain at her feet in Bethlehem in 2 B.C.

The poetic imagery is just stunning. No one could possibly have planned it this way. For the relevant events took place over 1500 years apart, at locations more than 7,700 miles apart---separated by the Gulf of Mexico, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Mediterranean Sea---among the people of two different cultures, neither of whom even knew of the existence of each other when the first event took place, in 2 B.C. And as for a coincidence? Well, if this is just a coincidence, then the supposed fact that it is a coincidence would appear to be an even greater miracle than if heaven itself directly ordained these things.

B. The Templo Mayor And The Birth Of Jesus

And yet, there is more, as seen here (in the photo in the upper-right corner of the article): <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/a1/bc/c7/a1bcc7ea93d92b12382d59b71b165b82.jpg>. This link brings you to an image showing where the Templo Mayor would have stood with relation to modern buildings. The view is to the southwest, and the Cathedral can be seen immediately past the image of the Templo Mayor (just above center), for the cathedral is adjacent to the site of the Templo Mayor.

The Templo Mayor was a pyramid-type structure which was the center of human sacrifice by the Aztecs and was the center of their religion. Twin temples, each dedicated to an important deity of the Aztecs, stood atop this structure, giving it a towering height of just under 200 feet,¹⁴⁸ as can be seen here in this artist's representation of the Templo Mayor: https://www.urbipedia.org/hoja/Templo_Mayor#/media/File:Templo_Mayor_Tenochtitlan.jpg. The view of the Templo Mayor is toward the northeast from the approximate site of the modern Roman Catholic Cathedral of Mexico City.

NOTE OF CAUTION: Many may find that the material in the following six paragraphs is shocking. Reader discretion is advised.

The exact extent of the wholesale slaughter of human victims on this site will probably never

¹⁴⁸ https://www.worldhistory.org/Templo_Mayor/

be known, but it is believed that anywhere from 20,000 to 250,000 victims were slaughtered here every single year, with at least 4,000 (and possibly as many as 80,000) slaughtered over a four-day period when the Templo Mayor was rededicated in 1487 A.D., shortly before the Spanish arrived.¹⁴⁹ The sacrifice would take place by having four Aztecs each take ahold of an arm or a leg of a victim in order to hold the victim down on a slab. Then a priest would take a knife and cut an adult victim's heart out and hold it up to display it to the sun god, preferably while it was still beating;¹⁵⁰ children were customarily sacrificed by having their throats slit.¹⁵¹ Cannibalism of adult victims would often accompany the sacrifice, apparently as a way of strengthening the persons who ate the victims and as a way of feeding their gods;^{152, 153, 154, 155} and cannibalism of children may have also taken place as well.¹⁵⁶

Of particular value to the Aztecs for the sacrifice itself, at least, were the child victims, since the tears of children were considered to be a connection to rainwater, which of course is needed to bring forth life. So in essence, in a cruel twist of fate, they would kill children to bring forth life. For the rainwater, they believed, was a gift given by one of the two gods to whom the Templo Mayor was dedicated: Tlaloc.¹⁵⁷

Now, to understand the spiritual significance of the message being displayed in the heavens above by the conjunction of Jupiter and Venus at the time when Jesus was born, we must consider two things. First, we must consider the cruelty of the matter. The Aztecs would bind their victims and march them (or drag them) to the killing field. There they would be herded to the Templo Mayor. As they would enter the grounds of this place, the victims could witness the spectacle of the those ahead of them being slaughtered and their bloodied, lifeless bodies then being rolled and pushed back down the pyramid. And as they knew, their own turn would soon come, for they were helpless.

For the children especially, the horror of the moment must have been unreal. Amidst their shouts and screams of terror, their tear-filled eyes must have been looking desperately about the crowd for some sign of their mothers or fathers---or anyone at all---who could come to rescue them from a very painful and very certain death. And yet, as they could see before them, the other children had done the exact same thing, yet no one had come to rescue them. And so they knew that soon, all alone, they too would have to face the cruel reality that there would be no one to rescue them, either, as they would have their throats slit and die. It can easily be imagined that the Aztecs not only would have done nothing to comfort these children, but that they might also have taunted them and have deliberately done all they could do to induce even more terror and panic in

¹⁴⁹ <https://www.historyonthenet.com/aztec-culture-how-many-were-killed-as-human-sacrifices>

¹⁵⁰ <https://www.mayaincaaztec.com/aztec/aztechumansacrifice>

¹⁵¹ <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2005-jan-23-adfg-sacrifice23-story.html>

¹⁵² https://www.worldhistory.org/Templo_Mayor/

¹⁵³ <https://eaoaes.wordpress.com/2013/04/11/aztec-cannibalism/>

¹⁵⁴ <https://heretical.com/cannibal/mamerica.html>

¹⁵⁵ <https://www.history.com/news/aztec-human-sacrifice-religion>

¹⁵⁶ <https://www.ancient-origins.net/news-history-archaeology/human-bones-show-evidence-aztecs-practiced-ritual-cannibalism-001235>

¹⁵⁷ https://www.worldhistory.org/Templo_Mayor/

the children, for this would enhance the flow of even more tears.

It can be of no moment, of course, that the Aztecs might not have had cruelty in mind as they did these things. Apparently, they thought they were simply repaying their angry gods for the sacrifices which the gods had supposedly made in creating the world and the human race, and they may have believed that the adults and children who were being sacrificed should have considered it to be an honor to be sacrificed.^{158, 159} But none of this could change the fact that the Aztecs beheld with their own eyes and heard with their own ears the sights and sounds of screaming children who were being tortured by horror and by the painful cuts of the knives, no matter what supposedly benevolent motive the Aztecs may have thought they had had (something which would have been exposed as a lie instantly in any event if it were any of they themselves who would be marked as the next victim for death, or if their own children were targeted).

Shocked by the horror of this sight---which was still in practice later on, when the Spaniards arrived---Hernan Cortes and the Conquistadors under his command¹⁶⁰ fiercely attacked the Aztecs leaders and their warriors. And so then---by virtue of their superior armor and weapons, by the exposure of the natives to smallpox carried by the Spaniards (which previously had been unknown in the Americas),¹⁶¹ and with the help of certain neighboring tribes which had been oppressed by the Aztecs---the Conquistadors eventually defeated the Aztecs and put an end to their cruelty and their entire culture.^{162, 163} Well ... for the time being, at least. For unfortunately, that same spirit which animated the sacrificial rituals of the Aztecs of old, and which caused them to believe that they were doing good even while they were doing great evil, is a spirit which now finds itself a new home in certain parts of the Americas,^{164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171} and today it even rears up its

¹⁵⁸ <https://eaoaes.wordpress.com/2013/04/11/aztec-cannibalism/>

¹⁵⁹ <https://www.history.com/news/aztec-human-sacrifice-religion>

¹⁶⁰ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/conquistador>

¹⁶¹ <https://www.thoughtco.com/the-conquest-of-the-aztec-empire-2136528>

¹⁶² <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/ancient-history/cortes-captured-mighty-tenochtitlan.html>

¹⁶³

[https://www.thoughtco.com/thmb/xBmrM8mzTaNCXGrFbi1YyK2lvk=/768x0/filters:no_upscale\(\):max_bytes\(150000\):strip_icc\(\)/Storming_of_the_Teocalli_by_Cortez_and_His_Troops1-56a58aca5f9b58b7d0dd4d77.jpeg](https://www.thoughtco.com/thmb/xBmrM8mzTaNCXGrFbi1YyK2lvk=/768x0/filters:no_upscale():max_bytes(150000):strip_icc()/Storming_of_the_Teocalli_by_Cortez_and_His_Troops1-56a58aca5f9b58b7d0dd4d77.jpeg)

¹⁶⁴ <https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/silent-scream-1984-bernard-nathanson-crusade-life-and-american-portrait-films>

¹⁶⁵ Caution: graphic video <https://vimeo.com/89258573>

¹⁶⁶ <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/aug/19/planned-parenthood-kept-aborted-babies-alive-to-ha/>

¹⁶⁷ <https://www.centerformedicalprogress.org/2017/04/2027/>

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.liveaction.org/news/partial-birth-abortion-was-it-really-rare/>

¹⁶⁹ <https://www.breitbart.com/faith/2021/09/06/leftists-look-satanists-last-best-hope-save-abortion-texas/>

¹⁷⁰ By contrast to what we find in the foregoing footnotes, consider the thoughts of the following website: <https://www.hli.org/2017/12/our-lady-of-guadalupe/>

¹⁷¹ <https://www.breitbart.com/politics/2022/08/28/vatican-chief-praises-italys-law-legalizing-abortion-pillar-society/>

ugly head from a site within walking distance of the cathedral and the ruins of the Templo Mayor:
<https://www.foxnews.com/world/mexicos-supreme-court-declares-anti-abortion-laws-unconstitutional>.

Now, the second thing which we need to grasp in order to appreciate fully the spiritual significance of the display in the heavens above is something which pertains to a verse from the Book of Revelation which we already considered with respect to a different point. Before we look at that verse again, however, let us consider for a moment the position of the Templo Mayor with respect to the cathedral and the positions of Jupiter and Venus at the time when Jesus was probably born.

As it turns out, the line tracing the midpoint between Jupiter and Venus on June 17, 2 B.C. not only crosses through the grounds of the cathedral which was later built, but as we saw before, it also runs first along the south side of where the Templo Mayor would one day stand:¹⁷²

¹⁷² <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/a1/bc/c7/a1bcc7ea93d92b12382d59b71b165b82.jpg>



Here again, the position beneath the mid-point between Jupiter and Venus is illustrated by the horizontal red line in the middle (going from right to left), from 21:46:53 to 21:46:54 UTC on June 17, 2 B.C. The grounds of the cathedral are marked by the large red box, and the ruins of the Templo Mayor can be seen to the right of (and above) the center of the photo (*i.e.*, to the right of the upper edge of the grounds of the cathedral); the ruins are marked by the phrase "Templo Mayor de Mexico-Tenochtitlan".

Image from Google Earth Pro: <https://google-earth-pro.en.softonic.com/mac>

To see how I ascertained this, in the Appendix find THE POSITIONS OF JUPITER AND VENUS WITH RESPECT TO THE TEMPLO MAYOR. Quite

fittingly, as it turns out, the southern temple atop the Templo Mayor (*i.e.*, the one closer to the mid-point between Jupiter and Venus) was painted blood red by the Aztecs in honor of their god of war, Huitzilopochtli.¹⁷³

That being said, let us look once more at the passage of Scripture which I referred to a moment ago:

The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. [5](#) She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. (Rev. 12:4b-5; NIV)¹⁷⁴

Keeping this verse in mind, let us next consider how the planets Venus and Jupiter themselves lined up over present-day Mexico City. In this photo, we can see that as these two planets moved over the city, Venus passed to the south of the where the cathedral and the Templo Mayor would someday lie, whereas Jupiter passed to the north of the future site of the cathedral

¹⁷³ https://www.worldhistory.org/Templo_Mayor/

¹⁷⁴ <https://biblehub.com/niv/revelation/12.htm>

and the Templo Mayor, just ahead of Venus (i.e. to the northwest of Venus):¹⁷⁵



An illustration of the relative positions of Jupiter, Venus, and the cathedral in Mexico City from 21:46:53 to 21:46:54 on June 17, 2 B.C.

The horizontal red line at the upper left shows the position and movement of Jupiter (right to left) over Mexico City during that time, which was caused by Earth's rotation. Similarly, the horizontal red line at the lower right shows the position and movement of Venus (right to left) during that time.

The horizontal red line in the middle shows the position and movement of the mid-point between Jupiter and Venus during that time (right to left), and the red box in the middle (which that line goes through, near the bottom of that box) shows the boundaries of the grounds of the cathedral. The two diagonal red lines show the area on the ground beneath a line going between Jupiter and Venus at 21:46:53 (on the right) and 21:46:54 (on the left).

Image from Google Earth Pro: <https://google-earth-pro.en.softonic.com/mac>

In this photo we can see that by the way the two planets lined up, with the birth of Jesus being mid-way between them, the Templo Mayor was positioned directly in front of where the birth would happen just one second (or less) before the birth of Jesus. And in the very next second, as her child emerged from the womb, her child was then snatched away from the future site of the killing field of the Templo Mayor by the rotation of the Earth beneath the stars above, and His birth would be marked instead in the heavens over the future site of the cathedral just a few feet away, on the very grounds where the roses would one day pour forth from the image of Mary, an image showing her pregnant with Jesus, as is shown on the tilma of Juan Diego.

¹⁷⁵ The equations used and the values used in those equations to determine the positions and motions of Jupiter and Venus are given in the Appendix; therein find THE POSITIONS OF JUPITER AND VENUS WITH RESPECT TO THE CATHEDRAL.

As I contemplated this, I soon realized that there is even more to it than that. For instance, the phrase “snatched up” in that verse comes from the Greek word *erpasthe*¹⁷⁶ (*harpazo*)¹⁷⁷, which means to be snatched away suddenly and decisively, which is precisely what happened in the heavens when suddenly, Jupiter and Venus separated from each other and the spot on Earth directly beneath the midpoint between the two planets shifted, in one second, away from its position next to the Templo Mayor and over to the site of the future cathedral.

In addition, I thought it odd that Scripture would say specifically that the child was caught up both to God and also to His throne. *Well, of course the child would be caught up to God's throne, if the child would indeed be caught up to God Himself*, I said to myself. *For where else would you find God, other than on His throne?* I then realized that the birth of Jesus was placed on display in the heavens over the future site of a cathedral; the significance of that, I believe, lies in the fact that the word “cathedral” is based on the Latin word *cathedra*, meaning a chair, or a seat.¹⁷⁸ The church from which a bishop exercises his authority is called a cathedral because that church is where the bishop has his seat of authority.

At the same time, a throne (the word the Bible uses in the verse quoted above) is likewise a seat. The word “throne” comes from a word in Greek: *thronos* (*thronon*), which means, in essence, a seat of dominion or power.^{179, 180}

So in other words, if Revelation had been written in Latin instead of Greek, the final sentence of Revelation 12:5 could be thought of as follows:

“And her child was snatched up to God and to his *cathedra* (cathedral).”

Putting this all together, here we have a verse of Scripture which says that the child, at His birth, would be snatched up to God in a sudden and decisive move, one which is illustrated by the separation of Jupiter and Venus in the skies above, an event which did in fact take place above the site of the future cathedral: *i.e.*, the seat of God's anointed bishop of the Diocese (now the Archdiocese) of Mexico City ... in other words, at the seat of someone who is anointed with God's own authority, so that the seat of that bishop (now an archbishop) is in fact an extension of the very throne of God.

As Roman Catholic traditionalist author Peter Krasniewski, writing in *Crisis* magazine, has pointed out, the Second Vatican Council itself declared in its publication *Lumen Gentium* that each bishop receives his authority and responsibilities not from any pope, but rather, from Christ

¹⁷⁶ <https://biblehub.com/lexicon/revelation/12-5.htm>

¹⁷⁷ <https://biblehub.com/greek/726.htm>

¹⁷⁸ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cathedral>

¹⁷⁹ <https://biblehub.com/lexicon/revelation/12-5.htm>

¹⁸⁰ <https://biblehub.com/greek/2362.htm>

directly.¹⁸¹ The role of the pope is simply to delegate that authority; the pope himself is not the source of that authority.

To top it all off, here again we have an illustration of how, in Platonic fashion (as we have seen before),¹⁸² that which is true on Earth is a reflection of that which is true in heaven above, the very point which the Apostle Paul also made in the Book of Hebrews about the comparison of how God's priests here on Earth, in the performance of their Old Testament priestly duties, were anticipating, in shadowlike fashion, the ministry of Jesus Himself in years to come in heaven above.^{183, 184}

Likewise fitting is the fact that since it was daylight, as the two planets did separate, Jupiter, as I said, would not be visible; its light would disappear by blending into the glow of the heavens above. This disappearance of the light from Jupiter is a poetic way of illustrating the point that since the light of Jupiter could no longer be seen on Earth, then the light from Jupiter was, at that point, caught up from Earth into heaven itself as the light intermingled with the overall light of heaven, illustrating the point that the newborn king was likewise being caught up from Earth directly unto God, as the Scripture says.

So here we have, in poetic fashion, an earthly/heavenly display (one that is stretched out over more than 1,500 years), of that which we find in Scripture: Satan standing before the woman just as she was about to give birth, and the child then being snatched away to God (by the disappearance of the light of Jupiter as it blended into the skies above), and also snatched away to His throne (by the movement of the mid-point of Jupiter and Venus over to the cathedral/throne), just as He was born. And how sad it is to note that just as Satan unleashed hell on Earth in Bethlehem over the birth of Jesus, so also it is the case that he unleashed hell on Earth some 1,500 years later at the site directly beneath the heavenly testimony which had been on display in 2 B.C., testimony which had announced the birth of Jesus. And no doubt also, he had no idea that in so doing, he would thereby inadvertently be giving testimony to us in our own day and age not only to the birth of Jesus in 2 B.C., but also to the truth of Scripture as a whole, and to the very nature of his own evil as well. For the slaughter of the innocents at the Templo Mayor mimics the slaughter of the innocents in Bethlehem. (In terms of Satan not realizing what he was really accomplishing by his evil acts, see I Cor. 2:6-8.¹⁸⁵)

¹⁸¹ <https://crisismagazine.com/opinion/resisting-papal-overreach-the-story-of-bishop-isidore-borecky>

¹⁸² Here in the text find Part One. I. B. The Possible Influence Of Plato On The Thinking Of The Magi.

¹⁸³ Hebrews 8:1-6; <https://biblehub.com/nasb/hebrews/8.htm>

¹⁸⁴ Hebrews 9:11-14; <https://biblehub.com/nasb/hebrews/9.htm>

¹⁸⁵ https://biblehub.com/nasb/1_corinthians/2.htm

C. The Remaining Signs In The Heavens On The Night When Jesus Was Born

1. Draco The Dragon And Guadalupe As Seen From The Cathedral

Returning to the tilma itself for a moment, let us consider the crescent moon depicted thereon, which Mary is seen to be stepping on. It may seem odd to do so because the crescent moon, as Prof. Callahan pointed out, is one of the aspects of the image which is not part of the original image on the tilma, and was added sometime after the fact by a human artist.¹⁸⁶

That being said, let us reflect further on Prof. Callahan's thoughts on the matter. As noted above, he concluded that while some of the portions of the image on the tilma are inexplicable, and suggest a Divine origin, other parts, however, are additions which were obviously made later by human artists. In that context he said,

The additions to the image of the Virgin, although by no means technically elegant compared with the original image, nevertheless add a human element that is both charming and edifying. Any single addition---whether moon, Aztec fold, gold and black border, angel or whatever---does not alone enhance the portrait. Taken together, however, the effect is overwhelming. As by magic, the decorations accentuate the beauty of the original and elegantly-rendered Virgin Mary. It is as if God and man had worked jointly to create a masterpiece.¹⁸⁷

With that in mind, let us consider the fact that the Aztecs were known to depict Quetzalcoatl, one of their most important gods,¹⁸⁸ as wearing a crescent moon medallion on his chest.¹⁸⁹ This would fit with the name of this god himself---"feathered serpent"¹⁹⁰---because a very thin crescent moon can indeed look like a serpent hanging in the sky. (And he is also said to have become a lightning bolt, which can look like a feathered serpent in the sky even more so.¹⁹¹)

All that being said, I cannot help but notice that this does give rise to the possibility that the human artist who added the crescent moon to the tilma did so while being oblivious to some Divine guidance which had him put it there, and in fact, in such a way as to reflect Prof. Callahan's speculation about the image showing God and man working jointly to create the final product.¹⁹² For just as we saw the story of the Star of Bethlehem and the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe merge in

¹⁸⁶ Callahan, pg. 9.

¹⁸⁷ Callahan, p. 19

¹⁸⁸ <https://mythopedia.com/aztec-mythology/gods/quetzalcoatl/>

¹⁸⁹ <https://www.samaelgnosis.us/glossary/gnosis/words/quetzalcoatl.html>

¹⁹⁰ <https://mythopedia.com/aztec-mythology/gods/quetzalcoatl/>

¹⁹¹ <https://draconika.com/legends/quetzalcoatl>

¹⁹² Granted, the artist easily could have had a verse in mind which we have considered several times here: Revelation 12:1 (<https://biblehub.com/niv/revelation/12.htm>), which tells of the woman in the heavens with the moon under her feet. But even so, there is no way that the artist who added the crescent moon to the tilma could have known of either the passage of the mid-point between Jupiter and Venus over the eventual site of the cathedral or how Draco the Dragon would have appeared from that site at that particular moment in time.

terms of the midpoint between Jupiter and Venus passing in 2 B.C. directly over the area where one day, 1,500 years later, the roses of the tilma would pour forth from an image of Mary showing her pregnant with Jesus, so also we see here yet another merger of Scripture and the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe, this one in terms of the very first Messianic prophecy in the Bible, in which the Lord God addressed the serpent and said to it,

15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. (Gen. 3:15; KJV)¹⁹³

As we consider that verse, we should note where Draco would be seen at the moment when Jesus was apparently born from the site of the future cathedral:



The position of Draco at the time of Jesus' apparent birth, showing the base of its head (as marked by the star 36 Draconis) at 16 degrees 26 minutes (16.5 degrees) as seen from the grounds of the future Roman Catholic Cathedral of Mexico City.

The horizontal white line represents the horizon.

Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.

Here we see that Draco lies along the horizon to the north-northeast. Interestingly enough, as seen today from the cathedral in downtown Mexico City, the small chapel which is built on the site where Mary appeared to Juan Diego (just slightly up the hill from the site of the old and new basilicas there) also lies along the horizon to the north-northeast (at a heading of about 16.5 degrees), and as the above image shows, this corresponds to the azimuth of where the neck of the dragon met the head of the dragon as seen from the grounds of the future cathedral right at the very moment when Jesus was apparently being born. And the image on the tilma shows Mary on Tepeyac Hill stepping forward and moving to her right; her next step with her right foot will fall directly

¹⁹³ <https://biblehub.com/kjv/genesis/3.htm>

onto that point where the neck of the dragon met its head on the horizon at the time of Jesus' birth: <http://infallible-catholic.blogspot.com/2012/04/our-lady-of-guadalupe-message-of-trust.html>. At that point she even is, in fact, looking directly at where the neck of the dragon meets its head.

Now, I don't know if one's view of Tepeyac Hill, where Mary appeared to Juan Diego, might be obstructed by trees or other things as seen from the grounds of the cathedral, or even from atop the cathedral. But theoretically, at least, putting this all together, at the time when Jesus was being born in 2 B.C., if one were to look out at that time from the grounds of where the cathedral stands today toward the site on Tepeyac Hill where Mary would appear to Juan Diego later on, in 1531, this view would show the place where she would come to stand in 1531 as being directly upon the very place where the neck and the base of the head of the serpent had been located along the horizon at the apparent moment of the birth of Jesus in 2 B.C.; and as I say, this view would also show she herself moving forward and to her right, thereby showing her stepping upon Draco's head and neck in the process.

With that in mind, let us consider the fact that when Mary said how she wish to be called, she used a word which not only sounds like the name of a village in Spain (Guadalupe), but which also is the pronunciation of a word in Nahuatl---the native language of the Aztecs, in which she was speaking at that moment---which means "one who crushes the serpent".¹⁹⁴

Now, a reference here to this verse from Genesis might seem out of place, since the verse says that the "seed" of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent, and not the woman herself, and that "his" heel (*i.e.*, the heel of her seed) would be bruised, not the woman's. But as I also pointed out above, Mary is not the only person depicted on the tilma; for the imagery on the tilma, as I noted above, depicts her, a daughter of Eve, while she was pregnant with Jesus.

So as she steps upon the serpent (crescent moon), Jesus in her womb is part of this, too; and as Lord and Savior, He uses her in this way in order to create an image showing Him, in artistic fashion, doing what this verse in Genesis said He would do to the serpent. And what could possibly do a better job of showing Him doing this to the serpent in His role as her offspring specifically (as the prophecy in Genesis said would be the case) than by depicting Him as being in her womb (the way the tilma shows Him) at the time He does this?

There is yet another way that this point is illustrated. Above we saw that the birth of Jesus was illustrated by the separation of Jupiter and Venus in the skies over the cathedral. Since Jupiter was north of the mid-point between the two planets and Venus was south of that point, this imagery would place the feet of Mary to the north of the mid-point. And that is where we do find the Templo Mayor. So in the imagery above we find yet another way that the seed of Mary operates through her to crush the head of the serpent. For as we also saw, the acceptance of the Gospel of Jesus Christ wiped out the Satanic practice of infant sacrifice almost instantaneously in that area.

Now, Genesis 3:15¹⁹⁵ is also peculiar in that it speaks of the "seed" of the woman, whereas

¹⁹⁴ <https://www.sancta.org/nameguad.html>

¹⁹⁵ <https://biblehub.com/kjv/genesis/3.htm>

a seed is commonly thought of as being the reproductive cell of a male. But there is one particular form of reproduction (arrhenotokous parthenogenesis)¹⁹⁶ in which a female of certain species produces a male offspring without a mate, as shall be explained later herein. And interestingly enough, this verse in Genesis, though it certainly does not speak directly to that point specifically, is nonetheless at least consistent with the idea of Mary, through miraculous intervention ("the power of the Most High"),¹⁹⁷ giving birth to Jesus through (or at least, in a manner consistent with) arrhenotokous parthenogenesis. The point is that if such were the case, then in that respect, He could indeed be thought of as being the product of the seed of Eve.

In a way, this juxtaposition of imagery from one location (the grounds of the cathedral) with imagery from a different location (Tepayac Hill) reminds me of so-called three-dimensional chess. For you cannot grasp the whole picture by looking at just one element of it.¹⁹⁸ Rather, one can grasp the whole picture only by looking at everything, from every angle combined.

In fact, it even goes beyond that. For this imagery also incorporates what Albert Einstein, years later, would come to call "the fourth dimension": time.¹⁹⁹ For in order to comprehend what you are beholding, you not only have to think in terms of three-dimensional space, but you also have to add in the element of time (specifically, events which are 1,500 years apart) in order to comprehend the whole:^{200, 201} i.e., the movement of the virgin from the place where she would be on Tepayac Hill in 1531 toward the place where the head and neck of Draco had been located along the horizon previously, in 2 B.C.

Of course, even a standard board game of chess does entail the use of the fourth dimension, though with only two of the other three dimensions (width and depth, but not height). Here, by contrast, the so-called fourth dimension must be incorporated into one's thinking along with all three of the remaining dimensions, as in fact is always the case in a game of so-called three-dimensional chess (which in fact is actually four-dimensional in nature). But then, this is fitting, for as the Scripture says regarding God's reckoning of time,

8 But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. (II Peter 3:8; ESV)²⁰²

More than this I cannot say, of course. And it would be wrong to dwell on a possibility as speculative as this at great length. But it is an interesting possibility to take note of at this point, in any event, and to consider at least briefly what implications this might have.

¹⁹⁶ <https://www.thoughtco.com/parthenogenesis-373474>

¹⁹⁷ Luke 1:45; <https://biblehub.com/nasb/luke/1.htm>

¹⁹⁸ <https://i0.wp.com/dudeliving.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/3d-chess-set.jpg>

¹⁹⁹ This is something which the Rochester Institute of Technology explains on its website: <https://13wham.com/news/top-stories/rit-research-helps-prove-einsteins-4th-dimension-theory>

²⁰⁰ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/quora/2016/12/07/einstein-could-easily-think-in-four-dimensions-and-its-a-skill-most-people-can-train/?sh=68ab601134fd>

²⁰¹ <https://medium.com/science-junction/fourth-dimension-spacetime-f7ef219f135d>

²⁰² https://biblehub.com/esv/2_peter/3.htm

For as you may recall, at the beginning of this book I said that one of my goals was to take something which sounded impossible (the story of the Star of Bethlehem) and show how it really is possible, anyway. And many would scoff at the idea of the story of the Star of Bethlehem even being plausible at all, and would believe that no rational, thinking person should even take it seriously. Such persons also commonly congratulate themselves for being sophisticated and intelligent, and not mere peasants, like those who believe in supposed religious superstitions, such as the story of the Star of Bethlehem.

To those who would say that, however, I would say that in the signs here on Earth and also in the heavens above of the truth of this story of the Star of Bethlehem and of the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe, this fellow named God has invented a most challenging board game for you, and He now invites you to play. But as you sit down with Him at the table to play this game, just keep in mind that if you're actually going to keep up with Him, you're going to have to think in four dimensions, not just three.

Hmmm ... chess, anyone?

2. The Moon And The True Separation Of Jupiter And Venus

Also of interest that night was the full moon crossing the meridian just before the birth of Jesus, plus the actual separation of Jupiter and Venus (as opposed to just their apparent separation). This material has been placed in the Appendix; therein find THE MOON ON THE MERIDIAN AND THE TRUE SEPARATION OF JUPITER AND VENUS.

D. The Positions Of The Virgin In The Sky

In examining the positions of the various different celestial signs pertaining to the birth of the King of the Jews, one cannot help but notice how the positions of the virgin (Virgo) correspond to certain aspects of the story of our redemption by Jesus. For instance, we have already looked at how the full moon during Purim in 9 B.C., as seen from Babylon (the probable home of one or more of the Magi), illustrated the virgin as first being pregnant when the night began, and then going through labor and childbirth by the time the night ended, while the conjunction of Saturn (the father of the gods) and Venus (the mother) took place. And we also saw that the virgin, at the conclusion of that same night---at the time when the combination of the constellation Virgo and the moon did illustrate childbirth---could be seen out in the direction of Jerusalem (and Bethlehem) as seen from Babylon.

So in other words, in all of this we can see an illustration of Jesus coming down from heaven to Earth through Mary, His mother, which is in fact how His coming to live among us actually did in fact happen. We have also seen how the position of Mary on Tepayac Hill at the time when she appeared to Juan Diego in 1531, as viewed from the grounds of the cathedral in Mexico City, illustrates her stepping on the place on the horizon where the base of the serpent's head had been and crushing it in 2 B.C.

Yet, marvelous as that is, there is more to it than that. And to understand the rest, we must first contemplate some of the basics of the Incarnation. For instance, Jesus did not just suddenly appear one day as an adult. Neither did He just suddenly appear one day as a newborn baby without any earthly mother. Rather, He came to us from the Father by way of gestation and childbirth, through Mary, His mother. So in other words, Jesus came down to us from heaven and accomplished the Father's plan of salvation through her. The thing is, there are still more signs in the heavens which illustrate this point.

For instance, as we noted in our discussion of Mary appearing to step on the head of the serpent as seen from the grounds of the future cathedral at the time of His birth in 2 B.C., that imagery also illustrated the point from Genesis that it would be her seed that would crush the head of the serpent. For Juan Diego's tilma shows her pregnant with Jesus; thus, Jesus is in the image on the tilma with her, and therefore He is thus likewise crushing the head of the serpent, albeit through her. Recall that at the moment of His birth, as seen in the imagery directly overhead from the grounds of the cathedral, He would just then be coming forth from her womb. So this imagery illustrates the point of Him crushing Satan's head with the assistance of the ministry of His mother, whose ministry brought Him here to Earth for us.

The thing is, there are even more ways which illustrate how the Father fulfilled Jesus' ministry through her. For instance, we have just seen, from the perspective of any Magi in Babylon, how the moon and Virgo combined during Purim in 9 B.C. to illustrate how the Father would be sending His Son to Earth through Jesus' mother. But in addition to that, here we see the image of the virgin at that exact same moment (during Purim in 9 B.C.) as seen from the grounds of the future cathedral in Mexico City, where the flow of roses from the tilma of Juan Diego in 1531 illustrated the birth of Jesus in 2 B.C.:



The full moon in the vicinity of the birth canal in Virgo as it rose during Purim in 3752 (9 B.C.), as seen from the grounds of the future Roman Catholic Cathedral of Mexico City.

The horizontal white line represents the horizon.

Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.

This would have looked exactly the same from the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe, a few miles away, right at that moment.

This is an image worthy of a queen of heaven walking upon the Earth. And since this illustrates the birth of Jesus as well, it also illustrates the King of Kings---through her, as He resides within her---walking upon the Earth as well as He comes to dwell among us.

Moving on to another set of imagery, recall that around the time when Mary ovulated (as we considered previously) in 3 B.C., we saw in the skies over Nazareth an image of the virgin coming down to Earth:

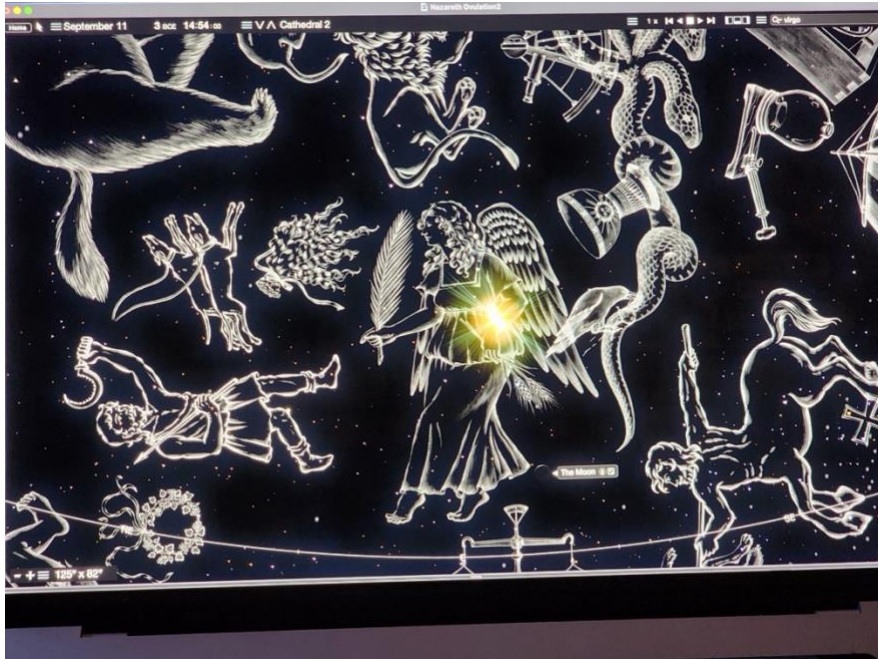


The moon beneath the feet of the virgin just before 3:00 P.M. (Standard) time (15:00 local) as seen from Nazareth on September 11, 3 B.C.

Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.

Consider how the image of Mary at that time overlaps with the image of Mary during Purim as seen from Babylon illustrating Jesus Himself coming down to Earth through her at the time of childbirth:

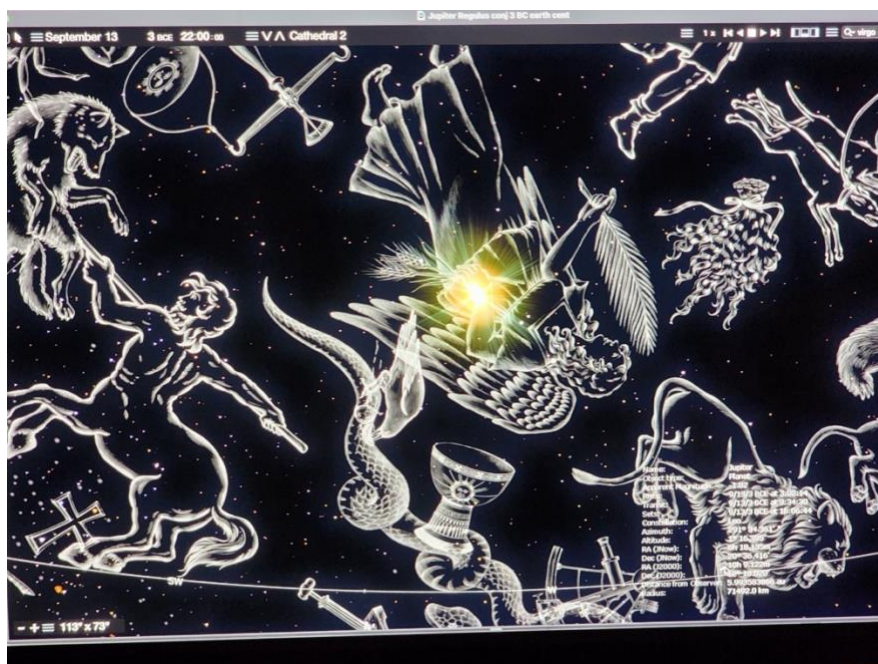
With all that in mind, now consider also how she also looked in 3 B.C., around the time she ovulated, as viewed from the grounds of the future cathedral in Mexico City:



Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.

The thing is, with respect to these images of Mary, this imagery of her could easily duplicate the way she herself personally could have looked to Juan Diego as he made his way up Tepayac Hill in 1531.

Furthermore, about two days after Mary presumably ovulated (two days and seven hours afterwards, specifically)---at the time of the first conjunction of the triple conjunction of Jupiter and Regulus, when I strongly suspect she would have conceived Jesus in her womb---here we see how the virgin would have appeared from the grounds of the future cathedral and the Shrine of Guadalupe in Mexico:



Virgo at the first conjunction of the triple-conjunction of Jupiter and Regulus from September of 3 B.C. to May of 2 B.C. (specifically, at 2200 UTC on September 13th), as seen from the site of the future cathedral and the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico City. Jupiter and Regulus are shown together in Leo the Lion about one degree above the horizon line, in the lower right corner, just as they were about to set.

Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.

Here we see how Virgo again prepares to bring Jesus down to Earth, just as the first of the triple-conjunctions of Jupiter and Regulus unfolds and likewise illustrates the King of the Jews descending to Earth.

Now, as I mentioned before, the Bible says that we are made of the dust of the Earth. And so when a child is conceived in the womb, the child is conceived within the Earth, so to speak. And here we see an image of the conception of Jesus taking place within the Earth (Mary's womb) as He is being brought down from the heavens above to us here on the Earth below through the ministry of His mother. And at that, let us bear in mind that this imagery shows us how this all looked from the future grounds of the Cathedral in Mexico City, where she appeared to Juan Diego, and where the roses poured forth from his tilma.

Another illustration of how the Scriptures concerning Jesus were fulfilled through her can be seen in the image of the virgin rising over the horizon in Jerusalem on the night when the Magi went to Bethlehem, at about the time when they probably arrived at the palace to visit Jesus:



Virgo with Jupiter as seen from Jerusalem about the time when the Magi may have arrived at the palace of King Herod.

Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.

In light of this image, consider the following verse:

[1](#) Thus saith the LORD, The heaven *is* my throne, and the earth *is* my footstool: (Isaiah 66:1a; KJV)²⁰³679

So here we see an illustration of how it is that through the ministry of Mary, we find that the King of the Jews---at the bosom of His mother, and held there within her arms---makes the heavens His throne and the Earth His footstool.

Then there is the position of the virgin as seen from Bethlehem at the time when the Magi arrived:

²⁰³ <https://biblehub.com/kjv/isaiah/66.htm>



Virgo as seen from Bethlehem at the time that the Magi probably arrived to worship Jesus on the morning of December 26, 2 B.C.

Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.

As we have seen, this was essentially the same position that the virgin was in as seen from Nazareth at the time of day when the moon first started to move under her feet on the day when she probably ovulated:



Virgo as the crescent new moon moves under her feet (with the glow of daylight removed) on the afternoon of September 11, 3 B.C., as seen from Nazareth.

Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.

This imagery again shows Jesus being brought down from the heavens to us here on Earth through her ministry. And we have already seen how this looks similar to how Virgo looked during Purim in 9 B.C. as seen from Babylon when looking out toward Jerusalem.

On top of all that, let us not overlook the position of the virgin as seen from the site of the future cathedral and the Shrine of Our Lady of Guadalupe at the time of Jesus' birth:



Virgo as seen from the future site of the Cathedral of Mexico City at the time when Jesus was born.
Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.

Here we see her rising up from the Earth as He begins His new life to a place of honor in the heavens, directly beneath her Son (in Leo).

With that in mind, we should next consider the position of the virgin as she rose during mid-eclipse on the day that Jesus died, as seen from Jerusalem:



Virgo rising with the moon (to the right of her feet) as seen from Jerusalem during the partial eclipse of the moon (visible to the right of her ankles) on April 3, 33 A.D.

The white horizontal line marks the horizon.

Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.

This image is something to consider: Taking this all together, here we have seen Mary rising up in nearly identical configurations from the Earth to a place of prominence in the heavens from the time of preparation for Jesus' earthly ministry (as Mary ovulates) as seen from the site of the future cathedral, and then also at the very close of His earthly ministry as well (as seen from Jerusalem), with His whole earthly life being framed by these two events, each of which His mother was present for both in the ordinary, earthly sense and also in terms of the celestial imagery at the same time.

With respect to her position on the day that Jesus died, this is not all, however. Recall that at Rosh Hashanah in 3 B.C., when Mary probably ovulated in preparation for the conception of Jesus within her womb, her image in the heavens as seen from Nazareth entered into the configuration which the Apostle John described in the Book of Revelation: the woman clothed with the sun, and with the moon beneath her feet, an image which would continue, on and off, at various times of day over the course of the next two days, when she would have conceived Jesus within her womb.

With that in mind, let us now look again at how she would have looked during the eclipse as seen from beneath her feet. This would have been from a position thousands of miles to the southeast of Jerusalem. The following is a series of photographs (ecliptic orientation) at fifteen-minute intervals over the course of two hours (one hour before mid-eclipse to one hour after mid-eclipse) if we were to look up at the moon from beneath her heels at this point in time.

Notice that during the eclipse, the moon is once again beneath her feet. Also, as the moon goes deeper and deeper into the eclipse, it appears to rotate into position to form a cup which fills

with blood coming down from her heels, which is where Genesis says that the seed of Eve would be bruised. And at that, as the moon approaches mid-eclipse, it temporarily takes on an appearance similar to that of a crescent moon in the usual sense, which is the phase it had been at back at the conception of Jesus in 3 B.C.



The partially eclipsed full moon beneath the feet of Virgo at 13:47 UTC on the day that Jesus died as seen from beneath the feet of Virgo (specifically, as seen from West Papua, Indonesia)
Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.



The partially eclipsed full moon beneath the feet of Virgo fifteen minutes later, at 14:02 UTC on the day that Jesus died as seen from beneath the feet of Virgo (West Papua, Indonesia)
Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.



The partially eclipsed full moon beneath the feet of Virgo at 14:17 UTC on the day that Jesus died as seen from beneath the feet of Virgo (West Papua, Indonesia)
Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.



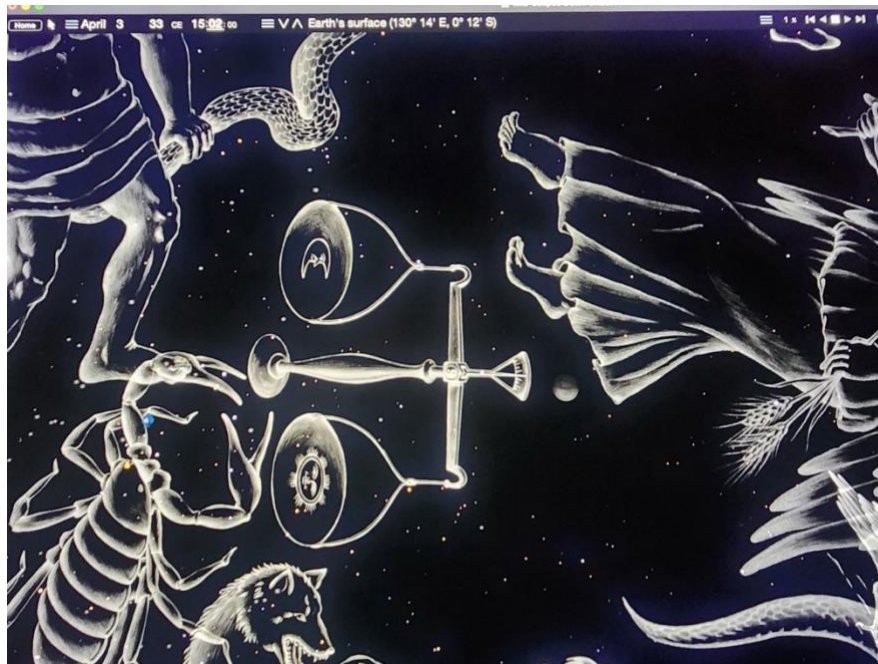
The partially eclipsed full moon beneath the feet of Virgo at 14:32 UTC on the day that Jesus died as seen from beneath the feet of Virgo (West Papua, Indonesia)
Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.



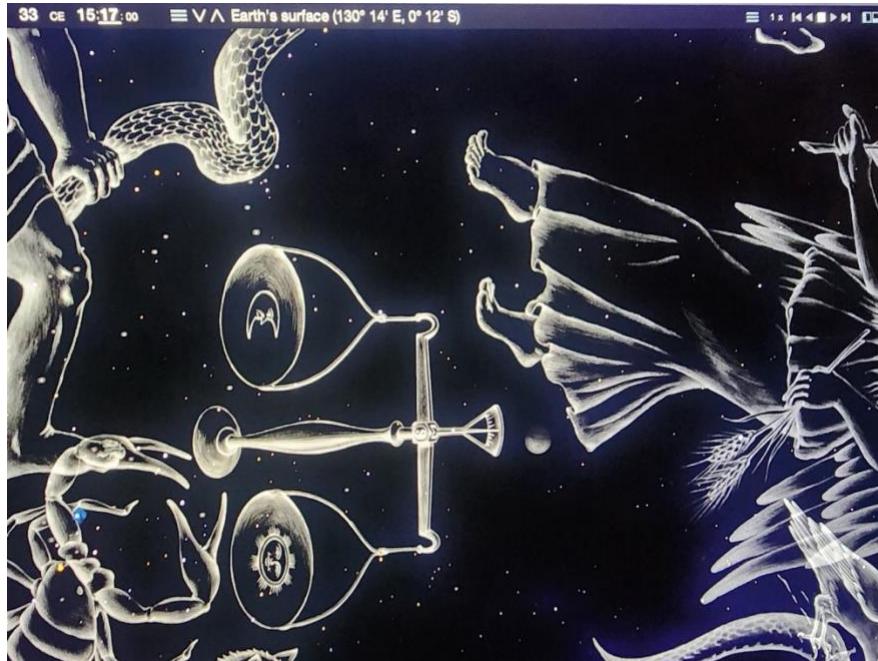
The partially eclipsed full moon beneath the feet of Virgo at mid-eclipse (14:47 UTC) on the day that Jesus died as seen from beneath the feet of Virgo (West Papua, Indonesia)
Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education
Photograph by the author.



A close-up of the partially eclipsed full moon beneath the feet of Virgo at mid-eclipse (14:47 UTC) on the day that Jesus died as seen from beneath the feet of Virgo (West Papua, Indonesia)
Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.

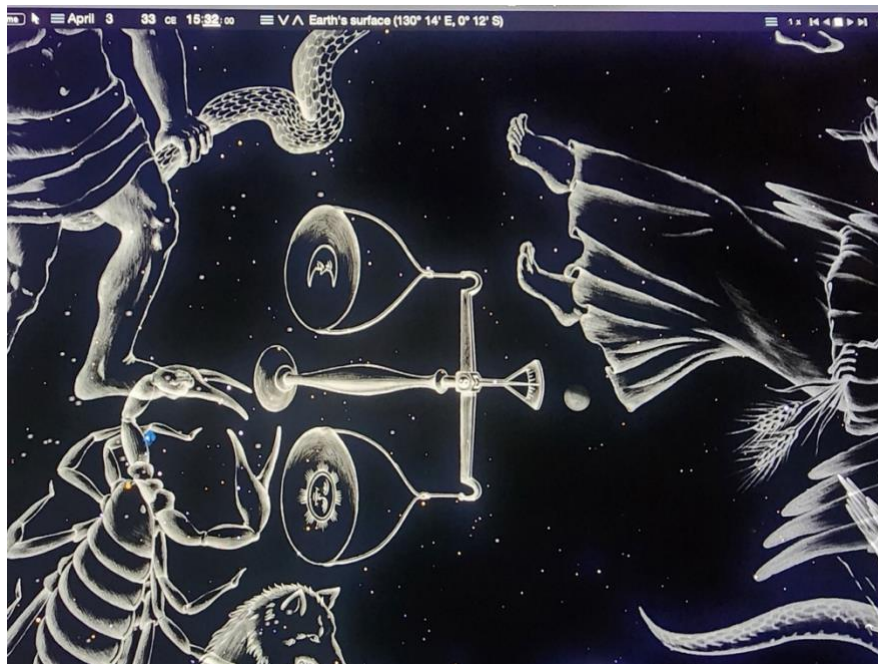


The partially eclipsed full moon beneath the feet of Virgo at 15:02 UTC on the day that Jesus died as seen from beneath the feet of Virgo (West Papua, Indonesia)
Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.



The partially eclipsed full moon beneath the feet of Virgo at 15:17 UTC on the day that Jesus died as seen from
beneath the feet of Virgo (West Papua, Indonesia)

Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.



The partially eclipsed full moon beneath the feet of Virgo at 15:32 UTC on the day that Jesus died as seen from
beneath the feet of Virgo (West Papua, Indonesia)

Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.



The partially eclipsed full moon beneath the feet of Virgo at 15:47 UTC on the day that Jesus died as seen from beneath the feet of Virgo (West Papua, Indonesia)

Images provided courtesy of Starry Night Education. Photograph by the author.

E. The Celestial Positions Of The Virgin In Context

With this in mind, we may wonder what all of this means. In considering that question, we must first consider whether this overlap of imagery simply constitutes an elaborate series of coincidences. As I mentioned previously, it would come as no surprise to me if at least some of the things which we find in this book are indeed coincidences, and we must consider that question here as much as in any other thing we examine in this book.

Now, I suppose one might argue that since I cannot state with absolute certainty that all of this imagery is noncoincidental, then I supposedly should not have presented these materials at all. I beg to differ with that idea, however, not only because I have first apprised the reader of the need to consider the possibility of coincidences, but also because I believe it to be so very important for me to refrain from withholding from the reader what I have found in the way of image overlaps, and that instead I should simply present the material to the reader and let the reader draw whatever conclusions the reader may deem to be most appropriate.

All that being said, I submit that even though part of what we find here may be coincidental, I cannot believe that all of it is. And so I respectfully submit that this imagery presents the following message: Mary is different. Mary is not like you and me. There is no one like her. Never has been. Never will be.

Our Lord's mother is someone so special in His eyes that He even wrote her image into the heavens themselves for us to see at key moments throughout His whole earthly life, over and over

again, going all the way back to the days just before His conception, and continuing on until His death.

King David wrote of how the heavens declare the glory of God, and how day after day they speak of His glory throughout all the world, to the ends of the Earth. (Psalm 19:1-4)²⁰⁴ And in the case of Mary, the mother of Jesus, the stars practically shout forth their message at the top of their lungs across the entire face of the Earth, so that we can't miss it. And yet, there is even more to it than this.

F. The Serpent And The Flag Of Mexico

In addition to the possible divine guidance given to some artist to paint the crescent moon at Mary's feet in Juan Diego's tilma, there is perhaps yet another way in which a human artist followed some Divine guidance without even knowing it. In that respect, consider the flag of Mexico. In the center it contains a depiction of an event which, by legend, was the thing which caused the early Aztecs to choose the site of present-day Mexico City as the place where they would settle and establish their kingdom. It shows an eagle perched atop a cactus eating a snake. The Aztec legend says that this fulfilled a prophecy from their aforementioned god of war, Huitzilopochtli.²⁰⁵



The flag (La Bandera) of Mexico
(Used with permission: <https://pixnio.com/flags-of-the-world/flag-of-mexico>)

In designing the flag of Mexico, the artist could have depicted this event in any one of a

²⁰⁴ <https://biblehub.com/kjv/psalms/19.htm>

²⁰⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coat_of_arms_of_Mexico

number of ways, but consider for a moment, please, the way in which it actually is depicted. It shows the eagle's right talon raised, with the snake held firmly in its grasp, as the eagle appears to step forward while moving to its right. And it shows the eagle's beak firmly clasped around the snake's neck, at the base of its head.

This is noticeably similar to the imagery just discussed above, in which the mother of Jesus appears on the tilma to be stepping forward (with her right foot raised) and moving to her right, and that the place where she did this (as seen from the cathedral), when combined with the signs in the heavens at the time when Jesus was born, would show her preparing to step on the head and neck of the dragon to kill it as she was doing so at the time of Jesus' birth.

And as for the eagle, is that supposed to be Mary? No, I think not. But remember, as I said above, the image on the tilma shows not just Mary, but also shows Jesus with her in her womb. The eagle, then, is Jesus---her seed, her offspring within her womb---triumphing over evil and over the snake, and devouring it as He breaks its neck. Sadly enough, the monument which depicts this event is in front of the very building which I referred to above---a building which is within short walking distance of the cathedral---where the Mexican Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation just recently gave its approval to a type of infant sacrifice similar to that which the cruel ancient Aztec priests and rulers before them had practiced.^{206, 207}

In saying all of this, I do not mean to lend credence to the idea that there is such a god as Huitzilopochtli. For there is only one God---the one, true God---the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob. And the Second Person of that Godhead is Jesus. Nor do I mean to comment, either one way or the other, as to whether the Aztecs, before they came upon this spot, had already had some reason to believe that they should look for a place where they would see an eagle perched atop a cactus eating a snake.

What I do mean to say, though, is that apparently, God did make use of the Aztec legend through Divine intervention, intervention which any human was apparently oblivious to (for the most part, at least). And so the flag of Mexico did come out the way it stands today. I cannot say with definite certainty that this was the result of Divine intervention. But this is at least a possibility for us to consider quite seriously, and it is what I myself do believe personally.

All in all then, what we see here is yet another depiction of how different, unrelated things come together to confirm the message that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. We have seen, for instance, how astronomy, biology, and the calendar come together to testify about the Annunciation and conception of Jesus generally, and about how all these things tend to confirm the Greek Orthodox details of the Annunciation specifically. And we have seen (in the Appendix) how both astronomy and history confirm Daniel's interpretation of the legendary "handwriting on the wall".

²⁰⁶ <https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/mexico/articles/a-guide-to-mexico-citys-15-most-important-statues-and-monuments/>

²⁰⁷ <https://www.foxnews.com/world/mexicos-supreme-court-declares-anti-abortion-laws-unconstitutional>

We have also seen how astronomy from 2,000 years ago comes together with the eventual placements of the Templo Mayor and the Roman Catholic cathedral of Mexico City to fulfill Scripture from Revelation; and now we see how the revealing of the tilma in 1531 A.D. comes together with the astronomy of 2 B.C., as seen from Mexico City, to confirm not only the birth of Jesus, but also the very first Messianic prophecy as well, which is found in Genesis.

If anyone wants to imagine that this was all just a plot by someone to come up with a set of circumstances like this to support a supposedly made-up tale about a guy named Jesus ... well, be my guest. Go right ahead and do so. But I surely will not join you in such folly. For I find it simply impossible to imagine how someone could possibly have come up with a plot to do something as complicated as this, one that would have to be stretched out over so much time and over such vast distances.

Furthermore, I think that all of this should be kept in mind in considering whether Mary should be considered an implied exception to the verse which declares that all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,²⁰⁸ a possibility which, as we shall soon consider, must also be considered in light of the possibility that even just biologically speaking, she may have been materially different from us, and so her sinless state might not even really be an exception to Scripture after all.

G. The Equipment Issue Details

But alas! Now for the tricky part, which I mentioned at the very beginning of this book.

The version of Starry Night which shows this imagery is not the most recent version of Starry Night. The version of Starry Night which I originally used for this is Starry Night Pro 6, version 6.3.9 pcEM. The most recent version is Starry Night Pro Plus 8, version 8.1.1.2078 leEM. And according to this most recent version of Starry Night, the timing of the separation of Jupiter and Venus is off by about 2 hours and 45 minutes from the Pro 6 version, which I used originally. This most recent version (Pro Plus 8) shows the separation of the two planets as having occurred at around 19:00 UTC instead of at 21:46 (more specifically, at 21:46:53) UTC. Furthermore, although the cathedral does lie between the paths of the two planets on either version, it does not lie close to the centerline thereof if one uses the planetary coordinates and timings from the latest version of Starry Night.

I noticed this as I was reviewing my original writings for this book.²⁰⁹ And when I saw it, I was crushed. My “smoking-gun evidence” of a divine message from God had been compromised. Or so I thought.

For as I looked into this further, I realized that this is not the only thing to consider. For as I learned from my further research into this topic, I learned that there is a window of time from about

²⁰⁸ Rom. 3:23; <https://biblehub.com/kjv/romans/3.htm>

²⁰⁹ Specifically, it was while I was using Pro Plus 7, version 7.4.1.809 leEM, that I originally noticed the difference. The most recent version of Starry Night (Pro Plus 8) is essentially the same as the Pro Plus 7 version.

500 B.C. to 500 A.D. when the exact positions of the planets are based on estimates which may or may not prove to be reliable. Furthermore, the adjustment which one must make to the computer program to account for this uncertainty could be in 500 B.C. just as much as it could be in 2 B.C., or even in 500 A.D., for that matter. So in other words, some guess work is involved here with either version, and so the latest version of Starry Night is not necessarily the more accurate one.

Now, although this is an extremely important issue for the point about a connection between the Star of Bethlehem and the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe, it is nonetheless, quite obviously, somewhat off-topic from the main subject of this book as a whole. So here again I shall deal in-depth with an issue of importance such as this, but only in the Appendix; therein find THE COMPUTER DISCREPENCY AND OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE.

V. A Real Eye-Opener

If you are still unprepared to receive those things which I have shared with you, please allow me now to show you one more thing. For it reveals that there is indeed more to this story than meets the eye ... literally. It is a photograph of the tilma from prior to the year 1926.²¹⁰ We know that it is prior to 1926 (or at least, prior to 1929, in any event) because that is when some caretakers of the tilma decided to deal with the fact that, when the tilma was first put on display, pilgrims apparently had a habit of kissing the image, and so it became slightly marred in the process. The means by which the caretakers tried to correct this, however, made the image appear more distorted than it had been before they tried to correct it.

Somehow, the touched-up image doesn't even look real. The area around the left side of her upper lip looks swollen, as if she were bruised. And the overall expression just doesn't seem lifelike. On the whole, if anything, the modern image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, just by itself, would tend to make me think that the image on the tilma is fake.

By contrast, a photograph of Mary from sometime before 1926---which shows essentially how the face of Mary looked to Juan Diego---shows her face differently, and she looks much more lifelike:

²¹⁰ <https://rlgeorge.studio/gallery/guadalupe-print/> (Note: Scroll down to the middle of the page to see the pertinent section discussed herein.)



Image of Mary (Our Lady of Guadalupe) from the tilma of Juan Diego prior to 1926
(public domain)

In fact, as I look at this image, I can't help but think how much it seems as though I am looking at an actual photograph of Mary as seen through a veil of linen, perhaps, and I see how someone could thus find it much easier to consider the possibility that the image on the tilma is of divine origin. Furthermore, when one adjusts the image of the photograph from before 1926 on a laptop computer screen (as is shown above) by moving the top of the screen down and backwards at an angle and then back up again, it suddenly appears to become even more lifelike, and more three-dimensional. The realism can also be enhanced by lightening or dimming the image on your computer (depending on your settings).

Now, aside from the fact that the image of her face here is much more lifelike, it shows us something which we ought to consider very seriously before we dismiss the image on the tilma as being something made by human hands. Specifically, do you see the glint on the left side of her left eye (the right side of the eye on the right, as seen from our perspective)? Well, look at her cheek and watch what happens if you again shift the top of the computer screen down or up.

Do you see the tear coming down on her left cheekbone? And do you see the ones to the left and right of it, which come further down? And likewise, over on her right eye, do you see the tear there coming down from the glint in the left corner of her right eye, apparently along the same path as a tear before it, one which now rests near the bottom of her right nostril? So not only does the image on the actual tilma itself seem to shift as you view it from different angles, but even this photographic/computer image of it does so likewise.

Notice in particular that even though the image is two-dimensional, the tears flow the way gravity would have them flow in the ordinary course of following the three-dimensional contours of the cheekbone and the surface of the cheek on a live person. This is especially apparent in the three tear tracks flowing from her left eye. None of them simply appear to flow straight down on the flat, two-dimensional surface of the tilma; the tear which is on the right of this threesome (the left, from our perspective) is of particular interest, because it is consistent with what one would expect to see if Mary had been facing forward as it started to flow, and then changed its course when she seemingly moved her head to the right at just the last second.

Of course, this imagery could have been deliberately made part of the tilma if the image were made by human hands. But is that what we are supposed to conclude? Consider: If an artist had put this imagery into the tilma, would not the artist have been quick to point out that such imagery is there, in order to impress its viewers? And doesn't the fact that we are only just discovering this now strongly suggest that no one knew beforehand that these images of tear tracks are there, and that therefore it is not likely that any human artist placed them there? Here again we see yet another example of how it is that that which is *not* said shows us that what we behold is genuinely from God, and was not simply made up by man.

As I look at this image, I can't help but think that the phenomenon of these tear tracks being present there is somehow a combination of the pigments which make up the image of her face along with certain possible flaws in the surface of the cactus tilma. As we saw earlier, this is just exactly what Dr. Callahan said was the likely explanation for some of the other features of her image. Now, on that basis, are we supposed to conclude that this would mean that the image was not miraculously produced?

If I may answer my own question, I would say that that would hardly be so. For if the image had not been miraculously produced, it would either have to be the case that the use of the pigments and the cactus flaws were deliberately used together by man to create this imagery, or it would have to be a coincidence.

As to the possible deliberate creation of this by a human artist, I have just covered that point, and I have previously mentioned Dr. Callahan's extensive discussion of that same point. So then, is this imagery a product of mere coincidence? Well, if this is mere coincidence, it would probably have to be one of the grandest coincidences since the beginning of the human race.

In light of that, do you still wish to maintain the position that this image was not miraculously produced? If so, be my guest. Have at it. But here again, I will not join you in such folly.

So then, getting back now to the question of whether the imagery of Starry Night does show an accurate representation of the events in the heavens pertaining to the conception and/or birth of Jesus, let me say that with the aforementioned admonitions of Moses and the Apostle Peter in mind, and likewise with the usual and customary caution of scientific inquiry in mind, here's where I stand with respect to whether the sets of imagery from Starry Night pertaining to the conception and birth of Jesus are accurate or not: Since I lack the expertise in computer technology to establish with certainty on my own that the program which I used is accurate enough to exclude all other reasonable possibilities, then all things being held equal, it ordinarily would be the case that I would have to refrain from saying that the accuracy of the Starry Night Pro 6 version is an established fact.

On the other hand, however, in light of all else that we have looked at, I would say that this other evidence constitutes compelling evidence that the Pro 6 version, which shows the many things which I have illustrated here, is indeed accurate. For in order to conclude otherwise, I would not only have to deem every single bit of this evidence to constitute nothing more than a coincidence, but also, I would have to dismiss the fact that these bits of evidence, which consist of so many unrelated things---including various different aspects of astronomy, geography, photography, and computer imagery---have likewise all come together coincidentally at the same time and are now interwoven with each other to create one consistent account, one in which various unrelated aspects confirm the same essential things: the lordship of Jesus Christ and the role of His mother in ushering in His salvation ... which, I wish to emphasize (for the sake of clarity), is indeed His salvation, and no one else's.

Resolving this puzzle this way is certainly not inappropriate. For this is not unlike a situation which a detective might face when, for instance, it is not clear which way the scientific evidence just by itself points to in solving a crime, but in which all other considerations indicate that it would have to be a coincidence of a most extraordinary nature if the conclusions which the non- scientific aspects were pointing to were not true.

Consequently, if you still disagree with my conclusions concerning this event as a whole I must ask, "Why fight it?" The message from God contained within all the facts put together (even if we do not include the amazing imagery from Starry Night) is liberating, if you have an open heart for such good news. For the image of the tear tracks on the tilma just by itself testifies in steadfast manner to the truth of the matter. And this means that you don't have to wonder any longer as to whether the story about there being a God who loves you so much that He would even send His own Son to die for you, to redeem you from your sins, and to bring you to Heaven is a story which is

perhaps simply a myth, or simply a fairy tale, a children's story. Instead, you can now know that what the Bible says is the literal truth about the nature of life, the nature of humanity, the existence and nature of God, of His love and His forgiveness, and of all that is within the entire cosmos.

Mary gave the whole world a gift when she said yes to the angel about becoming the mother of Jesus. And now, in the tracks of her tears in the image on the tilma, she gives us yet another gift: the liberating gift of our being able to know with assurance that the Gospel message about her Son is real.

Receive this gift. Receive it with gladness.

VI. Mariology

At this point, it would be appropriate to consider a pertinent portion of the background for such a study: specifically, the belief system known as Mariology, which is the collection of thoughts and beliefs concerning Mary, the mother of Jesus, principally among Roman Catholics, though also, to a certain extent, among some non-Catholic Christian denominations.²¹¹ As we get started, allow me to say that with respect to my own beliefs, I do not consider myself to be Protestant *or* Catholic, but rather, with respect to the distinction between the two, a passage of Scripture comes to mind:

[10](#) Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no schisms among you; but that you be perfect in the same mind, and in the same judgment. [11](#) For it hath been signified unto me, my brethren, of you, by them that are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. [12](#) Now this I say, that every one of you saith: I indeed am of Paul; and I am of Apollo; and I am of Cephas; and I of Christ. [13](#) Is Christ divided? Was Paul then crucified for you? or were you baptized in the name of Paul? [14](#) I give God thanks, that I baptized none of you but Crispus and Caius; [15](#) Lest any should say that you were baptized in my name. [16](#) And I baptized also the household of Stephanus; besides, I know not whether I baptized any other. [17](#) For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not in wisdom of speech, lest the cross of Christ should be made void. (I Cor. 1:10-17; DRB)²¹²

With that in mind, I consider myself to be interdenominational, and not just with respect to distinctions between Catholicism and Protestantism generally, but also with respect to distinctions between various Protestant denominations overall. Now, although Christians will, of course, choose between whether they will accept Protestant teachings or Roman Catholic teachings, I do not believe that I (or anyone else) am at liberty to choose between actually *being* either Protestant *or* Catholic, for I think that the above verse speaks against that practice, provided that one can at least acknowledge a particular denomination as being a truly Christian denomination. Rather, I believe that we are obligated by God to follow the Holy Spirit in all things, such

²¹¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Mariology.html>

²¹² https://biblehub.com/drb/1_corinthians/1.htm

that when we conclude that Scripture, logic, and experience all point together toward one conclusion, we must recognize that we dare not draw any other conclusion in the absence of some specific, concrete reason for doing so.

This is not to say that we can each have our own “truth”, or our own personal reality. Such a concept runs contrary to the idea that there is such a thing as absolute truth. But rather, it is to say that since each and every one of us is accountable before God for both knowing and accepting His truth, then if we then reject His truth, we will be accountable before Him for having rejected it; and likewise, each and every one of us is accountable before God for rejecting doctrine which is contrary to sound doctrine, for if we do not reject unsound doctrine, we will be accountable before God for not having done so.

So I consider myself to be both Catholic and Protestant, though Rome itself certainly would not agree that such a thing is possible (in the full sense, at least). And similarly, I myself do not consider my belief system to be an accurate reflection of Roman Catholicism in all respects, for that matter. But aside from the fact that, as an infant, I received a Roman Catholic baptism (which Rome will say makes one a Catholic right there), it is also the case that I do believe, as Rome itself teaches, that the Roman Catholic Church is the one institution founded by Jesus Himself to preach the Gospel to the world. (Matt. 16:13-19)²¹³ And so I do embrace the Roman Catholic Church as such.

That much being said, I must also emphasize not only what I said earlier about not having found anything which means that the Roman Catholic Church is the *only* Christian body which has been endowed (or even can be endowed) with authority in Christ; for I must also emphasize that these verses which we just looked at indicate that authority in Christ is found wherever there is an anointing from God to preach the Gospel.

Accordingly, when it comes to considering anything which Rome does formally teach, although I may not agree with it all (for I recognize that I don’t even have the right to accept doctrine which is contrary to sound doctrine, no matter who preaches it),²¹⁴ it is also the case nonetheless that when I consider something which Rome said, I believe that I myself and all other Christians (Protestants included) are under a spiritual obligation before God to consider it very seriously simply because it was Rome that said it, for Jesus established a position for Rome among Christians which no other denomination has. So I will never consider the Roman Catholic Church to be the enemy (as some Protestants do) at this time, even though Roman Catholicism eventually might wind up being seized and used by the enemy at the time of the end.

Consequently, I shall always endeavor to make my disagreements with Rome a matter of constructive criticism: designed to be helpful, not hurtful. In fact, I look upon my rejection of those Roman Catholic teachings which I deem to be contrary to sound doctrine to be helpful to Rome, not hurtful, for my rejection of unsound doctrine helps keep unsound doctrine from being perpetrated,

²¹³ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/matthew/16.htm>

²¹⁴ For that matter, I disagree with a number of teachings of Rome which Protestants do not generally accept.

as would likewise be the case with anyone else who might reject such teachings (hopefully, in a spirit of humility and grace).

That being said, I must also note that sadly, all throughout its 2,000 year history, the Roman Catholic Church has been under relentless attack by Satan, and that it has wound up taking on certain teachings which can only be characterized as being doctrines of devils, which the Apostle Paul warned us to be wary of.²¹⁵ And of course no one is at liberty (in Christ, or otherwise) to embrace doctrines which are contrary to sound doctrine. And so I take the position that it would not be permissible to embrace some of the things which Rome teaches, and that I would not be a good and true son of the Roman Catholic Church if I were to embrace any of those teachings of Rome which I find myself forced to conclude are contrary to sound doctrine. For if I were to embrace unsound doctrine, I would thereby encourage and foster such error within the Roman Catholic Church. One could hardly be a good and true son of the Roman Catholic Church by engaging in such a practice.

Accordingly, I will consider no teaching from any source, Protestant or Catholic, unless, at the very least, I can see that it is not incompatible with Scripture (the King James Version specifically, if there is any doubt), and unless I can also discern that the Spirit gives witness to the truth thereof. And in fact, the only teachings which I place firm reliance on are those which the Scriptures themselves make plainly clear. That is not to say that I do not have my own thoughts from time to time about various matters, matters as to which I might not be able discern whether such thoughts are contrary to sound doctrine or not. But I place no reliance on such thoughts of mine unless they meet the above test for reliability.

Now, I know that Rome and many of my fellow Catholics may cringe at what I say here, and that many of my fellow Protestants (I feel that I can speak from both sides of this issue) will likewise cringe as well. Be that as it may, I simply ask the reader to consider the following sections with an open heart and an open mind, and to try to discern where the Spirit might lead you in your heart and thoughts.

That being said, allow me to note for those who are unfamiliar with the overall scope of Christianity that there are many different aspects of Roman Catholicism which Protestants disagree with besides Mariology generally, and likewise, in addition to these specific points of Mariology which I discuss herein. Now, I do focus here on just a few of the aspects of Mariology (rather than all of them) not because those other aspects of Mariology are unimportant, or because those other issues besides the ones which pertain to Mariology might somehow be unimportant, either, but rather because I believe that having covered the particular aspects which I shall cover here, we shall have covered the most important points. (This will at least be true with respect to Mariology, an important topic with respect to Our Lady of Guadalupe, and how her appearance intersects with our study of the Star of Bethlehem.)

²¹⁵ https://biblehub.com/drb/1_timothy/4.htm

So in any event, the same means by which we analyze these points here will probably also suffice to help us analyze those other points as well. I am not absolutely certain about that, I am afraid to say, but I am at least reasonably confident that this is so.

One other thing I will note here: When I address Catholics concerning certain passages of Scripture regarding Protestant teachings, I shall be mindful of the fact that Catholics, perhaps more than most others, may be concerned with whether they are reading a reliable translation of the Bible. So for the most part, when addressing Catholics concerning possible errors which might be made by Catholics, I shall usually quote passages from the traditional Roman Catholic Bible, the Douay-Rheims Bible (DRB), though I do use other translations when need be for the sake of clarity; for the Douay-Rheims Bible and the King James Version (KJV) were each translated in the 1600s, and the English language was a bit different then, making each of them sometimes difficult to read and understand today.

In reciprocal fashion, I also focus on mainly using one of the Protestant translations of the Bible to discuss Roman Catholic teachings with my fellow Protestants. In any case, whenever I do use a translation other than the one which the reader would prefer, let me note here that the website which I use for linked Bible verses does have a tab up at the top for one to select from various different translations, such as the Douay-Rheims Bible (DRB), the King James Version (KJV), the New American Standard Bible (NAS, also designated as the NASB), etc.

A. Is Mariology A Form Of Idolatry?

The Roman Catholic view of Mary is one which honors her and exalts her so much that Protestants commonly believe that it amounts to idolatry. In terms of the actual substance of this view (*i.e.*, in terms of the actual, formal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church), there may or may not be some formally-adopted teachings of the Roman Catholic Church which fall squarely into this category. Unfortunately, I am not personally familiar with all of Rome's official teachings on the subject, so I can only say that if there is a formally-adopted teaching by Rome which amounts to an actual idolatrous view of Mary, I am not aware of what it is.

In so saying, allow me to emphasize here that I am talking strictly about any formally-adopted doctrines about Mary which I might not personally know about. As I shall discuss later herein, however, some of the other thoughts among various members of the Roman Catholic Church which I do know of---certain thoughts and beliefs which are not in fact officially approved by Rome---are to be considered heretical by any Christian.

Here again I would also emphasize what I said previously: The Vatican never makes personal spiritual experiences a matter of doctrinal faith. And so, the absolute most that Rome will ever say about such things is that at least a few of those accounts about the appearances of Mary (such as the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe), or certain other alleged personal spiritual revelations about her or other persons, are worthy of belief; furthermore, one is never required by Rome to believe that a personal revelation (such as the appearance of Mary as Our Lady of Guadalupe) is a true, factual account in order for one to be a good and faithful, practicing Roman

Catholic, even if every Pope has believed the account to be true on a personal level.

That being said, I must also note that unfortunately, even most Roman Catholics are unaware that they are not required to believe in any of the private revelations which are widely accepted by Roman Catholics personally; and so many believe that if Rome does allow them to believe in such things as the apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe that they, as faithful Roman Catholics, are then supposed to believe in that as a matter of faithful obligation. Likewise unfortunate is the fact that many Roman Catholics do in fact personally hold various beliefs about Mary which are truly idolatrous, though Rome itself may have no corresponding doctrinal teaching which would support their idolatry. For instance, some Roman Catholics deem Mary to be a Co-redemptrix with Jesus: *i.e.*, equally someone, in addition to Jesus, to whom we can turn for redemption. However, on the face of things (at least), this flat- out contradicts Scripture, as even the traditional Roman Catholic translation of the Bible---the Douay-Rheims Bible (DRB)---attests to itself:

[5](#) For there is one God, and one mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus: (I Tim. 2:5; DRB)²¹⁶

And again,

[17](#) For if by one man's offence death reigned through one [Adam]; much more they who receive abundance of grace, and of the gift, and of justice, shall reign in life through one, Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:17; DRB)²¹⁷

With that in mind, I am relieved to note that Rome itself has never adopted the view that Mary is a Co-redemptrix. And Rome's most recent statement on point reaffirms this view.²¹⁸ For Mary certainly cannot save us in the ordinary sense (though one might think of anyone---whether here on Earth, or in heaven---who does lead us to Christ as having saved us in an indirect sense, by leading us to that saving knowledge of Him). And she did lead many to her Son, Jesus, as we saw in Mexico, for instance, when the news of her appearance, and the gift of the roses and her image on the tilma, was proclaimed throughout Mexico.

So although we cannot call upon her to save us in the usual sense, yet a soul that is without Christ can call upon anyone who is a believer (Mary, or anyone else) to save him or her in the sense that the unbeliever can look to the believer for help in being brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. Anything beyond that---*i.e.*, any practice which looks to Mary herself as being the one (instead of Jesus) who is actually doing the saving itself---does constitute spiritual fornication.

²¹⁶ https://biblehub.com/drb/1_timothy/2.htm

²¹⁷ <https://biblehub.com/drb/romans/5.htm>

²¹⁸ <https://www.ncronline.org/vatican/mary-mother-jesus-and-all-believers-not-co-redeemer-vatican-says>

1. Praying Before Statues

Protestants are also repulsed by the fact that Roman Catholics commonly kneel before statues of Jesus or Mary, or before other saints, in apparent contradiction of the Ten Commandments (even as stated in the Douay-Rheims translation):

[3](#) Thou shalt not have strange gods before me.

[4](#) Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing, nor the likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or in the earth beneath, nor of those things that are in the waters under the earth. [5](#) Thou shalt not adore them, nor serve them: (Exod. 20:3-5a; DRB)²¹⁹

The traditional Protestant version words this just slightly differently (though with no material difference between the two, as far as I can tell):

[3](#) Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

[4](#) Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of *any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth: [5](#) Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: (Exod. 20: 3- 5a; KJV)²²⁰

Interestingly enough, I recall from my Roman Catholic elementary school education that the provision of the Commandment which says not to adore or bow down to statues was never mentioned. It's not that the nuns taught us that that provision isn't there; it's just that they never mentioned it, though they did discuss the topic of praying before a statue generally. In their defense, though, I might add that the Ten Commandments as a whole contain more statements than just the bare bones of the Ten Commandments themselves, and those details of all the various different Commandments are not always covered in detail in Protestant schools or Sunday schools, either, for that matter.

Furthermore, the nuns were quick to point out that although Rome allows one to kneel and pray before a statue, Rome also teaches, significantly, that it is not the statue itself that one is supposed to be praying to, but rather that one is supposed to be praying to the person whom the statue represents, and that the statue is simply there to help one focus one's thoughts on that person for the moment. This is materially different from the practices of pagans around the world in any era, in which people have believed that the statue is literally a part of the god who is represented by the statue, and who therefore have wound up worshiping and praying to the statue itself.

To that, I would add three things: First, even though Rome does not approve of praying to the

²¹⁹ <https://biblehub.com/drb/exodus/20.htm>

²²⁰ <https://biblehub.com/kjv/exodus/20.htm>

statues themselves, it is unfortunately the case that many Roman Catholics do in fact fall into this idolatrous practice nonetheless. Second, the idea commonly accepted among Protestants that there is nothing wrong when praying before a painting of Jesus (either while kneeling, or while sitting, or when standing upright) is very little different in substance from a Catholic praying before a statue of Jesus, provided that the Catholic does in fact follow Rome's teaching that it is never acceptable to pray to the statue itself.

Third, I myself do not kneel before statues when I pray, even when I am in a Catholic church. Granted, there may be a statue somewhere up in front of me when I pray (in a Catholic church, there would almost have to be one), but praying when a statue may be somewhere up in front of me---though considerably removed from me---is not the same thing as making a deliberate point of going up to a statue and praying there.

Now personally, I do in fact accept the validity of the idea, taught to me by the nuns, that as long as you are not praying to the statue itself, even if you deliberately pray right in front of it, you are not really violating the Commandment. I know many will disagree with me about that. Be that as it may, however, I still do not feel comfortable about kneeling before a statue anyway because not only can doing so turn my thoughts toward the statue itself, but also because if others see me do so, it may lead an unwary person to fall into the sin of idolatry, as I mentioned above. In that context, consider, by analogy, Chapter 8 of 1 Corinthians:
https://biblehub.com/nasb_/1_corinthians/8.htm.

Furthermore, there is this to consider as well: A cross, which many Protestants pray before and kneel before, is a likeness which we make of a thing that is in the earth. It therefore falls into the category of things which Deuteronomy 20:4 mentions.²²¹ To that one might say, "Yes, but Protestants don't pray to the cross or worship it." True enough; but by the same token, it is also the case that Roman Catholics, when they are properly following the teachings of Rome, are not praying to a statue or worshiping it, either.

There is one more thing to consider about this topic before we move on. In the Book of Revelation (known as the Apocalypse in the Roman Catholic Bibles), at one point we find the Apostle John, shortly after he has seen a multitude of revelations and wondrous signs, as he stands before an angel who has been speaking to him. And in that context we find the following verse:

10 Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brothers *and sisters* who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Rev. 19:10; NASB)²²²

So here we have the Apostle John himself, an apostle's apostle, so to speak, the only apostle who stayed with Jesus through thick and thin---all the way to the very end, there at the foot

²²¹ <https://biblehub.com/kjv/exodus/20.htm>

²²² https://biblehub.com/nasb_/revelation/19.htm

of His cross---falling down at the feet of an angel. (What a sight that angel must have been!) And as John himself said, he did this in order to worship the angel, something which is forbidden by Roman Catholic (and Protestant) teaching, and by the Law of Moses, as well. What is more, this event even took place while John was in heaven itself, which would have to be the very last place in the entire universe where one would expect to find someone---especially a spiritual giant, such as the Apostle John--falling into such error.

So let us not be surprised, therefore, when we find our Roman Catholic brothers and sisters here on Earth kneeling before statues out of reverence and respect for the one whom the statue represents, so long as they are mindful not to worship the statue in the way in which John sought to worship the angel. And similarly, let this verse also serve as a reminder to Roman Catholics to abide by the teachings of Rome, in that it is always improper to worship anyone other than God in any context, and that it is always improper to pray to the statue itself.

2. Praying To Those Who Have Passed On Before

Protestants also broadly reject the validity of the idea of praying to saints, essentially basing this rejection on certain verses in the Bible:

9 “When you enter the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. 10 There shall not be found among you *anyone* who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, a soothsayer, one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, 11 or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who consults the dead. 12 For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God is going to drive them out before you. (Deut. 18: 9-12; KJV)²²³

In light of these verses, Protestants generally believe that praying to the saints constitutes a violation of these verses (specifically, verse 11). With respect to that, three things must be considered.

First of all, these verses essentially address the practice of consulting with psychics or holding a séance; these verses do not address the practice of simply letting your thoughts be known to those who have passed on in the Lord before you. Second, from a proper Biblical perspective, those who come to a saving knowledge of Jesus while they are still here on Earth do thereby pass from death unto life in Christ Jesus while they are still here on Earth:

14 We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. (I John 3:14a; DRB)²²⁴

²²³ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/deuteronomy/18.htm>

²²⁴ https://biblehub.com/drb/1_john/3.htm

And also,

[4](#) But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, [5](#) even when we were dead in our wrongdoings, made us alive together with Christ (Eph. 2:4-5a; NASB)²²⁵

And so thus, the Apostle John and the Apostle Paul testify to our passing from death unto life while we are still here on Earth; and furthermore, the Apostle Paul refers to those who have passed on before us in Christ not as being dead, but rather as being asleep (until the Resurrection):

[30](#) For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number are asleep. (I Cor. 11: 30; NASB)²²⁶

So they are not dead, but rather, they are still alive in Christ, even now.

Third, although we commonly use the word “prayer” to refer to both those times when someone addresses one’s thoughts to the Lord and also to those times when one wishes to express certain thoughts to departed saints, those are two different types of things altogether (at least, if someone who is expressing their thoughts to a saint is properly refraining from idolizing the object of their prayers). For first of all, it is to God alone that we are to express thoughts of worship and praise, and it is His will alone that decides what will happen here on Earth. So ultimately, it is He and He alone who decides whether the requests we make in prayer will be answered the way we want them to be answered or not, and not any saint.

Furthermore, praying to saints in accordance with Roman Catholic teaching is not done for the sake of asking the saints themselves to do something for you, but rather it is done for the sake of asking the saints to join with you in intercessory prayer, beseeching the Lord Himself to hear and grant your prayer request.^{227, 228} Unfortunately, it is nonetheless the case that Roman Catholics do in fact quite commonly ask the saints themselves to grant their prayer requests directly ... very commonly, unfortunately, and they do generally believe that when their prayer is answered, it is the saint who answered it. Even this error, however, does not negate the more academic points about praying to saints in a manner which simply asks them to pray intercessory prayers on our behalf so that the Lord Himself will grant our requests.

One might further object to praying to saints on the grounds that all requests for help are to be directed only to the One who is capable of granting the requests. Although that has a certain logic to it, if that really is the case, then how do we explain the fact that we ask fellow believers here

²²⁵ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/ephesians/2.htm>

²²⁶ https://biblehub.com/nasb/1_corinthians/11.htm#fn

²²⁷ <https://www.ourcatholicprayers.com/prayers-to-saints.html>

²²⁸ <https://www.coraevans.com/blog/article/the-canonization-process>

on Earth to join with us in prayer? Bear in mind, after all, that in proper Roman Catholic practice, if one is praying to a saint, then that is the way one's prayer is supposed to be structured, anyway: *i.e.*, as a request for help through intercessory prayer, rather than for help directly.

So within that context, the only real difference between asking a fellow believer here on Earth to join with us in prayer as opposed to asking a believer in Heaven who has passed on before us to join with us in prayer is that on the one hand, we are asking someone who is alive in Christ and who *is still* here on Earth to join with us in prayer, whereas on the other hand we are asking someone who is alive in Christ but who *is not still* here on Earth to join with us in prayer.

With that in mind, consider the following verse:

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (James 5:16b; KJV)²²⁹

Now, that being the case, if you have the opportunity to have someone who would qualify as a Hero of the Faith²³⁰ intercede for you, don't you think it would be a good idea to ask that person to intercede on your behalf, whether that person is still here on Earth among us, or whether that person is someone who has passed on before?

a. Can Those In Heaven Even Hear Our Prayers?

In the midst of this we face the issue of whether the saints can even hear our prayers. Scripture does not directly address this point, but it does drop a hint about this:

1 Therefore, since we also have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let's rid ourselves of every obstacle and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let's run with endurance the race that is set before us, (Heb. 12:1; NASB)²³¹

Now, since this is the first verse of the chapter immediately following the one I referenced in a footnote a few moments ago (which lists the Apostle Paul's Heroes of the Faith), some have wondered whether the "cloud of witnesses" is limited, on the one hand, to those whom Paul mentioned (with perhaps other Heroes of the Faith of a similar caliber to be included), or is meant instead to include more broadly, on the other hand, the entire hosts of heaven.

Unfortunately, Scripture itself apparently offers only a couple of bits of guidance here. For instance, after having specified the many Heroes of the Faith listed in Chapter 11, Paul also mentions "the prophets" as being among the witnesses (Heb. 11:32),⁷⁰⁷ thereby indicating that

²²⁹ <https://biblehub.com/kjv/james/5.htm>

²³⁰ See Chapter 11 of the Book of Hebrews: <https://biblehub.com/nasb/hebrews/11.htm>

²³¹ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/hebrews/12.htm>

his list of Heroes is not an all-inclusive list, for none of the prophets are specifically mentioned in his list. We can therefore only guess as to who all is included in the cloud of witnesses, but one could rationally infer from that verse that all persons of similar stature in the Faith (and perhaps even the entire host of heaven) are among the witnesses. And if such should be the case, one could further infer from there that they can indeed see us and hear us.

This does, of course, assume that it is we ourselves, and our conduct before heaven, that they are witnesses of, which I think the overall context does imply, for Chapter 11 (immediately preceding this verse) tells much more about the conduct of the Heroes of the Faith than it does about any statements which they may have made. That being said, I cannot completely rule out the possibility, however, that they act not as witnesses who are observing our own conduct, but rather that they act instead as witnesses to testify to us (and to the world) of the truth of God's Kingdom by those statements which they did make and by the message which their personal lives proclaimed by the examples of their deeds to the world. Nonetheless, I think it more likely than not that the sense of Hebrews 12:1 is that the witnesses are witnesses of our practice of our faith.

Moving on, let us be mindful of the fact that Paul referred to the group of witnesses as being a "cloud". One could hardly think that Paul thought of the specific number of persons he listed in Hebrews Chapter 11 as constituting a cloud, and so one might infer from this that the number of witnesses whom Paul refers to is far more numerous. More than that I dare not say, however, for building inferences on top of inferences is a dangerous way to approach the study of any topic, including Scripture (*especially* Scripture), so I'll just have to leave it at that.

b. Why Do We See No Examples Of Praying To Saints In The Scriptures?

Another objection might be based on the fact that we see no examples of praying to saints in the Scriptures. Now, as for the Old Testament, those who passed on in the Faith before the Jesus came and rose from the dead were not alive in Christ, and so they could not go before the Throne of Grace to intercede for anyone. (Eph. 4:8)²³²

As for the New Testament, while the Apostles and Mary and other believers who were truly close to the Lord were still here living among us, and able to pray with us, would there have been any need to go ask anyone other than them (such as a saint in heaven) for intercessory prayer, anyway? And besides, while the New Testament was still being written, not many of them would have gone on before us to begin with.

Furthermore, the members and leaders of the First Century church, having come from the culture of the practices of the Law of Moses, certainly would have had no personal habit or cultural experience with directing any thoughts toward those who had passed on before, for the reasons just stated above. And it no doubt would simply seem too weird to them personally to do so. For by

²³² <https://biblehub.com/nasb/ephesians/4.htm>

their upbringing within their culture, they may have thought of such a thing as being downright repulsive in any event (at least, initially). And given their background and upbringing, I can't say that I would blame them for that.

In any event, the elders may have had the same concerns in mind which the Apostle Paul would later have regarding inadvertently leading someone into sin, as I mentioned earlier. (See I Cor. 8:4-13; https://biblehub.com/nasb /1_corinthians/8.htm .) For after all, in its earliest days, the church consisted only of Jews who had come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and the Gospel wasn't even preached at all to the gentiles for the first seven years of what we now call Christianity.²³³ Thus, during that initial seven-year period, at least, there were no Christians who were gentiles. Instead, there were only Christians who were Jews: those who had been born into Judaism, or who had converted to Judaism.

So it easily could have been the case that if the elders had started praying to anyone who had passed on before them---such as Stephen, the first recorded martyr²³⁴---they not only could have thereby unintentionally led some new believers into idolatry, but they also could have started a scandal within Jerusalem about them supposedly communicating with dead people (rather than with someone who was still alive in Christ), something which devout Jews would reject outright, and with it also, perhaps, the Gospel itself, simply based on a misunderstanding.

In light of all of this, it would in fact be quite odd to find any First Century Christian praying to anyone who had passed on before us. Thus, the absence of any instances of praying to a saint even in the New Testament should be considered in that light, for what it may be worth; and thus also, the absence of any instance of praying to a saint in the New Testament might not necessarily constitute meaningful evidence of a disapproval of that practice by God. But here, of course, we are left with little in the way of specific guidance from Scripture to help us find our way, and so we must proceed very slowly and cautiously in trying to reach any conclusions one way or the other.

With all that in mind, let us sit back, take a deep breath, and consider this: First of all, in light of what Scripture does say and does not say at all about this topic one way or another, it is of course the case in any event that Scripture certainly does not actually require anyone to engage in the practice of praying to the saints. Second, if anyone does pray to a saint---though not as a matter of worship, nor as anything other than a request for intercessory prayer--- then the worst one could say about such a practice, if God will not in fact allow such prayers to be honored, is that the prayer is therefore of no moment, and in that case it would simply do nothing at all.

So if we remain in disagreement about the nature of praying to the saints, then unless one

²³³ Acts 10:1-Acts 11:18;

<https://biblehub.com/nasb /acts/11.htm>

<https://biblehub.com/nasb /acts/10.htm>;

²³⁴ See Acts 6:7 to Acts 7:54;

<https://biblehub.com/nasb /acts/7.htm>

<https://biblehub.com/nasb /acts/6.htm>;

is called to take a lead on discussing this issue, let us spend no more time or effort on the topic than is needed to come to a conclusion, as best as one can, about whether such a thing is proper in God's eyes or not, and then perhaps also spend a few moments sharing our thoughts and the fruits of our research on point to see what we may learn from each other. So let us move on from there without overly worrying about it and without making a mountain out of a mole hill, which could potentially upset true fellowship among fellow members of the Body of Christ.

3. The Many Titles Of Mary

Another of the plainly obvious differences between Protestant and Roman Catholic thought concerning Mary is the way that members of each group refer to Mary. To Protestants, Mary is simply "Mary", or "the mother of Jesus" (or words to that effect). Other than that, among Protestants, she has no specific title.

This will not do for Roman Catholics, however, for among them, Mary has more titles than you can shake a stick at, including (most commonly) "Our Lady", or "the Blessed Mother". As for myself personally, I just call her "mom", and I am sure she and her Son know that I do so with the same degree of affection and respect for her as I had for my own earthly mom when I called her that while she was still alive here on Earth.

With respect to calling her "mom" or "mother", many Protestants may find that to be odd right there. But bear in mind that the Apostle Paul did refer to himself as the spiritual father of those whom he had led to Christ. (I Cor. 4:14-15)²³⁵ (See also, <https://sermons.faithlife.com/sermons/83809-paul-the-spiritual-father.>)

As to Mary, if she had simply had the role of mother of the Messiah thrust upon her unwillingly, then it would be inappropriate for us to consider her as being our spiritual mother in the same sense that the Apostle Paul could consider himself to be the spiritual father of those whom he brought to a saving knowledge of Christ. For in that case, she would have only entered into the physical dimensions of motherhood with respect to Jesus, and not the spiritual dimensions as well. But given the fact that Mary did willingly accept this role for herself, then it would in fact be appropriate for all who are true believers in her Son Jesus (Protestant and Catholic alike) to consider her to be their spiritual mother, which in fact she is, whether they like it or not, and in fact, whether they even know it or not.

Now, if I could cover all of the Roman Catholic titles for Mary in this work, I would do so. But going through all of them would require a separate work unto itself, and so for now I shall simply cover the main ones which may be most helpful for us to consider in coming to a proper understanding of what place Mary should occupy in Christian thought, Protestant or Catholic.

None of this would probably be necessary, however, were it not for three titles in particular

²³⁵ <https://biblehub.com/nasb /1 corinthians/4.htm>

which Roman Catholics have for Mary which Protestants generally have a major problem with: the Mother of God, the Queen of Heaven, and the Immaculate Conception. Let us first consider the title Mother of God.

a. The Mother Of God

Protestants object to this title first of all on the grounds that it is absurd to think of a part of the Creation (*i.e.*, Mary herself) as actually being the mother of the Creator, and that referring to Mary by the title "Mother of God" simply constitutes an example of syncretism from pagan cultures (syncretism itself being a topic which we have considered in detail elsewhere). Now, it is true, of course, that some part of the Creation certainly cannot be the mother of the Creator, but one must not miss the point: specifically, Roman Catholics certainly don't believe that, either. And when they refer to her "divine motherhood", they make clear the fact that the divine portion of that motherhood is the divinity of Jesus, and not some supposed divinity of she herself.²³⁶

All in all, in modern Roman Catholic practice, at least, it is nothing more than sloppy practice, I believe, for Catholics to refer to Mary as the Mother of God (although many years ago, there unfortunately might have actually been some syncretism involved in the development of this title for her). But for today, we must not allow the sloppy, imprecise terminology of the Roman Catholics to be blown out of proportion to the point that it would interfere with our recognizing them (or at least, some of them) as being Christians. Let me also note that it would be more precise for them to refer to Mary as the Mother of the Incarnation (someone who, after all, is God), or perhaps as the Mother of the One who is God, terms which do not suggest that Mary, a part of the Creation, somehow brought the Creator Himself into existence. (Note: see John 1:3.²³⁷)

If any Protestant still has some difficulty accepting this, then let me refer such person to Martin Luther himself, the one who started the Protestant Reformation in the first place. The Reformation began when Fr. Luther (he was an ordained Roman Catholic priest) published his so-called 95 Theses by nailing a copy of the Theses to the door of All Saints church (and possibly a few other churches) in Wittenberg, Germany, and also by mailing a copy to the Archbishop of Mainz.²³⁸ The 95 Theses are 95 statements (for the most part, single-sentence statements) of his concerns about the teachings and practices of Rome. They make for easy reading and they can be found online: <https://www.luther.de/en/95thesen.html>.

What is pertinent here is that in Thesis 75, Fr. Martin Luther himself refers to Mary as "the mother of God". Now, I am sure that he---as much as you and I---did not consider Mary to be part of the Creator rather than simply being part of the Creation instead. Yet, he had no trouble using the term "mother of God" when speaking of her. I suggest we take a lesson from that, and not allow our concern about this term for Mary to be blown out of proportion.

²³⁶ <https://www.motherofallpeoples.com/post/mary-s-divine-motherhood>

²³⁷ <https://biblehub.com/drb/john/1.htm>

²³⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ninety-five_Theses

b. The Queen Of Heaven

As to the title Queen of Heaven, this part can entail even more confusion, unfortunately. For the title “queen” can be thought of in different ways here on Earth. For instance, in some cultures, any woman who is the wife of a king can be thought of as being the queen of the realm, whether the woman has any claim to the throne herself, and whether she would or would not have the right to assert that claim upon the death of the king. In British culture, which of course American culture is principally derived from, the term “queen”, when used just by itself alone, is formally reserved only for a woman who would be the actual, reigning monarch in her own right, although the word “queen” can be used informally for certain other women within the royal family.

For instance, when King George VI died in 1952, his widow, Elizabeth, who had been the “Queen Consort” (and who had been informally referred to simply as “Queen”), did not ascend to the throne of Britain, but instead, from that point on, she was simply known as the “Queen Mother”. For it was her daughter Princess Elizabeth, the eldest child of herself and of her late husband, who then became a queen in the true sense. For at that point, Princess Elizabeth ascended to the British throne, and she became known from that point on, until her recent death, as Queen Elizabeth II.

Now, with respect to Mary, she certainly has no claim to the Throne of Grace. And since she certainly is not the wife of God, it would be inappropriate to refer to her as the Queen of Heaven in a formal sense. One title which would be appropriate for Mary, however, would be the title Queen Mother (for she is the mother of the reigning monarch, Jesus Himself), just as the widow of King George VI had been known as the Queen Mother (the mother of Queen Elizabeth II) following his death. And as it turns out, a queen mother is commonly referred to informally simply as a queen, so in that sense, Mary could be referred to as a queen.

In any event, although we may recognize that the terms “Mother of God” and “Queen of Heaven” are inappropriate for Mary (when speaking in a strict, technical sense), if we also recognize nonetheless that that flaw in terminology for the most part really amounts to nothing more than informal wording (and possibly sloppy wording, at least in some instances) of how we should refer to her, then we can simply take note of the flaw in such wording within our own minds and refrain from using such terms for her ourselves, and just leave it at that. For surely, as long as one keeps in mind what her true status actually is, there is no need to get into empty, endless quibbles about such matters.

To look at an example from Scripture of how the Lord Himself handled technical differences in doctrine, consider first of all how Jesus stumped His critics one day with a question:

[41](#) Now while the Pharisees were gathered together,
Jesus asked them a question: [42](#) “What do you
think about the Christ? Whose son is He?” They said to Him, “*The son of David.*”
[43](#) He said to them, “Then how does David in the Spirit call Him ‘Lord,’ saying,

[44](#) ‘THE LORD SAID TO MY LORD, “SIT AT MY

RIGHT HAND,
UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES UNDER YOUR FEET””?

[45](#) Therefore, if David calls Him ‘Lord,’ how is He his son?” [46](#) No one was able to offer Him a word in answer, nor did anyone dare from that day *on* to ask Him any more questions. (Matt. 22: 41-45; NASB)²³⁹

So here we see Jesus point out that, strictly speaking, the Messiah is not simply King David’s son, but is more than his son.

Yet, on another occasion, the title Son of David (a common term for the Messiah) came into play in another way:

[35](#) Now as Jesus was approaching Jericho, a man who was blind was sitting by the road, begging. [36](#) But when he heard a crowd going by, he *began* inquiring what this was. [37](#) They told him that Jesus of Nazareth was passing by. [38](#) And he called out, saying, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” [39](#) Those who led the way were sternly telling him to be quiet; but he kept crying out all the more, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” [40](#) And Jesus stopped and commanded that he be brought to Him; and when he came near, He asked him, [41](#) “What do you want Me to do for you?” And he said, “Lord, *I want* to regain my sight!” [42](#) And Jesus said to him, “Regain your sight; your faith has made you well.” [43](#) And immediately he regained his sight and *began* following Him, glorifying God; and when all the people saw *it*, they gave praise to God. (Luke 18: 35-43; NASB)²⁴⁰

Now, consider how different that story would have been if instead, after the blind man had called Jesus the Son of David, the Scripture had said,

But Jesus rebuked him and said, “No, I am not simply the Son of David, for in the Psalms King David calls the Messiah ‘Lord’.”

Of course, that is not in fact what the Scripture says (thankfully). And instead we see that Jesus looked only to the man’s heart, and did not split hairs on that occasion over fine details of doctrine, details which would not have gone to the heart of the matter, anyway.

Of course, the Lord, I am sure, must prefer precise, accurate doctrine at all times, and on all matters. But at the same time, He quite obviously does not elevate technical details over the intent of a sincere heart. And so He honored the blind man’s confession of faith that He Himself is the Messiah, and therefore healed the man rather than rebuke him for inaccuracy in technical details. Let us keep this in mind, and go and do likewise.

²³⁹ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/matthew/22.htm>

²⁴⁰ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/luke/18.htm>

c. The Immaculate Conception

This is one of the hardest parts about Mariology for Protestants to digest. And quite understandably so. For as the Scripture says, even per the Douay- Rheims translation itself:

[23](#) For all have sinned, and do need the glory of God. (Rom. 3:23; DRB)²⁴¹

And the King James Version translates this essentially the same way:

[23](#) For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (Rom. 3:23; KJV)²⁴²

Likewise, consider the following verse,

[6](#) All we like sheep have gone astray, every one hath turned aside into his own way: and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isa. 53:6; DRB)²⁴³

And again:

[10](#) As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one:

[11](#) There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God.

[12](#) They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. (Romans 3:10-12; KJV)⁷²⁰

And yet, all that being said, there are a couple of things which I think many Protestants overlook. First, the fact that Mary may have been conceived without sin (*i.e.*, “immaculately”) does not, without more, mean necessarily that she remained without sin throughout her entire life (though Rome does in fact espouse that view). After all, when God created Adam, Adam was without sin ... until he fell, that is. The same holds true for Eve.

So academically, at least, the idea that Mary may have been conceived immaculately---and presumably remained sin-free until the birth of Jesus, at least---is something which itself does not contradict Scripture, for she still could have sinned sometime afterwards. Granted, if such should be the case, it would be very odd for God to have developed things that way, and I personally do not think that this is in fact the way things actually worked out in the end. (I believe she was immaculately conceived and remained sin-free continually thereafter.) I mention this all here only to apprise the reader that there is an academic point about this to consider which one should take

²⁴¹ <https://biblehub.com/drb/romans/3.htm>

²⁴² <https://biblehub.com/kjv/romans/3.htm>

²⁴³ <https://biblehub.com/drb/isaiah/53.htm>

into account somehow, even if only by giving it a summary disposition, such as I do here.

Second, we must consider the possibility that Mary is an unspecified exception to these verses. Now, here we tread into dangerous territory, and we stand on very thin ice. For if we are at liberty to believe that there is one example of a place where our beliefs can contradict Scripture (at least, on the face of things, if not necessarily in the actual substance of the matter), then how many other places are there where we can adopt a belief that would constitute an exception to what Scripture says on the face of things? And perhaps more importantly, by what means would we even know when doing so may be permissible or not?

Good questions, both of those. Yet, to the surprise of many Protestants, many Protestants do in fact engage in the same practice, though on an entirely different topic. For although most Protestants believe that certain gifts of the Spirit, such as making prophetic utterances, passed from among us near the completion of the canon of Scripture (*i.e.* near the end of the First Century A.D.), they have certain verses to deal with:

[20](#) Despise not prophesyings. (I Thess. 5:20; KJV)²⁴⁴

And also,

[39](#) Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. (I Cor. 14:39; KJV)²⁴⁵

Among those who forbid anyone from attempting to exercise the gifts of a prophetic utterance, then, such persons do in fact contradict Scripture, at least on the face of things, and they explain their stance on the grounds that those verses simply don't apply today. Granted, Scripture does say that tongues shall cease, but Scripture does not say *when* tongues will cease, and the overall context of the passage in which that verse is found implies that this will be near the end of this age, when all things come to completion:

[8](#) Charity never faileth: but whether *there be* prophecies, they shall fail; whether *there be* tongues, they shall cease; whether *there be* knowledge, it shall vanish away. [9](#) For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. [10](#) But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. (I Cor. 13:8-10; KJV)²⁴⁶

Such persons also make the argument that since the verse says that all this shall take place when that which is perfect is come, and since the Bible is perfect, that this supports the idea that tongues and prophecy did cease when the Bible was completed, near the end of the First Century, and that thus there is today an implied exception to the verses which command us not to despise prophesying or to prohibit speaking in tongues.

²⁴⁴ https://biblehub.com/kjv/1_thessalonians/5.htm

²⁴⁵ https://biblehub.com/kjv/1_corinthians/14.htm

²⁴⁶ https://biblehub.com/kjv/1_corinthians/13.htm

True, the Bible is perfect, but the above verses also imply that at the time when prophecy and tongues do pass away, knowledge shall also pass away; and yet, as the Apostle Paul notes in those very same verses, it is still the case that knowledge has not yet passed away, for he points out that we still do know the things of God only in part. And such remains the case today, well after the canon of Scripture has been completed.

As we consider this debate between and among ourselves, I respectfully suggest that we consider as well the fact that the Bible talks about a number of perfect things: heaven, for instance, the New Jerusalem as well, and our resurrected bodies, to give some examples. And with that in mind I conclude that since we still do know only in part and prophesy in part, that the Bible is not that one, specific perfect thing which Paul was referring to when he said that these gifts shall cease “when that which is perfect is come”.

So those among us who hold that we are now permitted to despise prophesying and to forbid to speak in tongues do need to realize that they themselves must account for a doctrinal position in which they hold that their teachings are an implied exception to what Scripture says on the face of things. Significantly, this is not different in substance (in terms of Scriptural interpretation, that is) from what Catholics embrace concerning their belief that Mary was conceived without sin and remained that way throughout her whole life.

It is also the case that there is an easily-identifiable implied exception to what Scripture says on another topic in the Bible. In the Book of Hebrews the Apostle Paul tells us not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. (Heb. 10:25)²⁴⁷ The thing is, the word which he uses to say “forsake” (*egkataleipo/enkataleipontes*) has a meaning which is so broad that on the face of things, this verse would even include things such as leaving a church building during services because the church had caught fire.²⁴⁸ Of course, no one would seriously suggest that the Apostle Paul actually had the idea in mind of forbidding leaving a church building that was on fire, so I think we can safely say that this is one example of where we can find an implied exception to what we find in Scripture.

Moving on, yet another passage of Scripture which those who claim that Mary was not conceived without sin will look to in order to support their claim can be found in the passage which relates what happened when Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth, who at the time was then pregnant (as the angel had told Mary at the Annunciation) with the person we know today as John the Baptist, the person who would go before Jesus to tell all of Israel to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. Elizabeth first greets Mary with a joyous salutation. This passage then reads as follows:

[46](#) And Mary said: My soul doth magnify the Lord.

[47](#) And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. (Luke 1:46-47; DRB)²⁴⁹

²⁴⁷ <https://biblehub.com/kjv/hebrews/10.htm>

²⁴⁸ <https://biblehub.com/lexicon/hebrews/10-25.htm>

²⁴⁹ <https://biblehub.com/drb/luke/1.htm>

The point which those who question Mary's sinless status address is this: If Mary refers to God as her savior, how is it that she was sinless? For only those who have sinned, supposedly, would have a savior.

The point would be well made, and the question well asked, with respect to what one would expect from Mary's use of the word "savior" if she had been speaking in English. When we look at the language which the New Testament was written in, however (Koine Greek), the picture becomes less clear.

Of course, that is not the language in which Mary would have spoken, for she would have spoken in Aramaic (an offshoot of Hebrew), which was her native language. But in writing his Gospel, the Apostle Luke would have known just exactly what she did say in Aramaic, and his choice of how to translate the word which she did use in Aramaic into the Greek language would have been guided by that knowledge.

As it turns out, the Greek word which is translated "savior" in this verse is the word *soteri*,²⁵⁰ which is related to *soter* (pronunciation: <https://www.howtopronounce.com/soter>). It means a savior or deliverer, and this refers to the fact that Jesus saves us from our sins and delivers us to safety.²⁵¹

So it does encompass all the aspects of the word "savior" in the English language; and yet, what is important to note, in addition to all of that, is that it also means "preserver",²⁵² which does not entail the same concept of rescuing which "savior" and "deliverer" entail in common usage of the English language. In other words, in addition to being someone or something which saves or delivers, it can also mean someone or something which can keep you whole, much like water for your garden can prevent damage from occurring to your plants in the first place, and much like the way preservatives can prevent damage to food.

In this sense, with respect to Mary, Jesus was indeed her *soteri*, her preserver, at the very minimum. For even if she were sinless, she still would need God in order to sustain herself, whether in this life or in the next, much the same that you and I would, and indeed, in much the same way that you and I shall continue to rely on God, even in heaven. So the fact that she refers to God as her *soteri* does not necessarily mean that she herself had sinned. For God is the *soteri* in one true sense, at least (i.e., as the preserver), of all those who already are in heaven.

I strongly encourage Catholics in particular to keep this in mind so that they may enjoy a most excellent contemporary Christmas tune which refers to Jesus being Mary's deliverer. True, the author of the lyrics probably did mean his words to reflect the common Protestant belief that Mary was not sin-free. But if one can focus on the fact that Jesus was her deliverer in the sense just referred to above in any event, one might be able to enjoy an otherwise excellent production without

²⁵⁰ <https://biblehub.com/lexicon/luke/1-47.htm>

²⁵¹ <https://biblehub.com/greek/4990.htm>

²⁵² <https://biblehub.com/greek/4990.htm>

undue distraction: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ifCWN5pJGIE>.

Of course, it goes without saying, I think, that all of this put together, just by itself, cannot possibly establish that she was in fact conceived without sin and remained so for the rest of her life. Instead, at the very most, it can only lead us to conclude that Scripture does not, in absolutely iron-clad fashion, preclude all possibility that such was the case with her; and so, not surprisingly, I do not offer this analysis or these thoughts and Scriptures as a means of establishing that she was without sin. But I do offer such things instead for the sake of apprising Protestants of the fact that with respect to the claim of her sin-free existence, there is indeed at least something here to reflect on and consider, and to cause them to understand that the claim that she was sin-free is not something which is to be considered stark heresy, such as would be the case, for instance, with respect to any claim or teaching that Jesus did not rise bodily from the dead.²⁵³ And so the claim that she was sin-free should not simply be summarily dismissed outright.

Now, as for myself personally, when I started my research on this book, I took the position that Mary was not conceived without sin, and simply left it at that. And yet, as I researched this topic and saw how, in astonishing fashion, the Lord arranged that even the heavens above would testify over and over and over again to her special significance in His mind (as has been developed extensively in this book and the Appendix), and as I saw how He apparently wove her into the overall development of our salvation, and as I considered as well the miraculously-placed tear tracks on her face on the image on Juan Diego's tilma, I came to the conclusion that Mary could quite possibly be an exception to what Scripture says on the face of things about how all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. In that respect, I deem the position of those who believe that Mary was conceived without sin to be parallel to that of those who say that it is permissible after all to prohibit the exercise of some of the gifts of the Spirit, certain Scriptures to the contrary notwithstanding.

i. Was Mary A Parthenote?

All that being said, I must now pause here to pose a question: Was Mary a parthenote? A parthenote is one who comes into being by parthenogenesis (pronunciation: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/pronunciation/english/parthenogenesis>), which is reproduction without sex.²⁵⁴ One might think of it as being, in a certain way, a form of a virgin birth, or at least similar thereto. The famous ancient Greek temple known as the Parthenon, which still stands today on a hill overlooking Athens, is based on the word *parthenos*.²⁵⁵

Parthenogenesis is uncommon in the Animal Kingdom as a whole, but it is in fact known to take place, especially in certain species; and in some species, in fact, it is apparently the only means of reproduction. A parthenote does not have a matched pair of chromosomes from two different

²⁵³ See John 20:19-29: <https://biblehub.com/drb/john/20.htm>, and also, <https://biblehub.com/kjv/john/20.htm>.

²⁵⁴ <https://www.thoughtco.com/parthenogenesis-373474>

²⁵⁵ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parthenon>

parents, as is usually the case. A parthenote is instead a living thing which is usually based upon one set of chromosomes, although in some parthenotes this one set is duplicated.²⁵⁶

When parthenogenesis does take place, it usually produces a female member of the species, because the mother herself does not ordinarily have the genetic foundation for producing a male offspring. However, in the phenomenon known as arrhenotokous (ah-ren-O-toh-kus) parthenogenesis, a male offspring can be produced without sexual reproduction.²⁵⁷

If Mary were indeed a parthenote, this would go a long way toward examining the possibility that she is an implied exception to the verse which says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. For if she is a parthenote, then she is certainly different from us not only in an important biological sense, but she may also be different from us (at least potentially so) in an important spiritual sense. For if she is a parthenote, then she did not receive any of her DNA directly from any son of Adam, the one through whom the curse comes. And it would further mean that the DNA which her Son received---all of which came from Mary---would be free of that direct male lineage as well.

Among humans, there is as yet no known instance of parthenogenesis just by itself creating a viable offspring; the known instances of strict parthenogenesis in humans have only produced tumors within the wombs of the mothers, not actual individuals capable of living apart from the mother and then later on producing offspring.²⁵⁸ But researchers do also recognize that it would be highly problematic if one were to try to find one such instance of a normal human who is strictly a parthenote, and so the possibility that this has happened one or more times in human history is something which researchers at this point cannot rule out.²⁵⁹

As we contemplate this, let us also bear in mind that within certain elements of our culture, women are generally burdened with the shame and responsibility for the fall from grace because, as the Apostle Paul noted, “the woman was deceived” (I Timothy 2:14).²⁶⁰ But in taking the view of women which is based on a certain interpretation of that verse, do we read something into that verse which the apostle himself did not mean? For as I understand it, what that verse means, when taken in proper context, is that Eve could not realize the full implications of what she was doing because she could not perceive what the truth itself was, due to her deception.

With that in mind, bear in mind that Scripture records that only Adam was present when the Lord gave the command not to eat the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:16-17);²⁶¹ if God later did tell Eve the same thing, Scripture does not record Him doing so. So although we see that Eve did know that she was not to eat of the forbidden fruit, we do not know if her knowledge of this came by way of a direct

²⁵⁶ <https://www.thoughtco.com/parthenogenesis-373474>

²⁵⁷ <https://www.thoughtco.com/parthenogenesis-373474>

²⁵⁸ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28818272/>

²⁵⁹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0306987717302694?via%3Dihub>

²⁶⁰ <https://biblehub.com/nasb /1 timothy/2.htm>

²⁶¹ <https://biblehub.com/nasb /genesis/2.htm>

command from the mouth of the Lord Himself or came by way of something she had heard from Adam. (See Gen. 2:18-3:7.)²⁶²

Such was not the case with Adam, however. Adam knew better! He was *not* deceived. He was fully aware of the choice he was faced with, and he then deliberately decided to go ahead with his decision to partake of the fruit anyway.

Consider what Scripture says about what happened after each of them ate of the fruit. It says that Eve first ate of the fruit. And when she did so, the Bible does not record that anything happened.

It next says that Adam then ate of it, and when he did so, the fall from grace took place at that very moment.²⁶³ This is consistent with the fact that, as I said, the Lord initially commanded only Adam not to eat of the fruit; Scripture does not record Him directly repeating any of this to Eve.

They were then expelled from the Garden, and the curse fell upon us all. And yet, despite this clear message from Scripture, we somehow place all the blame for what happened on the woman.

How could anything possibly be more backwards than that? What we must bear in mind is that although the woman was a wrongdoer, and must bear part of the blame for what happened, the principle blame for what happened to humanity falls on the shoulders of the man, the one who knew better, and not her. As the Apostle Paul also noted, sin entered into the world through one man.²⁶⁴ Notice that he did not say through one woman, or through one man and one woman, or through one couple, or anything like that.

So I do not think that the Apostle Paul meant to cast the whole blame for the fall on the woman. Rather, he more simply was concerned about the fact that at the beginning, the woman had been deceived, and then Adam, in his stubborn insistence on doing whatever he wanted to do, chose to follow her lead rather than God's. And so quite understandably, Paul did not want anything similar to happen again. For he could see from the Scriptures, and from common human experience, just how weak the man is in sticking to the straight and narrow path, and how easily he will allow himself (through his own fault) to be misled and stray from that path, even when he knows that he is doing so. And Paul apparently was concerned that this could happen yet again, and again and again and again.

So all in all then, there are two very human flaws here to deal with: The woman displayed the tendency to be deceived; the man, by comparison, displayed the tendency to be stubborn and disobey God, and to go ahead and do what he wanted to do despite the fact that he knew better.

With all that in mind, let me also note that parthenogenesis does account for at least some of

²⁶² <https://biblehub.com/nasb/genesis/2.htm>

²⁶³ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/genesis/3.htm>

²⁶⁴ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/romans/5.htm>

the genetic material which was found in one viable human child. That boy apparently was the product of a parthenote in the womb fusing very early on in pregnancy with a male embryo which was itself the product of normal sexual reproduction.²⁶⁵ And perhaps significantly, with respect to God's plan of salvation, the one line of cells which was in fact found to be of strict parthenogenic origin (*i.e.*, a line of cells which was not, in whole or in part, the product of direct male lineage) was that of the blood cells. This establishes that in humans, at least, the blood cells need no male component, whereas all the other cell lines (for all we know) might normally have such a requirement.

Furthermore, with respect to the formation and the development of the blood, this would imply that the female genetic line, with no male component, is the genetic line with which nature itself prefers to endow an offspring with the ability to produce blood; for in this one child, both the parthenote line of genetic material for making blood and the usual genetic line (from male and female parents) were available. Yet biology, just by its normal course of action, effectively rejected the genetic line for blood production which had a male component, and steered only the parthenote line of genetic material (*i.e.*, the line free of any direct male component) into position to produce the blood. Now, with that rejection of the male component for the production of blood in mind, see I John 1:7,²⁶⁶ and consider the cleansing nature of the blood of Jesus Christ; for it was completely free of any inherited male component.

So we should keep in mind that the belief in "the Immaculate Conception" might possibly be a true account of the story of the mother of our Savior, and in indirect fashion, of His own lineage as well.

Just exactly how biology would interface with the miraculous in bringing us our Savior, then, is something which would not only be a complex issue to explore, but would also be difficult to develop a complete picture of. It would have to entail a detailed knowledge of certain specific biological facts about Jesus and Mary, facts which we certainly do not have, and cannot even obtain.

It is also the case that we do not have enough knowledge of the facts to venture a guess as to whether any and every strict parthenote who has survived outside of the womb (if there is such a thing among humans) would be someone who was "conceived" without sin, or would remain so throughout that person's life. We must therefore be content to keep our conclusions limited to those conclusions which our knowledge of the facts can support. But that's not such a bad thing. For Scripture gives us all we really do need to know in order to understand that which truly matters most of all: Jesus is the Son of God, and He was the perfect, sinless sacrifice who died for our sins and rose from the dead,²⁶⁷ and thereby purchased our salvation, which we can receive if we will believe in Him.

All that being said, I must now also say, in addition to all I have said so far, that I still do not actually go so far as to teach that Mary was conceived without sin and remained so for the rest of

²⁶⁵ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0306987717302694?via%3Dihub>

²⁶⁶ https://biblehub.com/nasb /1_john/1.htm

²⁶⁷ Romans 10:9-10; <https://biblehub.com/nasb /romans/10.htm>

her life, for I do not have enough factual evidence or statements in Scripture to establish either of those points as a fact. Rather, I simply state here that I think that the possibility that she was conceived without sin and remained so throughout her entire life is something which I cannot rule out entirely in terms of the things which I am teaching to others; and in fact, as a matter of my own personal belief, I do in fact think it more likely than not that she was a parthenote, that she was “conceived” without sin, and that she remained sin-free throughout her entire life. But rather than teaching that this was a definite fact, I simply say that these thoughts of mine are just my own personal opinion about a particular possibility, much as the Apostle Paul mentioned that a few of the specific statements within his overall writings about marriage were not teachings which he had from the Lord, and were simply his own personal thoughts instead. (See I Cor. 7:25.)²⁶⁸

Of course, at this point, one might wonder why it is that if Mary were indeed a parthenote, Scripture is completely silent as to this point. The answer (if in fact she was a parthenote) may lie in two things: First, in order to understand this concept, one must have at least a basic understanding of genetics, something which no one had 2,000 years ago. So there would be no point in the Lord making this a part of the canon of Scripture when the canon was completed nearly 2,000 years ago.

Second, given the fact that no one could understand the biological aspects of such a thing back then, if Scripture were to make reference to Mary as coming into being without sexual reproduction, it might make those who would have no grasp of the possible scientific dimensions thereof tend to think of her as a goddess, and start to worship her as such. (Hmmm ... sound familiar?) So in other words, if Mary were in fact a parthenote, the Lord may have left this out of Scripture to keep people from going astray and starting to worship her, as is sometimes already the case just as things are, unfortunately.

With all of that in mind, I respectfully suggest that Catholics should recognize that Protestants do have their basis in Scripture for refusing to accept Mary’s sin-free status, and that similarly, Protestants should recognize that Catholics do not do anything materially different, in terms of interpreting Scripture, from what many Protestants do with respect to doctrines about the gifts of the Spirit, and that in addition, it is at least plausible that there could be in fact a biological foundation which might distinguish Mary from the rest of us that would operate in support of Catholic teachings. And so although we shall always have our doctrinal differences among us (and being precise in doctrinal positions, I recognize, is always important, and highly valuable, of course ... at least, as much as one can be), it is nonetheless the case at the same time that we must not make so much of our doctrinal disagreements that we cannot have fellowship among ourselves.

4. Reciprocal Overreactions

a. Anti-Mary Backlash

One of the major repercussions of all this controversy (and one of the major reasons why we should strive to keep this controversy to a minimum) is that it has had a debilitating effect on the

²⁶⁸ https://biblehub.com/nasb/1_corinthians/7.htm

ability of Protestants to appreciate Mary in her own right. For in light of the fact that many Protestants are sensitized to the possibility that certain views of Mary by the Roman Catholic Church itself could violate Scripture (and also recognizing---quite correctly--- that the personal views of certain Roman Catholics, at least, do in fact constitute outright idolatry), the result is that many Protestants will therefore commonly wind up avoiding any and all discussion or contemplation of Mary, as though she were anathema.

That is a great loss for Protestants. And this is no way to treat the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. After all, Protestants commonly have no trouble talking about the Apostle Paul and all that he went through on a personal level---nor the other apostles, for that matter---nor Moses, Abraham, King David, or the prophets. Neither do they have any trouble with the idea of taking time to consider how each of them may have handled all the personal challenges which they faced. And it is indeed entirely proper for us to treat the Heroes of the Faith whom we find in the Bible this way:

16 All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: (2 Tim. 3:16; KJV)^{269, 270}

So we can use what we find in Scripture about the various Heroes of the Faith to guide us. Consider as well the time which the Apostle Paul himself spends dwelling on the lives of his Heroes of the Faith. (Hebrews 11:1-40)²⁷¹

But as for Mary? Not so! Protestants generally turn away from even thinking about her, let alone talking about her, as though it were improper even to contemplate her, despite the fact that she went through hardships and faith-challenging trials, much the same as the other great heroes of the faith, in order to bring to us our Lord Jesus Christ.

For instance, the most notable thing about the Annunciation, as I read it, is that when the angel got done telling her that she would be the mother of the Messiah, she didn't faint. I know I certainly would have, if I were in her place.

What great faith and strength in the Lord she must have had, just to endure the shock of that announcement by an angel standing before her without falling over! And so it is appropriate to reflect on her great faith and courage just for that reason alone, if nothing else. But of course, there is in fact quite a bit more to consider about her as well.

²⁶⁹ https://biblehub.com/kjv/2_timothy/3.htm

²⁷⁰ Note: This is not to say that we can know that Scripture is inspired by God because Scripture says that it is inspired by God. That would constitute circular reasoning, and as such would be illogical, and therefore invalid. Rather, here the Apostle Paul (the author of 2 Timothy) is simply pointing out a point of doctrine, by his authority as an apostle of Jesus, as being the starting point for his discussion of Scripture on this particular occasion.

²⁷¹ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/hebrews/11.htm>

For instance, there was the public scorn and shame she must have had to endure just for being pregnant before her marriage to Joseph was complete, plus the heartache of knowing that she couldn't tell anyone the truth of the matter to alleviate the shame on herself and Joseph and on her mother and father without risking being stoned for blasphemy.

It is also not too difficult to imagine the hardship of having to travel all the way to Bethlehem (in the heat of summer, if my estimates of when Jesus was born are correct) so that she and Joseph could register for the census just as she was about to give birth. And on top of all that, apparently she and Joseph were planning to stay in Judea for a while, at least; and she apparently had no foreknowledge of their eventual return to Nazareth. So with all that in mind, add to all her other heartaches and sufferings the heartache of having to leave her home and family behind indefinitely---possibly permanently--- something perhaps to be broken up only by brief visits with her family when they would all meet in Jerusalem for certain feasts. And at that, she had to endure all this at a very tender age.

With all that in mind, it is sad to note from Scripture that in addition, when she and Joseph came to Bethlehem, there was no place for them there. And yet, it is sadder still to note that within the homes and hearts of so many devoted followers of her Son today, there is still no place for her there, either.

b. The Overemphasis On Mary

Unfortunately, it is equally the case that in my experience, I have found that Roman Catholics quite commonly overemphasize the role of Mary in Christian practice. And sometimes very greatly so.

In that context, here is what we should bear in mind: As I explained above, she is our mother. And she will intercede for us in prayer, I am convinced, right before the very Throne of Grace itself. But she is not a substitute for Christ. She never can be, nor can anyone else ever be. It would be best, therefore, for us to look upon her as being a prayer partner---and what a powerful prayer partner she must be, the very mother of the Incarnation Himself!---but it would not do to make her the centerpiece of our prayer life, and never an object of our worship or praise. All in all then, let us be glad that she can be a powerful intercessor for us, even when we might not even know that she is interceding for us (John 2:1-11).²⁷² That being said, we must recognize at the same time that she is not more than a marvelous intercessor.

5. Other Apparitions

Many other claims of an apparition of Mary have been made over the years. The Vatican has accepted some of them as being worthy of belief. Here we shall consider two of them (in addition to Our Lady of Guadalupe) in order to illustrate an important point in discerning a work of God.

²⁷² <https://biblehub.com/drb/john/2.htm>

a. Lourdes

The Vatican has declared that the story of Our Lady of Lourdes is worthy of belief (although, as explained earlier, Rome does not make this tale, or any other private revelation---such as the story of Our Lady of Guadalupe---a matter of doctrinal faith). The story of Our Lady of Lourdes pertains to the claim by a 14-year old girl named Bernadette (now known as St. Bernadette) that a woman---later identified as Mary specifically---appeared to her in a grotto just outside of Lourdes, France, on several occasions over the course of a month and a half in 1858. Lourdes is a town in southwest France, at the base of the Pyrenees Mountains, which separate France from Spain.

Since the time of these apparitions, water has flowed from a spring in the grotto, and 7,000 people claim to have been miraculously healed by these waters or by praying to Our Lady of Lourdes. With respect to such claims at Lourdes and at all other places, the Vatican will accept none of them as being miraculous unless the claim first undergoes intense scrutiny. For instance, 33 medical experts were consulted before declaring a healing miraculous, and that was just for the most recent miracle alone.²⁷³ All in all, only 70 of the 7,000 claims have been officially accepted by the Vatican as being truly miraculous.

That's not to say that the Vatican takes the position that none of the other 7,000 claims involve a miraculous healing. It's just to say that if any of those other healings truly are miraculous, the Vatican has no way of ruling out, with absolute certainty, any possibility of a non-miraculous basis for the healing.

I do not teach anyone that the apparition of Mary to Bernadette at Lourdes did in fact take place, or that the 70 healings were miraculous. But I do believe personally that such is indeed the case.

b. Fatima

The story of Our Lady of Fatima, which the Vatican likewise finds to be worthy of belief, entails the story told by three Portuguese shepherd children in 1917. They claimed that Mary appeared to them on several occasions from May of that year until October. Certain miracles have been attributed to these apparitions, most notably the so-called Miracle of the Sun.

Whether any of these various phenomena associated with Fatima were miraculous in one way or another is something which I am unable to discern. But one thing about Fatima does stand out above all the others.

Specifically, two of the children---the oldest, Lucia, and her cousin Jacinta---each said that the person in the vision told them that World War I (which had been going on since 1914) would end

²⁷³ <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/253153/meet-sister-bernadette-the-most-recently-cured-person-at-lourdes>

on October 13, 1917. And yet, that date came and went with World War I still raging on (for another 13 months, specifically). When Lucia was asked later on how she could explain this, she did not deny that she had said it, and simply said that she did not know how to explain it.²⁷⁴

So there is no question that this is indeed a part of the tale of Our Lady of Fatima. And although an election in Portugal on October 14, 1917 may have led to Portugal's bringing all its troops home by April of 1918, it is the case that Portugal was still active in the war for some time after October 13, 1917.²⁷⁵

Now, if we had no guidance from Scripture on how to deal with a situation like this, perhaps we could just shrug this errant prophecy off and say that this was a minor, technical error. But Scripture does indeed give guidance on point, and so we must stick to Scripture and follow it.

Specifically, I have dwelt at great length regarding the various Scriptural admonitions to be wary of false teachings and to test the spirit of each doctrine to see whether it be of God or not. (See in particular Appendix Section V.A. Biblical Faith Is Not Blind Faith.) Allow me now to focus on one of the things which I pointed out therein: namely, the admonition of Moses regarding ascertaining the truth:

21 And if thou say in thine heart, How shall we know the word which the LORD hath not spoken? 22 When a prophet speaketh in the name of the LORD, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the LORD hath not spoken, *but* the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously: thou shalt not be afraid of him. (Deut. 18:21-22; KJV)²⁷⁶

With respect to the reliability of Scripture, Jesus Himself said that Scripture cannot be broken. (John 10:35)²⁷⁷ And of course, His statement would have to include the things of the Old Testament (such as this statement by Moses, for example), for the New Testament had not even been started yet.

Let us also consider the words of the Apostle Paul on point (likewise necessarily concerning the things of the Old Testament):

16 All scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice, (II Timothy 3:16; DRB)²⁷⁸

On top of all that, consider the thoughts of the Apostle Peter. He wrote his second epistle (II Peter) at a time when, in all probability, he knew he would soon face execution for his testimony about

²⁷⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Our_Lady_of_Fátima

²⁷⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Portugal_during_World_War_I

²⁷⁶ <https://biblehub.com/kjv/deuteronomy/18.htm>

²⁷⁷ <https://biblehub.com/drb/john/10.htm>

²⁷⁸ https://biblehub.com/drb/2_timothy/3.htm

Jesus. So the various things which he said in II Peter were no doubt of particular importance to him.

That being said, as noted before, he had been present at the Transfiguration. And in II Peter he makes reference to that fact. (II Peter 1:16- 18)²⁷⁹ But then, in the very next few verses, he makes the point that there is an even more reliable basis than the things which he witnessed at the Transfiguration for believing in Jesus: the word of the holy prophets of the Old Testament. (II Peter 1:19-21)²⁸⁰

Now, taking this all together, let us see what we have:

- First, it is established that the person in the vision at Fatima did say that World War I would end on October 13, 1917.
- Second, that statement is false. World War I would not end on that day even for Portugal (which did withdraw early from the war) or for the final belligerent nations (until November 11, 1918).
- Third, Moses said that the test of a true prophet was whether or not the things which the prophet had said would come to pass would in fact take place or not, and we should consider that statement of Moses in light of certain statements by Jesus, the Apostle Paul, and the Apostle Peter, as noted in the following statements:
- Fourth, Jesus said that Scripture cannot be broken.
- Fifth, the Apostle Paul noted that Scripture is inspired by God, and is useful for teaching, correction, and instruction.
- Sixth, the Apostle Peter emphasized that an even more reliable basis for believing in Jesus than his personally having witnessed the Transfiguration would be the word of prophets of the Old Testament, and the aforementioned statement of Moses would fit within Moses' admonition.

From all of this I submit that we can conclude the following:

- In light of the statement of Jesus that Scripture cannot be broken, along with the affirmation of the reliability of Scripture given by the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter, we can know that the test of a true prophet given by Moses is reliable.
- Applying that test of a true prophet given by Moses to the facts here, we must conclude that the statement that World War I would end on October 13, 1917 is a word which the Lord had not spoken.
- Likewise applying that test of a true prophet, we can know that the person in the vision who said that World War I would end on that date was not a true prophet of God.

So where does that leave us now? Well, sadly enough, it means we must reject the tale of Our Lady of Fatima as being a work of God. I say "sadly" because it is painful for me to have to say

²⁷⁹ https://biblehub.com/drb/2_peter/1.htm

²⁸⁰ https://biblehub.com/drb/2_peter/1.htm

this, for I am such a deep admirer of Pope John Paul II. And quite obviously, he firmly believed in the truth of the story of Fatima. But where two accounts of truth are irreconcilable with each other, and one must give way to the other, then if one account is based on Scripture, and the other contradicts Scripture, it is Scripture which must govern, always. There is simply no two ways about it. Our own personal feelings about any given matter must yield to God's Truth, as revealed in His Word. And so that must settle the matter.

The lesson to be learned from all of this is that each account of an apparition of Mary must stand or fall on its own merits, and cannot be bolstered simply by reference to the fact that another account of her appearing may indeed be true or may indeed be false. But let not your heart be troubled with concerns or anxiety over all of this. For we can know that the account of Our Lady of Guadalupe is certainly true (and most likely that of Our Lady of Lourdes as well). And we can then just leave it at that (if you do choose to accept these accounts as being true). For there are more important things to dwell on in the spiritual realm of things than the question of whether this, that, or some other apparition of Mary (or anyone else) really did take place or not.

6. The Heart Pierced With A Sword

There is one other aspect of Mary which we need to talk about, one which is perhaps the most pertinent of all. Namely, for the longest time, I could not envision how it is that the Father could have caused her to endure the agony of watching her Son slowly die a torturous death on the cross. For the Father, with no trouble at all, could have arranged for her to be elsewhere on that awful day, or be sick in bed, or perhaps have even passed on by that point (as Joseph, her husband, apparently had). But He did not choose to do things that way. Instead, He ordained that she should be there through the whole time, witnessing the entire spectacle.

Now she was, of course, dearly beloved of the Father. Very dearly beloved. For it is she alone, among all persons for all time, who was given the honor and privilege of being the mother of the Incarnation, His only begotten Son. So *why in the world would He allow her to suffer so terribly?* I kept asking myself.

In answer to that, let me say that although I don't know anything about that for a fact, I may have found a clue to the answer in Scripture:

[2](#) Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, (Heb. 12: 2a; KJV)²⁸¹

This verse does of course, at a minimum, refer to the fact that set before Jesus' His heart and mind was the knowledge that in the end, there would be an eternal reward more than sufficient to make up for the suffering, provided, of course, that He could endure it. And yet, I think there is more to

²⁸¹ <https://biblehub.com/kjv/hebrews/12.htm>

it than that. For on the opposite side of that coin it is the case that there, set before His very eyes in the physical sense on Calvary, was an all-too-vivid depiction of the absolute horror and agony which would result if He did not choose to remain on the cross and take the penalty for our sins, a depiction of horror and agony which was encapsulated in the trauma which He watched His own mother have to endure.

It was, specifically, a look at the horror and trauma which she herself personally would in fact have had to endure yet again if He had chosen to come down from the cross. And Scripture indicates that He could indeed have come down from that cross, or else perhaps have avoided going up on it altogether. For as Jesus said to Peter on the night He was betrayed, when Peter used a sword to attack a slave of the high priest who was present there to help arrest Jesus:

[53](#) Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels? (Matt. 26: 53; NASB)^{282, 283}

Now, the fact that Mary would have had to endure unspeakable horror and agony if Jesus had not fulfilled His mission of redemption would be true whether one accepts the Roman Catholic view, on the one hand, that Mary was without sin (and therefore would not have been subject to condemnation to Hell) or whether one accepts on the other hand the traditional Protestant view that Mary, like all the rest of us, did indeed have sin, and that therefore she would be subject to condemnation to Hell without the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. For even under the Catholic view (in which Mary would not be condemned to Hell), if Jesus had not fulfilled His mission of redemption, she eventually would have had to endure the pain of watching while her whole family---her mother, her father, etc.---would have been sent off to Hell for all of eternity, along with all of her friends and neighbors from throughout her whole life, and also Joseph, her husband.

Thus, the Father had set before Jesus---right in front of His own eyes while He was on the cross---a clear vision of the exact, precise opposite of the joy that was set before Him in his heart and mind at the same moment by the thoughts of the glorious redemption and resurrection that would result from His enduring to the end. And surely there would be no more effective way for anyone to see the contrast between that glory on the one hand, as compared to the horror of eternal condemnation to Hell on the other hand, than by putting the horror of it all right before Jesus' eyes while He was on that cross. For after all, it is easier to see a lamp which is lit when it stands in contrast to an otherwise darkened room than it is when one is holding the lamp out in the open in broad daylight. And so the darkness which Jesus had to behold with His own eyes in the form of the agony which His own mother had to endure (and which He knew all the rest of us would have to endure as well) must have made His thoughts concerning the potential glory which could come by His remaining on the cross all the more strikingly apparent, and all the more vividly real.

As I considered this perspective, a Scripture came to mind. It is from the time when Joseph

²⁸² <https://biblehub.com/nasb/matthew/26.htm>

²⁸³ See also: <https://biblehub.com/nasb/john/18.htm>

and Mary went to present Jesus at the Temple right after He was born. There, a prophet by the name of Simeon came and blessed Jesus, Mary, and Joseph:

[34](#) And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed [35](#) (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.” (Luke 2: 34-36; ESV)²⁸⁴

Now, this reference to the soul of Mary being pierced with a sword is no doubt connected, by this prophetic utterance, with her having to endure witnessing the crucifixion of her Son, if nothing else. And in fact, you may have noticed that Roman Catholic artwork sometimes depicts the heart of Mary (*i.e.*, the Immaculate Heart of Mary) as having been pierced through with a sword;²⁸⁵ this verse is what that imagery is in reference to. But let us not overlook the fact that, most interesting of all is the fact that Simeon refers to this as taking place within the context of Jesus’ work of redemption, something which tends to suggest that Mary herself had at least some role to play (even if only indirectly) in our salvation, a role which went beyond her obvious role in our salvation, first of all, by being the mother of the Savior, and thus God’s primary instrument in bringing Him into this world.

More specifically, putting this all together, I cannot help but think that, in answer to my own question at the beginning of this section, perhaps the reason that the Father had Mary there at the foot of the cross to endure the agony of watching her Son go through the crucifixion (and thereby having her soul pierced through with a sword) is that although it is indeed true that more than one thing must have helped enable Jesus to endure the agony of the cross, it is nonetheless the case that quite possibly, the one thing above all others which actually gave Jesus the final push of courage, love, and stamina to stay up there on the cross all the way to the very end---until it was finished---was a son's love for His mother.

To that, some might say that Jesus could not possibly have failed to accept the cross and endure it to the end. But if that is so, how are we to explain what He said to Peter in the garden about being able to ask the Father to rescue Him with more than twelve legions of angels? With that in mind, I sometimes cannot help but wonder if perhaps part of the reason why He suffered so much agony in the garden just before His betrayal is that He was terrified that He would fail while up there on the cross because of the excruciating pain (a term which itself derives from a Latin phrase meaning “from the cross”),²⁸⁶ and therefore be incapable of enduring that trial all the way to the end.

On that point, remember that although He Himself was perfect in spirit, His body was not so, as we see in the fact that while He was trying to fulfill the Father’s wish that He offer Himself up as a victim through crucifixion, the soldiers who were charged with crucifying Him apparently thought

²⁸⁴ <https://biblehub.com/esv/luke/2.htm>

²⁸⁵ https://www.michaelcorsini.com/warehouse-open-edition-prints/art_print_products/immaculate

²⁸⁶ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/excruciate>

that He was incapable of carrying out the task of bearing His cross all the way up to Calvary by Himself (after having been mercilessly flogged), and so they tasked a man named Simon with the job of bearing Jesus' cross behind Him. (Luke 23:26)²⁸⁷ Roman Catholics, in fact, think that He actually fell three times on the way up to Calvary, as is related in the prayer tradition known as the Stations of the Cross,^{288,765} a non-Biblical (though perhaps accurate) account of Jesus' trial before Pilate, crucifixion, and burial.

We might wonder, then, where did the love which He would need to endure hanging on the cross all the way to the end come from? Well, first of all, Jesus had at least the same love for His mother as He has for all of us. And yet, He would also necessarily have had an additional dimension of love for His own mother as well, as we each likewise have for our own mothers. This should not surprise anyone, not only because it would be the common, natural thing for any son to have such feelings for his mother, but also because we can see from Scripture an example of Him having an additional dimension of love for one of His apostles above all the others: *i.e.*, apparently, the Apostle John. (John 13:23)²⁸⁹

And so again I say, *Where in turn did this additional love for His mother come from?* Now, that is the easiest question to answer of all the questions we shall consider in this entire book! For it would have come from the exact same place as it comes from for all of us: It comes from a mother's love for her child. As the Apostle John said in another context (*i.e.*, the context of Jesus' divine love toward us):

[19](#) We love, because He first loved us. (1 John 4:19; NASB)²⁹⁰

And so it was with Mary and her divine Son. She first loved him as a mother loves a child, and then in return, He learned to love her as any son loves his mother. Personally, I believe that this mother-child bond of love between them may have had eternal consequences for us on Calvary. I mean, after all, if you had seen and heard your own mother screaming and going through unspeakable agony before you, would that not have strengthened your resolve to endure as much as possible, so that you could prevent her from suffering even worse the next time, or from ever even suffering again at all?

I do not know for a fact that this is how things actually worked out ... at least, not in detail, and so I do not teach that this is definitely true. But I respectfully submit that it may have worked out this way, and I personally do believe that in fact this was so. And in any event, it would be a good thing for all of us, Protestants and Catholics alike, to learn at least to contemplate the life of Mary as we see it in Scripture, no less than we do contemplate the lives of the many other Heroes of the Faith.

²⁸⁷ <https://biblehub.com/kjv/luke/23.htm#26>

²⁸⁸ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Stations-of-the-Cross>

²⁸⁹ https://biblehub.com/nasb/_john/13.htm

²⁹⁰ https://biblehub.com/nasb/_1_john/4.htm

In fact, as we contemplate these things, we would do well to consider the fact that the mother-son relationship between Jesus and Mary clearly illustrates the value and importance of the family in any event, whether this was that one critical thing which gave Jesus the strength to endure on the cross all the way to the end or not. Likewise, the sacredness of the mother-son relationship, as exemplified here, also does clearly illustrate the evil of Satan's war on children, including the evil of his sexualizing children and of his blood lust for something which has become--- for the most part, at least---his Satanic "sacrament" of abortion (though aborting mothers may be oblivious to this).²⁹¹

As a final note, let me emphasize here what I said above, that Mary does not have the status of being our Co-redemptrix. But in agreeing to take on the role of the mother of the Messiah when the angel came to her, with all the hardships and suffering which that would entail---and also in the Father's presenting her to her Son as an image of the unspeakable horror which would result if He did not finish His work on the cross---she apparently did become, by God's own hand, the one person among all the souls who have ever lived--- or who ever shall live---the main facilitator here on Earth of Jesus' work of redemption and of our salvation.

All in all, the fact that Protestants do not contemplate or appreciate Mary more fully is a terrible loss for them, one which is no doubt precipitated by their overreaction to the view of Roman Catholics (particularly some Roman Catholics) toward Mary.

7. My Own Personal Practice Regarding Mary

As for my own personal practice regarding Mary, I keep it simple. I do not pray the Rosary. For that matter, I do not pray any recited prayers (except, on occasion, the Our Father); for when I pray, I simply talk to God. And Jesus Himself admonished us in the Sermon on the Mount not to use thoughtless repetition while praying:

7 "And when you are praying, do not use thoughtless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. 8 So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him. (Matt. 6:7-8; NASB)²⁹²

As to whether reciting the Rosary does itself constitute an example of thoughtless repetition I cannot say for certain. Perhaps the answer to that would lie in whether the one who prays is thinking through each prayer which is recited in praying the Rosary or not. But in any event,

²⁹¹ <https://www.breitbart.com/entertainment/2024/02/21/exclusive-the-war-on-children-filmmaker-robb-starbuck-it-paints-a-hard-to-ignore-picture-about-how-evil-the-war-to-sexualize-our-children-really-is/> <https://www.breitbart.com/entertainment/2024/02/21/exclusive-the-war-on-children-filmmaker-robb-starbuck-it-paints-a-hard-to-ignore-picture-about-how-evil-the-war-to-sexualize-our-children-really-is/>

²⁹² <https://biblehub.com/nasb/matthew/6.htm>

praying the Rosary does at least mimic thoughtless repetition of prayers on the face of things, and I think I myself could easily slip into the actual substance of that practice (even if unintentionally so) were I to pray the Rosary.

I do, however, express my thoughts and feelings from time to time about what is going on in my life to Mary, and I take time to contemplate her personally and all that she must have gone through in bringing her Son to us. And as I allow myself to be awed by all of that, I take time to let her know that I am indeed in awe of her, and I take time to thank her for all she has done for me, and for all of us. I also thank her for gently leading me and guiding me by virtue of her example of a humble spirit which she showed to the world.

And just in case she cannot hear me (though I think in fact that she does), I have asked the Lord to convey my thoughts to her Himself, or by His angels. And I think that if it need be the case for that, that He does so.

I also ask her to intercede for me, and for those whom I am concerned about, before the Throne of Grace. I do think it is excellent that the Lord probably does allow this, and yet that is not the most meaningful part of all.

That is, when I first started opening up to the possibility that it may be permissible for us to have communication with those who have passed on before us, I could not help but get the feeling one day, as I sat there contemplating what she did for us, that she just came up beside me, put her arm around my shoulders, gave me a hug, and said, "I love you, my son." I was a bit startled by that, I must admit, and by reflex I found myself saying to her, "Why *is* that?!" She simply replied quietly, "Because you *are* my son," and left it at that.

No further words were spoken between us. For there was no need for that. She just wanted to spend time with me, just for the sake of spending time with me, just for the sake of letting me know that she loves me simply because I *am* her son, and because I love her Son Jesus, and because I am grateful for all that He has done for me, and because it is the case that for that reason, I proclaim Him to the world. And I remained silent, too, for I just wanted to spend time with her, just for the sake of spending time with her, as a way of letting her know that I love her, too, simply because she *is* my mom, and because of all she has done for me, and for all those whom I care about.

So there we were, mother and son, with me in her embrace, just taking as much time as we needed to appreciate in silent fellowship with each other the fact that we had each other---and in fellowship with her Son, on top of all that---just as if she and I were living in Jerusalem in the First Century shortly after Her Son's ascension.

I do not recall how long this went on. Not for long, as I recall (though it wasn't just momentary, either), for there was no need for it to be lengthy. For the few minutes which we did spend together was as refreshing to my soul as a long vacation would have been for my body and mind, at the very least.

You know, it just doesn't get any better than that.

And so, my fellow Protestants, eat your hearts out. And as you do so, bear in mind that your Roman Catholic brothers and sisters are already knowingly nodding their heads in approval of this practice of my faith as they read this. For they already do have what you yourselves are still personally lacking. Just bear in mind at the same time that we do invite you yourselves into this fellowship as well. And so does she. For after all, it should follow that if we have a personal relationship with Jesus, we could have a personal relationship with His mother as well.

So I'll leave you with this video clip from the movie *Fantasia*, whether you are Protestant or Catholic, to help you contemplate in your heart what she did for each of us, and what she must have meant to her Son Jesus as He gazed down upon her in her torment and agony while He hung there in torment and agony of His own for us on that cross:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyafdWIGU1s>.

PART SIX

Where Does The Evidence Lead?

There are those who take the position that once it has been established that a particular event has a rational explanation, then no miraculous explanation for that event can also be possible, and that the converse of that is equally true also. I have one thing to say about that:

WRONG!

Let us take a look at the nature of the miraculous and see why it is the case that the fact that some event has a rational explanation does not mean, by itself, that the event cannot also equally and simultaneously have a miraculous explanation.

I. What Is A Miracle?

First of all, what do we mean when we say that something is a miracle? Well unfortunately, that word is commonly used rather loosely these days. One might often hear on a news broadcast that someone's survival of a catastrophe was miraculous. And perhaps some such instances---perhaps even many of them---truly are miraculous. But it is frequently the case, I personally believe, that many of these references to someone escaping from tragedy as being miraculous are simply references to things which entailed no miracle at all, and which were instead simply fortunate outcomes which were so unlikely as to seem miraculous.

Moving on, let us consider whether the term "miraculous" means that some ordinary, rational explanation for an event cannot simultaneously and equally fully account for the event

taking place. That is to say, do we mean that if there is a God, that by producing a miracle, He violated the laws of nature and science which He Himself came up with so as to cause this miracle to take place? Or in other words, does a belief in the miraculous mean that a look to science is merely one way out of several ways of accounting for the existence of all that is in the universe and all the things which may happen, and that things can also sometimes take place in complete contradiction of the laws and principles of science, and occur without any rational explanation? To answer these questions, let us first clear up one particular myth about the nature of the miraculous.

A. The Difference Between A Miracle And Magic

Some confusion exists as to whether the words “miraculous” and “magical” are simply interchangeable. Such is hardly the case, however. Those two terms embrace two totally different concepts.

The idea that something is magical pertains to the idea that some particular thing---whether it be a talisman, a potion, or a spell, etc.---has power in and of itself to do something, power which requires the assistance of no outside source---such as the laws of physics, for example, or the principles of mathematics or chemistry---in order to perform those things which the magical thing supposedly accomplishes. A talisman is displayed, perhaps accompanied by a spell, and lo, and behold! A rock is changed into a loaf of bread! Or perhaps the spell, by its own power, will suffice. Or perhaps the drinking of some potion will transform someone into a frog. The key here is that the ability of the magic to operate magically supposedly emanates from, and is inherent within, the magical charm or spell itself, without regard to scientific principles.

The miraculous, by contrast, does not entail the use of any given thing or any spell which somehow has power within itself. Rather, those events which are miraculous take place because of the exertion of the will of a sentient being---be it that of an angel, a demon, or God---on the object which is the subject of the miracle, such as a dead body coming back to life, or water being changed into wine.

B. The Two Main Forms of Miraculous

There are two main forms of miracles. One is where God intervenes in the natural flow of events, and the other is where God prearranges things so that the simple and undisturbed natural flow of events operates in such a way as to produce the result He wanted all along anyway.

1. Miraculous Intervention

Imagine you have a time machine. You go back to Israel in Biblical times with a magnet and a nail. You tell people that you can make the nail lift off of a table and first touch, and then stick to, the object which you have in your hand (the magnet). No one believes you, of course. But then you do move the magnet near to the nail and the nail then does precisely what you said it would.

The people watching would have absolutely no clue as to what had just happened. They would see nothing that would account for why the nail lifted up off the table and clung to the magnet. They would likewise hear nothing, touch nothing, taste nothing, and smell nothing that would account for what had happened. And they would have absolutely no comprehension of the concept of the electromagnetic field. Bottom line: They would believe you had just performed a miracle, or perhaps a feat of magic. But would you have?

Of course not. And as for ourselves today, the mere fact that we cannot account for what happened in terms of our own understanding of the things around us does not mean, by itself, that those phenomena which we do not understand must necessarily have violated the laws of science, or that such things cannot possibly take place.

Consider this also: If these people had just gone and told other people what they had seen, and you were no longer around with the magnet and nail to repeat the phenomenon, those people whom they had told would no doubt be skeptics about the whole thing, correct? That is understandable. But would the fact that you are no longer around, and the fact that they cannot see this phenomenon for themselves, somehow make it logically valid for those with natural skepticism to conclude that the phenomenon could not possibly have taken place no matter what, simply because it would seem to them to violate all the known attributes of nature, and simply because they could not understand it based on their own knowledge of the natural order? Certainly not.

One might then ask, however, why it is that God does certain things in a miraculous way, yet seems to do other things in a perfectly normal, natural way. Well, in response to that, we might be able to gain a little insight into this matter from the writings of the famous author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

a. A Lesson From The Master Hobbit Himself: J.R.R. Tolkien

In the fantasy world of the famous trilogy *The Lord of the Rings*, which was written by J.R.R. Tolkien, there live several types of persons whom we do not have in the real world. (In part that is sad; in part that is good.) Two of the benevolent types from that realm are hobbits---who are roughly half the size of ordinary humans---and elves. Now, the elves of Tolkien's world are not like the ones which we think of, however. Not at all. They are quite tall, and are very serious-minded, though they can produce songs of merriment. They are very wise and culturally advanced in the arts, and also in what we today would call science. They would keep to themselves, for the most part, but they would make excellent allies when the need for battle would arise, if they took common cause with you. And they could make magical things, such as swords that glow in the dark when enemies are near.

Now, on one occasion, one of the hobbits, a fellow named Sam, mentioned in an elven realm that he would like to see Elf-magic at work. But to the elves, the word "magic" embodied a puzzling concept. For to the elves, there was nothing different about the things they made which we would call magical from the things they made which we would call non-magical. To them, their magical

powers were simply part of the norm, though to us, magic would seem to be abnormal.

At one point then, the elven queen, named Galadriel, invited Sam and one of his fellow hobbits (Frodo) to gaze into a basin of water that functioned as a magic mirror, being able to show them things distant in both time and space. When she asked them if they would like to peer into it, Sam's companion, Frodo, did not answer her. The passage describing this encounter then reads as follows from there:

"And you?" she said, turning to Sam. "For this is what your folk would call magic, I believe; though I do not understand clearly what they mean; and they seem to use the same word of the deceits of the Enemy. But this, if you will, is the magic of Galadriel. Did you not say that you wished to see Elf-magic?"²⁹³

Then, later on, these same two hobbits needed to get down from a ledge they were on. There was no way for them to get to the bottom unless they would use the rope which Sam had previously gotten from the elves. They did decide to use the rope to get down, but afterwards Sam was greatly grieved by the thought that they would then have to abandon the rope, for there would be no apparent way at that point for them to undo the knot up at the top and pull the rope down to the bottom.

Much to their very great astonishment, however, when Sam gave a slight tug on the rope after they had reached the bottom, the rope became untied up at the top and slid down to them. Sam's companion, Frodo, thought that the knot must have come undone because the knot supposedly had not been made properly. But Sam, an expert at making knots, thought otherwise. The passage describing this reads as follows:

"Have it your own way, Mr. Frodo," he said at last, "but I think the rope came off itself---when I called."²⁹⁴

Sam and Frodo had great trouble figuring out what had happened and were astonished by this (especially Frodo) because they were unprepared for the idea of a rope acting in such a magical way. To an elf, however, this would not have been a cause for astonishment at all. Rather, to an elf, this would have been nothing more than just a plain and ordinary event. For the rope was simply doing what any elven rope always does just naturally: It holds on tight when you need it to, and it also comes loose just when you want it to.

From God's perspective, perhaps the miraculous may be thought of in much the same way. We are astonished at stories from the Bible in which the Red Sea parts before Moses, and in which

²⁹³ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, book 2, chapter 7, page 406; Ballantine Books, Del Rey Mass Market Edition 2012.

²⁹⁴ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, book 4, chapter 1, page 241; Ballantine Books, Del Rey Mass Market Edition 2012.

Jesus turns water into wine. But should we be? We think of these things as being miraculous, and yet we think of an apple falling from a tree---every single time one comes loose, without exception, and without fail---as being ordinary, and non-miraculous.

From God's angle, however, perhaps the fact that an apple falls from a tree and the fact that the Red Sea parted, as well as the fact that water turned to wine, is all just the same to Him. Perhaps none of the things which we think of as miraculous seem somehow different to Him from all those things which we call ordinary, just as the elves of Tolkien's fantasy world saw nothing different or out of the ordinary in what everyone else called magic.

To this, some might object on the grounds that, contrary to the things in the Bible which we call miracles, an apple falling to the ground has an ordinary, scientific explanation: namely, the effect of the law of gravity. But then, where did the gravity which caused the apple to fall to the ground come from? And then, where in turn did that very source of gravity itself (*i.e.*, the thing which in turn underlies the source of gravity) come from? And so on, and so on. In other words, if God's will might have been involved at all, way back at the beginning of time in the sequence of events which eventually led to the creation of gravity itself, how can we now say with certainty that the operation of gravity to accomplish God's will could not also have been a miraculous event as well, stemming from a miracle which happened way back at the beginning of time?

In response to my questions, some might say that someday we shall discover the scientific answers to all of these questions (all the way back to the very first cause and basis of all the phenomena of physics) without making any reference to the existence of God, and therefore we supposedly can conclude today that physical phenomena can never be caused by a miracle. But if there is no actual, hard data which proves that someday we shall in fact find some ultimate source of all natural phenomena which operates without the existence of God, then our belief that such ultimate answers do in fact truly exist in nature, without having been created by God, is a tenet of a religion of sorts, not science. For without hard data, there is no science. That being the case, why should an insistent adherence to the idea that science can be trusted to come with an explanation for everything at some later date---and to the exclusion of God, at that---be considered to be a superior point of view to believing that events described in the Bible were true events, and that someday we shall come to a fuller understanding of just exactly how the realm of what we call the miraculous does interface with the natural realm?

Look at it this way: As I pointed out, to a primitive people, the fact that a magnet would draw a nail to it would seem miraculous, or magical. But to you or I, it would not seem so at all. Instead, it would appear to be perfectly ordinary, and unremarkable. That is because we each have at least a working knowledge of magnetism.

Let's see if we can put this in perspective. Let's say that you hold an apple out at arm's length. You decide to let the apple fall to the floor, so you let go of it. God, however, decides that He does not want the apple to fall to the floor. He no doubt would have quite a few ways of intervening to prevent the apple from falling to the floor, but let us say that on this occasion, He has an angel stand next to you and hold out his hand to catch the apple when you let go. You cannot see the

angel, and none of your other senses can detect his presence, either. But there you see the apple, suspended in midair before your eyes, and you cannot account for the apple being where it is on the basis of your knowledge of the laws and principles of science.

Now, the fact that you cannot figure this out by yourself does not, however, change the fact (in this hypothetical) that the angel does exist, nor does it change the fact that the apple's remaining suspended in midair has a perfectly natural cause, for it is simply resting in the angel's hand, which is preventing it from falling, just the same as if it were resting in your hand or mine. Yet to you and me, the whole event is wondrous, and we call it a miracle.

Well, the bottom line is this: It is indeed a miracle. For without God's intervention via the angel, the apple could not have remained suspended in midair. You see, the fact that you cannot detect the angel's presence does not mean that there can be no such thing as an angel, or that an angel, if one did exist, could not hold out his hand and catch the apple, any more than the fact that one cannot see an electromagnetic field is a fact which could somehow mean that an electromagnetic field cannot exist, or that such a field in any event could not cause a nail to rise up from a table and cling to a magnet. In either case, the phenomenon which is observed---the motion of the nail to the magnet, and the suspension of the apple in midair---has a perfectly natural explanation, though the fact that the apple remains suspended in midair does also simultaneously and equally have a miraculous explanation: *i.e.*, the intervention of God. It's just that we don't always see or understand certain things which God Himself does see and understand.

This causes us difficulty in believing in those things which we choose to call miracles. But when it comes to miracles by Divine intervention, I would suggest that they all can have a perfectly rational explanation (and no doubt, I believe, they all do in fact have such an explanation), one which is consistent with God's laws of science, even if we ourselves have not yet discovered the particular law of science which is responsible for the event which occurred. If nothing else, this is at least consistent with something which the Apostle Paul wrote:

“For God is not the author of confusion, ... ” (I Cor.14:33a; KJV)²⁹⁵

You see, for God to set things up one way, but then do things in a manner which totally contradicts that framework, would seem to be a manifestation of confusion (that is, if I understand things properly). And so I must strongly suspect that all of the miraculous things which we do not understand will ultimately be found someday to have a perfectly normal, scientific explanation in addition to being miraculous as well.

Some might then object that this would mean that I am acting irrationally, and that one must wait until some heavenly cause is discovered before believing that something miraculous did in fact take place. To that, I would say this: If one's source of information proves to be reliable in certain ways, ways which did not even seem possible at first, is it then irrational to accept the source as being reliable about other things as well?

²⁹⁵ https://biblehub.com/kjv/1_corinthians/14.htm

The unraveling of the mysteries of the Star of Bethlehem is a perfect example of that: The story seems totally implausible at first look, with the Magi following the Star to the south (and by first facing east, at that!), and also with respect to the Star somehow coming to a stop. And yet, in the wake of an in- depth study, it can be seen to be entirely plausible (and on the facts themselves, even likely, I submit), and all by the operation of perfectly ordinary properties of science (specifically, mathematics and astronomy) to boot. And so this gives us a basis for considering at least the possibility that perhaps the rest of what the Bible says might be true after all (as I myself do believe). For a further discussion of this, I again refer the reader to a particular portion of the Appendix, wherein I have placed a more detailed discussion of faith and rationality. (In the Appendix, again find the subsection Biblical Faith Is Not Blind Faith.)

Others might object on the grounds that what I am doing places the laws of nature on an equal footing with the Word of God. But they miss the point. For the laws of nature are caused and created by the Creation itself, and the scientific method simply reflects that fact. In other words, we didn't create or invent the scientific method. But rather, we discovered it. For the elements and forces of nature are so interwoven together that the scientific method simply arises out of nature itself. And when we discover some principle of science, we add nothing which wasn't already there.

So then, the laws of nature and the scientific method are extensions of the Word of God, for it is the Word of God which brought the universe and all that is within it (*i.e.*, the very source itself of the scientific method) into existence in the first place, whether one accepts the traditional view of creation or not. (Gen. 1:1-2:3)²⁹⁶ Viewed in proper perspective, then, there is no conflict between the laws of nature and the scientific method on the one hand, and the Word of God on the other hand, provided that all the facts are known, and each is properly understood and applied.

Granted, as I said before, some may use the scientific method incorrectly. And sometimes this is through fault of their own, and sometimes it is not. But the incorrect use of the scientific method does not negate the validity of the scientific method itself; instead, it only negates the credibility of those who use it improperly in terms of their ability to use the scientific method correctly.

In summation, the bottom line is this: At the beginning of this section we examined the claim by some that if an event is shown to have a perfectly natural explanation, then that fact by itself would supposedly mean that the event cannot also equally have, simultaneously, a miraculous explanation. The purpose of the discussion in this section has been to show that that idea, however, is false, and that it is in fact at least plausible that something which does have a perfectly rational explanation can also in fact have a miraculous explanation as well. I submit, with all due respect, that I have succeeded in establishing at least the academic truth of this point, even if one might still disagree with me on its various applications.

²⁹⁶ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/genesis/1.htm>

2. Miraculous Arrangement Of The Natural Order

The other form of miracle is when we find that God has planned things ahead of time--- probably even from before the creation of the Earth---such that things and events tend to come together to achieve the result which He wills from before the beginning of time just by the way He makes things naturally operate, once He has set His creation in motion. This is precisely the type of miracle which this book itself demonstrates, a point which Larson talked about in his own video. That is, the movements of certain objects in the heavens--- the Sun, the Moon, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, and Mercury---along with the positions of the fixed stars, together with the apparent positions and the motion of all of them across the sky from the rotation of the Earth, etc., constitute actions which were preordained by the laws of physics from the very moment when the cosmos first came into existence.

In particular, notice that although the apparent positions and movements of the many different objects in the sky did all develop in a way which shows an astonishing correlation to what the Bible says about them and about the birth of Jesus, it is the case nonetheless that none of those motions or positions had to undergo any change or interruption in their various normal properties which they have possessed from the beginning of time in order for each of them to perform its function in testifying, right before our very eyes, to the birth of the newborn King of the Jews. At the same time, bear in mind as well that it is God who caused these events to take place just the way they did; so this was not simply a matter of astronomy, mathematics, and physics. For God made a decision ahead of time---from the time of the creation of the universe---to set up things and arrange them to come out the way they did come out, all by themselves. Thus, this was not simply an instance of the laws of nature at work; rather, it was also equally and simultaneously an instance of God's will---i.e., an application of the miraculous---at work.

I first came to discover this type of thing when I was in my second year of undergraduate studies. There was a section of my organic chemistry textbook which pointed out that when two atoms or molecules collide, if the combined energy of their collision rises above a certain threshold, then a certain chemical reaction between them (or a series of chemical reactions) will have to take place, just as a matter of physics. And similarly, if the combined energy of their collision falls below that threshold, then a chemical reaction between them could not possibly take place, no matter what, just as a matter of physics.

The thing is, I realized that in each case in which no sentient being (such as a person, or an animal) interferes with, or has interfered with, the natural progression of things, then you could trace each such chemical reaction which takes place today back to the very beginning of time. And there would be nothing random about such reactions. For every one of them which did take place, and which does now take place, would be a chemical reaction that simply had to have taken place ... precisely that reaction (or series of reactions), and no other, and likewise, certainly no failure to produce a reaction at all.

From this we can see that the development of the heavens to testify to the birth of Jesus just by the ordinary operation of the laws of physics, including Kepler's Laws of Motion, is a perfect

example, then, of a miracle happening by the prearrangement of the natural order. And it was the decision by God to arrange things that way, and to then go ahead with that plan way back at the very beginning of time, which was the actual miracle itself: a miracle, that is, which took place within God's thoughts and heaven itself long before the events which we or the Magi could observe actually did take place.

II. A Lesson From G.K.

As we consider all of the things which we have looked at, how would we know when it is that we are supposed to conclude that what we have seen is all just a string of coincidences, and when are we supposed to conclude that these things are actual evidence---maybe even proof---of the point which is being made? I have discussed the topic of coincidences briefly in several passages of this book already, but now I wish to examine that point in more detail.

A famous British writer of the early 20th century, G.K. Chesterton²⁹⁷ (or simply "G.K.", as he was known to his admirers) made some interesting comments on the nature of coincidences in his famous work, *Orthodoxy*, a book which some have thought of as being the best work of Christian apologetics²⁹⁸ to be written in the 20th century.²⁹⁹ He said,

For the more complicated seems the coincidence, the less it can be a coincidence.³⁰⁰

In other words, if you walk into a restaurant and find that two of the people there---each of whom is seated at a different table from the other, in different rooms---has the last name of Anderson, you could readily accept the possibility that that is a simple coincidence. But if you walk into a restaurant and find that every person at each table in the restaurant, 130 persons total, is named Anderson, then unless you were perhaps in some town in Sweden where virtually everyone might be named Anderson, you would not be prepared to accept the possibility that by some greatly complicated, convoluted set of circumstances, the whole thing could be just a simple, natural coincidence. And the first thing which may come to your mind instead might be the idea that some family reunion of the Andersons was taking place in that restaurant at that moment.

With that in mind then, allow me to say that if you are going to find that everything which I have shown you in this book is simply a coincidence, then you are going to have to do so in a context in which the existence of a coincidence of that magnitude would then itself have to be a true miracle

²⁹⁷ <https://www.chesterton.org/who-is-this-guy/>

²⁹⁸ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/apologetics>

²⁹⁹ <https://www.leaderu.com/cyber/books/orthodoxy/ch6.html>

³⁰⁰ <https://www.leaderu.com/cyber/books/orthodoxy/ch6.html>

CONCLUSION

I. A Restoration Of The Fellowship Between God And Man Is The Ultimate Goal In God's Plan

If you are still convinced that this is all just a series of coincidences, if you are still convinced that God has not in fact provided us with certain means of modern technology to show us a message from Him about His plan of salvation through His son Jesus, well, all I can do is refer to that old saying, “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.” For I have now shown you all that I believe God has given me to share with you right at this moment. And if you choose not to drink from this fountain of knowledge, well, that is your choice. For the challenge is now set before you to consider what I have said. Investigate it for yourself if you feel so inclined---and I invite you to do so---and then draw your own conclusions, if you will.

Now, at this point, one might wonder, “What is the point of all this? Where does the entire story about Jesus lead us?” Here is what Jesus Himself had to say about that:

23 Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. (John 14:23; NASB)³⁰¹

And again, when Jesus was praying:

22 “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; 23 I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. (John 17:22-23; NASB)³⁰²

The author of that Gospel (the Apostle John) then went on to say this later on, in one of his letters (epistles) that he wrote:

24 The one who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. We know by this that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us. (I John 3:24; NASB)³⁰³

And likewise:

7 but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one

³⁰¹ <http://biblehub.com/nasb/john/14.htm>

³⁰² <http://biblehub.com/nasb/john/17.htm>

³⁰³ https://biblehub.com/nasb/1_john/3.htm

another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (I John 1:7; NASB)³⁰⁴

This all harkens back to what the Lord had told Moses during the Exodus:

45 And I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will be their God. 46 And they shall know that I *am* the LORD their God, that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I *am* the LORD their God. (Exodus 29:45-46; KJV)³⁰⁵

The Prophet Isaiah had this to say as well:

15 For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones. (Isaiah 57:15; KJV)³⁰⁶

Likewise, the Prophet Zechariah added this:

10 Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for, lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the LORD. (Zechariah 2:10; KJV)³⁰⁷

And King David added this thought, in his famous “The LORD is my shepherd” Psalm:

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. (Psalm 23:6; KJV)³⁰⁸

Getting back to the Law of Moses, for a moment, the LORD had this to say:

12 And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people. (Leviticus 26:12; KJV)³⁰⁹

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul would quote that very same verse: For we are the temple

of the living God; as God said,
“I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them,
and I will be their God,

³⁰⁴ http://biblehub.com/nasb/1_john/1.htm

³⁰⁵ <http://biblehub.com/kjv/exodus/29.htm>

³⁰⁶ <http://biblehub.com/kjv/isaiah/57.htm>

³⁰⁷ <http://biblehub.com/kjv/zechariah/2.htm>

³⁰⁸ <http://biblehub.com/kjv/psalms/23.htm>

³⁰⁹ <http://biblehub.com/kjv/leviticus/26.htm>

and they shall be my people.” (II Corinthians 6:16b; ESV)³¹⁰

In other words, all throughout the Bible, in both the Old and the New Testaments, we can see that the focus of the Lord God’s plan for us was for us to have fellowship with Him, and Him with us, first by the cleansing of our sins, and then by our acceptance of His atoning grace, so that the fellowship between us and the Lord God might thereby be restored. Having close fellowship with God is the way the Lord God wanted things to be from the very beginning, in fact, when the Lord God sought to walk with man in the garden in the cool of the day. (Genesis 3:8-9)³¹¹ With that in mind, the words of the Prophet Isaiah bear repeating yet again:

12 For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap *their* hands.

13 Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign *that* shall not be cut off. (Isaiah 55:12-13; KJV)³¹²

As it also says in the final book of the Bible, the Book of Revelation:

3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, 4 and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be *any* death; there will no longer be *any* mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.” (Revelation 21:3-4; NASB)³¹³

A. But How Can God Be Both A Loving God And Yet Also Be Someone Who Sends People To Hell?

One of the greatest mysteries which people inquiring about Christianity face is the question of how God can be both a loving God and yet also, at the same time, be a God who apparently sends people to Hell. On the face of things, that seems to be an irreconcilable contradiction in character traits, and so on that basis some people believe that the whole story about God---as told in the Bible, at least---must be false. But as we have seen in the text of this book with respect to the Star of Bethlehem and its seemingly contradictory attributes, how things might appear at first blush does not always tell the tale of what is or is not in fact the truth when all things are considered in their proper perspective. And so it is likewise with this seemingly contradictory character trait of God, with respect to both boundless love and eternal judgment.

³¹⁰ http://biblehub.com/esv/2_corinthians/6.htm

³¹¹ <http://biblehub.com/kjv/genesis/3.htm>

³¹² <http://biblehub.com/kjv/isaiah/55.htm>

³¹³ <http://biblehub.com/nasb/revelation/21.htm>

To consider this, let us start with some basic attributes of God. For instance, God cannot make an object which is too heavy for Him to lift. (Or to put it perhaps more precisely, an object too heavy for God to lift cannot come into existence in the first place, anyway.) Likewise, God cannot be unjust. And God cannot be untrue to His Word.

These things may seem odd, but they are true nonetheless. For if God is all-powerful, how can an object too heavy for Him to lift even exist at all? And if God is perfectly just and perfectly true and trustworthy at all times, how can it be possible at the same time for Him to be unjust, or untrue to His Word, even for one moment? Well, these things point to a key issue for our consideration: namely, even God Himself does not exist or operate in an unbounded, rules-free environment. Even God Himself cannot exist, and does not exist, in a universe in which the rules of logic are suspended: For if God is above everything in all respects, then nothing (such as a rock) can be above God in any respect. And if God is in fact perfectly just at all times, then there cannot be any instances at all when God could also simultaneously be less- than-perfectly just. There is just no other way that things can work out, even if you are God.

With that in mind, consider the following illustration from the Bible. Most people are generally familiar with the story of Daniel in the lions' den, but at the same time, most people are likewise unfamiliar with some important details of that tale. For those who may be completely unfamiliar with this story altogether, it is told in Chapter Six of the Book of Daniel in the Bible. It pertains to a time late in the Babylonian captivity, about 2,500 years ago, when many of the Children of Israel were still away from their homeland, and when the Persians and Medes ruled over Babylon, which the Persians and Medes had captured and conquered. The ruler of the Persians and Medes at the time of Daniel was King Darius. He loved the Hebrew prophet Daniel, and he intended to appoint Daniel over his entire kingdom. This made the other counselors of the king jealous, and they plotted together to get rid of Daniel.

Now, as it turns out, these counselors knew that Daniel, who placed God above everything else in his life, prayed aloud to the Lord God of Israel from his home three times daily, every single day, with the window open toward Jerusalem. So Daniel's rivals used flattery to convince King Darius to sign a law declaring that for thirty days, no one could pray to anyone except King Darius. The conspirators knew that if Daniel abided by this law, they would break his otherwise indomitable spirit, and shame him before the king, for the whole strength of his counsel was based on his unswerving devotion to God; on the other hand, if Daniel were not to abide by this new law, the punishment would be death by being thrown to the lions.

Apparently, none of this even dawned on King Darius when he was asked to sign the law, so he signed it, and he was horrified by what he had done when he found out that he had been tricked. For under Persian law, even he, the king, could not undo what he had done. He was bound by it, just as the lowest slave in the kingdom was. So if Daniel did pray to the Lord God during those thirty days, then King Darius would be obligated by law to throw Daniel, his close friend and most cherished counselor, to the lions.

Daniel heard about this new law, yet he did as he had always done: He went into his house

and prayed aloud to the Lord God with the window open toward Jerusalem, and he could be heard in the street. When the king's wicked counselors told the king what Daniel had done, King Darius spent the remainder of the day desperately trying to find some way to avoid having to throw Daniel into the lions' den. But in the end, nothing could be done, and in pain and in grief he ordered Daniel to be thrown to the lions. Yet before Daniel was taken from his presence, he said this to Daniel:

“Your God whom you constantly serve will Himself deliver you.” (Dan. 6:16b; NASB)³¹⁴

The Bible also records what happened next:

18 Then the king went off to his palace and spent the night fasting, and no entertainment was brought before him; and his sleep fled from him.

19 Then the king arose at dawn, at the break of day, and went in haste to the lions' den. **20** When he had come near the den to Daniel, he cried out with a troubled voice. The king spoke and said to Daniel, “Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you constantly serve, been able to deliver you from the lions?” **21** Then Daniel spoke to the king, “O king, live forever! **22** My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths and they have not harmed me, inasmuch as I was found innocent before Him; and also toward you, O king, I have committed no crime.” **23** Then the king was very pleased and gave orders for Daniel to be taken up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den and no injury whatever was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. (Dan. 6:18-23; NASB)³¹⁵

The Bible then says that King Darius had his wicked counselors, who had tricked him, thrown into the lions' den in Daniel's place, and that the lions leapt up and crushed them in their jaws on their way down, before they had even gotten to the bottom of the den. (Dan. 6:24)³¹⁶ (Note: shades of Haman, in years to come. Esther 7:9-10.³¹⁷)

In like manner, the Lord God is bound by His very nature in His dealings with us. For anything that is less-than-perfectly righteous, or less-than- perfectly just, or less-than-perfectly true and uncorrupted, cannot exist in His presence. And being removed from God, our source of all light and life, constitutes darkness and death. That's just the way it is, and there's no changing that, not even for God Himself, just as there was no changing the law of Persia when King Darius wanted a different result from what the law provided. With respect to God's righteousness and justice, logic itself will not permit such a thing: For something cannot be both in a shadow and yet also completely immersed in pure light simultaneously, and something cannot be both connected to our one, true source of life and yet also cut off from it simultaneously. So then, God does not first choose to allow

³¹⁴ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/daniel/6.htm>

³¹⁵ <http://biblehub.com/nasb/daniel/6.htm>

³¹⁶ <http://biblehub.com/nasb/daniel/6.htm>

³¹⁷ <https://biblehub.com/kjv/esther/7.htm>

some people into heaven and then choose, in some mean-spirited way, to send others to Hell; but rather, eternity in Hell is simply the natural, inevitable, unalterable consequence of sin without redemption. As the Bible says,

[23](#) For the wages of sin is death ... (Romans 6:23a; NASB)³¹⁸

As bleak as that may sound, it is fortunately the case that there is more to that verse than just the first half, which is the only part which I have quoted here for now. We shall be getting back to that verse itself to look at the second half later on.

All in all then, just as King Darius would have given anything to free Daniel from his sentence of death if he could have (and he tried in vain all day to find such a thing), so also the Lord God would give anything to free us from our sentence of eternal damnation if He could. And that is how it is that God can be both boundlessly loving and yet also be someone who cannot accept us into His presence, where we might have eternal life, if we have any stain of sin on our souls. You see, the difference between the Lord God and King Darius, then, lies in the fact that the Lord God did in fact find a way to free us from our punishment: the atoning, substitute death of His own Son as a payment, as a ransom, for our indebtedness of sin.

Look at it this way: You find yourself standing on the platform of a train station in the downtown area of a very large city. A nuclear war has just started, and in one hour a large nuclear bomb will explode right over where you are standing. Now, in this scenario, it is your sin that got you into trouble; it is your sin that sent you down to that train platform at an hour such as that in the first place. And so as a penalty for your sin, you will die if you are still standing there when the bomb goes off.

The thing is, though, there is a train sitting there at the station with its doors open. And there is a seat available for you on the train, and it has your name on it. So if you get onboard that train and take your seat before the doors close and the train pulls out of the station, then when the bomb goes off, you will be 100 miles away. You will live, and you will be unharmed. On the other hand, if you refuse to take advantage of the deliverance which is just sitting there waiting for you at the train station, then when the bomb goes off, you will perish.

For you, and for everyone else, the moment that you die is the moment that the doors of the train close and the train pulls out of the station. At that moment, you will either be on that train and in the seat with your name on it, or you won't be. And so, in the end, whether you live or die is based on just that one simple fact.

You see, just as our sins can send us down to the train station where the bomb will go off, it is our sins that can send us to Hell. That being the case, we must then depend upon God to rescue us by providing for our escape. So ultimately, whether or not you face the consequences of your sin won't be based just on that one fact that it is your sin that got you down to that train platform in the

³¹⁸ https://biblehub.com/nasb/_romans/6.htm

first place; instead, it will also be equally based on whether you now make the wise choice to get onboard that train and take your seat before the doors close and the train leaves the station. For if you do not do so, then when the bomb comes, you will look up and see it blazing through the sky above you as it reenters earth's atmosphere just moments before it explodes. And there will be nothing you can do about it then. As the Apostle Paul said,

[2](#) For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, [3](#) how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? (Heb. 2:2-3a; NASB)³¹⁹

Come to know and understand, then, these two things: 1.) because of your sin, you yourself, like each and every one of us (myself included), is slated for eternal darkness and death because of such sin; and, 2.) the Lord God has made a provision for us to escape that penalty, and that that provision is for us to believe in His Son Jesus, and to look to Him and rely upon Him---just as the children of Israel did by gazing upon the serpent during the Exodus³²⁰---so that we may each take advantage of Jesus' atoning death as the payment and ransom for our debt of sin.

With that in mind, here then is the further look at an above-quoted verse which I promised you. That verse more fully says,

[23](#) For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:23; NASB)³²¹

Here again, death is not something which either might or might not follow as a consequence of sin. Rather, it is the wages of sin. Therefore, death will always necessarily follow sin, come what may, each and every time; it is the exact price which is to be paid for sin, with no exceptions. Our sin occupies one side of a balance, and so death must be placed on the other side in order to set the balance to an equal level on both sides. And fortunately, as the second half of that verse points out, we can have the free gift of eternal life from God through Jesus; for it is His death, and not our own, which will pay the price and which will be placed on the other side of the balance to level things off if we will believe in Him and accept His atoning sacrifice for us.

B. Understanding The Love Of God

It is with all this in mind that we can fully comprehend the love of God. As the Apostle Paul said,

³¹⁹ <http://biblehub.com/nasb/hebrews/2.htm>

³²⁰ <https://biblehub.com/esv/john/3.htm> (John 3:14-15); see also:
<https://biblehub.com/nasb/numbers/21.htm> (Numbers 21:8-9)

³²¹ <http://biblehub.com/nasb/romans/6.htm>

[7](#) Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. [8](#) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

[9](#) Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! [10](#) For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! (Rom. 5:7-10; NIV)³²²

In other words, when we consider the whole picture, we see that Jesus didn't come to die for people who had somehow earned His love and the sacrifice of His life; rather, to the contrary, the exact opposite is true. For instead, the Father sent His Son to die for those who not only did not deserve God's sacrifice and love, but who also richly deserved the exact opposite: eternal darkness, suffering, and death. And that is us ... you and I. We didn't deserve God's love; instead, we deserved His judgment. And yet, because of the death of Jesus for us, He was able not only to withhold His judgment from us, but He was also able to extend to us redeeming mercy, grace, and love.

If you wish to see an example of this in the Old Testament, read II Samuel 11:1-12:24, where see that the Lord God not only did not give King David the punishment which he so richly deserved, but He also extended to him undeserved mercy and grace, and the end result was that King Solomon was then born to King David.³²³ That being said, allow me to say again that it is through King Solomon that Jesus traces his lineage back to King David: Matt. 1:6-16.³²⁴

For further reading, consider also the famous story which Jesus told about the prodigal son: Luke 15:11-30.³²⁵

Granted, sometimes God's love is difficult to comprehend, because sometimes He winds up doing the exact opposite of what you and I would do, for He is so merciful and forgiving. But then, that should come as no surprise. For as the Holy Scriptures say,

[11](#) For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
[12](#) as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.

³²² <https://biblehub.com/niv/romans/5.htm>

³²³ https://biblehub.com/esv/2_samuel/11.htm (Note: The books I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, and II Kings in the Protestant Bible are also in the Catholic Bible, but in the Catholic Bible they bear the names I Kings, II Kings, III Kings, and IV Kings, respectively. Please also note that the Bible website which I commonly refer readers to uses only the Protestant names for these books, even when it is giving the Catholic (*i.e.*, Douay-Rheims) translation.)

³²⁴ <https://biblehub.com/esv/matthew/1.htm>

³²⁵ <https://biblehub.com/esv/luke/15.htm>

13 As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. (Psalm 103:11-13;
ESV)³²⁶

And again,

8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.
9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways
higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:8-9; ESV)³²⁷

C. The Bottom Line

This hope of restored fellowship with the Lord God doesn't just end with our death here on Earth, fortunately. As Jesus Himself said to a friend of His,

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26; NASB)³²⁸

Is your own, personal answer to Jesus' question, "Yes"? Do you believe Him? Do you believe that everyone who believes in Him will never really die, and that in Him they will receive eternal life? Do you believe that Jesus is the one whom King David, while looking to the coming of the Messiah, identified as the Son of God (Psalm 2:7),³²⁹ that He is Messiah the Prince (Daniel 9:25),³³⁰ the one whose origins are from of old, from ancient times (Micah 5:2),³³¹ the one whom the Holy Scriptures call "The mighty God, The everlasting Father" (Isaiah 9:6b),³³² the one who is our Savior from our sins, in whom we can have eternal life? (John 1:4,³³³ John 10:10;³³⁴ I John 2:25³³⁵)

If in fact your answer to that question is, "Yes," the question then becomes, "How do we take advantage of God's offer to restore our fellowship with Him and His fellowship with us? How do we take advantage of the atoning death of Jesus and receive eternal life?" In answer to that, Jesus Himself had this to say in a message to the early Christians after He had ascended into heaven, a

³²⁶ <https://biblehub.com/esv/psalms/103.htm>

³²⁷ <https://biblehub.com/esv/isaiah/55.htm>

³²⁸ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/john/11.htm>

³²⁹ <http://biblehub.com/kjv/psalms/2.htm>

³³⁰ <http://biblehub.com/kjv/daniel/9.htm>

³³¹ <http://biblehub.com/niv/micah/5.htm>

³³² <http://biblehub.com/kjv/isaiah/9.htm>

³³³ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/john/1.htm>

³³⁴ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/john/10.htm>

³³⁵ https://biblehub.com/nasb/1_john/2.htm

message which He sent through the Apostle John:

20 ‘Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me. (Revelation 3:20; NASB)³³⁶

The Apostle Paul had this to say as well:

9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; (Romans 10:9; NASB)³³⁷

Putting it all together, then, it comes down to this: If you are now convinced Jesus is the one whom the Bible says He is, and if you are prepared to accept His forgiveness of sin and recognize Him as the Messiah, the one who was promised of old, then do these two things. First, pray this prayer:

Lord Jesus, I know that I have sinned. I know that you died for me to save me from my sins and that you rose from the dead so that I might have eternal life. I open the door of my heart to you and ask you to come in and be my Lord and Savior. I ask you to forgive me of all my sins, and I ask you to save me unto eternal life. I thank you Lord, and praise you. Amen.

Second, tell people about this. Tell them that you have come to believe in Jesus and that you have accepted Him as your Lord, and that you recognize Him as being the Messiah. Here is what Jesus Himself had to say about this part:

32 “Therefore everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. 33 But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32-33; NASB)³³⁸

So proclaiming Jesus publicly is a very, very important part about taking Jesus up on His offer to cleanse us from all sin and give us the gift of eternal life. Therefore, start telling people about this, and do so as soon as you can. Tell the whole world, in fact. It might not be easy to tell some of your friends or your family about this, and so they might not necessarily be the very first ones you tell this to. But do make a point of going public with this to some people you know right away, at least, and in very short order then also tell everyone else as well, even those who are close to you who might not like the fact that you have become a Christian. That is very important.

You might need help with this, particularly if your family or friends will oppose your new

³³⁶ <http://biblehub.com/nasb/revelation/3.htm>

³³⁷ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/romans/10.htm>

³³⁸ <http://biblehub.com/nasb/matthew/10.htm>

belief. So here's how to find likeminded souls, who can strengthen you, including many who have gone through the same things you might be going through, very quickly: Go online and search the name of your town online along with the words "Bible" and "church". Ask churches which you find under this search if they believe that the Bible is the divinely-inspired, inerrant Word of God.

Allow me to emphasize both of those two points: divinely-inspired, and inerrant. If they say yes to both of those things unequivocally, and do so without hesitation or modification, then that is the type of church you are looking for. This is the type of thing which will in fact be beneficial to all who come to know Jesus in a personal way, even if their friends and family are not always supportive of them right away. As Jesus pointed out,

[31](#) So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, “If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; [32](#) and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” (John 8:31-32; NASB)³³⁹

I say this even though I have just recently gone back to traditional Roman Catholic practice in my own life. The reason for this is that it is extremely important to become firmly grounded in the Word of God in your life, and it is not commonly easy to find in-depth Bible studies in the Roman Catholic Church, I'm afraid. But don't let entry into a Protestant fellowship interfere with your also establishing a traditional Roman Catholic practice at the same time. I would encourage you instead to have your cake and eat it, too: Get grounded in the Word of God, and---if your heart and mind will allow---accept Roman Catholic fellowship as well.

You might need help with this, particularly if you are Jewish. Fortunately, back in the 1960s and '70s, a great movement got started among Jews who, like yourself, came to believe that Yeshua (Jesus) is the Messiah. As a consequence, large numbers of Jews have come to believe in Yeshua as the Messiah within about the past fifty years or so. And as one might expect, organizations of Jews who believe in Yeshua (who call themselves “Messianic Jews”) have sprung up. One of them, for instance, is “Jews for Jesus”. Their web site is: <http://jewsforjesus.org/?gclid=COaDmfiB2s8CFY-EaQodFm0BJg> . There is also Chosen People Ministries: <http://www.chosenpeople.com/main/> , the International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues: <http://iamcs.org> , and an older organization as well, the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America: <http://mjaa.org> , along with several other groups as well in the U.S. There is also Kirt Schneider, who has his own web site and Facebook page: <http://discoveringthejewishjesus.com> . In Britain, there is the British Messianic Alliance: <http://www.theimja.org/category/british-messianic/>.

I recommend that you contact some of them as soon as you can. You might also wish to start out locally, if there are fellow Messianic Jews in your vicinity. You can use a search engine with the words “messianic” and “Jew”, and then the name of your town. You might find a Messianic congregation or two which holds regular services in your area. If you have any trouble finding one, the national organizations listed above should be able to help you with your desire to come to know

³³⁹ <https://biblehub.com/nasb/john/8.htm>

Yeshua in a better and deeper way. And of course, you are always welcome to attend a gentile Christian church if you should wish to do so.

So in closing, here is my prayer for all of you: that you may come to know Jesus, and come to know Him more and more each day in a rich and exciting way. And if you could contact me via my website to let me know the good news about your finding out who Jesus really is, I would appreciate hearing from you very much. In closing then, I simply say, "Peace be unto you!" And thank you for taking the time to read my book. And please encourage others to do so.

As a final note, I invite all of you to enjoy the following videos:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhnAblF-f6s>.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mjABef_hs9s.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=60EG9xjFwgg>.

This completes Volume 4 of The Star of Bethlehem Decoded. All four volumes plus the Appendix can be found at StarOfBethlehemDecoded.com.