

The American Taliban and the San Juan de Los Lagos Virgin
Marian Devotion in a Protestant Context

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Because of the tragic events of September 11th 2001 we cannot but think of the future. But, at the same time, reexamining the past too is unavoidable. Fanatical acts that result in suicide attacks and terrorism are phenomena which have often been repeated over and over again to this day. To begin with we should say that there is a need to analyze these acts – until now often treated separately and explained as incidents of madness – in connection with one another. The example I will use here is something that will clarify the impact and changes which the process of migration brings about. It is the result of developments which took place as the traditions, beliefs and daily customs of life of one culture were placed in the context of another nationality and culture. Because migration is a phenomenon in which people are in motion it often brings out the xenophobia, intolerance and fanaticism we all bear inside.

A man who was a pastor of a Protestant Church in a town called San Juan de Los Logos in Southern Texas was for many years troubled because his missionary work was unsuccessful. The majority of the people in the region were not only Catholic, but many of them were immigrants from Mexico. The Catholic Church, which was close nearby, was always full of many worshippers who would come to pray at a statue of the Virgin Mary brought there from Mexico in 1954. Finally, the man, exploding with the anguish of so many years of failure, flew into the Catholic Church in a Cessna aircraft which he piloted himself in 1970.

The Catholic Church burned to the ground, but the man's actions had an unintentional consequence. Nobody died in the tragedy, the statue of the Virgin Mary was saved, the church was built again due to an insurance payment, and because of the increased reputation of the Virgin Mary's statue brought about through these "miracles", the town became a new "holy place" for the Mexicans.

What can we learn from this event? If we think about how suicidal terrorism as a result of "intolerance" can change in meaning depending on the process of interpretation or the nature of the subject of interpretation, then the frightening reduction of individual events to religion or race, or the state becomes clear. Terrorism has no national borders or race or religion. In this sense, do we really fully understand the meaning of the events of September 11th 2001? We must think about that event and the meaning of the message that it brings us.