



Does challenging superstition or faith protect people?
 Is it mistaken to support organised religion in membership or donations?

If people do good because they are human, not because God prompts them,
 is it right to risk giving God any credit when they alone own their good?



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ANOTHER GUADALUPE?

I wonder why the visionary of Our Lady of Ocotlan was an Indian convert called Juan Diego Bernardino. The Guadalupe witness was also an Indian convert called Juan Diego.

On February 25 1541, Juan Diego Bernardino was out for water for his sick relations when he saw a lady in the forest. She promised to give him holy water to cure those who drink of it. She took him up a hill to see a fountain of water. She made a promise that all the sick who drink will be cured. This was a very unqualified promise. Yet what about those who were not cured. She tells him about an image. "Tell the monks that they will find an image of me here [meaning in the forest] that will not only represent my perfection but also through it, I will issue forth my mercy and my blessings. I request that the image be enshrined in the chapel of St Lawrence."

Friars went to see the fountain and reportedly found a tree that was miraculously burning. The remains of the tree were checked the next day. The tree was cut and they found an image of Mary in the trunk. In other words, they cut the tree to find a ready made statue. The statue still exists today. It is enthroned in the city of Tlaxcala. Popes, Clement 12, Pius 10, Pius 12, regarded the story as reliable and lent official credence to the story and the miracle.

A lot of this is too closely mirroring the Guadalupe story of a decade earlier. It suggests copying. The story is similar in essentials. The main difference, a statue appearing from nowhere and a painting of Mary doing that as well, is hardly significant. The two stories cannot afford to be too similar. They are already too similar.

Skeptics worry about amazing claims when there seems to be a tendency for such wonders to happen in a culture. For example, the Joseph Smith story would be amazing if it were just him. But it is not. His nation and his culture were hotbeds of attempts to form new religions and miracles. One crank had to succeed.

Two miracles that are similar in what they are about in such a short space of time is suspect. God would not need to repeat a miracle as if there was something wrong with the first attempt. And why do the two images not look like each other? Why is one clearly white and the other a person of colour?