

DISCUSSION AND BOOK SIGNING

Celebrating Paul J. Vanderwood's new book

WHEN: 3 o'clock the afternoon of March 19, 2005

WHERE: Barnes & Noble Booksellers, Grossmont Center, 5500 Grossmont Center Drive, La Mesa

JUAN SOLDADO

Rapist, Murderer, Martyr, Saint

"Juan Soldado is a true cannot-put-it-down read that combines deep research, strong narrative, and remarkable insight about how a spontaneous religious devotion comes into being and consolidates itself. I know of no other work that portrays the elements of this particular sort of religious belief—its spontaneity, its stubbornness in the face of the Church's indifference, and the matter-of-fact way it is practiced in daily life."—Eric Van Young, author of *The Other Rebellion: Popular Violence, Ideology, and the Mexican Struggle for Independence, 1810–1821*

"Juan Soldado is a rich, exuberant, and sensitive account of the making of a folk saint in Tijuana. It is based on extensive use of newspapers and remarkable interviews with eyewitnesses to events in the 1930s."—William A. Christian Jr., author of *Visionaries: The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ*

Paul J. Vanderwood offers a fascinating look at the events, beliefs, and circumstances that have motivated popular devotion to Juan Soldado, a Mexican folk saint. In his mortal incarnation, Juan Soldado was Juan Castillo Morales, a twenty-four-year-old soldier convicted of and quickly executed for the rape and murder of eight-year-old Olga Camacho in Tijuana in 1938. Immediately after Morales's death, many people began to doubt the evidence of his guilt, or at least the justice of his brutal execution. People reported seeing blood seeping from his grave and hearing his soul cry out protesting his innocence. Soon the "martyred" Morales was known as Juan Soldado, or John the Soldier. Believing that those who have died unjustly sit closest to God, people began visiting Morales's grave asking for favors. Within months of his death, the young soldier had become a popular saint. He is not recognized by the Catholic Church, yet thousands of people have made pilgrimages to his gravesite. While Juan Soldado is well known in Tijuana, southern California's Mexican American community, and beyond, this book is the first to

situate his story within a broader exploration of how and why popular canonizations such as his take root and flourish.

In addition to conducting extensive archival research, Vanderwood interviewed central actors in the events of 1938, including Olga Camacho's mother, citizens who rioted to demand Morales's release to a lynch mob, those who witnessed his execution, and some of the earliest believers in his miraculous powers. Vanderwood also interviewed many present-day visitors to the shrine at Morales's grave. He describes them, their petitions—for favors such as health, a good marriage, or safe passage into the United States—and how they reconcile their belief in Juan Soldado with their Catholicism. Vanderwood puts the events of 1938 within the context of Depression-era Tijuana and he locates people's

devotion, then and now, within the history of extra-institutional religious activity. In *Juan Soldado*, a gripping true-crime mystery opens up into a much larger and more elusive mystery of faith and belief.

Paul J. Vanderwood is Professor Emeritus of Mexican History at San Diego State University. He is the author of several books, including *The Power of God Against the Guns of Government: Religious Upheaval in Mexico at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century*; *Border Fury: A Picture Postcard Account of the Mexican Revolution and U.S. War Preparedness, 1910–1917*; and *Disorder and Progress: Bandits, Police, and Mexican Development*.

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