The Virgin of Guadalupe: The Formation of a Mexican National Identity and Consciousness

In establishing a cultural identity, nations must possess a unifying “master symbol” that can be interpreted by individuals as social and political environments change (Wolf 34). Originally introduced into Mexico as La Virgen de los Remedios by Spanish conquistadors and missionaries as a tool for conversion, the Virgin Mary was an intercessor between man and God and represented forgiveness, healing, and unconditional love for all. This particular image was transformed by Mexicans through syncretism with the Aztec deity Tonantzin into the Virgin of Guadalupe, and she brought comfort to the faithful during periods of cruelty, violence, and epidemic. No longer a symbol of Spanish power and authority, she became the patroness of an aspiring Mexican nation on the precipice of developing its own unique political, social, and economic ideologies (Hall 169).

The Virgin’s unspecialized, nonpolitical form could be adapted as complex social and political environments evolved within the antiquated social structure of the colonies (Kurtz 203). She symbolized freedom and spiritual salvation for Indians and mestizos, legitimizing their rights as humans. For creoles, she represented hope for the recovery of the holy rights that were corrupted by centuries of Spanish oppression (Henderson 15). Within the context of the struggle for independence, the Virgin of Guadalupe became a universal symbol of redemption and rebellion against a paternalistic power, and her ability to represent the religious and political beliefs of each disinherited caste founded a national consciousness that contributed toward the overthrow of Spanish colonial rule.

Works Cited

