

# Virgin mary in colonial latin america essay sample

[Art & Culture](#), [Painting](#)



Contained herein is an analysis of the depiction of Virgin Mary in Colonial Latin America, the scope period being 16-19<sup>th</sup> century. The analysis will specifically use the 1720 Virgin of the Mountain of Potosí painting to explain the significance of her presence. As a devotional image, Virgin Mary's body is imposed on a mountain visible from various angles in the entire region, which is symbolic that anyone in need of her interception could access without hindrance or restriction. Her head seems to spear through silver-like clouds that angels and the Creator seem to sit on.

This observation leads to conclusion that it is through her that angels and the Creator got to know of happenings in this world. Similarly, it seems that human race contacted the heavens through her intercession. Her importance in intercession is further illustrated in features on the painting. The lighthouses on either side of the mountain illustrate that she guided and guarded traders and colonialists during their sea voyages and other travels.

The use of a local mountain to superimpose Virgin Mary's picture was important because the local populace could easily relate with the resulting image. In fact, people were inclined to feel direct connection with the Virgin Mary herself. Such closeness increased confidence and faith that prayers will be heard earnestly. The use of mountain further illustrated the localization of Catholic faith that has been brought to Latin America by Spanish colonialists.

Such localization was vehemently important in winning believers and having them stick to the faith, mostly because it was easy to understand and follow. Additionally, the local mountain showed that Native Latin Americans were

willing to blend their traditional beliefs in nature with the teachings in the new faith that they started to cherish (Rishel 2006).

The illustration of Virgin Mary in a local setting is further indication of people's acceptance of the Christianity, which was regarded as the link between the local world and Creator in the heavens. The painting manifests that Virgin Mary, was not only sent from heaven but has local traits and therefore relate directly with the local people through their culture, traditions, and environs. In this regard, seeking her intercession was tantamount to approaching a mother close enough to relate with, a mother who understood what was going on at the local level, and therefore a loving and understanding mother who will ensure that what is needed is provided accordingly even before believers embark on asking.

The patrons pictured at the bottom were Virgin Mary helpers that interacted with the populace on day-to-day basis. These guardians were also angles sent by the Creator to help his people in their daily struggles, as well as aid Virgin Mary's work. In consideration that Latin American society had before Christianity been as led by guardian leaders, it was easy to relate with the patrons.

The patrons appear to be at both the present (17<sup>th</sup> century) era and from previous periods. Fact that earthly patrons attained such title through wealth accumulation leads to conclusion that industrial colonialists are also depicted at the bottom. According to Migden (2000) the patrons are giving thanks for what they gained in Latin America, especially minerals such as silver and gold.

The wealthy patrons seem to be giving thanks on Virgin Mary's feet; through her the gifts were to be blessed and received by the Creator and Angels. Virgin Mary was therefore seen as the route to having ones offering being blessed and consequently aid in increase of the same. The wealthy patrons are further surrounding the offering as if to illustrate offering as a group and asking for the Creator, through Virgin Mary to shower blessing on Latin America so the patrons could get more wealth.

Other than the patrons, other individuals are depicted in the painting taking offertory closer to Virgin Mary. Those taking smaller and individual gifts to Virgin Mary appear to be Creoles who lacked the colossal amount of wealth like the Spaniard colonialists—but the meager gifts did not stop natives from being thankful to the giver of everything.

According to Mills (2002) the Spaniards and Creoles had collectively taken Virgin Mary as the intercessor and looked upon her for good relations in the colonies. Indeed, the painting illustrates both groups coming together with a single purpose of communicating with the Creator through Virgin Mary. On top of silver cloud is the Holy Trinity that the people could communicate with through her. In this regard, she comes out as an important part of the Holy Trinity, especially considering her intercession role, helping cultivate positive relationships between colonialists and Native Latin Americans., and being the ambassador of goodwill.

Some critics have observed various similarities between the use of Virgin Mary's in Christianity and females in Latin American culture, which helped in speeding her acceptance in individual and societal spiritual growth. For

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instance, Andrien (2000) has highlighted the use of Pachamama, a female deity that was associated with mountains in Latin American traditional religions.

In this regard, having Virgin Mary take the place of Pachamama, after the colonial conquest was an easy process, did not leave bad taste among native Latin Americans. Similarly, Spain, which had been the home country of nearly all settlers in Latin America, had had a long history with female deities—this contributed a great deal to the use of Virgin Mary as the matron of good fortune in the new colonies Latin America.

The acceptance of female role in spiritualism between native Latin Americans and Spaniards boosted the process of having Virgin Mary play the many roles illustrated on the painting. The strong belief on both sides that she was indeed helpful in their day-to-day spiritual living was helpful in laying a strong foundation for the centuries to come. Virgin Mary has, as a result of this understanding, an important part of spiritual growth throughout Latin American generations.

She indeed occupies a special place in Latin American Catholics and non-Catholics. Unlike in 18<sup>th</sup> century that saw Virgin Mary play the role of uniting colonialists and the natives, she currently play a vital role of uniting Christians from various denominations and therefore strengthen societal bonds in Latin American and other part of the world.

Virgin Mary's is further depicted as being between the bright colored heavens and the dark colored earth, thus showing that her intercession

enabled people to get from relying on dissatisfying earthly life to more satisfactory heavenly one (Schwaller 2000). Her open hands are to welcome all people to God's kindness regardless of background, wealth or abilities. Indeed, all the people depicted on the painting seem to be eager to get to her welcoming arms. On one hand's side seems to be the day and the other indicates night time, which illustrate that she was ready to intercede and at any given time.

## References

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