

3 < R X U & D U L G De G r o t h y G a d a l u p e , b u t L e t U s S h a r e L a L e c h e :
A Look at Latina/o Theological Roots in Images of Breast Milk
Dr. Neomi DeAnda

Abstract

Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe, as Patroness of the Americas, has been used sometimes as a way of homogenizing Latinas and Latin Americans. While probably not the intention of Pope Pius XII in 1945, this single Marian image many times becomes associated with every Latino community from Canadian to Salvadoran, Cuban to Peruvian, Tejana to Puerto Rican, Argentine to Costa Rican, etc. Yet, the members of these various groups know very well that each nation and many times each region has devotions to its own distinct Marian images, most of which carry their own local stories of apparition and miracles, such as *Coleda* of Cubans and *Nuestra Señora de Chiquinquí* of Colombians.

One Marian image, however, does have roots across various Latin American communities and their histories. Nursing and Lactating Madonnas can be found throughout what we now call the Americas from Peru to Mexico; Puerto Rico to Florida with confirmed dates from the early seventeenth century but may have arrived earlier in the Americas. Members of the Spanish Monarchy had various devotions to these Madonnas, sometimes named *María de La Le Buena Parto* and other times named *Nuestra Señora de Belén*. Spanish Queens prayed for intercessions through this Mary for assistance in childbirth and child rearing.

These Marian images were brought to the Americas to also watch over the children during rearing of those living in the region as well as a way of union with God. One nun, Sor María Anna de Águeda de San Ignacio, wrote an entire theological treatise on *El Camino de La Leche*. RXWOLQLQJ WKH SDWK WRZDUG * R G d i v i n e l a c t a n g l e o n d u s i n g V P L O N breasts are not exclusive to the Spanish or to Christianity. Various deities and images of lactating and nursing breasts can be found in indigenous cosmologies of the Americas. So, these Marian images seem to have been easily adopted by various native communities.

Today, at least two of these Marian images are found in active chapels within the boundaries of the USA. One, a *Nuestra Señora de Belén* hangs in the Cathedral in Viejo San Juan. Two, a statue of *Nuestra Señora de La Leche y Buena Parto* sits in her dedicated chapel on *Misión* 1RPEUH GH 'LRV LQ 6W \$XJXVWLQH)ORULGD LQ ZKDW KDV \$FUH ` 7KLV KLVWRULFDQ VWXG\ RI WKH EUHDVW DQG ODFV sacred by various communities allows Latina theologies to reclaim the breast as a *coimage* of life and divinity.

Bio

Neomi De Anda Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at Dayton University, holds a PhD in Constructive Theology from Loyola University Chicago. Dr. De Anda serves as the Treasurer for the Academy of Catholic Hispanic Theologians of the United States (ACHTUS). Her primary interests include: Latina Theologies, Breast Milk and Divinity, Latin American Women 1500