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**WALKING WITH ONE HEART: HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE CATHOLIC  
CHURCH AMONG THE MAYA OF HIGHLAND CHIAPAS**

by

**CHRISTINE MARIE KOVIC**

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of  
Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1997

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## ABSTRACT

WALKING WITH ONE HEART: HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH  
AMONG THE MAYA OF HIGHLAND CHIAPAS

by

Christine Marie Kovic

Adviser: Professor June Nash

This thesis examines propositions about universal human rights and how they are interpreted in Chiapas where thousands of Mayan peoples have been violently exiled from their native communities. Many argue that the exile of indigenous peoples violates basic human rights guaranteed in the Mexican Constitution and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The objectives of this thesis are: (1) to analyze how Western-European notions of human rights articulate with understandings of rights in indigenous communities with distinctive cultural, religious, and political traditions; (2) to explore the impact of the pastoral work of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas on indigenous understandings and awareness of human rights, and in turn how indigenous views have affected the pastoral workers; and (3) to examine what concrete actions are being taken locally in order to defend such rights, and how these have been influenced by indigenous mobilization in Mexico, including the recent Zapatista uprising.

The methodological approach includes participant observation and structured interviews conducted over a thirty month period (1993-1996) in the highlands of Chiapas.

I focused on a community of post Vatican II Tzotzil (Mayan) Catholics who were violently exiled from their communities of origin for political, economic, and religious reasons. A description of the formation of this community, the history of exile in Chiapas, and indigenous understandings of human rights are presented in order to examine the complex relationship between religion, politics, culture, and rights.

This thesis demonstrates that culture excludes some while it includes others, and is often manipulated to promote the political-economic power of an elite group and to maintain the status quo. In fact, the promotion of indigenous culture can be linked to human rights abuses, including the violent exile of those who do not conform to local custom as defined by traditional indigenous leaders. The issue of defining human rights is taking on increasing significance as indigenous peoples in Mexico and elsewhere are demanding cultural and economic autonomy, and as governments are being forced to consider policies to protect the autonomy of indigenous groups within the boundaries of the nation-state.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

More people than I can name have supported me in the years that I have been conducting research and writing this dissertation. In Mexico and the United States, friends, family, and colleagues have shared their enthusiasm, provided encouragement, and made it possible for me to complete this work -- my deepest thanks to all.

My most profound debt is to the indigenous Catholics of Guadalupe who accepted me in their community and shared their stories of suffering and hope.<sup>1</sup> Without their help, this dissertation would never have been written. They gave hours of their time to talk with me, welcomed me into their homes, answered my questions, encouraged me to attend religious celebrations, and carefully explained their experiences -- wanting to make sure that I understood their lives. Juan, the eldest catechist in Guadalupe, not only served as a translator during many interviews, but also introduced me to other families, answered endless questions, and shared his knowledge on the recent history of expulsion and the Catholic Church. He and his family befriended me early in my fieldwork, and I am grateful for their support. The people of Guadalupe taught me what it means "to walk with one heart" and much more. I hope that this dissertation serves to denounce the human rights abuses they have suffered and gives voice to their struggle to defend their rights.

I first went to Chiapas in January of 1993 with Professor June Nash to gain fieldwork experience. A four-month "visit" became a two and a half year fieldwork project, and Professor Nash has supported my work from the very beginning. I was

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<sup>1</sup> "Guadalupe" is a pseudonym, as are the names of the people of the community.

extremely fortunate that June Nash and I were both working in Chiapas at the same time for a year, and I learned a great deal from her. I cannot express enough thanks for her inspiration, encouragement, humor, and friendship. She helped me to address theoretical issues, shared her vast knowledge of Chiapas and fieldwork, read several drafts of this manuscript, and pushed me to finish writing this dissertation in a short period of time.

I am most grateful to the members of the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" in the city San Cristóbal de Las Casas. They helped me compile data on human rights abuses in Chiapas, answered my questions, had confidence in my work, and provided friendship, support, and much more. Bishop Samuel Ruiz García, Patricia Gómez, and Father Pablo Romo deserve special mention for their assistance. I also want to thank all of the pastoral workers of the Diocese of San Cristóbal. Their work to promote and defend the rights of indigenous peoples in Chiapas continues to inspire me. Many individuals took the time to talk with me and also provided personal support through the difficulties of living and working in Chiapas during a time of intense political conflict.

At the Graduate Center of the City University of New York, professors and students have provided the necessary intellectual community to carry out this project. Members of my dissertation committee -- June Nash, Delmos Jones, Jane Schneider, and Frank Reynolds -- have been most supportive in the process of writing the dissertation. From the beginning, Delmos Jones pushed me to theorize the ideas of human rights and cultural relativism. Jane Schneider carefully read the first version of the manuscript and provided detailed comments on organization and style. Her editing made this a much

more readable thesis than it otherwise would have been. My outside reader, Frank Reynolds, carefully read the entire manuscript and provided in-depth comments and suggestions. I am also grateful to Ron Waterbury who served on my second exam committee and shared his insights on Mexico.

Pauline Herman, a student at the Graduate Center who died in March of 1995, shared my interest in human rights and supported my work in Chiapas. Other friends and colleagues at the Graduate Center helped out with reference, advice, ideas, and housing -- thanks to Maria Hart, Anthony Marcus, Jonathan Hearn, Youngmin Seo, and Tom Burgess. Terri Vulcano helped out with paperwork and bureaucratic issues -- particularly in the three and a half years that I was out of the country -- and in countless other ways.

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Thanks to my family who took great interest in my thesis and encouraged my work in Chiapas, even when they were extremely worried about my personal safety and just wanted me to come home. My parents have provided much love and support, and have helped me in more ways than I can express. John provided practical support by buying the computer on which I wrote the dissertation. My mother has supported me in the non-traditional path I have taken in recent years and has always encouraged my work. At the last minute, she proof-read the entire manuscript so that I could finish on time.

I am grateful to Francisco Argüelles Paz y Puente for his love and support. He answered all of my questions and more, and helped me to recognize the importance of the work, even when I didn't.

I dedicate this work to the indigenous peoples in Chiapas who are working to defend their human rights, to all those who are walking with them in their struggle for a dignified life, and to the memory of Pauline Herman who inspired me in her work.

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## GLOSSARY

Sp. - Spanish.

Tz. - Tzotzil.

*agente*: a local leader who has the power to mediate in community conflicts (Sp.)

*Asuntos Indígenas*: the government office in charge of indigenous affairs (Sp.)

*cabecera*: town center; central village or administrative, economic, and ritual center of a municipality. (Sp.)

*cacique*: entrenched local leaders within indigenous communities (Sp.)

*campesino*: a peasant, a person who works the land (Sp.)

*cargo*: work which is carried out for the benefit of one's community. Literally, burden or duty. The term is also used to refer to the work done by the sponsor (*cargo*-holder) of a traditional festival. (Sp.)

*catechist*: Catholic lay leader. In the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, the catechists prepare people for sacraments of baptism, first communion, confirmation, and marriage, and serve as religious leaders of their communities.

*caxlan*: a Tzotzil word used to refer to non-indigenous peoples; it refers both to Mexicans and to people from other countries. (Tz.)

*Chenalho'*: a highland Tzotzil community located north of San Juan Chamula.

*colonia*: literally a colony, refers to a neighborhood, mostly located at the outskirts of a city (Sp.)

*costumbre*: a Spanish word referring to the religious and social customs which define traditional Maya life. (Sp.)

*curandero*: A traditional healer who cures spiritual and physical ailments (Sp.)

*finca*: cattle ranches and coffee plantations occupying extensive territories of land (Sp.)

*hamlet*: a community within a rural township, *paraje* (Sp.)

*indigenismo*: a policy initiated in Mexico after the Revolution of 1910 which attempted to integrate indigenous peoples into one unified nation-state through assimilation (Sp.)

*mestizo*: technically used to refer to people of mixed Spanish and Indian blood. Tzotziles use this term interchangeably with *Ladino* to describe non-indigenous Mexicans. (Sp.)

*milpa*: field cultivated with maize, beans and squash. (Sp.)

*municipio*: township. (Sp.)

*peón*: an unskilled day laborers who perform menial work in the construction of homes and public works (Sp.)

*pox*: An alcoholic beverage made from distilled sugar cane juice. It is produced locally in Chamula. (Tz.)

PRI: Institutional Revolutionary Party, the ruling national political party in Mexico.  
*Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Sp.)

PRD: Party of the Democratic Revolution, a left of center opposition party in Mexico.  
*Partido Revolucionario Democrático* (Sp.)

*pueblo*: literally, a town or a village, but term implies community (Sp.)

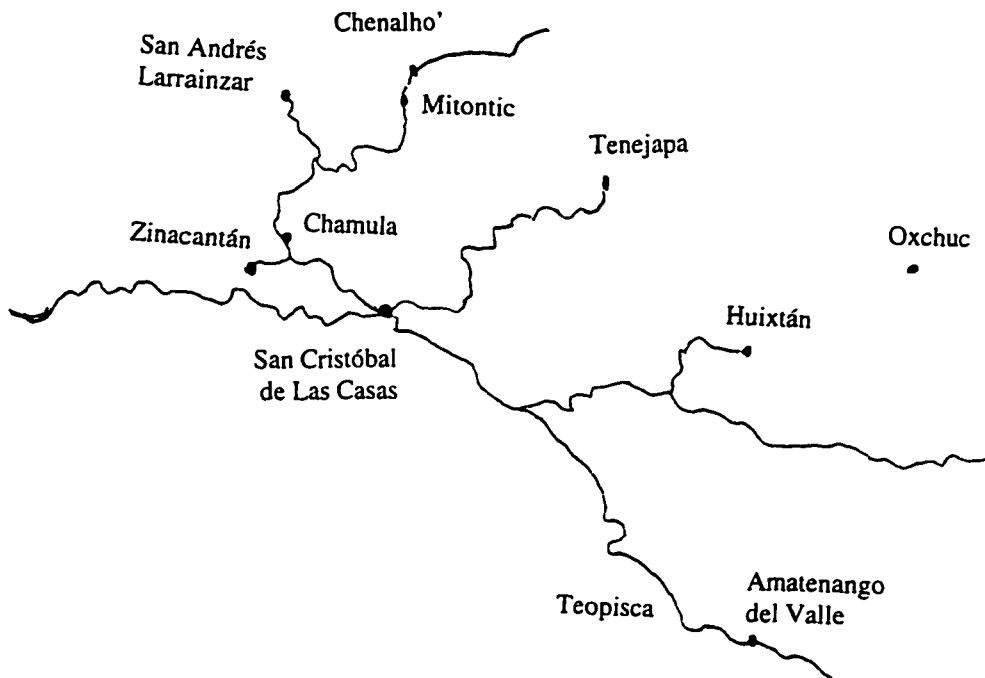
*tierra caliente*: literally, hot lands. The lowlands of the Grijalva Valley of Central Chiapas. *Campesinos* of the highlands commonly rent lands or practice sharecropping in this region (Sp.).

*tortilla*: a flat pancake made of maize; the staple of the Mayan diet (Sp.) *Vaj* (Tz.)

Tuxtla Gutiérrez: capital of the state of Chiapas (Sp.)

Word of God: The indigenous of Chiapas describe being Catholic as hearing or following the Word of God. A celebration of the Word of God takes place when the Bible is read and discussed. In contrast, mass includes the sacrament of communion which is consecrated by a priest.

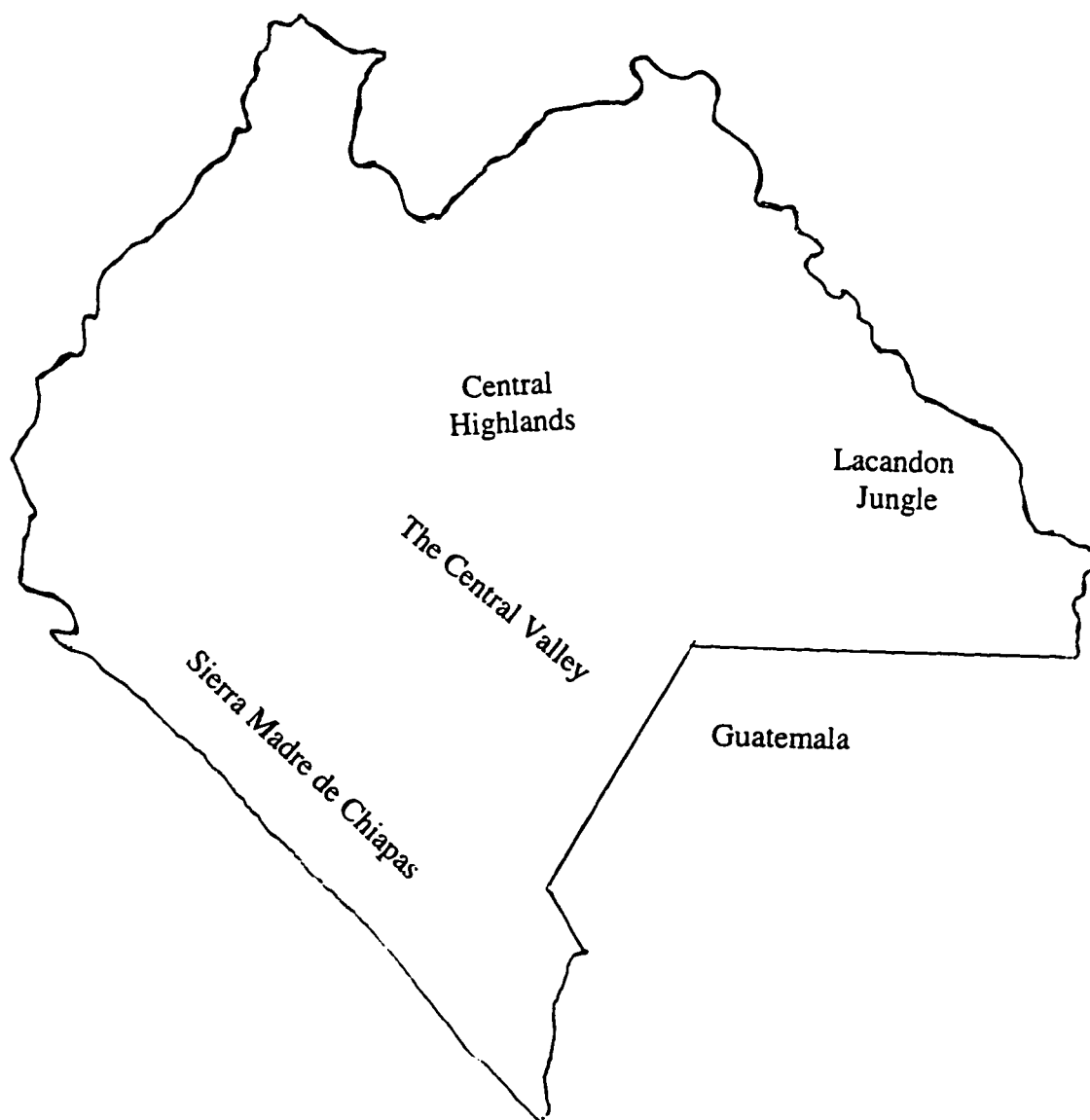
**Map 1**  
**The Highlands of Chiapas**



**Map 2**  
**The Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas**



**Map 3**  
**Chiapas: Regional Features**



**PART I**  
**CONTEXT AND HISTORY**

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

As *campesinos* we have to walk a lot. Sometimes there are no roads, sometimes we don't have money to pay for transportation. We carry our belongings with us, women carry their children. We walk for hours in the rain and cold. Catechists [lay preachers] have to walk to visit families and communities to share the Word of God. The work of the catechist never ends. It is difficult to follow the Word of God. The path is narrow and there are more people who don't follow than who do. Following the Word of God is working and walking. But we must help our brothers and sisters in Christ (Juan, Catechist of Guadalupe).

Having served as a Catholic catechist for over twenty-five years, Juan knows what it means to work and walk to share the Word of God.<sup>1</sup> He walks for hours to visit the ill, to prepare families for sacraments, and to preach in his own and in other communities. Walking is also part of being poor. As Juan points out, *campesinos* are the ones who live in places that are inaccessible by cars, and in any case, they often lack the money to pay for transportation. He also uses walking as a metaphor for building unity within a community, "When we walk together with one heart, we are strong." Walking in unity is moving forward on a path to defend one's rights. Finally, walking to serve God is also a symbolic act which involves following the path of the Gospel to help construct the Reign of God.

Juan currently lives in Guadalupe, a community located on a hillside among the many shantytowns surrounding the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas which

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<sup>1</sup> The names of informants as well as the name of the community have been changed in order to protect their privacy. Throughout the text I use pseudonyms to refer to the inhabitants of Guadalupe.

have been called a *cinturón de miseria* (poverty belt). Like the majority of the residents of Guadalupe, Juan is a Tzotzil (Maya) and was violently exiled from his native home in the municipality of San Juan Chamula. When a family is exiled (or expelled) from their home, they may be jailed, beaten or threatened; their home may be robbed or burned; and their crops may be destroyed. Then they are told that they must leave the community or suffer further violence. Sometimes, the mere threat of violence is enough to cause families to flee. Currently, over 30,000 indigenous peoples have been expelled and live in poverty in San Cristóbal and other towns where they have initiated a new life separated from their land, homes, and communities.

As an anthropologist studying in Chiapas, I became absorbed by the issues of human rights, religion, and exile. It became clear that the act of exile demonstrated the complex way in which politics, religion and culture are entangled in definitions of human rights and attempts to protect them. This thesis examines propositions about universal human rights and how they are interpreted in Chiapas, where thousands of Mayan Indians have been forcibly exiled from their native communities in actions which violate basic human rights guaranteed in the Mexican Constitution and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I focus on expelled Catholics, and examine the role of the evangelization by the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in Chiapas in educating indigenous peoples about their human rights.

The problem of indigenous exile has generated an intense conflict involving the expelled, indigenous leaders responsible for expulsion, the state and federal government, Catholic and Protestant Churches, and human rights organizations. All of these groups,

along with academics and journalists, have been engaged in a public debate regarding human rights, Mayan culture, and the use or abuse of power. As noted, the act of expulsion clearly violates several human rights guaranteed in the Mexican Constitution and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, namely the rights to personal security, physical and moral integrity, property, and freedom of worship. On the grounds that these basic guarantees should be respected and that local indigenous leaders are abusing their power, some argue that the expulsions must be stopped immediately, those responsible should be punished, and the expelled should be allowed to return to their homelands. Most notable in this group are the non-governmental organizations, the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" and CHILTAK, the indigenous organization Regional Council of Indigenous Representatives of the Highlands of Chiapas (CRIACH), and more recently and dramatically, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. However, others have argued that exile of those who espouse distinct beliefs and customs is justified if it serves to maintain internal harmony and tradition; academics taking this position include Jacinto Arias (1992), Duncan Earle (1990), and Andres Fabregas Puig (1991).

In examining conceptions of human rights of Mayan Catholics, one must also consider how doctrines emanating from the Catholic Church -- which claims to be universal in its structure, origin and development -- have affected indigenous notions of rights. Some sectors within the Catholic Church, particularly followers of liberation theology, posit a conception of human rights broadly defined as "the right to a dignified life" which goes beyond eighteenth century theories of civil and political rights based on

liberty and equality.

In examining the case of expulsion, this thesis demonstrates how a group of exiles in Chiapas have created an indigenous, Roman Catholic community in which a self-conscious effort is being made to develop an understanding of human rights which is internationally informed, but locally-grounded. Within this community, the Catholic exiles actively defend their rights in conjunction with other indigenous peoples in Chiapas, primarily through networks stemming from the Diocese of San Cristóbal. Through in-depth analysis of local understandings of human rights in Guadalupe, I examine the relationship between universal and indigenous definitions of rights. Although traditional Chamulan culture is privileged in government discourse and defended on the grounds that it is authentically Indian, this thesis demonstrates that culture excludes as well as includes, and is often manipulated to promote the political-economic power of an elite group and to maintain the status quo. In fact, the promotion of indigenous culture is linked to human rights abuses, including the violent exile of those who do not conform to local custom as defined by *caciques*.

This thesis addresses three fundamental questions related to human rights and expulsion. First, how does the Western-European notion of human rights, specifically that of the legal code of the United Nations, articulate with conceptions of human rights in indigenous communities which have distinctive cultural, religious, and political traditions? Second, how does the pastoral work of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas affect the indigenous understandings and awareness of human rights, and in turn how have indigenous views affected the Bishop of the Diocese and the

pastoral workers? Third, following indigenous understandings of human rights, what concrete actions are being taken locally in order to defend such rights, and how has this been influenced by the recent Zapatista uprising in the state of Chiapas?

These questions take on increasing significance as indigenous people are demanding cultural and economic autonomy, and as the Mexican government is being forced to formulate policies in order to protect the autonomy of indigenous groups within the boundaries of the nation-state. As a result of the peace talks between the Mexican government and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Chiapas, indigenous people throughout the country are mobilizing to defend their right to govern themselves according to their own cultural values. The Zapatistas are demanding increased respect for human rights and the autonomy of indigenous peoples, a desire which encompasses the defense of customs, traditions, specific forms of government and political culture that have been repressed for over five hundred years (López y Rivas 1995). International legal human rights codes and indigenous understandings of rights are central issues promoted by civil society and Zapatista activities, and changes in the Mexican Constitution are being proposed as a result of these debates. The problem of how to protect the rights of different political, cultural, and religious traditions within the context of nation-state is of increasing importance throughout the world as minority groups demand the right to live and govern themselves according to their own customs.

### **Explanations for Expulsion: Culture, Religion and Politics**

The process of forced exile demonstrates intense power struggles within indigenous communities. Since the late 1960's, well over 30,000 people have been exiled from their homelands resulting in numerous conflicts and several violent confrontations. In the two years in which I conducted fieldwork, at least six people were killed as a direct result of the expulsions, and countless others were wounded or threatened with violence. The violence has escalated as the expelled have taken up arms to defend themselves, and they too are participating in violent acts. Currently, the violence in the municipality of San Juan Chamula has increased: in the confrontation on November 19, 1995, more than six Chamulans were killed in a conflict between a group of exiles and the indigenous authorities.<sup>2</sup>

The expulsions of indigenous peoples are concentrated in Tzotzil and Tzeltal (Maya) highland communities, such as Chamula, Mitontic, Amatenango del Valle, Oxchuc, and Tenejapa (see Map 1). An estimated ninety percent of the expelled are from Chamula (Estrada Martínez 1995). Unlike the majority of human rights violations in Chiapas which are committed by authorities outside indigenous communities -- most notably members of the police and military -- those responsible for expulsion are *caciques*, or locally entrenched indigenous leaders. Hence, although expulsion is clearly a human rights violation, government officials have commonly defended the *caciques'* right to perform this act, claiming that it is necessary to preserve indigenous culture and

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<sup>2</sup> The name San Juan Chamula refers to Saint John who is considered to be the patron saint of the municipality. For the sake of brevity, I use the name Chamula to refer to San Juan Chamula.

tradition.

Both political/economic and religious/cultural reasons have been mustered to explain the expulsions, although these explanations are not mutually exclusive. Anthropologists have long recognized that the politics of indigenous communities has traditionally been contained within now threatened local civil-religious hierarchies, and that political-economic life is necessarily linked with religious practice among the Maya. In short, the political and economic argument for the expulsions is that those exiled threaten the power of *caciques* by their refusal to engage in festivals for the *pueblo* that entail buying and drinking soft drinks and alcohol, which are sold for profit by the leaders themselves. It has similarly been pointed out that the power of the ruling *caciques*, who are affiliated with Mexico's ruling party (the Party of Institutionalized Revolution or PRI) is threatened by political dissidents affiliated with opposition parties (see for example, Morquecho Escamilla 1992, 1994; Nash and Sullivan 1992; Pérez Enríquez 1994; Tejera 1991; Tickell 1991; Rus 1994). These dissidents are commonly exiled and accused of being "Evangelicals" regardless of their religious beliefs. For example, in November of 1974, the *caciques* of Chamula expelled a large group of so-called "Evangelicals" because they had voted against the PRI candidate for municipal president. The fact that the state and federal authorities have not acted to stop the expulsions reveals the way that the Mexican government has manipulated the problem in order to maintain political hegemony in the region through governors appointed from the center and their local political agents, the *caciques*. Interfering in the problem would cause the government to risk the loss of thousands of votes supporting the PRI in state and federal elections.

Cases documented by the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" reveal that people have been expelled for challenging the political and economic power of the *caciques*. For example, in August of 1993, one man was arbitrarily arrested and threatened with expulsion for questioning the use of public funds for the construction of a road, and another man was threatened with expulsion for protesting the detention of his nephew. In a separate case in September of 1993, a man and his family were threatened with violence and expulsion for defending five other families who were expelled (Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" 1993).

The role of land is also important in economic explanations of expulsion: the population of the highland communities has dramatically increased, in some cases more than doubled, since 1960 (see Table 1). According to government census figures for 1990, the population density of Chamula is 132 inhabitants per square kilometer, making it one of the most densely populated municipalities in the state of Chiapas. Rapid population growth in Chamula coupled with dense population places tremendous pressure on land (see Table 2). This growth took place even as thousands of people were emigrating from Chamula to other areas. Some went to settle federally-owned land in the Lacandon Jungle under the encouragement of President Echeverría's administration (1970-1976), while others performed seasonal wage labor on coffee plantations in the state. A demographic study of several Chamulan hamlets in the 1970's revealed that 77 per cent of heads of households relied on wage labor or sharecropping outside of the municipality since the size or quality of their land was insufficient to meet family consumption needs (Wasserstrom 1977).

**Table 1: Population Trends in Highland Municipalities**

Municipality	1960	1970	1980	1990
Amatenango de Valle	3,179	3,656	4,425	5,681
Chamula	26,789	29,357	31,364	51,757
Chenalho'	10,553	13,522	18,400	30,680
Larraínzer	7,337	8,101	10,591	15,303
Mitontic	4,677	3,339	4,913	5,783
Tenejapa	9,768	12,930	20,642	27,217
Zinacantán	7,650	11,428	13,006	22,392

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática 1930-1990.

**Table 2: Population Growth in Chamula, 1930-1990**

Period	Rate of Growth
1930-1940	84.51%
1940-1950	37.60%
1950-1960	21.61%
1960-1970	9.59%
1970-1980	6.84%
1980-1990	65.02%

Source: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática 1930-1990.

In the late 1970's, the increased use of jungle lands for cattle ranching and oil exploration, pressure from environmental groups, and the large numbers of Guatemalan refugees who began to replace Mexican plantation workers have made migration a less viable option in the 1980's (Ascencio Franco and Leyva Solano 1992). Because highland

communities depend on agriculture, land is a non-negotiable resource; exiling thousands of community members lessens population density and thus preserves this resource for those who remain. Given that some 20,000 to 30,000 people were forcibly exiled from Chamula between 1970 to 1995, its impact on population density cannot be ignored.

Indigenous leaders of the expelled such as Domingo López Angel have accused Chamulan *caciques* of expelling people with the intent of taking land for their own use.

The cultural and religious explanations note that the expelled are religious converts who threaten customs and thus the cohesion of the indigenous communities. The traditional religion of the Maya is a mixture of pre-Columbian beliefs and Roman Catholicism (see for example Bricker 1981; Earle 1990; Eber 1995; Gossen 1974; Maurer 1984; Nash 1967; Vogt 1976). The traditionalists of Chamula worship Mayan Gods as well as Catholic saints, and mix Mayan rites and beliefs with Catholic sacraments. Since the late 1960's, a growing number of Mayas have been converting from traditional Mayan Catholicism to Protestantism or post-Vatican II Roman Catholicism, both oriented beyond the local community.<sup>3</sup> Typical of both the Protestant and Roman Catholic converts is the rejection of alcohol and limited participation in traditional religious celebrations. Because of this, it is argued that religious conversion undermines both

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<sup>3</sup>The Wycliffe staff of the Summer Institute of Linguistics began evangelizing in Chamula in the 1940's, but it was not until the late 1960's that a significant number of indigenous people began to convert to Protestantism. Recent conversion to Roman Catholicism began when the Church established a mission in Chamula in 1966. The work on Protestant conversion among Mayas of Chiapas is extensive; notable sources are Giménez 1988, Hernández Castillo 1992, Rus and Wasserstrom 1981 and Sullivan 1995. There is little academic work on conversion to Catholicism, with one significant source being Iribarren 1980.

custom and community and that the converts must be exiled.

Explanations for exile are not merely academic concerns. Policies for dealing with the problem are shaped by these explanations, and the issue has been used to advance political motives of religious and government leaders. A popular explanation for expulsion is that it is a religious conflict between Catholics and Evangelicals; the simplistic version of this explanation does not distinguish between the traditional Catholics of Chamula and those who convert to a post-Vatican II Catholicism of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, and also fails to note that Catholics as well as Evangelicals are being expelled.<sup>4</sup> Various Evangelical groups have described the issue in this simplistic manner, often implicating Bishop Samuel Ruiz García as being responsible for the violence.<sup>5</sup> For example, the Rutherford Foundation presented a complaint to the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights regarding exile, and referred to the issue as a religious conflict between Catholics and Protestants. The Mexican government has also relied on the religious explanation for the expulsions, and while declaring the need to respect "indigenous custom and tradition," has taken little action to prevent the expulsions or punish those responsible for violations of human rights resulting from them. Since the late 1960's, governor after governor in the state of Chiapas has claimed inability to intervene because the problem is a "religious matter" and the autonomy of the

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<sup>4</sup> Newspaper articles documenting expulsion commonly call it a conflict between Evangelicals and Catholics.

<sup>5</sup> This is not to imply that all Evangelicals present the conflict in this manner. Several groups recognize that both Catholics and Evangelicals are being exiled, and there has been some cooperation between the Diocese of San Cristóbal and Protestant groups to attempt to reach a peaceful resolution.

indigenous communities must be respected. The Mexican government has supported expulsion both implicitly (by failing to punish those responsible) and explicitly (by providing transportation to take the exiled from Chamula).<sup>6</sup>

From the time that the expulsions began, both Catholics and Protestants have been forced to leave their native communities. My research focuses on the Catholic population because it has often been overlooked by scholars, journalists, and government officials who emphasize Protestant conversion as a key cause of the expulsions. Since authorities responsible for the expulsions consider themselves to be Catholic, examination of the differences between converted Roman Catholics and traditional Catholics promises to reveal the strengths or weaknesses of the political, economic and/or cultural reasons behind the expulsions that have been put forth. Finally, I focus on Catholics since I am interested in how Catholic theology articulates with indigenous notions of rights. Although I consider religious and political motives behind the expulsions in Chapters 2 and 3, the goal of this thesis is not to resolve the debate over which should prevail; this topic has been amply discussed and the religious, political, and economic motives are well documented (see for example Estrada Martínez 1995; Gómez Rivera 1995; Morquecho Escamilla 1994; Pérez Enríquez 1994). At any event, the main goal of this thesis is not so much resolving this debate as examining how universal human rights codes, indigenous codes, and religious tradition have converged and/or conflicted.

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<sup>6</sup> The role of the Mexican government in expulsion will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

### **Human Rights, Anthropology and Indigenous Rights**

The highlands of Chiapas have been studied by anthropologists for well over fifty years, and there are numerous ethnographies of the area, many of which take a longitudinal approach in examining political and economic changes in the region and their effects on indigenous communities (see for example, Bricker 1973, 1983; Bricker and Gossen 1989; Cancian 1965, 1972, 1992; Gossen 1974; Maurer 1984; Nash 1967, 1993; Vogt 1969, 1976; Wasserstrom 1983). These communities suffer extreme poverty: there is little access to education and social services, a high rate of infant mortality and disease, and an overall scarcity of fertile land -- a situation aggravated by rapid population growth and the economic crisis which began in Mexico in the 1980's.

Human rights abuses -- including torture, arbitrary detention, abuses of authority, and execution, among others -- are common in Chiapas, and are concentrated in the indigenous communities of the highlands and the Lacandon Jungle. Indians experience racism persisting from the colonial period, a lack of access to the legal system, and the negation of their rights as communities. Although anthropologists have described the political and economic oppression experienced by indigenous peoples and/or *campesinos*, the issue of human rights abuses in the area has seldom been explicitly addressed.<sup>7</sup> In 1992, two years before the Zapatista uprising, a total of 2160 human rights violations, or

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<sup>7</sup> Several works document the exploitation of indigenous peoples in Chiapas. Robert Wasserstrom's *Class and Society in Central Chiapas* (1983) takes a historic view, and the publications of the Taller Tzotzil of INAREMAC use oral histories to describe the unequal power relations between indigenous peoples and *mestizos*. Recent anthropological works describe the human rights situation in Chiapas (see Nash and Sullivan 1992 and Collier 1994).

64 percent of all violations in Mexico, occurred in Chiapas, the majority against indigenous peoples (Centro de Derechos Humanos "Miguel Agustín Pro" 1992).

Massive human rights violations continue to take place in Chiapas. I place human rights abuses at the center of my research in order to examine why they take place, and the philosophical issues regarding how human rights can be defined by and for indigenous communities.

The legal conception of human rights emerged with the Enlightenment, and was confirmed in the revolutionary constitutions of France and the United States in the eighteenth century. Currently, human rights are defined by the universal legal code of the United Nations which recognizes that all human beings are born with equal and inalienable rights and fundamental freedoms, and provides for a "common standard of achievement (of rights) for all peoples and nations" (United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights). From a philosophical perspective, human rights are based on the fundamental right of each person to enjoy the social, economic, and political conditions necessary to live a dignified life (Crahan 1982; Downing 1989; Doyle 1993).

Since the proclamation of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, there has been a debate in anthropology with respect to international human rights and cultural difference. On the one hand, it is argued that the social and cultural differences among societies negate the application of a cross-cultural code of rights. On the other hand, it is argued that standards of human dignity are shared cross-culturally, thus allowing for an international code of human rights. The international legal human rights framework has been criticized for being ethnocentrically Western, and

for failing to recognize that different peoples have different conceptions of rights (American Anthropologist Association 1947). Some argue that the customary law and communal rights of indigenous peoples conflict with the Western-European notion of individual rights which undervalue the importance of community. Two philosophical issues are central to this debate; first, the merit of cultural relativism and second, the merit of individual versus communitarian rights.

### *Cultural Relativism*

The concept of cultural relativism became important in anthropology through the work of Franz Boas. In countering the evolutionary framework which placed all cultures in a vertical hierarchy, with Western European cultures at the apex, Boas argued that all cultures were equal and could not be judged by the value system of Western Europeans. Instead, the value system of each culture had to be understood within its own context, human difference had to be respected, and cultures could not be ranked. Boas' defense of cultural relativism was important in countering the racism and ethnocentrism of his time. His students, especially Margaret Mead and Melville Herskovits, further developed the idea of cultural relativism (Bidney 1968; Rabinow 1983; Rentlen 1990). Herskovits defined it as "a philosophy which, in recognizing the values set up by every society to guide its own life, lays stress on the dignity inherent in every body of custom, and on the need for tolerance of conventions though they may differ from one's own" (Herskovits 1950: 76).

On June 24, 1947, as the United Nations was drafting its Universal Declaration of

Human Rights in response to the Second World War, the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association rejected the idea of a universal human rights framework, arguing that different peoples have different notions of rights. The statement, drafted by Herskovits, relies on the concept of cultural relativism: "Standards and values are relative to the culture from which they derive so that any attempt to formulate postulates that grow out of the beliefs or moral codes of one culture must to that extent detract from the applicability of any Declaration of Human Rights to mankind as a whole" (American Anthropological Association 1947: 542). Herskovits' view of cultural relativism is not opposed to the existence of universals; he believed in the "psychic unity of mankind" and hence, that cultural generalizations and lawlike cultural theories could be found. What he was opposed to in the statement of the United Nations was that rights were "conceived only in terms of the values prevalent in the countries of Western Europe and America" (Ibid: 539).

Now, almost fifty years later, more questions than answers have been raised regarding cultural relativism and human rights, particularly with regard to indigenous communities (see for example Cohen 1987; Geertz 1984; Kelsay and Twiss 1994; Nagengast 1994; Washburn 1987). When human rights violations such as executions, torture or arbitrary detention are committed by the police, military, or other government authorities, it is clear that they should be condemned. Anthropologists have denounced these types of abuses, particularly as they affect native ethnic groups in the process of defending rights to economic autonomy and self-determination against Western notions

of development.<sup>8</sup> However, defining human rights abuses becomes problematic when the issue of "culture" is involved, and when individual and communal rights conflict. Part of the problem is untangling exactly what cultural relativism is. There are two parts which must be separated: cultural relativism as a method, and as a theory and philosophy. First, since social/cultural problems are to be seen from the "perspective of participants in or adherents of a given culture" anthropologists must interpret data "from the point of view of the subject." (Bidney 1968). Second, as a theory and philosophy, according to cultural relativism all values are culture-bound and are only valid within the culture where they exist. "Since there are no universally acceptable evaluative standards, any judgments regarding the behavior patterns, cognitions, emotions and the like of different social groups--judgments such as good or bad, right or wrong, normal or abnormal, and the like--must be relative to the standards of the cultures that produce them" (Spiro 1986: 261). With regard to universal human rights, it is this second proposition which is problematic. Given this definition, no one can define human rights and their violations except for the people within a given culture. If one follows this definition of cultural relativism, it is difficult to condemn customs such as female circumcision, foot-binding, and the killing of "witches" among other practices because they can only be evaluated by the cultures in which they are practiced. In order to create an international human rights code, it would be necessary to conduct a world-wide study of rights in order to find universals.

However, some have argued that universal human rights and cultural relativism

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<sup>8</sup> For example, the Documents of the Second and Third Meeting of Barbados (1979 and 1994 respectively) and the works of Cultural Survival and the International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs all denounce violations of indigenous rights.

can be compatible. Renteln (1988) notes that cultural relativism has been misused by anthropologists; the theory must be based not on tolerance, but rather enculturation, "the idea that people unconsciously acquire the categories and standards of their culture." Further, she argues that the idea of cultural relativism does not preclude the existence of cross-cultural universals. Just because all moral systems "are discrete, separate and competing" there can be some convergence among them, though "It remains to be seen if empirical cross-cultural data can be adduced to show that some standards are, in fact universally shared" and to hence validate international human rights standards (Renteln 1988:68). Jennifer Schirmer (1988) asserts that in practice anthropologists have taken different views of cultural relativism. There are what she calls "radical cultural relativists" who reject universal human rights because of the diversity of cultural forms by which people understand the world. In contrast, "cultural diversivits" or "contextualists" are concerned with cultural context "but argue that some commonalities need to be established (or even discovered) for human rights if cultural diversities are to be defended and maintained" (Ibid: 93). In both cases, she argues that anthropologists can make an important contribution to the human rights debate in using cultural contextualization to examine how rights and wrongs are defined.

It is critical to place power relations at the center of the debate about cultural relativism and human rights. The tension between the protection of cultural tradition and human rights becomes particularly problematic in cases such as the caste system and suttee in India; the rights of women in Islamic societies; and African customs of bride wealth, arranged marriages, and child betrothal. among others. In these cases, it is critical

to recognize that conflicting rights claims can exist within a single tradition. For example, the rhetoric of cultural rights can contradict women's rights or children's rights. The work of the anthropologist is not only to uncover cultural practices, but to examine their history, who benefits from them, and how they are related to the economic and political situation of the group. Without addressing such questions, culture itself become reified as a neutral and static object. As numerous anthropologists have pointed out, culture must be understood within particular historical situations and power plays a central role in cultural production (see Roseberry 1989 and Sider 1993).

In the case of indigenous expulsions in Chiapas, it is not sufficient merely to defend cultural relativism or universal human rights codes, but to examine the history and power dynamics involved. The importance of "community" and "traditions" such as drinking alcohol, the *cargo* system, and native religion are defended by indigenous leaders as being essential to Mayan culture, and converts are accused of threatening this culture. I examine these practices in detail in Chapter 6, placing them in a historic context, analyzing who benefits from them, and finally, from interviews with the exiled, exploring the extent to which those expelled threaten these customs.

### *Individual versus Communal Rights*

The debate regarding the importance of individual versus community rights in the Western legal tradition has a long history, accelerating in the modern period with the Conquest of the Americas and the Protestant Reformation. More recently, this issue has

been raised in works on liberalism and communitarianism in the field of political philosophy. Proponents of liberalism argue that the role of the state should be the protection of individual liberties through the support of civil and political rights, most importantly through freedom of religion, expression, thought and association, political participation and legal due process (most notably Rawls 1971). Liberals recognize that there are plural conceptions of the "good life" based on differing philosophical, religious, and moral beliefs and that these cannot be enforced by the state. Instead, "if the state enforces the basic civil and political rights it will leave individuals free, within broad limits, to pursue their own conceptions of the good and will preclude itself from imposing upon them any one particular conception of the good or of virtue" (Buchanan 1989: 854).

Proponents of communitarianism have criticized liberal philosophy from several perspectives. First, they note that liberalism undervalues the importance of community which is fundamental to the life of humans. Second, it does not address obligations and commitments such as those to family, religious belief or one's community. Third, it fails to effectively deal with the rights of minority groups (see especially Sandal 1982; Van Dyke 1982). Furthermore, and perhaps most relative to indigenous societies, liberalism's focus on the individual cannot be effectively applied to societies which live by a communal sense of justice and adhere to obligations stemming from kinship and other non-state entities. Van Dyke (1982) argues that if members of ethnic or indigenous communities which differ from a larger dominant society are treated strictly as individuals, they will never be able to adequately compete with dominant groups given their historical and political disadvantage, and will be forced to assimilate or live as

disadvantaged members of the society. Hence, it is necessary to grant specific rights such as self-determination and the recognition of political communalism in order to preserve the identity and culture of ethnic communities.

On the other hand, proponents of liberalism argue that the protection of individual rights can be compatible with the protection of communal rights (Buchanan 1989; Kukathas 1992; Tomasi 1991). The wish of indigenous peoples to follow their cultural practices and to live communally should be respected from a liberal position because "individuals should be free to associate" (Kukathas 1992: 116).

Regardless of the position taken on the protection of communal versus individual rights, a fundamental issue is the role of power within collective entities (see especially Howard 1993; Kukathas 1992; Donnelly 1989; Pineda 1992). Social scientists, particularly anthropologists, have often romanticized the notion of communal justice within indigenous societies, and the emphasis on the harmful effects of colonialism and state-sponsored repression of indigenous peoples has led to a blind spot in seeing exploitation and domination within indigenous communities themselves.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the

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<sup>9</sup> Much of the Mexican literature on human rights of indigenous communities provides an example of this omission (see for example Bonfil 1984; Díaz Polanco 1994; Stavenhagen 1988, 1989). This void can be explained by the tremendous record of abuses committed by the Mexican state against indigenous communities. However, for sources which examine the problem of exploitation within communities see Arias 1994 and Pineda 1992. In an important work on law and justice among the Zapotec of Oaxaca, Mexico, Laura Nader (1990) demonstrates how "harmony ideology" stresses reconciliation among community members, but is also the result of conquest and colonization.

The issue of divisions within indigenous communities has recently been raised as violent confrontations among indigenous peoples resulting in numerous deaths have occurred in several regions of Chiapas, particularly among members of opposing political parties in the northern municipalities of Salto de Agua, Tila and Tumbalá (Center for

focus on the importance of cultural rights makes it easy to ignore that culture itself can be oppressive, and to overlook how native "tradition" can be manipulated to serve state interest.

The theoretical issues relating to the conflict between individual and community rights are particularly relevant to the case of the expulsions in Chiapas where it is believed that individual juridical rights conflict with the value of community cohesion. Examining internal power divisions in indigenous communities is fundamental to understanding the relative importance of communal or individual rights. Assuring indigenous rights by granting communal autonomy in the highlands of Chiapas could benefit *caciques* -- entrenched leaders of indigenous communities -- who have been aligned with Mexico's ruling party, the PRI, since the 1970's. While these leaders assure that votes are provided to the ruling party, the government in turn does not interfere with their system of local rule (Burguete 1987; Pineda 1993; Tickell 1991). Clearly, increasing respect for communal rights of indigenous communities could have the effect of giving these leaders more power. In this thesis, I address how one group of Catholic Tzotziles understand human rights, and the relative importance of individual and communal rights. The role of power relations within indigenous communities is also critical to understanding local rights. Can communal rights be justified when indigenous leaders exploit community members in order to preserve and even increase their own political and economic power? Whom will a greater recognition of communal rights effectively benefit, Mexico's ruling party or indigenous communities?

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Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" 1995d, 1996).

## Human Rights and the Catholic Church

During the colonial period in Latin America, the Catholic Church was responsible for the violation of human rights in indigenous communities, particularly in the destruction of native culture and in the exploitation of indigenous land and labor. However, there have always been certain sectors of the Catholic Church directly working to defend indigenous rights. For example, the first bishop of Chiapas, Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, was one of the most important defenders of indigenous rights during the colonial period. The city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas was named after this Bishop who worked to end the enslavement of indigenous peoples and *encomienda*, a royal grant giving Spaniards the right to collect tribute from indigenous towns.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, in *Historia de Las Indias*, Las Casas writes that the oppression of indigenous peoples is against God's will, and he identifies the indigenous people with Jesus Christ:

For I leave, in the Indies, Jesus Christ, our God, scourged and afflicted and buffeted and crucified, not once but millions of times, on the part of all the Spaniards who ruin and destroy these people and deprive them of the space they require for their conversion and repentance, depriving them of life before their time, so that they die without the sacraments (*Historia de las Indias*, cited in Gutiérrez 1993: 62).

Today, Bishop of the Diocese of San Cristóbal Samuel Ruiz García has been recognized as the worthy successor of Bishop Las Casas (see Map 2). Influenced by the liberation theology movement in Latin America, Bishop Ruiz García has proclaimed the importance of defending the rights of the indigenous peoples who comprise the majority

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<sup>10</sup> In 1540, Las Casas read his *Brevísimo relación de la destrucción de las Indias* before a Spanish court to plead for the end of slavery and *encomienda*. Both of these institutions were abolished in 1542 as a result of Las Casas' work, although the *encomienda* was reinstated in 1545 (Adorno 1992: 10).

of the Diocese.<sup>11</sup> There is very little academic work on the influence of liberation theology in Mexico or Chiapas.<sup>12</sup> What makes the implementation of liberation theology in Chiapas unique is its indigenous people, who live in extreme poverty. I examine the impact of the Church's work on indigenous conceptions of human rights and mobilization to defend these rights.

The importance of the Catholic Church in working to protect human rights in Latin America has been explored in the context of liberation theology. The Church can provide an institutional connection through which people recognize that they share problems, learn leadership skills, and mobilize to change their situation (see for example Berryman 1987; Cassanova 1997; Cleary 1990; Eckstein 1989; Levine 1992; Mainwaring and Wilde 1989). This literature addresses the importance of the Catholic Church as an institutional structure that can be used to foment change; however, very little attention has been given to theology, which is exactly what makes the Church unique from other institutions (Floyd 1995). Theology is very powerful because it is not based only in theory, but is believed to come from the Word of God. The roots of Roman Catholic theology dealing with human rights discourse go back to Thomas Aquinas, Augustine,

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<sup>11</sup> In 1995 the Vatican appointed Raul Vera as coadjutor bishop of the diocese, which means that he serves the diocese together with Bishop Ruiz García. The stance of the diocese in defense of the poor and downtrodden has not changed with this new appointment.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Tangeman's *Mexico at the Crossroads: Politics, the Church, and the Poor* (1995) deals with the Catholic Church in Mexico and documents the work of Samuel Ruiz García. Carlos Fazio's *Samuel Ruiz, El Caminante* (1994) documents the life and work of the bishop. Both books are written by journalists. The work of the Catholic Church is also mentioned in Collier 1994, Chapter III.

and the Bible.

Consideration of Catholicism as a "transnational religion" (cf. Rudolph and Piscatori, eds. 1997) whose organization transcends political boundaries demonstrates the Church's role in promoting human rights. As José Cassanova points out, Catholic social teaching and papal pronouncements, particularly since the 1960's, "have consistently presented the protection of the human rights of every person as the moral foundation of a just social and political order, . . . and universal human solidarity as the foundation for the construction of a just and fair national as well as international division of labor and a just and legitimate world order" (Cassanova 1997: 126). Unlike Western-European notions of human rights based on individual claims, Catholic theology bases rights on human dignity which is shared by all humans because they are children of God. This concept of rights is closer to indigenous views than the Western-European concept. Samuel Ruiz García was deeply influenced by the Second Vatican Council (1965), the Medellín Conference (1968), and the Puebla meeting (1979). At these conferences, it was recognized that the Church must make a commitment to work for social justice and human rights. It recognized the poor as subjects; indeed, liberation theology was and is to be produced from contact with the poor. As Bishop Samuel Ruiz has proclaimed:

The Second Vatican Council and the Latin American Bishops Meeting in Medellín committed the Church to lay the groundwork for their pastoral work, not to let the Church be guided by passive resignation which is not very Christian, but to commit itself to look for effective concrete solutions to the serious problems of the people, as Jesus did in his time. Following his teachings, we decide not to pass by the wounded on the road, but to take responsibility for them, help them get on their feet, and denounce that which caused suffering as a tragedy which should not continue. We wanted, and we want, a peace with justice. In our pastoral work we have

continued to confront situations which maintain a crucified people, killed for causes which could be overcome in a socially just and fraternal social organization, making it possible for the poor to be subjects of a dignified history and to be children of God (Declaration of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas on the Situation in Chiapas, April 1994).<sup>13</sup>

In my thesis, particularly in Chapters 4 and 5, I examine how the doctrine of the Catholic Church has affected indigenous consciousness of human rights.

Liberation theology takes an explicit stance toward working for peace and justice, directly addressing economic and political rights. However, in working with indigenous peoples, the question of whether and how the Catholic Church can protect *cultural* rights is also important. From a historical perspective, the impact of Catholic evangelization on indigenous culture during the colonial period in Mexico has been well documented (for the case of Chiapas see for example, Bricker 1981; Fariss 1984; Friede 1974; Meggid 1996; Wasserstrom 1983). The relation between Christianity and indigenous tradition is full of contradictions. Although the Catholic Church as an institution was a powerful agent of economic and cultural exploitation of indigenous communities, as previously noted members of the Church such as Bishop Las Casas were among the first to argue for the protection of indigenous rights in the face of the Spanish Crown. Furthermore, while missionaries often attempted to change or destroy culture in order to "save souls," religious tradition and symbols were often reworked by the indigenous peoples who borrowed symbols from the oppressors to maintain their autonomy in the face of Colonial

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<sup>13</sup> All translations from Spanish to English in this dissertation are my own. This includes translations of texts, published material, and field notes.

domination.<sup>14</sup> Recent work on the Christian missionization of indigenous peoples describes the complexity of the process. In their discussion of the Nonconformist Protestant mission in Southern Africa, Jean and John Comaroff (1991) note that the process of evangelizing the Tswana people was not simply imposed on "passive black South Africans." They examine "the various ways in which the culture sown by the churchmen took root on the social terrain of the Tswana, some of it to be absorbed silently and seamlessly into a reinvented -- or, rather, reified -- ethnic 'tradition,' some to be creatively transformed, some to be redeployed to talk back to the whites" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 12). Hence, while the nonconformist mission provided the cultural agents of the British Empire, it also gave rise to new forms of consciousness amongst the Tswana.

Recent examples show the irony of how Christian doctrine and symbols can be used by indigenous peoples to resist exploitation and to protect local communities. In *We Eat the Mines, the Mines Eat Us*, June Nash (1979) describes how tin miners in Bolivia use symbols of folk Catholicism to maintain unity, which was important in the development of the strong labor mobilization of the miners. Nash examines the role of being *Chola* (indigenous peoples of Quechua and Aymara origin who now speak Spanish, but still identify with pre-Conquest beliefs) in giving the miners a sense of their own history as well as "an account of how they have overcome defeat. . ." (145). Blanca Muratorio's work on Colta Indians of Ecuador (1980) shows how peasants recently

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<sup>14</sup> The Cuscat rebellion of Chamula, 1868-1870 is a good example of this contraction. The Tzotziles set up a religious cult to a Virgin to resist *mestizo* rule.

converted to evangelical Protestantism in part, to maintain their ethnic identity. Again, a religion propagated by outside forces, in this case by U.S. missionaries with their own conservative agenda, was reworked by indigenous peoples to strengthen a local group.

In the current context, the impact of the "liberationist Catholic Church" on the indigenous peoples of Chiapas has been less studied. Some have argued that the Catholic Church in Chiapas represents a threat to indigenous culture and tradition, while others maintain that the Church's liberation theology respects indigenous culture and only threatens the political and economic power of local authorities and the state government. The issue cannot be starkly presented in black and white. Following the examples of Jean and John Comaroff, June Nash and Blanca Muratorio, I examine how the symbols of Christianity are interpreted and used at the base.<sup>15</sup> In Chiapas, Christianity may both threaten and protect indigenous tradition and autonomy.

One key problem in the debate is how to define culture and tradition. The Spanish invasion represents only one of many factors which have caused dramatic change in Mayan traditions. As indigenous peoples have accommodated and/or resisted exploitation from complex political, economic, and cultural forces, what can be defined as authentic indigenous tradition? Furthermore, many argue that tradition cannot be accepted as something inherently valuable and worthy of protection. Indigenous women of Chiapas have been the strongest critics of certain customs -- including forced marriage,

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<sup>15</sup> Another example of the ironic use of Christian symbols is the Judas figure which is created and hanged during Easter week in indigenous communities in Mesoamerica. Judas, the betrayer of Jesus Christ, is commonly represented as an enemy of the *pueblo*, for example as a *Ladino* with dark glasses and a cigarette (see Nash 1967 and 1994).

domestic violence, and the use of alcohol -- arguing that they oppress women (see "El Grito de la luna" 1994; Hernández Castillo 1994; Hernández Castillo and Garza Caligaris 1995). Through the case of expulsion, I critically examine the notions that Chamulan tradition should be privileged because it is authentically Indian and that respecting tradition is the best way to protect indigenous rights.

Social scientists have noted how liberation theology, with its emphasis on justice and equality, has affected the consciousness and mobilization of the poor in Latin America, particularly in Brazil, Chile and Central America (see for example Berryman 1987; Cleary 1990; Levine 1992; Mainwaring and Wilde 1989). Religion can reshape "prevailing images of the self and patterns of intragroup relations, thus laying a foundation for new ideas about legitimacy and different cultural representations of authorities" (Levine and Mainwaring 1989). Over the past twenty-five years, the Catholic Church as a transnational religion has created and supported informal transnational networks including publications, centers, and grassroots movements to facilitate democracy (Levine and Stoll 1997: 69). It is critical to examine the Church's impact on the consciousness of the poor in Chiapas where pastoral workers have assisted in establishing local human rights centers and, since 1994, Bishop Ruiz García has been the official mediator between the federal government and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. Leaving aside the polemic on the Church's role in politics, it is clear that the Church has had an important role in shaping indigenous consciousness of exploitation and working toward liberation. However, the Church is not the only factor in indigenous mobilization; class and ethnicity are also pivotal forces in Chiapas.

The work on "new social movements" notes that recent movements are not only class-based, but that identities which do not necessarily relate to socioeconomic roles, such as gender, ethnicity, and ideology can also be mobilizing (Escobar 1992b; Melucci 1985; Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Slater 1985). Social movements are not only struggles over material conditions, but also cultural struggles over meanings which are carried out in everyday life (Escobar 1992b). In the case of the Catholic exiles, I critically draw on this literature to examine the relative role of class, ethnicity, and religion in mobilizing the Maya to defend their rights. I also analyze how a broad based definition of human rights serves as a catalyst for political mobilization. In my work, I found networks within and outside the local community to be important in laying the base for mobilization. I examine these networks in detail in Chapters 7 and 8, analyzing the role of religion, ethnicity and class in creating and maintaining these networks, and how they are linked to the understanding of rights on the part of indigenous people, and the struggle to protect these rights.

### **Method**

I began my research on the problematic of exile by consulting the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas," the largest non-governmental human rights group in Chiapas. The Center was founded in 1989 by Bishop Samuel Ruiz to deal with the increasing number of human rights abuses reported by the indigenous and poor of the Diocese of San Cristóbal. I conducted research with this group for two years (1993-1995). The Center was the logical place to start examining records of expulsion

because, since its foundation, it had worked to document and denounce cases of expulsion, both of Catholics and Protestants. In 1990 when the Center celebrated its first anniversary, it organized a special conference on expulsion. I began my work by interviewing members of the Center and examining case records of the expelled to gain an overview of the extent of the issue. I also examined the testimonies of the expelled which were collected by the Center, and the relationship between the Catholic Church and human rights since the Center was giving human rights courses in indigenous communities. I observed several of these courses and also analyzed the *memorias*, or booklets written as a summary of each course, archived in the Center. During this time, I participated in a research project examining the relationship between agrarian conflict and human rights violations in Chiapas, which resulted in the book, *Con un pueblo vivo en tierra negada: un ensayo sobre los derechos humanos y el conflicto agrario en Chiapas, 1989-1993* (*With a Living People in the Denied Land: An essay on human rights and agrarian conflict in Chiapas, 1989-1993*) published by the Human Rights Center in August 1994 with Patricia Gómez. The intensive interviews conducted in six communities on indigenous understanding of rights and in-depth analysis of thirteen cases of human rights violations provide important contextual information for my dissertation.

Collaborating with the Center allowed me to see the context in which human rights abuses take place and to examine abuses at the state level before beginning work in a single community. It was important to recognize that the violations are not isolated incidents carried out by a few corrupt authorities, but are part of maintaining a repressive power structure within the state of Chiapas. Through condoning human rights abuses by

police, militia, and local representatives, the government attempts to repress political mobilization which is opposed to the PRI and to maintain the concentration of political and economic resources in the hands of the few. At times, *campesinos* are pitted against one another, making conflicts appear to be internal, when in reality, they are a result of government negligence and corruption.<sup>16</sup> Human rights abuses also represent a systematic threat to life of indigenous communities as people's houses are illegally entered, work tools and seeds are stolen, and medicine and clothing destroyed (Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" 1995a). This is currently evident in the Lacandon Jungle in the eastern part of the state, where thousands of soldiers have occupied the region since February of 1995. Due to fear, many families have been unable to plant crops which are essential for their survival.

Finally, collaborating with the Diocese's Human Rights Center also allowed me to observe how this Center defines human rights when working with indigenous peoples and the role that Catholic theology plays in their work. It was through my contact with the Center that I met a priest who first introduced me to the community of Guadalupe.

I conducted fourteen months of fieldwork in Guadalupe (from September of 1994 to August of 1995, and in June and July of 1996), a community of expelled Tzotziles with a concentrated Catholic population of twenty-six families. Working in one community allowed me observe how people define human rights, how they act to protect their rights,

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<sup>16</sup>This tactic is particularly evident in land conflicts and in expulsion (on land conflicts see Gómez Cruz and Kovic 1994). Until recently, the Mexican government has taken very few steps to attempt to end the expulsions, protecting local *caciques* who in turn deliver votes to the PRI.

and what impact these violations have on daily life. It is one thing to know someone has been detained, tortured, exiled, but it is another to observe what this means in their day to day existence.

Initially, participant observation was important for getting to know the Catholic members of the community and gaining their trust. I attended Catholic celebrations in the local chapel to get to know Church leaders. At the suggestion of community members, I began to teach a literacy class. Between eight and twelve students attended the literacy class two days a week for a six-month period. I taught the class mostly in Tzotzil, since the students spoke very little Spanish. This class served to establish trust with the peoples of Guadalupe and helped establish some mutuality in my work; I did not feel that I was just extracting data from the community in order to publish, but that I was giving something concrete in return.

Perhaps the most important factor in building trust with the people of Guadalupe is the fact that I am Catholic. The people I worked with are all Catholic, and in their view, they were exiled from their native lands for their religious belief. Religion is a central reference point in their lives, and I was constantly asked, "What is your religion?" It is important to them that I am a Catholic, and also that I attend religious celebrations in the local chapel. In addition, I attended baptisms, first communions, and weddings, and took several trips to the municipality of Chenalho' with a catechist who preached there. The fact that I am Catholic provided an important link; it was obvious to people that I was otherwise very different. I come from far away, I do not have a husband or children, my parents had not seen me for months, and rather than doing physical labor, I worked

writing at a desk. Our shared faith somewhat bridged the gap between fieldworker and informant. I found myself discussing the Bible with informants who would ask me questions about certain passages, and I would ask them questions. They often compared their situation to certain biblical readings, and it was important that I understand the reference. Since I was interested in how Catholicism had impacted people's views of human rights, these discussions were quite helpful in conducting research. In our conversations, they mentioned the way their faith strengthened their resistance to poverty, gave hope, and caused them to look for unity within community.

Working with an interpreter who was a catechist in the community, I conducted in-depth interviews in Tzotzil with each of the exiled Catholic families in Guadalupe.<sup>17</sup> These structured interviews revealed how many Catholics were in the community, where they were from, how long they had lived in Guadalupe, when they converted to Catholicism, and what work they did. They also gave a large amount of qualitative data: I collected stories of how people were expelled, how they had arrived in Guadalupe, what they thought about the authorities in Chamula and the Mexican government in relation to expulsion, and how they discussed rights. Perhaps more important, in visiting all the homes in the community, I got to know the Catholics who later invited me to attend their religious celebrations, pilgrimages, and other events. Hence, I was able to directly observe the construction of identity related to community, ethnicity, and religion, as well

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<sup>17</sup> I studied Tzotzil for a year in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Although I am conversant in the language, I do not speak fluently. Working with a translator who is a catechist not only helped me with the language, but also facilitated the process of making contacts and conducting interviews.

as the role of rights in daily life. Critical events which I was able to observe were the process of building a new chapel, preparation for weddings and other religious events, organization for participation in pilgrimages and marches, and finally the complex networks among members of the community, and between Guadalupe and other indigenous communities and organizations. I collected detailed life histories of six members of the community in order to explore how people converted to Catholicism, and the role their understanding of rights played in their lives.

In order to place the community of Guadalupe within the wider context of the phenomenon of expulsion and human rights, I conducted interviews with leaders outside the community and analyzed documentation of the history of the issue. I consulted primary and secondary sources at the Institute of Anthropological Advisory for the Maya Region (INAREMAC). This library contains documents which record the history of the Diocese of San Cristóbal. Of particular interest are those recording the changing relationship between the Catholic Church and the municipality of Chamula and those on the issue of exile. The local press -- primarily in the newspaper *El Tiempo* which has an important history in documenting the plight of the indigenous of Chiapas -- provided information on the twenty year history of expulsion, the response of government officials to the problem, and the mobilization of the indigenous population of exiles. Newspapers and documents from the National Commission of Human Rights, a commission of the Mexican government which was established in 1990, revealed the government's position and actions. Interviews in the community were complemented by interviews of political leaders of the expelled and pastoral workers of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las

Casas.

### **Organization of Thesis**

The thesis is organized into three sections that examine the complex relationship between religion, politics, culture and rights in order to analyze how indigenous notions of human rights have developed over time in the national, regional, and local context, above all in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. In exploring the struggle to define and defend human rights in these contexts, the thesis presents two interrelated histories: the formation of the community of Catholics in Guadalupe and the Diocese's recent work with indigenous peoples. The first section, which includes this introduction and two more chapters, presents the context and history of the issues. Chapter 2 is focused on Guadalupe: it introduces the community, describes how it was formed, and presents the Roman Catholics' explanations of the process of expulsion. Chapter 3 presents an overview of the origin of the conflict of expulsion, the work of Bishop Samuel Ruiz in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in human rights, and the recent work of the Catholic Church in Chamula.

Part II examines indigenous notions of human rights, both in theoretical terms and in definitions given by the Roman Catholics of Guadalupe. Chapter 4 presents several different definitions of human rights and their relation to indigenous communities. It analyzes the theoretical issues related to the conflict between communal and individual rights, as well as between local customary and universal human rights codes. It also examines the universal rights codes of the United Nations, Mexican legislation, the

doctrine of the Catholic Church, and the position of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Chapters 5 and 6 present the view of human rights held by the exiled Catholics of Guadalupe. Chapter 5 details how the indigenous Catholics mix doctrine emanating from the Catholic Church, legal codes, and traditional indigenous views in defining human rights. Chapter 6 deals with the complicated issue of cultural rights. It examines how the exiled Catholics of Guadalupe promote or contradict native tradition, and gives a historical, political, and economic context of traditions which are believed to be threatened by conversion to a post-Vatican II Catholicism.

Part III explores how Catholics are involved in concrete actions and mobilizations to defend their rights. Chapter 7 describes local networks in Guadalupe which lay the basis for political mobilizations. I analyze how these networks are created and maintained, based on religious, ethnic, and class identities. Chapter 8 describes political mobilizations which extend beyond the local community, and their relation to struggles for the human rights of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas, including those of the diocesan-level. The larger question of what the case of Guadalupe and the work of the Diocese of San Cristóbal contribute to understandings of human rights in indigenous communities is addressed in Chapter 9.

When I asked the people in Guadalupe if I could write a book about their community, religion and expulsion, they responded with great enthusiasm. They felt that it was important to document their history and wanted others to know what they had experienced. They saw the value of the project even when I did not. In fact, when I first explained my research plans, they asked me to write a booklet for them in Tzotzil telling

how they had left Chamula and established a new community. This booklet, titled “Walking With One United Heart: The Catholics of Guadalupe,” is included in the appendix. They taught me about their lives so that I would understand what they had experienced and what they were living. A central theme in our conversations was suffering. Over and over, they repeated to me “Christina, here we are suffering a lot.” They took me into their homes to show me how they lived, told me of their illnesses, described the difficulty of finding work, and expressed sadness in having to leave their land, houses, and community in Chamula. They wanted me to understand the persecution they suffer at the hands of the authorities in Chamula, the poverty they encounter in the city, the discrimination from *mestizos*, and the refusal of government authorities to address their situation and help. However, theirs is not only a history of suffering, but also of hope. Much of this hope was expressed in their faith in God, that one must be strong in faith and never give up struggling. There is also hope in the community itself, that people can work together to find strength and change their situation. Above all, this thesis is a history of the suffering and hope of the people of Guadalupe.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE GENESIS OF A COMMUNITY IN EXILE: THE HISTORY OF GUADALUPE

For over twenty years, anthropologists have argued for the necessity of placing the "closed corporate community" in a wider social, economic and political context. Recent anthropological works on Chiapas use a historical and contextualized view to show that indigenous communities are and always have been subject to change from outside forces.<sup>1</sup> The uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation on New Year's Day of 1994, in part triggered by the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, clearly demonstrates that the Maya are affected by national and international political-economic pressures, and are actors who respond to and propose alternatives to these policies.

One of the key arguments used to defend the authorities of Chamula responsible for expulsion is that the exiled negate participation in "community life" and hence threaten the social fabric which has held indigenous communities together for centuries. In my work in Guadalupe, I found that the notion of community serves to organize life, albeit with significant difference from that of Chamula. Perhaps the most important differences are that the people of Guadalupe do not organize extensive festivals or drink alcohol. However, the post-Vatican Catholics of Guadalupe have worked for ten years to create a community where members know and assist one another, where people join to

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<sup>1</sup> See for example, Bricker 1983; Collier 1990, 1994; Nash 1993, 1995b; Rus 1994. However, Frank Cancian's *The Decline of Community in Zinacantán: Economy, Public Life and Social Stratification, 1960-1987* assumes that change in community structure is synonymous with the decline of "community."

celebrate the Word of God, and where each member carries out his/her obligations toward other members.<sup>2</sup> In the Catholic community of Guadalupe, which is made up of people from eight hamlets of Chamula, new ties of *compadrazgo* are created in which people from different hamlets become *compadres* through marriage and baptism.<sup>3</sup> Projects such as the construction of roads, schools, and churches are carried out at a community level with groups of families contributing money and labor. The notion of community is central to the Catholics' understanding of human rights; in fact, human rights can not be understood without community (see Chapter 5). In this chapter, I present an economic and social description of the current community of Catholics, the history of the foundation of Guadalupe, and the importance of the process of exile in the social history of these Catholics.

### **Reconstructing Community**

The use of the concept of the "closed corporate community" to describe the highlands of Chiapas has been criticized for ignoring the wider context in which indigenous communities exist and for the assumption that change implies the destruction of communal bonds and social ties (Wasserstrom 1983). However, "community" continues to be a salient feature in Mayan life; it is worth re-examining the concept to see

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<sup>2</sup>A celebration of the Word of God takes place when the Bible is read and discussed; mass includes the sacrament of communion which must be consecrated by a priest or deacon. People also refer to being Roman Catholic as hearing or following the Word of God.

<sup>3</sup> A hamlet is a small village within a municipality. There are some 96 hamlets in Chamula.

how it can be useful in understanding indigenous peoples. The term closed community was coined by Eric Wolf in 1957; ironically, Wolf does not maintain the total insularity of the Mesoamerican communities. Instead, he notes that historically, the Spanish Crown established semi-autonomous indigenous communities in which "communal officials were to administer the law through the instrumentality of their traditional custom, whenever that custom did not conflict with the demands of church and state" (Wolf 1959: 214). As Wolf and other scholars have pointed out, the existence of the "closed corporate community" did not inhibit, and in some cases increased, the economic exploitation of the indigenous people (De la Peña 1981; Nader 1989; Smith 1977; Wolf 1982).

Critiques of the use of the concept of "closed corporate community" in highland Chiapas often refer to works of Sol Tax and his students.<sup>4</sup> Tax's article "The *Municipios* of the Midwestern Highlands of Guatemala" (1937) describes the importance of the *municipios* of Guatemala as "territorial and administrative divisions commonly recognized in all governmental matters," but also comprising "the basic ethnic divisions and cultural groups into which the country is divided" (1937: 425). Tax noted that the *municipios* are separate geographic units, each with its own town center, church, and market place. The *municipio* is also a social unit. "From the point of view of the Indians themselves, the people of each *municipio* constitute a unique group, united by blood and tradition and differing from all others in history, language, and culture." (1937: 433).

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<sup>4</sup> One the strongest critiques of the use of the concept of the "closed corporate community" in the anthropological literature in the highlands of Chiapas is that of Wasserstrom (1983) who bases much of his attack on the work of Sol Tax and his students.

Within a single *municipio*, there is a distinctive traditional dress, endogamy is practiced, and there are variations in the Mayan languages. This structure of *municipios* described by Tax for Guatemala is similar to that of highland Chiapas, where *municipios* also have administrative and social significance, each with its unique traditional dress, church, and local government. The members of any given *municipio* in Chiapas consider themselves to comprise a distinct group, and endogamy is commonly practiced.

In spite of their geographic segregation, Tax noted that the *municipios* are *not* economically or socially isolated. "The Indians, far from being isolated by these geographic conditions, are much given to traveling in spite of them; in commerce (wherein man himself is the chief beast of burden), in traveling to religious *fiestas*, or simply in going to see new places and new faces, much of the time of the Indians is spent in plodding of the rocky trails" (1937: 427). Of particular importance is trade. Since *municipios* commonly specialize in the production of particular agricultural or artisan products, trade is necessary to sustain all the communities.

In the work of Eric Wolf and Sol Tax, several points about the "closed corporate community" are important. First, indigenous communities are not, and never have been, "closed" in the sense of being isolated from outside political and economic forces, nor have they been static structures. Second, this community does not protect indigenous peoples from exploitation, but rather can be manipulated by the state in order to exploit and dominate the poor. Finally, the fact that the "community" is neither isolated nor static does not negate that it serves important political, economic and social functions in a local area.

The concept of community is important in the current debate on expulsion as *caciques* accuse supposed converts of threatening community cohesion while the exiled establish new communities in urban and semi-urban environments (see Sullivan 1995; Kovic 1995). The notion that indigenous culture is unchanging and isolated has often been explicitly or implicitly used by academics and government officials. On one hand, the Mexican government has defended the expulsions, deferring to the indigenous leaders who claim that converts threaten "tradition." This takes tradition as a reified and unchanging concept separated from power relations, and fails to note that tradition itself can be oppressive. On the other hand, academics have criticized the missionizing of the Protestant church for imposing changes on indigenous culture.<sup>5</sup> This view assumes that historical change did not exist in the "closed" communities before missionaries arrived.

Chamula has often been described as the municipality where indigenous communal traditions have been most strongly preserved (Earle 1991, Gossen 1974). The festivals organized in Chamula to celebrate feast days such as Carnival and the Day of San Juan are two of the largest and most elaborate of all the highland communities. However, the notion of protecting a cohesive community has been manipulated by Chamula's municipal authorities. People who challenge the power of local authorities are

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<sup>5</sup>Anthropologists have noted that the Protestant missions, particularly that of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, signed an agreement with the Mexican Ministry of Education to teach and evangelize in southern Mexico. This was part of an attempt to encourage conservative political teachings among the *campesinos* and to prevent the growth of guerilla forces which existed in Guatemala (Pérez Enríquez 1994, Rus and Wasserstrom 1981). The "imperialistic" intention of these missions has been amply criticized. Recently, scholars have noted that simply discarding the conversion to Protestantism as an "imperialist conspiracy" assumes that the Protestant missionaries were the first force of change.

accused of going against community tradition. This is exemplified in local elections in Chamula, where current authorities decide who the next municipal president will be.<sup>6</sup> The vast majority of the votes cast are for the pre-selected authority, and ballots are commonly filled out by the current PRI officials. Hence, what emerges is a "forced consensus" which attempts to deny the political heterogeneity of the municipality (Rus 1995). This is not to deny that at a local level, particularly in the hamlets, community continues to be important in Chamula. The extended family, support networks, and cooperation in community construction projects continue to be important. "Tradition" guides the selection of marriage partners, the organization of festivals, and the planting of crops (Rosenbaum 1993).

A central problem with the concept of the closed corporate community is that it is predicated upon homogeneity; it is assumed that there are no political, economic, ethnic, or class divisions within indigenous communities. However, in the current context in Chiapas, migration, integration with commercial centers, conversion to Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, multiple political affiliations, and the participation of women in the labor market are just some of the factors contributing to a plurality of identities within indigenous communities (Nash 1995c:5). The Roman Catholics of Guadalupe, nonetheless, insist on their unity in spite of their differences. The phrase "walking with

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<sup>6</sup>According to the Mexican Constitution, members of the municipality elect their municipal president who in turn appoints *agentes*, the "agents" or representatives of the president, for each sizable community outside the town center. In practice, communities often select their *agentes*. Municipal Presidents can jail people for up to 36 hours, at which time they must be turned over to the judicial authorities; they can impose administrative fines, but cannot make penal judgements.

one heart" demonstrates the importance of unity and community, a unity that is based in poverty -- the indigenous poor walk, while others pay for transportation -- and their shared religious beliefs.

### **The Community of Guadalupe, 1994-95**

In order to reach Guadalupe, one has to climb a steep path, which winds up a mountain, passes trees and rocks, and during the rainy season, is covered with mud. A *combi*, or Volkswagen bus, provides service to the top of hill, but most of Guadalupe's inhabitants walk twenty minutes uphill to their homes, unable to spare the twenty cents for the fare. I prefer to walk up the hill, and in doing so pass women walking down the hill, carrying infants on their backs and accompanied by other children as they take their sheep to graze in the fields below. Women walk uphill with their children as they return from the market in the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas with fruits and vegetables wrapped in their shawls. Even barefoot and with their bundles, the women and children walk faster than I. As people pass me going up the hill, we exchange greetings in Tzotzil, and sometimes stop to talk. When I finally reach the community, I am out of breath; children run to greet me shouting in Tzotzil, "Christina, Christina, *bu xa bar*" (Where are you going?). Then they start to giggle; they aren't used to seeing *caxlanes* (non-indigenous peoples) in their community. During the twelve months that I conducted fieldwork in Guadalupe, I made this trip countless times in order to discover how a group of people living in exile describe their situation as related to the issue of human rights. Conducting ethnographic research with the twenty-six Catholic families of the

community allowed me to overcome the Eurocentric bias in human rights studies that do not take into account local understandings of rights which are observable in daily behavior.

Walking to Guadalupe from the center of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, I felt that I had arrived in a rural Tzotzil community. The women and girls wore their traditional dress; those from Chamula had a white or blue blouse adorned with embroidery and satin ribbon, a black wool skirt tied with a red sash, and were either barefoot or wearing plastic shoes. The majority of the men wore *caxlan* shirts and pants which can be bought second-hand in the streets of the market, and sandals. As I passed the small stream which runs through the village, I greeted women and girls bent over the rocks washing their clothing. Walking through the community during the day, I passed women and girls carrying plastic containers which they filled with water from one of two tanks. No one has running water in their homes, so they must carry water to their homes for cooking, drinking, and cleaning. On sunny days, I greeted women who sat in the front of their homes working. Most often they were making clothing. It takes a woman a week to make a wool skirt, first cleaning the wool, then spinning it, then weaving it on a backstrap loom. They also sewed and embroidered blouses. Some worked drying, cleaning or sorting beans and corn. The majority of the families in Guadalupe are from the municipality of Chamula, but there are also families from Zinacantán and Chenalho'. There are a total of 220 families in Guadalupe, twenty-six of which are still Catholic. The following table presents these twenty-six families, their occupations, the year of their exile, and their role in the Catholic Church, if any.

**Table 3: The Catholics of Guadalupe**

Name of Heads of Household	Occupation	Number in household	Role in Church	Year of exile
Javier Magdalena	<i>peon</i> artisan products <sup>7</sup>	4	Prayer leader	1992
Lucas Micaela	cultivates land in Betania, sells charcoal artisan products	7	Sacristan until 1995.	1988
Emiliano Pascuala	<i>peon</i> artisan products	8		1988
Mónica Andrés	<i>peon</i> artisan products	7		1989
Juan Rosa	<i>peon</i> artisan products	10	Catechist	1986
Rafael Reina	carpenter artisan products	5	Song and prayer leader	1992
Antonio Manuela	cultivates in lowlands artisan products	3		1988
Pedro Yolanda	sells popsicles artisan products	8		1994
Agustin María	carpenter artisan products	6	Head catechist until 1996	1985
Sebastian Marcela	<i>peon</i> artisan products	3		1988
Francisco Anita	sells popsicles artisan products	9	prayer leader until 1995	1988
Ernesto Carmela	cultivates in Chenalho' artisan products	6	Prayer leader	1991

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<sup>7</sup>This indicates that the women make and sell artisan products to earn cash for the household.

**Table 3 (continued): The Catholics of Guadalupe**

Alejandro Otelia	both sell produce in the market	5	Prayer leader	1988
Fernando Dominga	shoemaker artisan products	10		1987
Cristóbal Josefina	<i>peon</i> artisan products	7	prayer leader	1995
Heriberto Daniela	sells popsicles artisan products	7		1988
Roberto Silvia	<i>peon</i> , photographer local store	8	prayer leader	1989
Simón Lucia	carpenter, 1996 -- migration to the US artisan products	3		1988
Santos Luz	<i>peon</i> artisan products	7	sacristan 1996	1988
Salvador Agustina	carpenter artisan products	6	catechist 1996	1988
Matías Lorenza	gardener artisan products	6		1992
Pedro Olga	carpenter artisan product	5		1988
<b>Female Heads of Household</b>				
Verónica single mother	runs a store in Guadalupe	5		1993
Martha single mother	sells artisan products in plaza	5		1991
Antonia widow	artisan products son is carpenter	5		1988
Juana widow	sells in market son works as <i>peon</i>	3		1984

*Making a Living: "Here we are poor"*

Separated from their homes and lands in Chamula, the residents of Guadalupe have been forced to start anew in a community located on the outskirts of the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. The homes of the community are varied. In the simplest, the walls are made of adobe or boards and the roofs are made of *cartón*, a corrugated and waterproofed cardboard which provides protection from the rain. Plastic and cardboard boxes are used to cover up the space between the slats in an attempt to give protection from the wind and water, and the poorer families do not have beds, but sleep on *petates*, straw mats, or broken-down cardboard boxes. The majority of the homes are made of boards with roofs of corrugated sheet metal, and dirt floors. A small number of families have acquired the money to build homes of concrete block with concrete floors. Most of the homes have electricity which is used almost exclusively for lights and radios. In back of each home, a latrine is "walled off" by sheets of plastic tied up with wooden posts.

People commonly repeated the problem of being separated from their land in Chamula as one of the most difficult aspects of exile. They lamented that in Guadalupe there is not enough land to cultivate subsistence crops or to allow animals to graze. However, the lack of land is not a problem which began with exile, but rather is a continuation of a problem in Chamula. While some families had as much as four hectares of land in Chamula and could survive by planting *milpa*, the pre-Conquest combination of corn, squash, and beans, most had less than one hectare and were forced to participate in other strategies to supplement their small harvests.<sup>8</sup> The life histories I

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<sup>8</sup>One hectare is equal to 2.47 acres.

collected reveal that males commonly performed seasonal labor in *fincas* (coffee plantations), that families migrated to the Lacandon Jungle in the east of the state to settle lands in a colonization process encouraged by the federal government, and that others worked as sharecroppers on lands in the Central Valley of the Grijalva River (see Map 3). These three strategies, along with others, have been well-documented by anthropologists studying Mayan municipalities of the highlands of Chiapas (see for example Collier 1975; Rus 1994; Wasserstrom 1980, 1983).<sup>9</sup> Participation in these activities demonstrates that the current residents of Guadalupe combined subsistence production, the sale of artisan goods, and wage labor when they lived in Chamula: they did not fit neatly in the category of peasant, petty commodity producer, or proletariat.

Due to a lack of land, the economic activity of the residents of Guadalupe is increasingly separated from subsistence production in cultivation. Nonetheless, the tie to land continues to have economic and symbolic significance, and they call themselves *campesinos*. The families have built their homes on tiny plots of land measuring ten by twenty meters. In front of their homes, people keep chickens and sheep. No matter how small their plot of land, many families plant *milpa*. For the majority of the families, the yield is not significant; they harvest at best a few of the tender ears of corn which are roasted and eaten. However, planting serves as a reminder of the land lost, and that they

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<sup>9</sup>A study of wage labor in eight hamlets of Chamula revealed that a total of 76 percent of male heads of household worked outside the municipality, including fifty-two percent who worked on coffee plantations, 25 percent who worked as unskilled *peones* in San Cristóbal, Tuxtla, and La Reforma oilfield, and another 25 percent who rented land to cultivate in the Central Valley. The total adds up to more than one hundred percent since many families engaged in several activities per year (Wasserstrom 1983: 202-203).

are *campesinos*. Fernando, who now supports his family by making sandals, explained the importance of working the land:

The indigenous people think like *campesinos*, the *campesinos* are the workers. The *mestizos* do not work the land, but the *campesinos* plant corn, beans, carrots, squash and other crops. They are the workers who know how to make corn. It is through the work of the *campesinos* that the *mestizos* live.

According to Fernando, "All *campesinos* are indigenous -- Ch'ol, Tzotzil, Tojolabal, whatever, they are indigenous." He distinguishes between indigenous *campesinos* who are the workers and the non-indigenous *mestizos* who have all the money but do not work. However, it is important to point out that there are non-indigenous *campesinos* in Chiapas and in other parts of Mexico.<sup>10</sup>

Most of the men of Guadalupe directly sell labor force, working for wages in the city. They do not, however, refer to themselves as proletariats, but rather describe themselves as poor or as *campesinos*, a description that reflects an incomplete proletarianization process. Displaced from land which once provided part of their means of production, they lack regular employment, commonly work in the informal sector, and make up a reserve army of labor which serves the *mestizos* merchants of San Cristóbal.

Eight of twenty-two male heads of household in Guadalupe are *peones*, or unskilled day laborers who perform menial work in the construction of homes and public works (see Table 3). The work is physically exhausting; men carry concrete blocks and bags of cement, pour concrete, clear roads, and shovel gravel. The pay is fifteen to

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<sup>10</sup>Although indigenous peoples suffer discrimination and poverty, a large percentage of *campesinos* in Mexico are also poor and marginalized.

twenty pesos a day (currently about two to three U.S. dollars). All of the *peones* in Guadalupe work irregularly; they are hired for a few days or weeks at a time to complete a specific project. During this time, they work nine hours a day; when the work is completed, they search for another project, but can go for weeks or months without work.

A few men in Guadalupe rent small plots of land in municipalities in the highlands or in the *tierra caliente* (the “hot lands” or lowlands of the Central Valley) where they cultivate corn and beans for family consumption. However, rent, which is commonly paid as a share of the harvest, plus the cost of transportation, fertilizer, and seeds, makes it difficult to earn much. A few men sell *paletas* (popsicles) from small, insulated carts which they rent and push around the city. On a good day, they can earn twenty to thirty pesos, but on a particularly cold or rainy day, common from July to September and November to February, it is difficult to sell many popsicles. A small group of men in Guadalupe work as *albaniles*, or carpenters. These men work on the same projects as the *peones*, but are paid thirty to fifty pesos a day since they have been trained in construction and give orders to the *peones*. However, like the *peones*, the work of the *albanil* is irregular; it depends on finding an available project. Some families have small stores where they sell soft drinks, pasta, rice, and other items. One man makes sandals out of used tires, another has a stand in the market where he sells coconuts, another makes and sells charcoal. All of these jobs provide an irregular source or income; one can never count on earning money from one day to the next.

The women and children earn money for their families by making artisan objects, most commonly handwoven bracelets and belts. Several women weave and embroider

cloths which were originally made only in Zinacantán. They spend nine pesos to buy the yarn for three cloths, work for a week weaving and embroidering, and sell the three for a total of twenty-two pesos, earning a total of eleven pesos in profit. Bracelets are sold to vendors for six pesos (currently less than one dollar) a dozen, and the vendors sell them in the city to tourists. Women also hand-weave wool ponchos, vests, jackets and purses for tourists. It takes over a week to clean, spin, and weave the wool and then to stitch up a poncho: women receive thirty-five pesos for their work and the materials. Few women sell directly to tourists or other buyers, but instead rely on "middlemen." Although this method of sale pays less, it is more secure and the women do not have to spend time in the streets attempting to sell.<sup>11</sup> Women's contribution to the household income through the sale of artisan products is small, but stable. It is important in making ends meet since men's income is often irregular.

Given their situation of extreme poverty, the Catholics of Guadalupe help one another out -- sharing food, money, and other kinds of support. I observed many examples of such support: one man spent several work days helping his neighbor put a roof on his house; a family bought medicine for the child of a poor family who was sick; families lent money to others for special festivals or emergencies; and women helped one another cook for festivals. This type of mutual support is described in detail in Chapter 7.

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<sup>11</sup> Another reason that women may not sell artisan products directly to tourists in the streets is to avoid domestic conflicts. Christine Eber and Brenda Rosenbaum (1993) note that marital tension increased when women in Chamula and Chenalho' began to sell artisan products. Women who sell products directly to customers may be accused of being "women of the street" or males may become angry if women keep their money from sales.

*Religion: Celebrating the Word of God*

Religion is a central force in maintaining the cohesion of the Catholics who live in Guadalupe, but it also facilitates networks beyond the local community. The small chapel in Guadalupe is a central meeting place where people unite four times a week to celebrate or listen to the Word of God. Several prayer leaders explained to me that since the majority of the people in Guadalupe cannot read or write, they must meet in the chapel to read the Word of God together. As Juan put it: "We can't read the Bible in our homes like you do, so we meet together." After the celebration, information on current political events and other issues important to the community are shared.

Catechists -- men and women are selected by the community to serve as lay preachers, make a commitment to promote reflection of the Word of God, and play an important leadership role in religious and civil matters -- are central to maintaining a sense of community in Guadalupe. They commonly receive orientation in the study of the Bible, Catholic doctrine, and sacraments through courses of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Since catechists are expected to set an example in following the Word of God in their daily lives, they have moral authority in their communities and are often sought out for advice and to mediate conflicts. There are currently some 8,000 catechists in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas; given the lack of priests, the catechists are the most important spiritual leaders in their communities.<sup>12</sup> While conducting fieldwork in Guadalupe, I met the three catechists of the community -- Juan,

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<sup>12</sup> In his 1993 pastoral letter to Pope John Paul II, Bishop Ruiz García stated that there are a total of 7,822 catechists in the Dioceses (Ruiz García 1993: 31).

Agustin, and Salvador. Juan, the oldest of the three, has been a catechist for over twenty-five years and received training during a four month course organized by the Marist brothers. Agustin and Salvador are younger men who did not complete formal training, but rather became catechists because they were elected by the community and demonstrated initiative and interest in serving others.

The center of religious life in the community is the local chapel, however, several families from Guadalupe regularly attend mass or service at Caridad, a church in the city of San Cristóbal which has been the center for Tzotzil Catholics for ten years. Each Sunday the church is filled with indigenous Roman Catholics, primarily from Chamula and Zinacantán, but from other highland communities as well. People from Guadalupe regularly walk to the church of Caridad to celebrate with other Catholics, and their connection to this church brings news of what *campesinos* in the region and the state are doing.

During my fieldwork, one event of extreme importance to the Catholics of Guadalupe was the rebuilding of their local chapel. The small chapel which existed had a dirt floor, a roof of *cartón*, and walls of wooden boards. As I began to get to know the people of the community, they told me that they were all contributing money so that they could build a new chapel; they said that the old one was too small, the roof leaked, and the wind entered through the spaces between the boards in the walls. During Sunday celebrations, special collections were taken up to buy the supplies to rebuild the chapel. The act of giving money to the project is called *cooperar* or cooperate, significantly referring to the necessity of community participation. The catechists were expected to

give more money than other families. This, I was told, was because they are seen as leaders and must set a good example. In total, over 2,000 pesos were needed for the materials to construct the new chapel. This money was used to buy new boards, corrugated metal for the roof, nails, and concrete for the floor. Divided by twenty-five families, the money comes to eighty pesos each, the equivalent of a week's wages.

By the second week of May, there was enough money to rebuild the structure of the chapel, and the people were in a hurry to rebuild before the rains started. During the week, more than twelve men worked full-time on the building, giving up any wages they might have earned working in the city. The *albaniles* of the community directed the project. Since many of the men work in the city as *peones*, they were prepared for the task. On Saturday, after six full-days work, the final pieces of metal were being placed on the roof. In the end, there were not enough pieces, and more had to be "borrowed" from those Catholics who had "extra" pieces in their homes. I stopped to talk to the men who were working and they explained that the chapel was almost finished. Then I walked to the home of Agustin where several women were preparing a meal to celebrate the completion of the project. They were cooking rice and chicken soup, and had finished making the *tortillas*. I helped place the *tortillas* in a basket covered with a cloth to keep them warm. The women, like the men, were proud that the project was almost complete, and they told me that I must go to hear the Word of God on Sunday in their "new" chapel. At dusk, the men finished their work, and gathered in Agustin's patio to celebrate over the meal.

The time and money sacrificed to rebuild the chapel demonstrates the extreme

importance of religion in the community. The participation of all Catholics of Guadalupe in collecting money and building of the chapel also reflects the way in which religion is used to foster a sense of community among the twenty-six families.

The majority of the remaining families living in Guadalupe are Protestants; there is a great deal of difference among the Protestant groups, although Catholics of Guadalupe commonly refer to all as *Evangélicos* or Evangelicals. There are two Pentecostal churches in the community which are full on Sundays, and others walk to worship with Presbyterians, Seventh Day Adventists, or Jehovah's Witnesses in temples located in nearby shantytowns.

Both the Catholics and Protestants of Guadalupe claim that they "have religion" while the self-proclaimed "traditionalists" of Chamula (those who mix pre-Colombian Mayan beliefs with some aspects of Roman Catholicism) do not have religion. From an anthropological perspective, all three of these groups have religious beliefs and practices. The claim that those in Chamula lack religion comes, in part, from the traditionalists themselves; the *caciques* criticize and expel anyone who is Catholic or Protestant under the accusation that they "have religion," implying that true Chamulans do not "have religion." In this text, I refer to traditional Catholics of Chamula as "traditionalists" to avoid their being confused with the post-Vatican II Roman Catholics of Guadalupe.

In the view of the expelled, only Christians who go to church "have religion." One example of this belief was a conversation I had with Juan when he asked if my parents are religious. I explained that my mother is Catholic and that my father believes in God but does not go to church. Juan told me that if my father does not go to church.

then he must be a traditionalist, like those of Chamula who say that they have religion, but really only like to drink alcohol.

### *Expelled Catholics in the Highlands*

Guadalupe is not unique among the shantytowns on the outskirts of the city of San Cristóbal in that it has a population of Roman Catholics. Although the majority of the inhabitants of Guadalupe and other shantytown communities are members of various Protestant denominations, Catholics are scattered throughout all of these new settlements which surround the city. Catholics comprise a significant number of the exiled, but it is difficult to estimate their exact number. In the six month period from July to December of 1993, the National Commission of Human Rights reported that eleven percent of the approximately 557 people expelled were Catholic.<sup>13</sup> In this same period, the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" reported that over one-third of the 520 people expelled were Catholic.<sup>14</sup> If one estimates that ten percent of the total population of expelled are Catholics, this means two to three thousand people. However, this number includes only the most visible population of the expelled, namely those who live in the urban and semi-urban areas of San Cristóbal and the neighboring municipality of

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<sup>13</sup> This number is based on the 54 legal complaints which were presented to the State Attorney General in this period; the number does not represent all of the people expelled in this period (Estrada Martínez 1995).

<sup>14</sup> This number is based on the cases in which the victims arrived to this Human Rights Center to file a complaint. It is likely that the percentage of Catholics is higher than the overall percentage since the Center is part of the Catholic Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas (Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" 1993).

Teopisca. There are also hundreds of Catholics who were expelled from Chamula who now live in rural areas in Chenalho, San Andrés Larrainzer, and San Cristóbal de Las Casas. For example, in San Andrés Larrainzer there are several hamlets populated exclusively by expelled Roman Catholics who once lived in Chamula. Another community of expelled Catholics exists in La Florecilla, a community founded by Clarist nuns who bought land in this rural area of the municipality of San Cristóbal. Finally, there are communities of Catholics who were not exiled in the "traditional" way -- most notably, the communities of Candelaria and San Antonio de Las Rosas, which until 1967, were part of the municipality of Chamula. The majority of the members of these communities converted to Catholicism in the 1960's and built a chapel. Due to violent conflicts between these hamlets and the authorities of Chamula, the two communities joined the municipality of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in 1967. Currently, the vast majority of the members of these two hamlets are Catholics who retain their dress, language, and traditions from Chamula. There are also several communities of Catholics from Chamula who have formed new settlements outside their homelands, such as Dos Lagunas, Corazon de María and San Antonio de Los Baños. This is not in any sense an exhaustive list of Roman Catholics who have been forced to leave their native lands, but serves to point out that the Catholics of Guadalupe are only some of the thousands of Catholics exiled from Chamula.

### History of the Community of Guadalupe, 1983-1993

Community is a central dynamic in the lives of the expelled -- they recreate their churches and neighborhoods in urban and suburban areas outside their municipalities of origin -- as is the case for Guadalupe. Although the new community differs significantly from the hamlets of Chamula, Tzotzil identity continues to be important.

The community of Guadalupe was founded by Mateo, a Catholic catechist who was expelled from Chamula in 1983. He was one of three catechists in the Church of Caridad in San Cristóbal de Las Casas where indigenous Roman Catholics meet to celebrate the Word of God in Tzotzil:

I arrived in the Church of Caridad to prepare for my baptism and to be baptized. But because I went to Caridad, I was accused of being an Evangelical and was expelled.<sup>15</sup>

Mateo was approached by Roman Catholics who were being exiled from Chamula and who needed a place to live; he told me how he worked to buy the land to found a community for these exiles:

In 1983 I began to go to the church of Caridad to hear the Word of God. Later, some people from the community of San José Buenavista had a course for catechists and I attended the course which lasted five days. I returned to the church of Caridad and together with another catechist, we held a general meeting for the catechists there in May of 1983. When I began attending the church of Caridad there were about fifteen or twenty believers. We began to work hard, and little by little we gathered more

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<sup>15</sup> *Caciques* of Chamula commonly accuse Catholics of being Evangelicals as a reason to expel them. The *caciques* associate all religion which differs from that of Chamula with Evangelical Churches. Perhaps this is also because the Evangelicals, or Protestants, supposedly present a threat to customs and rituals of the indigenous community. Since traditional Chamulans mix Catholic beliefs with Maya ritual, it would be more difficult to claim that Catholics following liberation theology threaten community.

people, believers from San Cristóbal, from Corazon de María, and other communities. In two or three years the church was full. The people were asking us, where are we going to live. Together with another catechist, I began to look for land. We found the land in Guadalupe which belongs to my mother-in-law. She sold us the land for a good price, she said that it was good that Catholics were going to live there. We bought twelve hectares at the price of 25,000 pesos per hectare. We found the money little by little. On December 12, 1983, we bought the land and also obtained the papers for it. We made announcements in Caridad that we had land, we told the people that they could build their homes and live there. At first, only three to five families went to live in Guadalupe, no more. It was only mountain and brush.<sup>16</sup>

I lived in Guadalupe for six years, from 1983 to 1989. It had only Catholic families then, about 120 Catholic families in all. Some of the other shantytowns of expelled weren't established yet. I worked for three years as representative of the expelled.

Hence, the community was founded by and for Catholics who were being exiled.

This was in contrast to the growing shantytowns on the outskirts of San Cristóbal de Las Casas since the late 1970's which were populated primarily by Evangelical Protestant exiles. By 1980, neighborhoods with names like Nueva Esperanza, Benito Juárez, and Palestina had already been established on the edge of the northern highway of the city of San Cristóbal (Calvo Sánchez 1990) and Betania had been established in the municipality of Teopisca. Guadalupe also differs from the other shantytowns in that it is more isolated from San Cristóbal and the families' plots of land are a bit larger.

Since the land was purchased on December 12, 1983 -- the day of festival of the Virgin of Guadalupe -- I chose the name Guadalupe as a pseudonym for the community. Not only did Mateo directly help many people to acquire land and establish themselves in

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<sup>16</sup> The land Mateo purchased was uninhabited forest. When people began to settle, they cut down trees to clear space for their homes.

their new home; many families spent their first months in Guadalupe living with him or on land that he lent them. One widow remembered his help:

The catechist (Mateo) looked for and bought the land here in Guadalupe. At first, I lived with Mateo because I had no home. He gave me land to live on. I didn't have any money because I came here from Chamula without anything. Later, I was able to sell my house and land in Chamula and give 5,000 pesos to Mateo. He had a good heart. He shared his coffee, corn, and beans with others. He didn't get sad when he didn't have his food, his corn (Antonia).

Remembering the beginning of settling the community, another woman told me:

Earlier, the catechist Mateo lived here. When I left [Chamula] my children were small, that was ten years ago. There were only ten homes here. We lived up in the mountain. It was all brush and mountain here, it was dangerous. They said that people would come to kill you. The women were afraid to go out for water at night. There was hardly anyone here. Religious celebrations were held in the house of Don Mateo (Juana).

Initially, people walked to the Church of Caridad in the city of San Cristóbal to attend celebrations of the Word of God. Little by little the community grew and by 1988 there were thirty-five Catholic families and a provisional chapel in the house of Mateo. As more and more families moved to Guadalupe, it grew beyond the initial twelve hectares. People built homes near the original settlement without acquiring legal title to the land. They told me with pride that the Bishop of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Samuel Ruiz García, had visited the community in 1988 to celebrate mass. They met in Mateo's home for the mass and the floor was covered in pine needles, as is traditional in Chamula during *fiestas* and other important events, and there was much music and singing. Later they built a simple chapel in the center of the community.

In 1990 there was a split in the community and little by little, the majority of the

people left the Catholic Church. Several related reasons were given for the split. One factor, which everyone seemed in agreement about, was that Mateo began to drink and more importantly "took a second wife." Disapproval of his actions was not based on personal conflicts with Mateo. Drinking alcohol and taking more than one wife are two of the primary practices of the "traditionalists" which the Catholic converts rejected in Chamula. Hence, the people of Guadalupe felt betrayed by Mateo who was the founder of the community, and above all a catechist who was expected to provide moral and spiritual leadership. In taking a second wife and drinking, he represented what they had left behind. They demanded that Mateo leave the community, and he now lives in another shantytown inhabited by exiles from Chamula. The Catholics noted that since then Mateo has given up drinking and now lives with only one woman whom he married. His first "wife" still lives in Guadalupe, but now attends a Pentecostal church.

Another factor was related to acquiring the legal titles to the land of the community. It was decided that everyone would contribute fifty pesos to carry out the necessary legal procedures. Mateo said it would cost twelve million pesos to legalize the title to the land and people started to give him money. Then another Catholic, Salvador, said that he had inquired among several lawyers who said it would only cost two and a half million pesos. The people began to wonder what Mateo was doing with their money and decided to give it to Salvador instead. They asked Mateo to give back what they had already invested, but he said that he did not have it because he had already started the legal procedure. People were annoyed. Meanwhile, Salvador kept asking for more money, ultimately claiming that he needed a total of thirty-six million pesos to legally buy

the land. People asked what was happening to their money and why they still lacked the titles to the land. Mateo said it was not his fault, he was working hard, but "the lawyers didn't want to work. They were lazy, and one had cheated him of his money." Salvador still needed more money and still did not have the papers. The people were angry. Since both Mateo and Salvador had been active with the Catholic Church, the fraud was associated with the church. People were disenchanted and many left the Catholic Church.

A third reason mentioned for the split was that Mateo was accused of being "too political." People associated involvement in politics with deception, after they had been deceived by the authorities of Chamula and San Cristóbal in the process of expulsion. Mateo had been involved in the founding of the Regional Council of Indigenous Representatives of the Highlands of Chiapas (CRIACH), an organization dedicated to the defense of indigenous rights and has worked toward the end of expulsion as one of its fundamental goals. As a leader of the group, he visited government officials demanding that something be done about the problem of expulsion. He also asked for concessions to help the people of the community. The state government, through the office of *Asuntos Indígenas* (Indigenous Affairs), had given twenty-five homes each to several communities of exiles. Mateo was able to obtain forty homes instead of twenty-five. Other members of CRIACH were angered by this as were many residents of Guadalupe. They felt that Mateo should not accept the government offer; their demand was and had always been that the government help them return to Chamula, not settle in San Cristóbal. With the concession of the forty homes, suspicion against Mateo grew; people thought that he had

betrayed their cause.<sup>17</sup> People also complained that Mateo had become too much of a politician which can only create more problems.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time that sentiment against Mateo was increasing, an indigenous Pentecostal pastor began to evangelize in the community. Soon a Pentecostal Church was built, and little by little, people left the first church to join the new one. A second Pentecostal pastor began to assist in preaching, but soon a personal conflict developed between the two pastors and a second Pentecostal church was built. Currently, the majority of the inhabitants of Guadalupe attend one of the Pentecostal churches in the community, and others walk to one of several Protestant churches in the nearby shantytowns. In 1992, with the assistance of lawyers, papers to the community were finalized as *copropiedad* (property with joint ownership), with a total of twenty hectares in addition to the original twelve hectares. This means that the entire community owns the land and that each family has rights to their specific lot. Having the papers which recognize the families of Guadalupe as legitimate owners of the land is critical in a state with permanent conflicts regarding the access to and tenure of land.

At present there are some 220 families in the community, well over a thousand people, a school, a road, several small stores, and three churches. Most important, people in Guadalupe say that their hearts are now "content" because they live together in peace.

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<sup>17</sup> This conflict is also documented in Morquecho Escamilla (1992), an undergraduate thesis on the organizational process of the expelled.

<sup>18</sup> They were right in claiming that being "too political" only causes problems. Mateo was detained twice in 1994, once by federal police and once by Chamulan *caciques*. His involvement in CRIACH makes him a target for political repression.

In fact, however, it was only from 1984 to 1990 when the vast majority of the inhabitants were Catholic and that the community seemed united. I was told that it was easier to make decisions when everyone was Catholic.

### **Expulsion from Chamula**

One morning in late February, I sat in the house of Juana in her home in Guadalupe. Outside were three sheep, and the woman in the house next door was weaving on a backstrap loom. Juana is a widow and her two girls, ages ten and thirteen, sat close, the youngest in her mother's lap. All three were dressed in the traditional clothing of Chamula and spoke Tzotzil. Juana knew me because I attended the small Catholic chapel in the community for the celebration of the Word of God on Sunday mornings. We exchanged greetings, and she said she was glad I had come to visit. She was one of the first people to arrive in Guadalupe eleven years ago. I asked Juana to tell me why she left her home in Chamula and came to live in Guadalupe, and she began by telling me how she converted to Catholicism:

I started to listen to the Word of God because I was sick. My body was very weak and I couldn't work. When I understood the Word of God my illness went away. The people of Chamula saw that I wasn't sick anymore and they thought that I must have religion. They asked what medicine I took, and they saw that I had religion. The Catholic catechists who work in Caridad came to my hamlet. They met with people there. The people saw that I was talking with these three catechists. They also have spies who knew that I went to the Catholic Church in San Cristóbal to attend mass.

She continued her story, explaining the problems which arose as a result of her conversion:

People said that these catechists are Evangelists. They told me that I had to leave my religion. They said that if I didn't give up my religion I would be taken to the authorities in the center of Chamula. But I didn't stop listening to the Word of God. So they took me to the authorities and asked me, "Are you going to continue learning religion?" and I said yes, because I am no longer sick, thanks to God. The Municipal President of Chamula does not like people who have religion. He took me to jail and said "We are going to punish you." I was in jail for three hours and my children were waiting for me outside the jail. I was very sad because I thought they were going to kill me. There were lots of people outside the jail, around 500 people. They were yelling. They said that if I gave up my religion I could go back to my village and everything would calm down. If I continued with my religion, the conflict would continue. I didn't give up my faith because my heart was very strong.

They threw me out of my village because I didn't give up my religion. I signed a paper saying that I couldn't stay in my village because I had religion. I had two days to leave. On the third day I was still there and the people gathered. They wanted to kill me because I hadn't left. There were a lot of people and I was afraid. I fled to the mountains. I returned to my house after dark at eight at night because my three children were very young. Then I left. I walked for four hours alone in the night with my children. I cried a lot. I had to carry my two daughters because they were so small. We slept a few hours in the mountains. I awoke at three in the morning to walk to San Cristóbal.

I left everything I had in Chamula. I couldn't carry anything. I left all my clothes and my house. Now I have a house here. Before I didn't have anything. I didn't have a bed, I slept on the floor. I didn't have clothes either. I got sick. My first house here was of plastic and *cartón*, it was cold and wet. Now, thanks to God, I have a better house and we live peacefully in Guadalupe.

Stories similar to Juana's were repeated to me time and time again in my interviews with the people in Guadalupe. Several issues remained constant in their stories. First, their religious conversion, which is a conversion from the traditional, folk-style Catholicism practiced in Chamula, to a Roman Catholicism heavily influenced by Vatican II theology. Religion continues to be central to the daily lives of the people of Guadalupe, even years

after converting. Second, they described persecution which began as a result of their conversion: people recounted being beaten, jailed, threatened, and finally exiled. In the process, they lost their land, homes, and possessions. Third, they described the difficulty of establishing a new life in the city, without land and the skills necessary to find work. And finally, they told of the importance of their new community and of being able to worship freely.

As has been documented in historical and ethnographic accounts, the Chamulans, like other Mayans, were not fully evangelized by Catholic missionaries in the Colonial period, but had mixed many pre-Conquest beliefs and customs with Catholicism. For example, Mayas continue to associate the sun with the Christian God and the moon with the Virgin Mary. This association reinforces the Mayan belief about the sun and moon being symbols of maleness and femaleness. In many cases, these traditional beliefs do not conflict with Catholic theology. The Diocese of San Cristóbal has, in fact, encouraged indigenous Roman Catholics to retain and rescue pre-Conquest religious belief, and has a work group called "Indigenous Theology" in which indigenous catechists participate together with pastoral workers. However, other facets of Catholicism do present conflicts with traditional beliefs. In some cases, as young catechists begin to acquire power in communities, they threaten the traditional power of the elders and reject certain customs. The converts may dismiss traditional beliefs about souls, alcohol, and saints. The conflict between "traditionals" and Catholics is evident not only in Chamula; it also exists in several highland communities such as Chenalho', Chalchuitán, Zinacantán, and San Andrés Larrainzer. In this conflict, it is necessary to untangle how

much is related to power struggles within communities and how much is related to differences in theology and world view. I examine this issue in detail in Chapter 3. Here, I present the problematic from the point of view of the exiled, focusing on what they see as being significant about their conversion and what caused problems with the authorities of Chamula.

When I began visiting the homes of the Roman Catholic families of Guadalupe, I was eager to hear their stories of how they were exiled from Chamula and wanted to know how they talked about the human rights abuses involved. I was worried that people would be reluctant to open up before a *caxlan* and therefore an outsider. Instead, I found that they were eager to talk and were pleased that I had an interest in their history. They saw me as someone who did not know about their lives, sufferings, and customs, but they wanted me to understand what had happened. They told me over and over about hearing the Word of God, the authorities in Chamula, their arrival in Guadalupe, and the role of God in their lives. Talking served to denounce what had happened to them, and they told me in hopes that I would continue to denounce their suffering, in Mexico well as in my own country. People were well aware that the problem of expulsion had been presented as a conflict between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics, and they wanted me understand the "true" story. They also told of expulsion as a testimony to their faith; in spite of what they had suffered, they never gave up their religion. Telling of their suffering was a sort of catharsis. Women spent hours talking to me as they sat weaving, spinning wool, making bracelets, or cleaning their children's hair. Their hands were never idle. I spoke to men in the evenings and weekends, since they commonly walked to San Cristóbal to

work during the day. One evening after talking for hours with a catechist about the history of the community, he insisted that I come back as soon as possible so that he could finish the long story.

People began their stories of expulsion by describing the time when they first "heard the Word of God." In Tzotzil the verb to hear -- *a'iel* -- translates as to hear, listen, feel, and understand. At first, people began "to hear" the Word of God, but in time, began to understand it and "change their hearts." Some began to hear the Word of God in the church of Chenalho', a municipality which shares a border with the north of Chamula. Others heard the Word of God from Catholic catechists who work in Chamula or from friends who had already converted. Some converted while they were working in *fincas* in other parts of Chiapas, and others while they were working lands in the Lacandon Jungle. In many cases, people walked great distances to attend mass and religious meetings.

Many who live on the edge of the municipality walked to the church in Chenalho' simply because it was closer to their homes than the church in the *cabecera* (administrative and ceremonial center) of Chamula. Unlike other municipalities, Chamula does not have chapels in its hamlets; there is only one church which is located in the *cabecera* where political and ceremonial power are concentrated. The *cabecera* of Chamula is not located in the geographic center of the municipality, but rather in the south. Inhabitants of the northern hamlets have to walk for several hours in order to reach the church. Several families in Guadalupe who once lived in the northern hamlets of Chamula made the decision to walk to the church in Chenalho' on Sundays to hear mass. As suggested above, this was a pragmatic decision -- the church was closer -- rather than

a decision motivated by political or religious factors. The church in Chenalho' is served by the Catholic priest, Father Michel Chanteau, who has worked there for over twenty years. In the church of Chenalho', people learned several religious practices that differed from the church in Chamula. They learned that parents and god-parents must prepare for Baptism by studying with catechists; they learned that it is important to be married by the Church; and they learned that one should study the Bible in order to better understand the Word of God. Many formed relationships with Father Chanteau and the catechists who worked in Chenalho'.

Others heard the Word of God in their hamlets in Chamula. Before 1982, Catholic priests and nuns worked in the community and trained indigenous Roman Catholic catechists. While these catechists lived in Chamula, they talked with friends and acquaintances and attempted to spread the Word of God. People in Guadalupe described talking to priests and catechists in Chamula; once they made the decision to convert, they walked to the Church of Caridad in the center of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Agustin explained the process of converting in Chamula:

I first heard the Word of God in my hamlet, Milpoleta, when I was little, about ten years old. My mother took me to a house where a priest came to visit every Sunday, and we prayed the Our Father and other prayers. At this time, there was no road to Milpoleta and the priest had to walk to the community. My older brother made his first communion. The priest baptized people and celebrated communion and marriage. He went there for about a year. But the people of Milpoleta said, "There is a priest here, we're going to kick him out." This was before 1965. People were frightened and didn't come to pray any more. Once the priest arrived but there wasn't anyone in the house. The owner of the house was frightened and told the priest that it was better that he didn't come anymore.

In 1983 I heard the Word of God again, I went alone to the Church of

Caridad to see about this religion. I wanted to see if my cousin was a catechist like they said. There weren't many people in the church of Caridad, only some ten people, no more. They didn't even have music. I thought, this is good, I am going to come regularly.

Many inhabitants of Guadalupe had left Chamula to work the lands of the Lacandon Jungle in eastern Chiapas. Some heard the Word of God in these new lands and converted to Catholicism. Yolanda explained to me how she and her husband had converted while they were in the jungle:

My husband and I heard the Word of God in Las Margaritas. We were confirmed there and also married by the church. We lived in *el Nacional* for twelve years.<sup>19</sup> We lived in an area of Catholics, priests and nuns came to visit us there. We went to church and there were catechists. There aren't problems with religion there [unlike Chamula] because everyone is Catholic.

I asked people why they decided to convert to Catholicism. Both men and women explained that the women were often the first ones to convert, and later convinced their husbands. The most common reasons for conversion were related to illness, alcohol, and respect for families. Many described converting to Catholicism as the result of illness. Unfortunately, illness is a regular part of the lives of those in Chamula and the exiled. During interviews, people were constantly telling me of their health problems and asking me for medical advice. Respiratory and intestinal infections are extremely common; in fact some accept illness as a regular part of life. One day a woman told me that she had finally gone to visit the doctor because she had diarrhea for a long time; she had not had the money to go the doctor earlier. When I asked how long she had been ill, she said

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<sup>19</sup> *El Nacional* or National refers to lands of the federal government endowed to *campesinos* to farm in the Lacandon Jungle.

"Over a year." When one is afflicted with a serious or long-term illness, one traditionally visits the *curandero* in the *cabecera* of Chamula. The *curandero* asks for money, alcohol, soft drinks, candles, chickens and other items; he takes the patient's pulse, placing his thumb on their wrist; and he prays to cure the patient. Many women told me that when they or their children were ill they became frustrated with the *curanderos*, either because they did not have the money to pay them and give the necessary offerings, or because the *curanderos* did not cure the illness. Instead, they were cured by praying to God, or by using medicine which they associated with the Catholic Church. It is important to note that their rejection of the *curanderos* was not a rejection of traditional medicines. According to the people of Guadalupe, the *curanderos* did not prescribe herbs or other traditional remedies to cure illness. The traditional doctors, or *iloles*, were in charge of this task.

One woman explained how she converted to Catholicism as a result of the illness of her son:

I've been listening to the Word of God for thirteen years now. Once one of my children who was three months old was sick and I looked for someone to cure him. The *curanderos* are always going to charge. Before, they charged me ten or twenty thousand pesos (at the time about three to seven dollars). Now they charge fifty pesos. I paid the *curandero*, but my child wasn't cured. They asked for chicken, alcohol, and candles. But my son wasn't cured; he was going to die. We went to a doctor in Chenalho' and I looked for medicine. That's how my son was cured. We began going to church in Chenalho'. From our home in Chamula, it is an hour and twenty minutes walking down hill and over two hours walking back up. Many families from my hamlet went to worship in the church of Chenalho' (Marcela).

Another woman told how accepting the Word of God cured her illness and,

similar to Juana's experience, how it caused suspicion in her community:

I was very sick, my body was weak and I couldn't work. When I heard the Word of God, my illness passed. The people saw that I wasn't sick and they asked "Why aren't you sick any longer?" I told them that I had accepted the Word of God. The only thing that cures illness is Jesus Christ (Agustina).

Anita explained what she saw as the different views on illness in the traditionals and those who accepted the Word of God:

With religion, when one is sick, one takes pills or receives injections. The *curandero* charges twenty pesos, and also earns in soft drinks and chickens. With the Word of God, you take medicine. The *curandero* doesn't really cure you. He is always wrong, it's a lie.

A separate motive for conversion was giving up alcohol. Catholic doctrine does not prohibit drinking, but the converts reject all use of alcohol. Drinking and alcoholism are serious problems in Chamula as in other municipalities of the highlands (see for example, Eber 1995 and Rosenbaum 1993). People in Guadalupe described drinking as being problematic because it made men violent; when they were drunk they beat their wives and children and fought with other men. They also saw drinking as creating problems because men spent money on alcohol rather than on food and other necessities for their families. Men and women described how they had been beaten by their fathers when they were little, and how there was little food for their families because of the money spent on drink. Women told me that their husbands had beaten them before they accepted the Word of God. For them, their husbands' giving up drinking was synonymous with converting; and they felt that they lived a much better life without alcohol. Some women accepted the Word of God and decided to leave their husbands

because they refused to give up drinking. One woman explained that she decided it would be better to leave her hamlet after accepting the Word of God. Although this meant she would live with her children in poverty, at least her husband wouldn't beat her anymore:

I have four young children. They suffer, they need food, and they don't have enough clothes. I left my husband in Chamula four years ago. He got drunk and hit me a lot. When he returned [from the fields] in the afternoon I said to him, "Here is your food, your pozole [a drink made from ground corn], your *tortilla* and beans." But he didn't want to eat. He hit me, and kicked me. My face swelled up from being beaten. I left because I didn't want to be beaten anymore (Verónica).

Giving up drinking was always related to accepting the Word of God. One man explained the relation between alcohol and religion:

When we changed religion, we changed our hearts. Now we are happy. With the money we spent on alcohol there wasn't money left for food. When a man is drinking a lot he doesn't like to buy food. With the Word of God you know how to think well. If you believe in the Bible, you can't drink. You can't hit. You have to love others. That's what the Bible says (Emiliano).

Another important factor in conversion was the rejection of the "custom" of taking two or more wives. Polygamy was commonly described as being the "tradition" in Chamula. It was criticized by converts, not only for being morally wrong, but more importantly because men abandoned their family to live with another woman. I was told that this is against the Word of God; according to the Bible, husbands must provide for their wives and children.

Conversion to Roman Catholicism involved making many changes in one's life. Many of these changes are reported as being positive: people gave up alcohol, men

reportedly began to treat their wives with more respect, and illness was less common. However, conversion also entailed many painful changes, not the least of which is being jailed and exiled from their communities. This is evident in the story of Micaela and Lucas, an older couple who has lived in Guadalupe for seven years. Before they converted to Roman Catholicism when they were still living in Chamula, they were relatively well-off. Micaela recalled:

We had two hectares of land in Chamula. We worked well there growing potatoes. In Chamula I sold *pox* [an alcoholic drink made from sugar]. I didn't plant *milpa* myself. Twenty liters of *pox* sold for forty pesos, two pesos a liter. With the money I earned, I could eat. We looked for workers who planted for us. We paid them with corn, beans, and potatoes, two baskets of potatoes for a days work. My husband, Don Lucas, didn't make *pox*, he made and sold charcoal.

However, this changed once Micaela heard the Word of God; she gave up drinking and stopped producing *pox*. She told me how she and her husband converted and about the problems that started:

After we heard the Word of God, I stopped making *pox*. I changed my heart.

We [my husband and I] were already old when we first heard the Word of God. I heard the Word of God from a man named Manuel who lives in Candelaria, three hours walking distance from our paraje in Chamula and another three hours to return. I first heard the Word of God because I was sick. It cured my illness. Before we heard the Word of God, we got sick a lot. We walked to Candelaria to hear the Word of God.

The problems started soon after. The *agentes* said that they wanted us to go to the school to meet with them; they asked to meet with us four times. Don Lucas decided to give up his religion for four weeks. Don Lucas left it because he was afraid, there were so many problems. But I didn't. I said that I was going to continue with the Word of God. I continued to go to the Church of Caridad.

The President of Chamula and the authorities don't want any religion. The President says that we don't respect the saints or the cross. We do, but the President says we don't. We also contribute and cooperate by giving money for the festivals. We have to give five to ten pesos for each festival. We always give our contribution. They say that we aren't going to cooperate, and sometimes the authorities refuse our money. That is their fault. The *agentes* gave an order to kill us. The authorities don't respect religion.

I told the *agente* that I wasn't going to give up my religion. He told me that I had to go to talk to the president of Chamula. I was thrown into jail with many others. I was taken to the *cabecera* of Chamula in a truck. There was so much suffering. There were nine men and eighteen women, many women, in jail. All were Catholic. Four people agreed to give up their religion, and they left the jail. The rest stayed. Many people learn the Word of God, but when the problems start, they renounce their religion. I entered the jail at eight in the morning and left at six in the evening.

After leaving jail, I went back to my land. They gave me a period of fifteen days to leave Chamula. When the fifteen days were up, the *agentes* met and plotted against us since we still hadn't left. Don Lucas left our home in the night; he was very sad. He didn't have a house. He looked for a place to live in the lowlands. He was very sad without his house, without his land. He thought that he wouldn't be able to return to Chamula; he thought the people would beat him. There was a lot of sadness. When we left Chamula, there was a lot of illness. We didn't have land. We were afraid. The people wanted to kill us.

Micaela stated that life was easier in Chamula because she and her husband had land.

She lamented that in Guadalupe "There isn't land, there isn't anything. When I left Chamula, I cried a lot." Currently, her husband, Lucas, rents some land in Betania, a community of expelled in the municipality of Teopisca, where he plants *milpa* for household consumption and continues to burn wood to sell charcoal. Micaela makes and sells bracelets to earn cash. In stark contrast to their position in Chamula, the couple is by

far one of the poorest of the Catholic families in Guadalupe.<sup>20</sup> At the same time that Micaela complains about their current poverty and suffering, she notes that “Now we are content, we don’t have problems.” For her, the clear benefit of living in Guadalupe is that one can worship as a Roman Catholic without receiving death threats and being thrown into jail. Living in peace “without problems” is more important than the suffering she experiences in poverty. Lucas served as sacristan of the local chapel for over a year, and the couple is excitedly making plans for their confirmation. Their main stumbling block is in acquiring the money to hold a small party after the event.

Fernando's story of exile and conversion to Roman Catholicism contains a series of migrations in the search of a home, migrations which began even before his exile. From Chamula, to San Cristóbal to the Lacandon Jungle to the Grijalva Valley, he and his family searched for a way to make a living. Since he converted to Roman Catholicism seven years ago, Fernando's faith in God remains constant, and his "home" is a place where he can share his faith with others. Wherever he is living and working, he attempts to celebrate the Word of God with fellow Catholics on Sundays. Fernando recalled that immediately after being exiled:

I arrived at the chapel of Domingo López Angel who gave us shelter. There were a total of 47 people there, all had been expelled from Chamula. We went to look for land in Betania [a community of exiles in the municipality of Teopisca]. The only land we found there was too expensive for us, so we couldn't live there.

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<sup>20</sup> When I was visiting in the summer of 1996, they told me that their eldest son was going to the United States to find work. He left his wife and one year old daughter with his parents and hoped to return in six months with enough money to build a new home and support his family.

Then, one day, we met Mateo at the Church of Caridad. We decided that it would be better if we came to live here [in Guadalupe]. We saw that here there is water to drink. But we didn't have enough land to cultivate corn and beans, only this small lot.

Later, we went to try to live in *El Nacional*. We planted pineapples, oranges, coffee, and corn there. My wife didn't like it at all. There are mosquitos, other insects, and illness. There weren't any people to talk to there since we lived in the mountain. But we did have plenty of water. We lived there for half a year. We didn't find any Catholics in the Jungle, only Protestants.

So we left the Jungle and went to live in the lowlands. We lived near Cintalapa and stayed there for a year and a half. We grew corn and beans. But in Cintalapa, people do not worship the Word of God the way we do. There are Evangelicals, Pentecostals, and Seventh Day Adventists, but no Catholics. We had to leave our home at five in the morning on Sunday in order to go to the celebration of the Word of God, and we did not return until almost nine at night. We had to walk a long way. We walked every week. Sometimes, my poor wife couldn't make the long trip. It was very difficult. I thought that it would be better to leave -- that it would be better if we didn't stay there any longer. We returned to our home here in Guadalupe.

All of the Catholics in Guadalupe shared the experience of being forced to leave Chamula. All of the families of Guadalupe were exiled after 1980, had seen others be violently exiled for their religion, and were aware of the threat of being Catholic in Chamula. In most cases, the fear, threats, and violence took place over a prolonged period; people were jailed or threatened several times before leaving their homes. In collecting the stories of how people were exiled, I saw that the human rights violations did not take place at once, but occurred over days and even years. In spite of the threats and violence, people never gave up their faith in God. The inhabitants of Guadalupe told me that once the authorities in Chamula found out that they were Catholic the trouble began. Converts describe being threatened and intimidated by the authorities. Many

were jailed and were told that if they continued with the Word of God they would have to leave the community. If they gave up their newfound religion, they could stay. Some decided to continue worshiping in private, but there were spies who watched the churches of Caridad and Chenalho' to see if people from Chamula attended. These spies then reported to the authorities who cited the dissidents to the *cabecera* of Chamula, and the dissidents were forced to leave. Some decided to give up their religion, but later went back to learning the Word of God, and were exiled. Stories of exile are stories of suffering. People were beaten, jailed, threatened and robbed by the authorities of Chamula. Above all, people had to give up their homes, land, animals and community and find somewhere else to live. Several men described being thrown into the municipal jail in Chamula in a huge group, where they were left for two days without food or water, or without being able to leave to urinate. In some cases, there were so many men in the jail that there was no room to sit or lie down.

When I asked the people in Guadalupe why they had been expelled, their explanation was overwhelmingly religious. They told me that the authorities of Chamula do not like people "with religion" meaning any converts to Catholicism or Protestantism.<sup>21</sup> When I asked why the authorities do not like people "with religion" they replied that they did not know, that the authorities claim that people with religion will lose their traditions or that the authorities want people to continue drinking and fighting.

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<sup>21</sup> Again, from an anthropological perspective, the Roman Catholics and Protestants as well as the Traditionalists are religious. According to the people of Guadalupe, the Traditionalists are not religious, and sometimes it is implied that the Traditionalists themselves deny that they are religious.

A small group of men, particularly those who work as catechists or prayer leaders, explains expulsion as serving to protect the economic power of the *caciques*. They mentioned that the *caciques* earn money from alcohol and the *curanderos*, and therefore will lose this money if people convert.

In all of the stories, people describe the involvement of the authorities of Chamula, for the most part *agentes*, or local officials who report to the Municipal President. The participation of authorities confirms that these are human rights violations, since in juridical terms a human rights violation is one committed by an authority. The violence in Chamula is not a personal conflict between families, but is encouraged and carried out by local authorities. The act of expulsion violates several human rights guaranteed in the Mexican Constitution and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For example, the right to protection against arbitrary detention; protection from threats against one's physical or psychological integrity; the right to hold property, and protection against torture and maltreatment are guaranteed in these legal codes.

In expulsion, some described their homes being destroyed by the authorities of Chamula:

During the festival of San Mateo, all the *Agentes* and *Mayores* met. They arrived at our homes to throw rocks and burn. The cardboard houses burned down and the clay tiles of the roofs broke. So, we didn't return to our houses. We fled to the mountain. There was a lot of rain because it was September, the rainy season. We were without food and clothing. I only had my shawl, nothing else. We cried a lot (Francisco and Anita, couple of Guadalupe).

Many described being thrown in jail and being beaten or threatened. One man told me

how he was beaten by four men while he was in jail:

I was thrown into jail once, and then I returned to my hamlet. The problem began again two months after I had returned to my house. The *agentes* met and threw me into jail again. They hit me. I fell down and couldn't get up, I was in pain. There were four men hitting and kicking me (Emiliano).

After being jailed, people were given a period of hours or days to leave their hamlets. They gathered the belongings they could and walked to San Cristóbal. In some cases, people couldn't leave immediately and were jailed a second time.

The *agentes* arrived at our hamlet and gathered the people. They took us to the center of Chamula and threw us into jail for six hours. After we were jailed, they gave us a period of three days to leave our hamlet. After the three days I still hadn't left because my son had just died. So, again, they took me in a truck to the jail in the center of Chamula (Anita).

People described arriving in Guadalupe with sadness. They had just left everything they had -- homes, land, animals, and sometimes family. In Guadalupe, by contrast, they had nothing and had to start anew.

I left my land, my house, and came to live here. I came with my wife and children, we had to walk five hours to get here. I didn't have a house here, I didn't have money, I didn't have anything. In Chamula, I had land, a home, chickens, and three sheep. I couldn't bring anything with me. Here there isn't much land, where are sheep going to graze?

Here we are poor. We sleep on the floor because we don't have beds. We need money to buy corn, beans, clothes. We are without clothes. So we get sick. First, we built a house with plastic and *cartón*. There is little money. I left everything in Chamula. We couldn't bring our things with us. I was very sad. In Chamula, we had some land, we grew potatoes. We arrived in Guadalupe with our pigs, but they died. Here, in the beginning, we didn't have a house, land or anything. There is so much suffering (Emiliano).

However, in time, people were able to build homes and establish themselves in

Guadalupe. When I asked people if they would rather live in Chamula or Guadalupe, they said that although their land was in Chamula, it was better to live in Guadalupe because here you could live in peace. Similar to Micaela's recollection of expulsion and the difficulties of starting a new life in the shantytown, Emiliano stated that in spite of the poverty and suffering, Guadalupe provides an important community where people can live together in peace.

Here we work peacefully. We don't fight or hit. Here we are united. We must unite and work together with our wives and children . . . When there are problems, we will pray to God through our faith. Here we are peaceful (Emiliano).

## **Conclusion**

Contrary to the claim of the Chamulan caciques that Roman Catholic converts threaten community, the residents of Guadalupe have established a new community where indigenous identity as Tzotziles continues to be important. The shared experience of being expelled from Chamula is one which unites the Catholics of Guadalupe; the memory of the suffering entailed in being jailed, of losing one's home and belongings, and of starting a new life in the shantytown was repeated over and over in interviews. Their shared Catholicism was fundamental to establishing a new community, and faith takes on powerful meaning in their daily lives, especially since they claim that religion is the reason they were forced to leave their homelands. Nonetheless, divisions exist in Guadalupe; there are strong divisions between the Catholics and Protestants, and also divisions within the small group of Catholics. Regarding the anger and resentment

between Catholics and Protestants, Catholics often criticize some of the Protestants claiming that they drink too much and do not understand the Bible. However, community is still held up as the ideal. People constantly told me that according to the Bible, the two religions -- Catholicism and Protestantism -- have the same God, and must work together. At times, the members of Guadalupe unite, working together to build the road, the school, and uniting to give money for burials. As catechists put it, all members of the community must work together, "walking with one united heart." For the Catholics, this statement is an implicit denial that they are alienated from community and indigenous identity as their Chamulan compatriots claim. Walking is linked with being poor and being indigenous: residents of Guadalupe walk up and down the hill to reach their homes daily, unable to afford the twenty cents for carfare. A marked contrast in who must walk is exemplified by political protests when those denouncing government actions arrive on foot to demonstrations, and PRI supporters are brought to counter-demonstrations in busses provided by the government, sometimes even being paid for their participation. Hence, walking is an important symbol of unity among the poor and an indicator of the genuineness of their actions.

"Walking with one heart" contains another meaning for Tzotziles and Tzeltals; people with only one heart place the interests of the community before their own individual interests and remain faithful to themselves and their people. In contrast, someone with two hearts is not to be trusted. Having two hearts is similar to the English expression two-faced (see Nash 1970: 280). Hence, "the true man and woman are those who have 'one heart' (*jun ko'ontontic*). The false one has 'two hearts' (*chib ko'ontontic*)"

(Mondragón 1996). As will be discussed in Chapter 5 and 6, notions of humans rights in Guadalupe are predicated upon each member being of only one heart and working to defend their rights as a community. The fact that there are divisions between the Catholics and Protestants of Guadalupe indicates that this idealized unity is not always a reality. Nonetheless, the residents of the community, particularly the catechists and prayer leaders, repeated to me that they were committed to walk the narrow path together to serve God. The following chapter departs from the local view of the community of Guadalupe in order to describe the history of expulsion, the work of the Diocese of San Cristóbal in Chamula, and the diocese's involvement in the promotion and defense of indigenous rights.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### WITH THE POOR OR ABOVE THEM?: CHAMULA, THE DIOCESE OF SAN CRISTÓBAL, AND THE HISTORY OF EXPULSION

The sin of *Occidentalización* [Westernization] occurs when we identify Christianity with Occidental Christian culture, demanding the resignation of culture, of the heart. It demands that in order for people to become Christians, they renounce being human. . . . In the work of the Church, we must decide if we are with Christ or against him, that is, if we are with the poor or above them (Bishop Ruiz García, 1978).

When Bishop Samuel Ruiz García first arrived in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in 1960, he was more concerned with Occidental Christian culture than he was with the tradition and culture of the indigenous peoples who comprised the majority of the Diocese. His plan for addressing the poverty of the indigenous peoples was reformist and had elements of *indigenismo*, a policy common in Mexico at the time which attempted to integrate the indigenous peoples into the "modern Mexican nation" through education in Western values. In short, the Bishop believed the situation of the indigenous peoples could be improved by making them more like the *mestizos*. Upon his arrival in Chiapas, Bishop Ruiz García began to travel to the indigenous communities to learn about their lives and their religion; these visits had a tremendous impact on him. He was from Irapuato, Guanajuato, a city in central Mexico, and was alarmed by the contrast between Chiapas and central Mexico.<sup>1</sup> Central Mexico had much more access to social and economic resources, and according to the view of the newly arrived Bishop, Catholicism was more firmly established there (Fazio 1994: 56). On one of his early

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<sup>1</sup>Samuel Ruiz García was ordained to the priesthood in 1949 in the Seminario Conciliar de Leon, in the state of Guanajuato, and also studied in Rome. He was appointed Bishop of Chiapas in 1960 at the age of 35.

visits to an indigenous community, the Bishop encountered an atmosphere of tremendous grief. When he asked what had happened, he was informed that a large number of children in the community had recently died of measles and diarrhea. He asked how this had happened and was told:

When the children got sick, we went to the closest place to ask that a doctor or nurse come to give us some medicine. And they told us: "Tomorrow the doctor will come. Wait there at the cross-roads." We waited all day and he did not come. We went to see what had happened and they told us they had been sent away on a project. The second time they said: "He will come the day after tomorrow." Well, we waited and he still didn't arrive. . . . The third time: "The nurse will go there." The nurse never arrived. The fourth time we no longer needed anyone; all of the children had died. (Fazio 1994: 57).

A spokesman in the community told the Bishop that there was nothing the people could do, it had been the will of God. Bishop Ruiz García disagreed. He told them that this was not the will of God -- God desires that there is life, and life in abundance. From the beginning Ruiz García was concerned with indigenous human rights, namely their right to a dignified life. However, during his first years in Chiapas, he tended to ignore or criticize indigenous culture.

In response to this experience and the countless other examples of extreme poverty and marginalization in the indigenous communities of the Diocese, Bishop Ruiz García elaborated a preliminary pastoral plan. His first goal was to teach the indigenous peoples Spanish; his second, to give them shoes since the majority were barefoot or wore sandals; and his third, to improve their diet. He noted that his plan for the indigenous peoples was simple; he wished to raise their socioeconomic level, and give them food so that there would be less hunger and illness. Bishop Ruiz García did not consider

evangelizing in native indigenous languages: he felt that since the indigenous peoples were Mexicans, they should speak Spanish (Fazio 1994). Similarly, he did not consider changing the underlying structure of their oppression, but rather planned to bring change through education and improved living conditions. This pastoral plan follows the development and modernization theories of the 1960's which emphasized economic and technological change as the best way to solve the indigenous "problem." The structure of oppression and domination resulting from wider political and economic forces remained unaddressed.

At best, the missionary philosophy and work of the Diocese in the early 1960's viewed indigenous culture as irrelevant to evangelization, and at worst, an impediment to pastoral work. The Bishop and many of the pastoral workers in the Diocese took a top down approach; the indigenous communities were viewed as passive receptors of evangelization, not as actors with their own history, religion, and tradition. As the Bishop himself noted in 1993 in his letter to Pope John Paul II, "Our first actions, years before the Second Vatican Council, were destructive of culture. We used only our own criteria to judge the customs. We were encased in our ethnocentric and moralizing judgements; our attitudes for this time are generally regrettable" (Ruiz García 1993: 35).

In working with the poor and *campesinos* of the Diocese, Bishop Ruiz García, priests, nuns and others underwent a process which they call conversion. In this conversion, they began to recognize and value certain aspects of indigenous tradition, and incorporated indigenous culture into Catholic religious practices. Pastoral workers were also profoundly influenced by the teachings of the Second Vatican Council (1961-1965)

and the Latin American Bishops meeting in Medellín (1968) which emphasized the structural roots of poverty and called on the Church to take concrete actions to end injustice.

However, the tension between indigenous culture and Occidental Christian culture presented numerous conflicts in the Church's work of evangelization in Chiapas. Such was the case when a Catholic Mission was established in the indigenous municipality of Chamula in 1966. Like Bishop Ruiz García and his first pastoral plan, Father Hernández - the priest in charge of the Mission -- wished to help the indigenous peoples overcome their poverty and oppression. However, he viewed indigenous culture as an obstacle both to evangelization and to liberation from domination. In 1974 the first large expulsion of Chamulans from their native lands occurred; one factor contributing to this expulsion was the activities promoted by Father Hernández and his supporters. This Chapter describes the complex relationship between the Catholic Church, the municipality of Chamula, and the expulsions, which gave origin to the community of Guadalupe. It presents a brief history of Chamula's relationship with *Ladinos* and the Mexican government, the difficulties of the Chamula Mission, and the factors leading up to the first expulsion. Finally, it examines the Diocese's growing respect for indigenous culture and their commitment to working *with* (not *above*) the poor which for the most part began after the Indigenous Congress of 1974. The recent relationship of the Catholic Church with Chamula is fraught with conflict between the local culture of the indigenous peoples and the values of Occidental Christian culture.

### **Chamula: Caciques, the PRI and the Construction of Tradition**

Chamula has a reputation as being the municipality of highland Chiapas which is most closed to *mestizos* and where indigenous tradition is most strongly preserved. With over 51,000 inhabitants, it is also the largest and most densely populated -- 132 people per square kilometer -- of all highland indigenous municipalities (Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geográfica e Informática 1990). Thousands of Chamulans also reside outside the municipality, having migrated or been expelled to the cities of San Cristóbal de Las Casas and Tuxtla Gutiérrez, to the Lacandon Jungle, and to other areas. Because of their numbers, Chamulans are a symbol of "Indianness" in the area (Gossen 1986, cited in Rosenbaum 1993). Some Mexicans refer to all Maya Indians of Chiapas as *Chamulitas* (little Chamulans); thousands of national and international tourists visit the town center every year to observe and partake in traditional festivals; and political candidates of the PRI visit Chamula during election campaigns, put on hats of the *mayordomo*, and are handed a walking stick symbolizing traditional power. In short, Chamula represents a showcase of indigenous culture.

In many respects, the people of Chamula have maintained their "indigenous culture" in spite of, or perhaps more importantly because of, political and economic pressures from the Spanish and *mestizo*-dominated Mexican state. During the Colonial period, Chamulans continued to practice subsistence agriculture on their lands, but were nonetheless exploited by colonial administrators, priests, and Spanish entrepreneurs.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>For historical accounts of Chamula during the colonial and post-independence periods see Bricker 1981, Favre 1984, MacLeod 1973, and Wasserstrom 1983.

Under the system of *repartimiento*, Spanish settlers were granted temporary access to indigenous labor. Given Chamula's proximity to the Spanish capital of San Cristóbal de Las Casas -- at the time called Ciudad Real -- they were particularly vulnerable to extractions of tribute and forced labor. Natives were forced to transport heavy loads of iron and other goods between Tabasco and Ciudad Real, and pay tribute in the form of chile, maize, and beans (Wasserstrom 1983: 87). During the colonial and post-independence periods, Chamulans engaged in numerous rebellions to resist outside interference imposed by Spaniards and *mestizos*. These rebellions commonly appropriated Catholic symbols in order to resist domination and to "construct a spiritual and communal refuge from the painful realities of exploitation, death, and constant migration" (Rosenbaum 1983: 22).

The Cuscat Rebellion or the "War of St. Rose" of 1867-1870 was perhaps the most important Chamulan uprising. During the mid-nineteenth century, native communal lands were seized by *Ladinos*, and indigenous peoples had to pay rent in order to continue planting crops. At the same time, Creole priests exacted taxes and urged the indigenous peoples to change their religious customs. Indigenous protest against this economic and religious domination began with the formation of a cult to an indigenous saint. On December 22, 1867 Agustina Gómez Checeb -- a young Chamulan woman from the hamlet of Tzajaljemel -- declared that she had seen three rocks fall from the sky while caring for sheep. She collected rocks from the area and built an altar. Tzajaljemel was a strategic area of the highlands because of its proximity to the indigenous municipalities of San Andrés Larrainzar, Chenalho', Tenejapa, and Mitontic. When Pedro Díaz Cuscat, the

local *fiscal* (public prosecutor), took the rocks and put them in a box, he heard them speaking and trying to escape. He stated that this miracle indicated that the "talking rocks" were sacred messengers and that Gómez Checeb was the mother of God because she had given birth to the stones (de Vos 1979). Soon, Tzajaljemel became the site of pilgrimages for Chamulans and other Tzotziles from neighboring municipalities. It displaced the main church of Chamula and became an important mercantile center of the region. When the indigenous peoples traveled to Tzajaljemel instead of to the city of San Cristóbal for trade and worship, the exploitative economic relation between Tzotziles of the highlands and *Ladinos* of the city was threatened. With this revitalization movement, the *Ladinos* of the city did not have access to the cheap agricultural products sold by Tzotziles nor did the indigenous peoples arrive to buy things from their stores. At the same time, the Church's earnings were reduced since the Indians did not pay alms nor the fees for baptism and other sacraments (Pérez López 1990).

Alarmed by the news of the new "cult," a group of priests from San Cristóbal de Las Casas visited Tzajaljemel in 1868. While they tried to convince people to give up praying to the rocks, they were also confident that the indigenous peoples were still Catholic so they let things be (Wasserstrom 1983). However, in the following months, the cult continued to grow. Claiming that they were threatened by a caste war, highland conservatives sent troops to Tzajaljemel where they destroyed the new temple and took Agustina Gómez Checeb and Pedro Díaz Cuscat as prisoners. With the disappearance of these two leaders, new ones were chosen. It is said that on Good Friday of 1869, the community crucified the younger brother of Agustina in order to have a savior of their

own race. The parish priest of Chamula and several *Ladino* teachers were also killed. When conservatives claimed that San Cristóbal was in danger of being attacked by the indigenous people, the government sent troops to Chamula to crush the rebellion. Numerous *mestizos* and between 100 and 800 Indians were killed in the fighting (Bricker 1981, de Vos 1979). By October 31, 1870, convinced that the rebellion had been effectively destroyed, government troops abandoned the area.

Although the Cuscat Rebellion had religious roots, it cannot be viewed as a revival of pre-Hispanic culture. Instead, the Tzotziles borrowed religious symbols of their oppressors in order to resist *Ladino* domination and to form an autonomous church (de Vos 1979, Wasserstrom 1983). The violent response on the part of *Ladinos* indicates the importance they placed on maintaining economic control of the indigenous peoples for their benefit.

Unlike the Cuscat Rebellion, The War of Pajarito (1911) demonstrates the way that *Ladinos* took advantage of the growing discontent in Chamula. In 1911, conservatives of San Cristóbal de Las Casas seized upon the confusion following the defeat of Porfirio Diaz and formed an indigenous army -- comprised principally of Chamulans -- to overthrow the Porfirista state government in Tuxtla Gutiérrez (Rus ms). One of the agents recruited by the *Ladinos* to organize indigenous troops was Chamulan Jacinto Pérez Chi'xtot, nicknamed "Pajarito" or "Little Bird" -- the translation of Chi'xtot. He claimed to have seen a new god, Saint Matthew, who had arrived to teach Chamulans how to defend themselves and to see that they would win the war (Sna jtz' ibajom, Cultura de los Indios Mayas 1994: 34). The indigenous "Brigada Las Casas" which he

organized fought numerous battles in which over three hundred indigenous people were killed. When they met difficulties, their *Ladino* leaders abandoned them, and the Indians' political and economic grievances were forgotten after they fought. "What the cristobalenses had not counted on when they organized the 'Brigada Las Casas' however, was that by legitimizing the Indians' opposition to the state government and established order, they would at the same time unleash all the resentments and hatred that had been building up within their own communities against the collaborationist *ayuntamientos*" (Rus ms: 14). Although *Ladinos* were killed in this violence, the majority killed were indigenous people.<sup>3</sup> In Chamula, violence was directed against "Pajarito" and his followers; there was much hatred against them for making the Chamulans suffer the consequences of a *Ladino* conflict external to their community. Another focus of the attack was those indigenous people who had served the *Ladinos* in carrying out the tax and labor recruitment policies against the Chamulans during the preceding fifteen years. Previous municipal presidents and scribes were killed, and were replaced with "real Indians" or men who had served in religious offices.

Through oral histories, the War of Pajarito remains within the memory of Chamulans today. The experience of fighting for the *Ladinos* increased Chamulan suspicion and hostility toward them, causing the municipality to be increasingly closed to outsiders. For example, in 1934 when a rumor circulated that anti-Catholic *quemasantos*

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<sup>3</sup>According to the account of the War of Pajarito written by Chamulan, Enrique Pérez López, "The Chamulans, in revenge for the maltreatment they had suffered by the *Ladinos*, assassinated defenseless elders, women, and children who could not flee" when they attacked Villa de Acalá in September of 1911 (1990:63).

(people who burn saints) were coming from the state capital to burn the saints in Chamula, people hid images of saints and maintained an army for months on the road leading to the *cabecera* (Rus 1994). However, much hostility was also directed against "Pajarito" who had been used as a pawn of the *Ladinos* to manipulate his own people.

In the 1930's, the Mexican government itself initiated a process of co-opting indigenous leaders to serve the Mexican state against their own people. This resulted in the formation of *caciques*, entrenched local leaders, who exploit other community members for their own benefit. Currently, powerful *caciques* are critical to preserving Chamula's supposed autonomy from *Ladino* cultural, political, and economic influences.<sup>4</sup> *Caciques* maintain their economic control through monopolies on the sale of alcohol, soft drinks, candles and the few communal plots of land that remain in existence. They also keep political control through violence or the threat of violence, jailing, threatening, or expelling those who go against their authority.

The formation of *caciques* is intimately linked with the violent expulsions from Chamula in the 1970's, but the roots of the *cacicazgo* phenomena were planted during the term of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) who attempted to integrate indigenous peoples into the modern Mexican nation through the process of *indigenismo*. As early as 1935 President Cárdenas visited the highlands of Chiapas, observed the poverty of the

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<sup>4</sup>In a classic work based on research in the Northern Sierra of Puebla, Mexico, Luisa Paré defines *caciquismo* as "a phenomenon of political mediation characterized by the informal and personal exercise of power in order to protect the economic interests of an individual or a faction" (Paré 1979, cited in Pineda 1993:25). She argues that the *caciques* became the agents of capitalism as the traditional *campesino* economy of autoconsumption was transformed into a simple mercantile economy. The *caciques* limit popular political participation, as decisions are made by a select few.

area, and created the *Departamento de Acción Social y Cultural de Protección al Indígena* (Department of Social and Cultural Action for the Protection of the Indian) (Pineda 1993). In 1936 Erasto Urbina (who claimed Chamulan ancestry on his maternal side) was appointed as the state's director of this Department. Urbina worked on two primary issues: land and education (Ibid). During his term he expropriated many highland *fincas* (large extensions of land used for cattle ranching or coffee plantations), giving them to indigenous communities (Rus 1994). Urbina also provided for the education of a number of young Chamulan men in Spanish and in administrative skills in order to aid in the "development" of their communities. He appointed scribes in Chamula who were to serve as administrators in the town councils (Wasserstrom 1983).

In 1938, Urbina declared that only bilingual municipal presidents would be permitted to run in the local elections of 1939. The leaders of Chamula rejected this reform, and instead decided to have two municipal presidents: one who was a monolingual elder who had achieved status in the *cargo* system and would administer local affairs, and another younger and bilingual man, called an *escribano*, who would deal with relations between the municipal and state government. Salvador López Castellanos (nicknamed "Tuxum") served as the *escribano* president of Chamula in the 1940's, then, following this service, announced his candidacy for office in the religious *cargo*. Although the sale of alcohol had been illegal in Chamula since 1937, in 1942, during the same week that López "Tuxum" announced his candidacy, the state government enforced a law which gave religious authorities exclusive rights to sell alcohol in their municipality. This concession guaranteed economic resources to local leaders since they

would earn money from the sale of alcohol. State authorities acknowledged this in pointing out that the concession was made "both out of respect for its ritual meaning and to help defray the costs of office" (cited in Rus 1994). In 1943, López "Tuxum" took power as Chamula's only municipal president; the state concession of the sale of alcohol to local leaders consolidated civil and religious power in Chamula. At the same time, bilingual scribes were accepted as the sole leaders of the community (Rus 1994, Wasserstrom 1983).

By the second half of the 1950's, the Chamulan scribes had been successfully co-opted by the state, and worked from within the community to serve the state against the indigenous peoples (Rus 1994). The scribes appealed to tradition and unity to defend their power. At the same time, they ensured that votes were provided to the PRI in exchange for which the state government did not intervene in internal affairs. The Cardenistas had successfully worked from inside the indigenous communities in order to change leaders, to create new offices and, most important to co-opt native leaders. Hence, in the 1950's, "the very community structures previously identified with resistance to outside intervention and exploitation . . . had become institutionalized revolutionary communities" which were part of the Mexican State (Rus 1994: 267).

By the 1970's, the *caciques* of Chamula had obtained a monopoly not only over the sale of alcohol, but also over trucking, lending money, and the sale of soft drinks (Wasserstrom 1983). These leaders had access to the most fertile land and earned large

sums of money from the established monopolies, leading to a stratification in wealth.<sup>5</sup>

When the Catholic Mission was established in Chamula in 1966, Father Hernández and other religious workers recognized the destructive power of the *caciques* and fought against them. However, they committed the critical mistake of associating the *caciques* with Chamulan culture rather than identifying the governmental policies that had put them in place. When the missionaries directly attacked the culture and tradition of Chamula, they made many enemies which prevented them from building a popular base of support.

#### **Sin of Occidentalización: The Chamulan Mission, 1966-1969**

The Catholic Church under Bishop Ruiz García has had a difficult relationship with Chamula. As noted in Chapter 2, a group of Clarist Missionaries worked in several hamlets of Chamula in the 1960's, primarily in Candelaria. They were accused of being evangelicals and because of conflicts with municipal authorities, they were asked to leave in 1965. On May 13, 1966 Bishop Ruiz García established *Misión Chamula*, a Catholic mission in the municipality of Chamula. The mission was directed by Father Leopoldo Hernández who established a "development plan" for the community, including the construction of a health center, a campaign for hygiene, a school of home economics, a night school for boys and girls with classes in Spanish, and training so that the students

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<sup>5</sup> In 1977, around 25 percent of the men in Chamula had an annual income of 20,000-50,000 pesos from transportation, the production of rum, and the sale of agricultural products. In contrast, 50% of the men had an annual income below 3,800 pesos, primarily from working as *peones* or wage laborers (Wasserstrom 1977).

could become educational promoters of the community. These initial goals illustrate that Father Hernández set off with the best of intentions to assist the indigenous peoples of Chamula, however, in attempting to evangelize the mission contributed to the development of serious conflicts in the municipality. As this description of the work of the mission will illustrate, Father Hernández is a complex character who at times made ethnocentric judgements, but who also had a genuine desire to better the lives of the Chamulans. Aside from Father Hernández, the personnel of the mission included three nuns of the Catholic order Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, two *mestizo* catechists (who also taught sewing and literacy), and two female indigenous catechists who had been prepared in the missionary school of the city of San Cristóbal (Iribarren 1980).

From its onset, indigenous authorities in Chamula, the *principales*, were resistant to the work of the mission, and placed restrictions on its work which were accepted by Father Hernández. It was agreed that:

- (1) The priest was to remain in the town center and would not travel to any of the hamlets;
- (2) Catholic doctrine could not be spread unless it was freely accepted, and
- (3) No buildings dedicated to Catholic worship could be constructed (Achieves of the Diocesan Curia, cited in Iribarren 1980:2).

Although the Diocese agreed to these conditions, Father Iribarren -- a Dominican priest of the Diocese -- points out that they went against the national constitutional guarantee of freedom of religious belief and worship (Ibid: 1).

The initial work of the mission, although a well-intentioned attempt to help the people of Chamula, contained elements of *indigenismo*. This plan follows the general scheme of development policies for its time, emphasizing technological, economic, and

cultural change as the way to solve the poverty of the indigenous people. In numerous ways, the Mission's work attacked indigenous culture, and the "sin of *Occidentalización*" as defined by Bishop Ruiz García, was committed against the Chamulans. In "Friends of the Chamula Mission," a news bulletin written by Father Hernández to inform the mission's financial backers of its activities, a paternalistic view of the Chamulans is continually expressed. In the first bulletin, dated May 13, 1966, for example, Father Hernández introduces the Chamulans as "obstinate and stubborn, indifferent to pain and very criminal, very susceptible to alcohol. They make *chicha* which is a thick and dirty drink for their bacchanal."<sup>6</sup> He also refers to the Chamulans as *inditos*, a pejorative term which literally means "little Indians."

Father Hernández soon met trouble with the Chamulan authorities. He broke his initial agreement by approaching the hamlet of Candelaria which is outside of the town center of Chamula. The conflict worsened when he presented a plan to build a chapel there. On October 26, 1966, a meeting was held between Father Hernández, Father Ernesto Bañuelos (Representative of Bishop Ruiz García), Father P. J. Bermúdez (a past priest of Chamula), and the authorities of Chamula. As a result of the meeting, an act was signed with four primary agreements:

- (1) In order to avoid problems, the Chamulan authorities will request that mass not be held in the hamlet.
- (2) The land [in Candelaria] is private property and cannot be used to construct a chapel.
- (3) They [the Chamulans] want to practice their religion as they know it. Those who want to learn doctrine can learn, [but] other representatives of the community oppose this.

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<sup>6</sup>*Chicha* is an alcoholic drink made from fermented sugar cane juice.

(4) If they [the Catholics] construct the chapel, the authorities will not take responsibility [for what happens] (Diocesan Archives, cited in Iribarren 1980: 2).

The attitude of Father Hernández and the other missionaries was that the Chamulans had to reject many elements of their traditional culture in order to be evangelized and modernized. Rather than respecting the religious customs of Chamula while evangelizing, the work of the mission directly attacked many traditional ceremonies. In the news bulletin of February 1967, in a short article entitled "Two Different Pictures of a Tribal Mission," Father Hernández contrasted the indigenous festival of Carnival to a Catholic religious ceremony. The festival of Carnival is described as "seven days of unending sacred orgy," with some 15,000 Chamulans flooding the central esplanade of the village and "rivers of bronzed aborigines" walking through the streets. The Temple of San Juan is characterized as a Babylonia with people "practicing *curandería*, drinking alcohol, shouting, and singing in an environment thick with the smoke of incense and dust."<sup>7</sup> In contrast, the Catholic celebration is portrayed as being orderly and Christian, with people recognizing the presence of the Holy Spirit, uniting in their faith, and gathering around the altar to sing spiritual songs.

All told, the news bulletins continually contrast the ignorance of the people of Chamula with an enlightened modern view. Referring to a catechism course given to the indigenous people, Father Hernández laments that "we see their misery and ignorance without a remedy close at hand" and later states "I put my hope for establishing the rein of Christ in Chamula in the education of these ill-mannered [coarse] men" (Bulletin,

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<sup>7</sup> The word temple is commonly used to refer to a Catholic church or chapel.

September 6, 1969). The majority of the mission's evangelical work was carried out in Spanish; for example, people were taught the Psalms in Spanish rather than their native Tzotzil. This was a practical problem since most of the people in Chamula spoke Tzotzil rather than Spanish, but it also reflects the colonial mentality of the mission. Although they had arrived in Chamula from elsewhere to teach the Word of God, they did not learn Tzotzil themselves. Instead, they required the Chamulans to learn Spanish.

One of the first direct conflicts between the Chamulan authorities and the work of the mission was over the construction of a shed for pigs near the Temple of San Juan. As a rule, Chamulans do not eat pork because they consider it dirty. However, in May of 1968, Father Hernández commissioned the help of Indians to build a shed to raise pigs for consumption. Perhaps he was not aware of their resistance to eating pork. Nonetheless, it is clear that he did not think to ask the Chamulans their opinion on the project, nor did he ask what might be the best productive project for the community. Instead, he made the decision himself and looked for people to do the work. In his bulletin of October 12, 1968, there is a picture of eight Chamulan men holding pigs. The caption below reads "Eight catechists will go home with pigs. They are happy. Chamulans, according to tradition, don't eat sheep because they are sacred and don't eat pork because it is dirty. But Christians have learned that it is not what enters the mouth that stains the soul, but what enters the heart." Here, it is evident that Father Hernández believed that Chamulan culture directly conflicted with creating good Catholics; in his view, it was necessary to rid the Chamulans of part of their culture in order to Christianize them. In spite of these "happy Christians," many Chamulans criticized the construction of the shed. Not only did

the people reject the pork, but the presence of the "dirty" animals near the Church of San Juan was seen as an insult. In later letters from Chamulan authorities, the pig shed was repeatedly mentioned as an accusation against Father Hernández. The priest was eventually forced to remove the pig shed because of protest.

An important part of the mission's work was the formation of catechists. As noted in Chapter II, catechists are men and women who are trained to discuss the Bible and to prepare people for Baptism, first communion, marriage, and the other sacraments. Juan, a Catholic catechist who now resides in Guadalupe, recalls being encouraged by Father Hernández to become a catechist in the late 1960's:

One day, about twenty-five years ago, Father Polo [nickname for Father Leopoldo Hernández] arrived at my house in Chamula and invited me and my brothers to attend a class for catechists in the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. I went with my two brothers. There was a lot of work in the course, we worked day and night, even when we were tired. We lived and worked in the same place. We were not allowed to drink any alcohol. The people in charge of the course would get angry if we didn't work hard. There was not very much food at the course. They only gave us a few tortillas, and we are used to eating more. We read in Spanish and Tzotzil. I didn't know how to read when I arrived at the course, but I studied hard. With the help of God, I learned to read and write. They had a book in the two languages, one page in Spanish and the facing page in Tzotzil.

There were more than sixty people at the course. They were all indigenous -- Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Cho'les, Tojolabales, Mames, and Zoques. I studied there for four months. During the course I made my first communion and my confirmation. I have my credential from 1969 which states that I am a catechist. I received this credential twenty-five years ago, after completing the course. But in Chamula, they don't respect this credential, they don't respect anything.

I will be a catechists for my entire life. Some people say that they need a rest, and will stop preaching the Word of God when they are older. But a catechist is a job for life, there is no rest because there is a lot of work to be done.

In Chamula, the majority of the first catechists, like Juan, were very young and conflict developed as young male catechists began to displace the religious and social authority of the elders. Hence, it is not surprising that the Chamulan Counsel of Elders became one of the strongest opponents of the Mission. In June of 1967 they prohibited the priest from celebrating mass outside the temple in Chamula, under threat of death. Father Hernández did not understand the traditional authority and respect granted to the elders. In his news bulletin of February 1, 1968 he reported that the Counsel of Elders is "impenetrable and unyielding to true Christianity, remaining obstinate in its traditions with profound roots in the past." Again, traditional indigenous culture is criticized from the perspective of Christian Occidental culture.

The work of the mission not only attacked the cultural life of Chamula, but also threatened the power of the local leaders. Father Hernández publicly and officially denounced *caciques*, sometimes by name. However, his critique was limited; he saw the *caciques* largely as a product of indigenous culture itself rather than as a product of *Ladino* society, namely the Mexican government and their *indigenista* projects. Furthermore, rather than recognizing the *caciques* as a social and political problem for all Chamulans, Father Hernández felt that the powerful *caciques* should be destroyed in order to better evangelize (Letter from Andres Aubry to Pablo Iribarren, September 30, 1980, INAREMAC).

The cultural insensitivity of the mission was harshly criticized from within the Catholic Church. In a letter written to Bishop Ruiz García in 1975, Father Mardonio Morales -- a Jesuit priest of the Diocese -- noted that Father Hernández's evangelizing in

Chamula had attacked the traditions, indigenous identity, and life of the community itself. He claims that the mission mistakenly focused on economic oppression narrowly conceived, rather than on a structural injustice. His critique echoes Bishop Ruiz García's definition of the sin of *Occidentalización* which occurs "when we identify Christianity with Occidental Christian culture, demanding the resignation of culture, of the heart." Father Morales emphasized that "We must end oppressive pastoral work which sustains half truths or . . . destroys their [indigenous] life and identity in order to throw them into a risk of internal struggle in the darkness of a life without a past" (February 25, 1975, Diocesan Archives, INAREMAC).

In 1969, complaints about and threats against Father Hernández from *caciques* grew in intensity. He was constantly accused of being an Evangelical and received death threats. On September 4, 1969 the religious authorities of Chamula denounced him to the Office of National Patrimony.<sup>8</sup> They accused him of the following crimes:

- (1) Committing acts against the cultural unity of Chamula; of having been imposed by the Diocese; of exciting an immediate danger of a rupture of the religious sentiment of the community. He has tried to make us deny "our Gods" and is against our customs; he has introduced outsiders into the municipality.
- (2) Crimes against the Patrimony of the Nation; works against the aesthetic: pig sheds, hen houses, rabbit warrens, washing-places, dining rooms, dormitories, and all of this next to the temple.
- (3) Other crimes in prejudice of the economic interests which are established in the zone.

The letter was followed by signatures and fingerprints of some 500 people (Iribarren

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<sup>8</sup> This office is dedicated to the administration of government possessions, including historic monuments. According to the Mexican Constitution, all churches are property of the state.

1980: 6). It is interesting to note that all of the attacks against Father Hernández are of a religious and cultural nature. He is not attacked for his political work.

Father Hernández was not the only person who received threats; numerous Catholics of Chamula were threatened by the traditional authorities. In September of 1969, the only Christian family in the hamlet of Las Ollas was violently attacked. The mother, Dominga, and her eight year old son were assassinated. The woman was in the process of preparing for her first communion. A second son was hospitalized due to wounds caused when his ear was cut off with a machete (Bulletin of Father Hernández, September 6, 1969). In October of 1969, a petition was written by Father Hernández asking for protection of some 800 Catholics in Chamula. He reported that there had been death threats against Catholics in three hamlets. In the hamlet of Candelaria, where there was the largest number of converts, some 200 Catholics had been threatened with violence by the Chamulan authorities.

On October 13 of the same year, a public assembly was held in Chamula in which the priest was threatened with death if he did not abandon his work. Bishop Ruiz García responded to the accusations and threats against Father Hernández in a letter to the Public Ministry in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. The Bishop rejected all the charges against Father Hernández, expressed his doubts that it was the community that was raising the problem, commented that the Chamula authorities themselves were frightened by the work of the Mission, and announced the retreat of Father Hernández in order to prevent "the disgrace of a crime of uncontrollable resonance of which the community would not be responsible" (Iribarren 1980: 7). In this statement, the Bishop implicitly suggested that

the reason for the rejection of Father Hernández was his attack on the power of the *caciques*, rather than the mission's criticisms of indigenous culture. However, the power of the *caciques* cannot be so easily separated from "traditional Chamulan culture" as is illustrated by the Mission's attack on the authority of elders and the threat this represented to traditional leadership.

On October 26, 1969, Father Hernández wrote the last news bulletin from the mission. He laments that "The temple will remain without a priest and will return to be occupied by the *curanderos* and witches." He continued, "Each time there were larger uprisings against me by the *caciques*, *curanderos* and *alféreces* who furiously threatened me with death if I did not leave their tribe; they used the experimental pig shed as the pretext . . . I removed the pigs and the rebellion and death threats continued" (Bulletin October 26, 1969). From these statements, it seems that Father Hernández left the Chamulan mission with the same ethnocentric and paternalistic attitude that he had when he entered the community. The national newspaper *Excelsior*, reporting on the priest's departure from Chamula, commented "The majority of the *Pueblo* [of Chamula] celebrated the new triumph over the conquistadors. Although some Indians accepted the decision with a certain bitterness" (cited in Iribarren 1980:8).

The movement against Father Hernández and the Catholic Mission in Chamula must be placed in the context of the growing number of Protestant converts in Chamula in the 1960's. Protestantism entered Chiapas in 1938 under the auspices of the Summer

Institute of Linguistics (SIL).<sup>9</sup> The Wycliffe's Reformed American Church of the SIL began work in Tzotzil communities in the 1940's (Hernández Castillo 1992). In Chamula, people were reluctant to convert to Protestantism in the 1940's and 1950's; they risked social ostracism, economic ruin, and the possibility of being accused of witchcraft (Rus and Wasserstrom 1981). By the late 1960's, however, more people began to convert. Rus and Wasserstrom (1981) attribute this to the fact that Chamulans were tired of depending on the favoritism of the *caciques*, due to political and economic changes. As plantation owners began to directly recruit workers rather than work through the *caciques*, economic dependence on them lessened. For example, in 1968, one third of all Chamulans refused to pay a tax to fund a personal project for the *caciques* (Ibid). By 1968, there were only twenty Protestant families in Chamula, but by 1972 there were eighty. As it became evident to the *caciques* that the newly converted Protestants and Catholics opposed their authority, these converts were seen as a threat to established power relations.

#### **Local Elections and the First Expulsion in Chamula, 1970-1974**

Although Father Hernández no longer resided in Chamula after October of 1969, he continued to travel to the municipality to work. His new focus was to be on the formation of Chamulan catechists who would be trained in the city of San Cristóbal.

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<sup>9</sup>In 1951, the Mexican Ministry of Education signed an agreement with the SIL to support their work in investigating native language, studying the cultural and biological characteristics of Mexican natives, and carrying out other work to benefit Indians (Rus and Wasserstrom 1981).

From 1970 to 1973, Mariano Gómez López served as the municipal president of Chamula and there seems to have been a change of attitude on the part of the municipal authorities. Rather than being hostile toward the priest, he was asked to be present in Chamula to celebrate baptisms and during special occasions. From 1970 to 1973, the catechists and Christian leaders intensified their work and seem to have had complete liberty in doing so. The number of Catholics increased in the hamlets, especially in Yalichín, Yolonan, Chicuntantic, Tzonteuitz, Yilchequen. Magilió, Bautista Chica, Saclamantón, Yipic, Las Ollas, Candelaria, and San Antonio de Las Rosas, among others. In these hamlets, the Catholics met in the homes of the catechists (Iribarren 1980: 9). On July 9, 1972, Cardinal Angelo Rossi visited Chamula. The authorities and elders received him openly and accompanied him through the town center where people waved their ceremonial flags and played traditional music.

In the early 1970's, Father Hernández initiated several social development projects in Chamula. For example, he set up a local credit union which charged minimal interests rates, especially compared with *caciques* rates of ten to fifteen percent monthly. Father Hernández notes that one man borrowed 200 pesos and had to pay back 260 pesos in interest alone (Bulletin July 3, 1970). Clearly, the new credit union cut significantly into the profit of the *caciques*.<sup>10</sup> In 1973, work in the area of health and medicine began; a two month course on health was given in Chamula by pastoral workers. Catholic organizations along with Oxfam contributed economic resources and medicine to the

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<sup>10</sup>Although the documents of the Diocesan Archives do not mention any direct conflicts between the *caciques* and Catholics resulting from the credit union, it is likely that the *caciques* were angered by the project.

project. Courses in carpentry and home economics also began in 1973.

Most important to the history of expulsion was a project established in 1972 to form community and political leaders.<sup>11</sup> The project involved courses aimed at: (1) creating integral community development, (2) laying the groundwork for an interregional indigenous alliance between Tzotziles and Tzeltales, (3) teaching about the Mexican Constitution, individual guarantees, agrarian law, government offices, and planning of community projects (Iribarren 1980:14). The team responsible for the courses included Father Hernández, eight nuns, and specialists in certain areas. In 1972, three ten day courses were given, with an average of thirty-three Indians attending each one. When Father Hernández evaluated these early courses, he noted, "We believe that with the assimilated knowledge (about laws) they will be able to defend themselves a little from the oppression and injustice in which they live" (Iribarren 1980: 14). One of the intentions of the courses was to train people who would resist the political and economic power of the *caciques*.

In 1973, four courses were given, each lasting ten days. Again, evaluations of the project by the clergy were positive. Father Hernández noted that the newly trained leaders were well-received in their respective communities, and many were given important *cargos* such as municipal *agentes* or heads of local education committees. These leaders also helped many resolve problems they were having with the public authorities. Most important, the students in the courses formed the *Unión del Pueblo*

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<sup>11</sup>The courses were funded by Catholic Relief Services.

(Union of the People) which organized to protest the injustices of the *caciques*.<sup>12</sup>

In 1973, Father Hernández and other pastoral workers became involved in the preparation for the elections of the Municipal President of Chamula. For the first time in years, there was an opposition candidate, Domingo Díaz Gómez, who was an independent, not affiliated with any political party. He had attended courses given by the Mission in catechism and leadership training. Díaz Gómez had a large number of supporters, among both Catholics and Protestants. His campaign was supported by Father Hernández and the nuns working in the area. The official candidate of the PRI, Agustín Hernández López, promised moreover "that if I win the election, I will expel all the believers of the municipality." He also declared his support for those who take the *cargos* of the traditional fiesta system and those who sell alcohol (Iribarren 1980: 24). By "believers," Hernández López was surely referring to Catholics and Protestants who supported the independent candidate. As the election neared, it seemed that Domingo Díaz Gómez would win. Witnesses stated that during the election, two lines were formed, one for the supporters of each candidate. The line for the independent candidate was much longer than the line for the official candidate. Observing this, a group of Chamulan authorities invented pretexts as to why a number of Díaz Gómez's supporters could not vote. They pulled men and women out of this line until it was shorter than the line for the PRI candidate (Ibid: 25).

In response to complaints about this fraud, a second election was held on

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<sup>12</sup> The third phase of the project was completed in 1974 with four new courses. In four years, hundreds of indigenous people had been trained in these courses.

November 18 of the same year. Angel Robles, Director of the government office of *Asuntos Indígenas*, was present. This time people marked their ballots with different symbols for the different candidates: a cross was used for Díaz Gómez and a circle for Hernández López. The ballots were sent to the state capital in Tuxtla Gutiérrez to be counted. It remains unclear whether the votes were fairly counted; however, on December 30 Hernández López took possession of the Municipal Presidency in the presence of Angel Robles and Congressman Jorge Ochoa. The next day, seven Chamulan men who protested the unfair election were jailed by local authorities. Two other men from Chamula were jailed in San Cristóbal for attempting to speak to the Governor about the elections (Letter from Bishop Ruiz García to Governor, December 31, 1973, Diocesan Archives, INAREMAC).

Supporters of Díaz Gómez did not abandon their attempt to run a popular candidate for the presidency. In 1974, they met with members of the National Action Party (PAN, a right of center opposition party) who agreed to open an office in Chamula. But attempts to reach a peaceful solution to the post-election dispute were continually thwarted by the Mexican government. When President Echeverría visited the city of San Cristóbal in September of 1974, a group of Chamulans including Domingo Gómez López tried to speak to him, only to have the dialogue interrupted by the Governor of Chiapas, Velásco Suarez, who called the Chamulans "agitators of the *pueblo*" (Iribarren 1980:27). Meanwhile, the newly elected municipal president of Chamula, Agustín Hernández López, knew that he had many enemies within Chamula and attempted to make his authority known by intimidating those who opposed him. For example, Pedro Santis

Diaz, a catechist of the hamlet Yolonam was arrested by Hernández López who sarcastically said to him, "Now you recognize that I am the president" (Ibid: 28).

Frustrated in their efforts to receive assistance from the state government, opponents of Hernández López resorted to more drastic measures. On October 13, 1974, a group of 300 Chamulans and forty students from Tuxtla Gutiérrez occupied the municipal presidency of Chamula arguing that Agustín Hernández López had won the local presidency by fraud. At noon the students returned to Tuxtla, leaving the Chamulans alone to defend the building. In the afternoon, Ángel Robles and Jorge Ochoa arrived in Chamula. After making an agreement with the municipal president and judge of Chamula, transit police violently evicted the protesters, injuring and arresting several (*Caminante* October/November 1984; Iribarren 1980: 29). Not only had the opposition group failed in its attempt to take the presidency; it was now clear to all that the state government backed Hernández López and would assure that he remained in power. His supporters began to organize to get rid of the opposition group, and plans for the first expulsion from Chamula began.

On November 1, 1974, the *principales* of the hamlets held an assembly and began to identify members of the opposition -- mostly Catholics, but also evangelicals -- in their respective communities. Many were detained, robbed, wounded, threatened with death, or had their homes burned (Report from Father Hernández, Relation of Facts Related to the Liberation of Chamula, INAREMAC; see also Morquecho Escamilla 1994:63). Municipal authorities claimed that these people were Evangelicals who were going to destroy the Temple of Chamula, when in actuality they were Catholics and Evangelicals

who opposed the Municipal President. At the same time, three Catholic chapels in the hamlets of Chamula were burned. One hundred and sixty-one people were arrested and taken to jail in the municipality of Teopisca in vehicles provided by *Asuntos Indígenas* (Iribarren 1980; Morquecho Escamilla 1994).<sup>13</sup> Those exiled were threatened with death if they ever returned to their hamlets in Chamula. Hence, the first act of expulsion was completed.

Given this sequence of events, many have argued that the phenomenon of expulsion cannot be seen only as a religious conflict; instead religion is merely a veil which masks political and economic interests (Morquecho Escamilla 1992, 1994; Pérez Enríquez 1994; Rus 1994). However, it is important to point out that religion is also a symbolic system in which other interests are embedded. As previously noted, politics in Chamula are closely tied to the civil-religious hierarchy, and political-economic life is necessarily linked with religious practice. Although Chamulan authorities criticized the work of the Catholic Church for attacking indigenous culture, the mission was also attempting to dismantle the power of the *caciques*. After 1974, the expulsions continued, with 600 people exiled in August of 1976 by President Hernández. The majority were Evangelicals but Catholics were also included (Iribarren 1980: 38). In response, the Catholic clergy wrote a letter to the Chamulan authorities announcing that the priest would not go to celebrate mass for the important Feast of Rosario if the exiled were not

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<sup>13</sup>According to authorities of *Asuntos Indígenas*, the Chamulans were taken to Teopisca to assure that they would not starve to death in jail in Chamula (Iribarren 1980). However, the participation of government authorities in the arbitrary detention of 161 people raises a lot of questions about negligence and corruption.

allowed to return. The letter was unsuccessful; the exiled were not allowed to return, and relations between the Catholic Church and Chamulan authorities grew more tense.

Year after year, Chamulans were expelled from their native villages. The number of people expelled each year varied depending on the position of the Municipal President. From the beginning, the Catholic clergy of the Diocese of San Cristóbal strongly opposed the expulsions and denounced them publicly. However, the history of the Chamulan Mission demonstrates that the Catholic Church contributed to the conflicts underlying expulsion.

In the early 1980's, as a result of a conflict between the *caciques* of Chamula and the Dominican priests working in the municipality, Bishop Ruiz García declared that the Diocese would no longer work in Chamula. In the 1980's the Chamulans found a new priest in Tuxtla Gutiérrez -- Agustín García from the Temple of San Pascual Bailón of the Mexican Orthodox Church. The priest did not reside in Chamula, but visited once a month to perform weddings and baptisms (Estrada Martínez 1992, Tickell 1991).<sup>14</sup> Relations with the Catholic Church were reestablished in 1994 when Chamulan leaders asked that the Diocese of Tuxtla Gutiérrez to send a priest every few weeks to perform baptisms in the Temple of San Juan.<sup>15</sup> Ecclesiastically, Chamula forms part of the Diocese of San Cristóbal. The fact that Chamulan authorities decided to initiate relations

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<sup>14</sup>There is some disagreement as to the affiliation of this priest. The Mexican Greek Orthodox Church denies that he is associated with them. Some claim that the Church of San Pascual Bailón was formed by a dissident seminary student who made a wooden Christ as its patron saint.

<sup>15</sup>However, a priest from the Diocese of San Cristóbal has begun to make regular visits to a hamlet in Chamula at the request of its residents.

with the Diocese of Tuxtla may reflect their memory of the work of the Mission in the 1960's or a rejection of the criticisms of expulsion issued by the Diocese of San Cristóbal. In this decision, it is also important that the Diocese of Tuxtla is affiliated with the conservative line of the Mexican Catholic Church and is often politically aligned with the government, while the Diocese of San Cristóbal has taken an active stance opposing the political and economic repression in the state of Chiapas.

### **Working with the Poor: Recent Work of the Diocese of San Cristóbal**

Through his experiences with the indigenous peoples of Chiapas, Bishop Ruiz García began to re-evaluate indigenous tradition and custom. Clearly, the failure of the Church's project in Chamula indicated that these traditions could not be ridiculed and rejected because they differ from Western beliefs. The Bishop was also influenced by the liberation theology which recognizes the poor not only as the subjects of their own history, but as the *preferred* subjects for the revelation of the Word of God and the history of salvation. Hence, if the Church rejected the customs of the indigenous poor -- be it medical beliefs, language, dress, relations to nature, and ways of worshiping God, among others -- it would be committing the "sin of *Occidentalización*." Bishop Ruiz García and the pastoral workers began to educate themselves about indigenous customs and beliefs. "Traditional" Mayan customs were incorporated in liturgy; the re-examination of ancient stories, symbols, and myths was encouraged; and some pastoral workers learned native

languages.<sup>16</sup>

Another change in the Diocese's actions after the failure of the Chamula project was to work toward structural change to combat poverty rather than promoting reformism. This change, along with the re-evaluation of indigenous tradition are two critical parts of the process of conversion of the Diocesan workers. However, this process has been a slow one. For the pastoral workers of the Diocese, conversion represents a commitment to the *pueblo* and their process of liberation; this entails accompanying people in their struggles and taking on their struggles as one's own. Another part of the conversion is in allowing the indigenous peoples to be the subjects of their own history, respecting their path to liberation, rather than imposing Westernization as the only means to end poverty and exploitation.

It was not until the First Indigenous Congress which took place in San Cristóbal de Las Casas in October of 1974 that diocesan pastoral workers took concrete steps to respect indigenous culture and to defend the human rights of the poor. Initially, the Congress was to be coordinated by the governor of Chiapas, Dr. Manuel Velásco Suarez. He asked for help from Bishop Samuel Ruiz García, looking for assistance from the Church because of the presence of religious workers in communities throughout the area. Given the historical separation between Church and State in Mexico, this was an

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<sup>16</sup> Practices such as the killing of people due to witchcraft and the inferior status of women within indigenous communities are two examples of "traditions" which contradict Catholic doctrine. In fact, indigenous women and pastoral workers in the Diocese have argued against the uncritical acceptance of all customs, since many can oppress women. These issues are still being debated within the Diocese as pastoral workers, together with indigenous Catholics, attempt to sort out which aspects of indigenous culture support human dignity, and which oppose it.

interesting decision. The Bishop agreed to help coordinate the program on the condition that it would not be a touristic or folkloric event, but rather that the indigenous would be permitted to give their word in public after living in silence for so many years.

The process of preparing for the Congress was as important as the event itself. Preparations began in August of 1973, and between October of 1973 and September of 1974 local, regional, and municipal meetings were held in indigenous communities to discuss the upcoming event. Initially, people met to "know our reality," that is to talk about the situation of indigenous communities, and to discuss the work of Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas in defense of indigenous rights. Hopes, desires, and future goals were also addressed. Each of the four major ethnic groups of the Diocese -- Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Ch'oles, and Tojolabales -- prepared their presentation on the themes of the Congress: land, commerce, education, and health. In the course of these meetings, leadership initiatives were manifested and representatives were democratically selected to attend the Congress. The social conditions of the early 1970's favored the beginning of an organizational process. At this time, there were no institutional political structures representing the indigenous people of the state, although the catechist movement within the Catholic Church had opened local-level discussion on such issues as the lack of land and the equity of its distribution. Day laborers who worked on plantations were challenging their oppression and taking over land; and people were calling for an end to commercial exploitation (Morales Bermudez 1991: 248).

Over 1,230 indigenous delegates from the state of Chiapas attended the Congress: 587 Tzeltales, 330 Tzotziles, 152 Tojolabales and 161 Ch'oles. They represented 327

communities with a combined population of 250,000. The importance of this Congress cannot be overemphasized; it was the first opportunity in 500 years for the four ethnic groups to unite and reflect on their situation in public spaces that had been dominated by *Ladinos*. During the Congress, agreements were reached on each of the four themes discussed. Although neither politics nor human rights were addressed as specific topics, they were apparent in the discussions of all four themes.

The issue of land distribution was of special importance, given the existence of *fincas* (plantations) in Chiapas. In the early 1970's, over thirty percent of the agricultural workers in the state were *peones acasillados* who worked for extremely low wages (*sueldos de hambre*) and were continually exploited by the landowners. The critical agreement reached on the issue of land was that "*La tierra es de quien la trabaja*" (the land belongs to those who work it).<sup>17</sup> It was also agreed that "the communal lands which were taken from our fathers be returned to us" (Agreements, Indigenous Congress of 1974).

The indigenous participants in the Congress recognized that they shared similar problems -- that, for example, the issue of land was similar in the regions of all four ethnic groups. The realization of their common problems and the need for unity is evident in the agreements reached in the Congress. For example, in their first agreement on land: "We all want to resolve the problems of land, but we are divided, each one on his own. Because of this we do not have strength. We are looking for the organization of

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<sup>17</sup>This was also the slogan of Emiliano Zapata in the Plan de Ayala of 1911 which was directed toward the recuperation of communal lands of Morelos, separating them from the control of *Ladino* sugar cane plantations.

each group in order to have strength because unity gives us strength." The slogan of the Congress, "Equality in Justice," reflects the principal agreement reached: only through the unity of the pueblos could liberation be attained.

The importance of the event in uniting indigenous peoples from various communities, and in initiating a larger organization beyond the community, is worth remarking. Father Iribarren noted that one of the key achievements of the Congress for the indigenous peoples was: "The discovery that the plan of God was not their actual situation of misery and marginalization. God had other more just and kind projects for them. But in their action, the projects were impeded by the ambition of powerful and the lack of adequate channels for their voices to be heard" (Iribarren 1985: 6, INAREMAC). The Congress itself was critical in establishing logistic and symbolic ties between the four ethnic groups. Indigenous representatives-- "*hombre de buena palabra*" (men of good word) or those who were consistent in what they said and what they did -- were elected to take the proposals of the Congress to their *hermanos* (brothers and sisters) in the communities. The Congress provided the space for the formation of independent *campesino* organizations; earlier, the National Federation of *Campesinos* (CNC), a group affiliated with the PRI, had been the dominant organization in the state.

The Congress also had an important impact on the consciousness of the pastoral workers of the Diocese of San Cristóbal. They recognized the Indians' ability to organize, the values that can and must come from evangelization, and the evidence of a liberating process supported by the Gospel. Furthermore, they decided that it was necessary to revise all pastoral work (Iribarren 1985). In the words of Bishop Ruiz

García:

When the pastoral agents of the Diocese saw and heard what the indigenous people were saying about their own situation, it was very clear that our Pastoral Plan had been elaborated without taking into account the aspirations, necessities, and hopes of the communities. In response to this appeal we made a Plan which tried to respond in some way from the faith of the necessities described (Ruiz García 1993).

During the Diocesan Assembly of 1975, the "option for the poor" was formally chosen as the path of future work.

The mandate to "look for effective concrete solutions" to the poverty of the indigenous peoples in Chiapas led pastoral workers to take a more direct role in *campesino* political organizations. Following the Indigenous Congress of 1974, pastoral workers played a key role in the formation of *Quiptic Lecubtesel*, a productive cooperative run by catechists and pre-deacons. The name *Quiptic Lecubtesel* is a Tzeltal phrase meaning "Our Strength is Our Unity for Progress." The catechists called the organization "the little sister of the Word of God." In it they learned to defend their rights and to struggle for access to land. In time, the group acquired more autonomy from the Church. Other non-religious based groups grew in the 1970's. In 1976 the *Alianza Campesina* (*Campesino Alliance*) was established; this organization demanded the "return" of lands in which had been illegally appropriated by *latifundistas*. In the late 1970's, *campesinos* who worked in *fincas* also began to mobilize to improve their quality of life. One group which stands out for its work with the *peones acasillados* is the *Sindicato Nacional de Asalariados Rurales* (National Union of Rural Wage-earners), formally constituted in 1979. Workers from ten *fincas* in the region of Simojovel and

Huitiupán joined the union, demanding the right to work, a just salary, an eight hour day, the right to strike, social security and unemployment benefits. Little by little, the rural organizing grew, and by 1980 three major organizations, CIOAC (Independent Confederation of Agricultural Workers and *Campesinos*), OCEZ (*Campesino* Organization of Emiliano Zapata), and ARIC (Regional Association of Collective Interest) had formed in Chiapas.

As the organization of *campesinos* grew in size and number, government repression against *campesinos* increased. In 1980, the repression culminated in what *campesinos* remember as the massacre of Wolochoan. In the region of Sitalá in the north central part of Chiapas, *campesinos* had been attempting to gain legal access to the land from the Secretary of Agrarian Reform for nineteen years, but had not received a positive response. Recent organization in the region had flourished following the Indigenous Congress of 1974; the cooperative *Quiptic Lecubtesel* had been particularly strong. In 1980 when pastoral workers stopped advising the *campesinos* in the area, the Socialist Worker's Party (PST, a left of center organization which was co-opted to be a satellite group of the PRI) became involved with the Christians. The PST was pushing for land invasions at a national level (Iribarren 1985). Under advisement of the PST, *campesinos* from several communities invaded the *finca* of Wolochoan in 1980. Soon after, the police arrived with the *finqueros* of the area. Father Mardonio Morales -- who was mentioned earlier for his criticism of the Chamula Mission -- met with the state governor on June 2, 1980, and the next day the governor went to visit the *finca*. Nonetheless, on June 15, 1980 police and soldiers arrived and began firing at the 723 families who occupied the

land. The firing lasted two and a half hours. At least twelve people were killed and countless others wounded (*Caminante* June/July 1985, Fazio 1994: 145-46). Through the CNC (National Federation of *Campesinos*) the government offered to buy the *fincas* for the invaders, under the condition that the *campesinos* would pay the government back within ten years. However, the land was very expensive, and in order to receive the land, *campesinos* were required to affiliate with the PRI (*Caminante* June/July 1985).

Although religious workers of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas had worked to defend the human rights of the indigenous people since the Indigenous Congress of 1974, it was not until the 1980's that the promotion of human rights was articulated as a concrete goal of pastoral work. From the 1980's on, there was increasing violence against *campesinos* in their struggle to gain access to land. Between 1982 and 1987, there were 86 political assassinations registered in the state of Chiapas (Burguete 1987: xviii). In response to the violent repression of land occupations, particularly that of Wolochan, a Diocesan Assembly was held in 1985 on the topic of land. Pastoral workers began by examining what they had done to accompany the poor. In the area of economics, religious workers noted that they had assisted in the formation of productive and transport cooperatives, popular credit unions, workshops, and had also offered technical assistance. In the area of politics, they had supported people in filing claims to gain access to land; contributed to political formation through sponsoring courses and assemblies; and given legal advice on initiatives and rights. They also gave critical support to organizations, regional catechists groups, refugees, political prisoners, organizations working for access to land, marches of *campesinos*, and the creation of a

union of *ejidos* dedicated to gaining credit, subsidies, and markets for goods, among other things. In ideological work, they accompanied theological and Biblical reflection groups, held mass for the successes and failures of land struggles, encouraged the participation of women, and informed people about Protestant "sects." As an important criteria for all of these works, it was noted that they must not substitute actions that must be taken by the *pueblo* itself; the *pueblo* is a subject of its own history. This represented a major change from earlier work in Chamula.

At this 1985 Assembly, concrete goals were established. First, a Diocesan organization to assist the poor with land-related problems would be established to offer legal advice, provide a channel for denunciations, and defend human rights. Second, theology itself would be examined and used to illuminate the struggles related to land. Third, the relationship between politics and faith would be analyzed in order to see how the Church could act in conflicts. The goal of this analysis was to reinforce the actions of the people, cause the Church to be present in their struggles and share their risks, relate the Diocesan structure to the base, and assist in political formation (Iribarren 1985).

The Church in being more particular -- more concretely related to Tzotziles, Tzeltales, Tojolabales, and Zoques -- would become more universal. In this process, the Assembly noted that the Church must value the traditions and dignity of the people. This course of action is not without its ambiguities and problems. As one Dominican priest noted, "There is a difficult interaction between the project of creating the reign of God and socio-political liberation. Sometimes the later overshadows the former in the work and thought of pastoral agents" (Iribarren 1985). The Diocese's work with the poor in the

1980's took place in the context of the growing movement of liberation theology in Central and South America. While the ideas were articulated in the 1960's and 1970's, it was in the 1980's that they were implemented. The repressive wars in Central America and the repression of the Catholic Church -- including the assassination of Monsignor Romero -- also served to radicalize members of the Diocese in the 1980's.

Another factor which played a critical role in mobilizing Diocesan workers to take a stance on human rights was the arrival of Guatemalan refugees in Chiapas beginning in the early 1980's. Thousands of Guatemalan Indians fled the repressive regimes of Lucas García, Ríos Mott, and Mejía Víctores. The "scorched earth" policies and military counter-insurgency campaigns led to the massive violation of human rights of the Mayas of Guatemala. By 1984, around a million people had been displaced from their homes, and 150,000 of these refugees found their way to Chiapas (Davis 1988, cited in Verrillo and Earle 1993: 227-228). Upon their arrival in Chiapas, the refugees first came in contact with the *campesinos* of the communities on the border with Guatemala. Then pastoral workers in the region began to assist the refugees; the work with refugees served to radicalize pastoral agents of the Diocese. They heard stories from people who had suffered human rights violations in Guatemala. Many of those who arrived in Chiapas were from the Diocese of Quiche where the Catholic Church had worked to protect indigenous rights and to empower indigenous peoples to be leaders within the Church. The pastoral workers in the Diocese of San Cristóbal were forced to decide how they would accompany the refugees. They decided that Christian solidarity was essential to this work. The Diocese offered support in the form of food, clothing, and housing. The

*Comité Cristiana de Solidaridad* (Christian Solidarity Committee) was set up to offer material and legal support to the refugees. The Diocese's involvement with refugees also led to direct confrontations with the Mexican State which considered them a political threat to Chiapas' stability. While the Mexican government "relocated" refugee camps (in some cases, violently) and the Guatemalan army raided the camps, the Diocese denounced these violations of human rights and continued to provide support for the refugees.<sup>18</sup> This placed the Diocese in increasing disfavor with the Mexican government.

Throughout the 1980's and into the 1990's, the Diocese continued to denounce acts of expulsion in Chamula. The Catholic Church played a fundamental role in the establishment of a non-governmental organization, CHILTAK, which worked to protect indigenous rights, and took the problem of expulsion as one of its primary issues. As Bishop Ruiz García noted in 1993:

Since the 1970's, we have had to confront the painful problem of the expulsion of people and groups of Indians from the municipalities and communities. The victims have been not only evangelical brothers, but also Catholics. The phenomenon has obligated us to put the politics and economics of the *caciquil* government structures in the foreground, . . . This situation has demanded, furthermore, an ecumenical dialogue at diverse levels and humanitarian aid and advice in the defense of the human rights for the groups, families, and persons affected (Samuel Ruiz García 1993: 16).

During the late 1980's and into the 1990's, the Diocese continued to formalize its commitment to defend the human rights of indigenous peoples. The Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" was established by Bishop Ruiz García in 1989 to

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<sup>18</sup> The Guatemalan army made sixty-four raids on refugee camps to find supposed guerrillas in Mexico between 1981 and 1984 (Benjamin 1989: 238).

deal with the large number of human rights violations committed against the indigenous people and poor of the Diocese.<sup>19</sup> One of the main projects of the Center was confronting the issue of expulsion. In 1992, a group called *Teología India* (Indigenous Theology) was formed so that pastoral workers and indigenous peoples could share their reflections on faith and culture. One goal of this group is to re-educate indigenous peoples on the religious tradition of their ancestors. This group as well as other projects demonstrates the Diocese's attempt to work *with* the poor, and represents a major shift in perspective since the work of Father Hernández in Chamula in the 1960's.

### **Conclusion**

The Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas has taken important steps to work *with* the poor, rather than *above* them. Although the Diocese has taken an active stance in criticizing the expulsions from Chamula, it is evident that the Catholic Church played a role in fomenting the conflict which led to expulsion. Especially problematic was the work of the Chamulan Mission which, in committing the "sin of *Occidentalización*," attempted to evangelize the Chamulans by making them more Western. However, beginning with the Indigenous Congress of 1974, many of the actions of the Diocese began to be oriented toward the defense and promotion of the human rights of the indigenous people. In a pastoral letter written in honor of Pope John Paul II's visit to Mexico in 1993, Bishop Ruiz García strongly denounced the structural situation in Chiapas in which the indigenous and *campesinos* are politically and economically

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<sup>19</sup>The work of this Center is described in detail in the next Chapter.

marginalized; he denounced the extreme inequality in the state as well as the neo-liberal policies implemented by the federal government. The Bishop also noted the importance of respecting indigenous culture. He states:

One of the things that we can say is an achievement in our diocesan work is that indigenous communities and *campesinos* are no longer the objects of the decisions of others, but have begun to be subjects of their own history (Ruiz García 1993: 33).

Making the indigenous and *campesinos* subjects of their own history means that the Western model of development -- including Bishop Ruiz García's plan of 1960 to give the indigenous peoples shoes, teach them Spanish, and change their diet -- cannot be uncritically accepted as the path to liberation. As demonstrated with the Chamulan Mission, treating the indigenous as objects of pastoral work was repressive and in the end, led to an increase in the number of violations in human rights. However, defining indigenous tradition and accepting it uncritically is extremely problematic. As the phenomenon of the *caciques* of Chamula demonstrates, some indigenous people may oppress members of their own communities in the name of preserving their tradition and culture. In the next Chapter, I present a theoretical overview of the problem of defining human rights for indigenous communities before returning to the Catholics of Guadalupe, their conceptions of human rights, and their criticism of expulsion.

**PART II**  
**DEFINING HUMAN RIGHTS**

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DEFINING HUMAN RIGHTS: WESTERN-EUROPEAN, CATHOLIC, AND INDIGENOUS VIEWS

The act of expelling Tzotziles and Tzeltales from their native communities violates several human rights which are protected in the Individual Guarantees of the Mexican Constitution and international agreements, most importantly the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. These violations include mistreatment, arbitrary detention, exile from land, unusual punishment, and lack of respect for religious freedom. Nonetheless, federal and state authorities in Mexico have taken little action to prevent expulsion or to punish those responsible for the act.<sup>1</sup> In several cases, the authorities have encouraged those threatened with exile to leave their communities and promised them land elsewhere in the state. For example, as mentioned in the previous chapter, in November of 1974, the *caciques* (local entrenched leaders) of Chamula expelled a large group of people, claiming that they were "Evangelists" who were going to destroy the temple of San Juan. In reality, the group was composed predominantly of Catholics who had voted against the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution (PRI), thereby threatening the political power of the entrenched *caciques*.

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<sup>1</sup>The negligence of government authorities in regard to expulsion has continued to the present, although the Zapatista uprising of 1994 forced authorities to directly address the issue, at least on paper, if not in actions. On April 19, 1994, the National Commission of Human Rights issued the first recommendation on the problem of expulsions in the municipality of Chamula. The recommendation responded to the series of complaints that had been received since 1990, the year that the National Commission was formed. The document recommends that penal action be taken against those responsible for expulsion, that the expelled be permitted to peacefully return to their communities of origin, and that exile be stopped. However, this recommendation has not been effectively carried out.

Vehicles were provided by the government office of *Asuntos Indígenas* to transport the exiled to the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas (Morquecho Escamilla 1994; Iribarren 1980). In September of 1993, the Attorney General for Justice and the Secretary of the Government of the State of Chiapas informed the National Commission of Human Rights that they had failed to act on the numerous legal denouncements of expulsion because it is "a very complicated matter that surpasses the juridical aspect" (Estrada Martínez 1995: 60). In December of 1993, authorities of the office of the Attorney General similarly stated that "the juridical framework is insufficient to reach an agreement between the two parties" (Ibid). The implicit message of these statements is that expulsion is a religious problem between traditional Catholics and Protestants who oppose community custom: the clear violation of Constitutional Guarantees is downplayed, if not ignored. Although the act of exile violates the law and numerous legal denouncements have been made against those responsible, the government of Chiapas has not taken firm steps to end the act.

The position of the Mexican government in regard to the expulsions raises critical questions about the application of human rights codes in indigenous communities. Are human rights universal, or are they only applicable to Western-European societies? Can juridical codes based on the protection of individual rights effectively protect the rights of collectivities based on communal systems of justice? Is local custom and tradition compatible with universal human rights codes? These questions have been the subject of extensive debate in the field of political philosophy, and to a lesser extent in anthropology. This Chapter explores these questions through a critical presentation of the

literature on human rights and indigenous communities. After discussing the theoretical issues, I examine several conceptions of human rights and how they articulate with indigenous rights in order to explore the conflict between individual and communal rights in the act of expulsion in Chiapas. I analyze universal codes of the United Nations, Mexican legislation, the doctrine of the Catholic Church, and finally, the position of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

### **Human Rights and Indigenous Communities: Theoretical Perspectives**

The legal conception of human rights emerged with the Enlightenment, and the revolutionary constitutions of France and the United States in the eighteenth century. The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of the French Revolution written in 1789 was based on individual rights and equality. It recognized the fundamental rights of liberty, equality, property, security, and the right to resist oppression. However, this notion of rights did not extend to all people; it excluded blacks, women, children, and the poor because of the belief that these people lacked rationality, and therefore the ability to exercise individual rights (see Pollis 1982). The term human rights was introduced at an international level in the contemporary period with the creation of the United Nations in 1945. In response to the Second World War and the massive human rights violations committed under fascism and Naziism, member states of the UN drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was passed in December of 1948. The document contains thirty articles, and recognizes "the inherent dignity and . . . the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom,

justice, and peace in the world" (Preamble, Universal Declaration of Human Rights). The Declaration is based on rights granted to individuals which are to be protected by States. Many of the delegates present at the General Assembly level in the writing of the Declaration made favorable comparisons between the eighteenth century declarations of rights, particularly the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. However, in its final version, the Universal Declaration differs from eighteenth-century Western views of rights in that it includes economic, social, and cultural rights, in addition to political rights (United Nations General Assembly Official Records, Third Session, cited in Ahmed An-Na'im 1990: 351). The Declaration is based upon the unity of human beings, which its authors saw as extending beyond races, groups, and individuals, and the universality of fundamental human values seen as transcending the particular values of diverse cultures (Sélim Abou 1992, cited in Beller Taboada 1994). Human rights were thereby recognized for all human beings for the condition of being human, independent of their social circumstances and the differences between individuals. Given this focus, it is not surprising that the UN Declaration of 1948 does not mention indigenous peoples nor grant them specific rights.

Scholars, including both anthropologists and political philosophers, concur that human rights as set out in the UN Declaration are Western in origin and focus.<sup>2</sup> What remains in debate is whether the UN Declaration can be applied universally without

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<sup>2</sup>It is important to note that there is significant variation in "Western" notions of rights, just as there is variation in non-Western definitions of rights. I use the term Western to refer to rights codes coming out of the Western-European tradition, such as the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the U.S. Bill of Rights, which protect individual rights to equality, liberty, and justice.

infringing upon the rights of societies with distinctive cultural, religious, and political traditions. When the United Nations was drafting its Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1947, the Executive Board of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) rejected the idea of a universal human rights framework, arguing that different peoples have different notions of rights. The statement of the AAA proclaims that: "Standards and values are relative to the culture from which they derive so that any attempt to formulate postulates that grow out of the beliefs or moral codes of one culture must to that extent detract from the applicability of any Declaration of Human Rights to mankind as a whole" (American Anthropological Association 1947: 542). The controversy in anthropology as to whether rights are universal or particularistic has its roots in the debate between Max Gluckman (1955) and Paul Bohannan (1957) as to the nature of juridical processes in non-Western societies. In studying the juridical procedures of the Barotse of Northern Rhodesia, Gluckman concluded that the local judges use juridical mechanisms similar to those of the West; they make decisions based on custom, morality, ethics, and ideas of how a reasonable man should act, among other criteria. Hence he argues that juridical processes are universal; in different cultures, people rely on similar instruments to deal with problems of justice. Bohannan studied the Tiv of Nigeria, and concluded that they rely on culturally specific concepts which differ significantly from Western notions. He argues that Western juridical notions cannot be used to study the economic and political processes of non-Western societies. The Gluckman-Bohannan debate remains unresolved.

The current debate regarding human rights and their application to non-Western

societies centers on how rights are defined and how the human rights of culturally distinct communities can best be protected. The work of anthropologists has revealed that all societies have some conception of human rights, when these are broadly defined as moral standards for establishing and respecting human dignity. There are few in-depth studies which attempt to flesh out conceptions of human rights in non-Western societies.<sup>3</sup>

However, for the most part, works on rights in non-Western-European societies concur that these societies have codes of human rights, although their codes differ significantly from that of Western-European states. The 1947 statement of the American Anthropological Association does not argue that non-Western societies lack notions of human rights; on the contrary, it claims that all societies have specific human rights codes which negate the application of a "universal" code based on Western conceptions of rights. As An-Na'im notes, "Many Western scholars concede that the broadly defined human values underlying the concept of human rights may be universally shared, but they insist that a distinction be made between the moral standards of human dignity, which all cultures share, and the specific human rights that are enforceable against the state, which are believed to be a modern European creation" (An-Na'im 1990: 3).

One exception to the argument that all societies have human rights codes is the

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<sup>3</sup>Much of the work which explicitly addresses human rights in non-Western societies relies on citing ethnographic works. The most extensive literature is that of Africa (see for example, An-Na'in 1990; Cohen 1993; Howard 1984, 1986; Waltz 1995). Significant works for other geographic areas include Waiko (1988) on Melanesia; Keddie (1988), Mayer (1991) on Islam; Tang (1995) on Asia. For Mexico, there is an extensive literature on law in indigenous societies (see for example, Chenaut and Sierra 1995; Collier 1973; Estrada and González 1995; Nadar 1990), although the issue of human rights is seldom explicitly addressed (but see Stavenhagen 1988; Stavenhagen and Iturralde 1990).

work of Jack Donnelly who argues that "most non-Western cultural and political traditions lack not only the practice of human rights but the very concept" (Donnelly 1982: 303). His argument is circular; he relies on a Western definition of human rights and then claims that such rights are non-existent in non-Western societies. For example, Donnelly notes that communitarian societies -- which he defines as those that give ideological and practical priority to the community over the individual -- are "antithetical to the implementation and maintenance of human rights because they deny the autonomy of the individual, the irreducible moral equality of all individuals, and the possibility of conflict between the community's interests and the legitimate interests of any individual" (Donnelly 1989: 75). I argue to the contrary, that because communitarian and other non-Western societies do not define rights through individual autonomy does not mean that these societies lack their own conceptions of human rights.

Sinah (1981) contrasts the universal framework for human rights with non-Western understandings and describes three central elements that reflect Western values in the universal framework:

One, the fundamental unit of society is the individual, not the family.  
 Two, the primary basis for securing human existence in society is through rights, not duties. Three, the primary method of securing rights is through legalism whereunder rights are claims and adjudicated upon, not reconciliation, repentance, or education (Sinah 1981, cited in Renteln 1985: 517).

For decades anthropologists have been aware of the close relation between religious values, moral precepts, tradition, and political structure in non-Western societies (cf. Malinowski 1926, Radcliffe-Brown 1952). To the extent that these issues impact law

and social order in non-Western societies, they also affect human rights on an ideological and practical level. For these societies, human rights standards are closely linked to histories, traditions, and cultures which differ significantly from Western tradition. While Western notions of rights are based in the protection of individual rights, indigenous societies commonly base rights in the protection of the community itself which can override individual interests. For example, while the Western juridical system seeks to punish those guilty of a crime, indigenous communities may seek to arrive at a compromise between the parties in order to conserve internal harmony (Collier 1973: Nadar 1989). Ronald Cohen (1993) discusses the relation between individualism and communalism in the context of African human rights. He notes that it has been argued that people in Africa are socialized in groups, and that personhood is intelligible only in the group and is not individualistic as is the Western concept. Valuing the group, members of African culture believe that "one should never die alone, live alone, remain outside social networks . . ." Cohen notes, however, that the individual person's autonomy and dignity are also protected in African tradition. The individual has rights to land, to compete for public office, and to personal success. In sum, "African societies and nation-states emphasize both communal and individual rights, although there is a traditional tilt to communalism" (Cohen 1993: 15).

The argument that non-Western societies have differing notions of human rights begs the question of how these rights can be protected. This question has been the

subject of much debate among legal scholars, political philosophers, and anthropologists.<sup>4</sup>

I summarize three central approaches to the problem:

- First, those who argue that indigenous or community rights can best be protected through a political system which respects Western-based individual rights;
- Second, those claiming that indigenous rights can best be protected through specific legislation which differs from national legislation; and
- Finally, those who argue that it is necessary to mix non-Western and Western rights codes in order to protect indigenous rights.

*Applying Western Human Rights Codes Universally.*

Many argue that respecting Western-based individual rights is the best and only way to protect "cultural minorities."<sup>5</sup> Proponents of liberalism argue that the protection of individual rights can be compatible with the protection of communal rights typical of

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<sup>4</sup>There is a gap between the work of political philosophers and political scientists, and that of anthropologists. While the first group has advanced extensive theories regarding rights and the respective role of individuals and communities, they seldom examine detailed ethnographic works in non-Western societies in order to see how these theories are played out in concrete situations. The anthropological literature provides detailed descriptions of law and rights in non-Western societies, but reference to theories of rights is minimal.

<sup>5</sup>The term cultural minorities is problematic. It refers to groups identified by race, language, religion, or "indigeneity" who differ from that of the "majority" society (Van Dyke 1985). In some countries -- such as South Africa, Guatemala, and Bolivia -- cultural minorities are actually the majority of the population. Much of the literature on human rights and cultural rights uses the term cultural minorities; it is useful to define minorities as those who lack the protection offered to the dominant society rather than those who are a numerical minority. The term "special groups" is used in the literature interchangeably with cultural minorities.

indigenous societies (Buchanan 1989; Kukathas 1992; Tomasi 1991). They claim that the role of the state should be the protection of individual liberties through the support of civil and political rights, most importantly through freedom of religion, expression, thought and association, political participation and legal due process (most notably Rawls 1971). Liberals recognize the existence of plural conceptions of the "good life" which are based on differing philosophical, religious, and moral beliefs and cannot be enforced by the state. Hence, cultural rights are related to individual rights; "if the state enforces the basic civil and political rights it will leave individuals free, within broad limits, to pursue their own conceptions of the good and will preclude itself from imposing upon them any one particular conception of the good or of virtue" (Buchanan 1989: 854).

The argument for respecting universal individual rights is perhaps most strongly defended by Jack Donnelly in *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*. According to his definition, human rights are held by individuals and are exercised primarily in relation to the state. He claims that such rights are universal. "If human rights are the rights one has simply because one is a human being, as they usually are thought to be, then they are held 'universally,' by all human beings" (Donnelly 1989:3). He argues that in order to accommodate non-Western notions of human rights based in communal rights, one would have to defend social rights and duties over the individual. In this case, "the 'right' would be largely useless because it would be easily overridden by the rights of society or associated individual duties" (Ibid: 58). Furthermore, he argues that defending non-Western notions of rights lacks validity because "Westernization, modernization, development, and underdevelopment - for better or worse, the dominant

contemporary social and economic forces - have in most places significantly separated the individual from the small, supportive traditional community" (Ibid: 59). Individuals who once lived in small, communal societies now suffer abuses at the hands of the modern state, economy, and city. These individuals need individual rights in order to protect and realize human dignity. In short, Donnelly argues that even if human rights is a Western concept, it should be applied universally to protect human dignity. Here Donnelly makes an important point; given that the Western concept of the modern state is dominant in the world, it follows that individual rights must be protected to assure respect for basic human rights.

Charles Kukathas argues that cultural minorities should not be granted specific rights because their rights are effectively protected within the Western political notion of liberalism. His primary reason for rejecting the claims of cultural communities for special rights is that these communities are not part of some natural order, but are constantly changing in response to historical, political and institutional circumstances. Group formation is determined by political institutions, among other factors. "This is not to say that culture is unimportant, but it is not fundamental, even for the constitution of group identity." As an example, he notes that in the 1960's in Assam, Bengali Muslims declared Assamese their language in part to be able to receive land destined for indigenous peoples. Doing so they showed that cultural groups have "no special moral primacy in virtue of some natural priority" (Kukathas 1992: 110). A second reason given for his support of individual rights is that there are divisions between the masses and elites within groups. Elites may manipulate ethnic sentiment to benefit themselves or

may take advantage of other members of their cultural community. Because "cultural groups are not undifferentiated wholes but associations of individuals with interests that differ to varying extents," individual rights, rather than cultural rights, will best protect members of these groups (Ibid: 114).

Kukathas argues that liberal societies which protect individual rights should defend cultural communities as voluntary associations "whose freedom to live according to communal practices each finds acceptable is of fundamental importance" (Ibid: 116). He acknowledges that individual rights may in some cases conflict with group rights, however, this is permissible as long as group members have the right to leave and to enter the wider society. This necessitates the "existence of a wider society that is open to individuals wishing to leave their local groups" (Ibid: 134). In his view, members of special groups who do not conform to group norms could be "ostracized" by the community, but could not be made the victims of other penalties. He proposes a liberal political culture in which individuals have the freedom of association, hence permitting the existence of diverse cultural groups.

### *Granting Special Rights to Minority Cultures*

Many argue that minority cultures should be entitled to special rights which value and protect their culture. One of the central reasons behind this argument is that it is necessary to protect cultural minorities to assure their continued existence; Western-European values of individualism can be destructive to communitarian values and therefore the culture of indigenous societies. Within the context of the larger society,

cultural minorities commonly suffer discrimination and live in unequal circumstances. Hence, granting special rights to these cultures would assure greater justice in removing or compensating for undeserved disadvantage. "Were it not for these special rights, the members of minority cultures would not have the same ability to live and work in their own language and culture that the members of majority cultures take for granted" (Kymlicka 1992: 140).

Similarly, Van Dyke argues that without special protection, distinctive cultural groups would be forced to assimilate into Western society. A society based on individual rights can "break up reservations, destroy tribal relations, settle Indians on their own homesteads, incorporate them into the national life, and deal with them not as nations or tribes or bands, but as individual citizens" (Van Dyke 1982: 29). A liberal society based on individual rights confers advantage to the dominant group. Minority cultures are in need of special protection through differential treatment. Furthermore, conferring only individual rights denies the importance of community; it fails to acknowledge that many societies value the community over the individual. "According to the communal view, the community is a kind of corporate entity, with a right to protect precious features of communal life. The community has the right to decide what kinds of behavior are acceptable, without any pretense that this right depends on unanimous consent, whether given now or in the past" (Van Dyke 1995: 105). He notes that in reality, harmonious cooperation in communities is problematic, just as it is in states. However, destroying communities, and thereby their cultures, is obviously not the solution to the problem. Van Dyke proposes the possibility of coalitional governments based on proportional

representation (which would include adequate representation of indigenous groups), respect for indigenous law, protection of indigenous land, among other rights. How these propositions would be carried out and whether, in reality, they would protect distinctive cultural groups are questions that remain open for debate.

Will Kymlicka argues that differential treatment for cultural minorities can be defended within the concept of individualism. Concern for cultural difference is important because it is "only through having a rich and secure cultural structure that people can become aware, in a vivid way, of the options available to them, and intelligently examine their value" (Kymlicka 1989: 165). He proposes granting minority cultures specific rights within liberal societies, although he does not explain how this could be implemented. He believes that even "illiberal cultures" can be respected and tolerated within liberal societies. Kymlicka directly addresses the problem of the conflict between individual and community rights. He notes that rights for the minority culture against the larger community should be protected, but that rights of a culture against its own members cannot be justified. Kymlicka does not address how this distinction would work out on a practical level. For example, who would decide that the rights of a culture are being used against its own members, and with what criteria? Culture is not a static and homogenous concept which can be easily defined for a given society. Rather it is contested and changes historically. Conflicts commonly occur within minority groups over definitions of cultural rights and how these rights should be applied to those with less status due to their sex, age, or economic standing (Preis 1996). Defining cultural rights and relating them to individual rights remains problematic.

*Combining Western and Non-Western Rights Codes*

Some argue that it is necessary to incorporate non-Western notions of human rights into the Western-based UN Agreement in order to create truly universal standards which would combine individual and communal notions of rights. These scholars accept that conceptions of human rights grounded in the cultures of indigenous societies exist and differ significantly from Western-European rights codes. However, they maintain that this does not negate that some standards of behavior are universally shared, and that these standards could be elaborated upon to form a universal rights code. "Some rights or standards of behavior, such as limitations on sanctioned violence, clearly seem to exist in all cultures. And all societies have basic rules for food sharing and other essential forms of social assistance to guarantee life for the society's members under normal circumstances" (Messer 1993: 223). Another universally shared rights concept is that of human dignity which defines "the inner (moral) nature and worth of the human person and his or her proper political relations with society" (Howard 1990). Some argue that in order to effectively protect human rights, these commonly shared codes of behavior should be elaborated and expanded in an attempt to produce a universal human rights code (Renteln 1990). Others prescribe dual codes, one universal and one particular, in order to effectively protect human rights within specific societies (An-Na'im 1990, Cohen 1993).

In the volume *Human Rights in Africa* the authors "hope to show that the conceptualization, formulation, and promotion of international or universal human rights standards can be positively reinforced and enriched by the moral values and normative

behavior of traditional African societies" (An-Na'im 1990: 9). Exactly how communal and individual rights codes as well as traditional cultural views of human rights could be integrated remains to be seen. Numerous countries have passed legislation providing specific rights to indigenous communities within the boundaries of the nation-state; however, the incorporation of indigenous values into the laws of the wider society has yet to occur.

Revising current international human rights codes has the advantage of making them more acceptable to non-Western societies. Many non-Western states and societies object to the imperialism of enforcing Western-based standards. For example, some Africans object to Western-based rights codes claiming that human rights violations have been perpetuated mostly by the West through the slave trade, colonialism, and apartheid (Howard 1984, cited in Renteln 1985). Similarly, Nikki Keddie (1988) argues that the subordination of women in Muslim societies has more to do with colonial relations and the hostility between the West and the Muslim World than it does with the actual position of women. Keddie concludes that many Muslims are reluctant to borrow ideas from the modern West because they see this as bowing to neocolonialism. Allowing respect for non-Western culture and tradition in human rights codes might make them more universally acceptable.

Providing legal protection for cultural human rights values is problematic in that it can legitimate the power of local elites who can use it for their own political advantage and may manipulate or exploit community members in the name of tradition. For example, *caciques* in Chiapas claim that they are protecting "traditional culture" in

expelling dissidents; at the same time, they receive political and economic benefits from exiling their enemies. Victims of abuses often refer to international standards to criticize local elites who manipulate culture. This has happened in Chiapas as those expelled from their native communities appeal to local, state, national, and international human rights groups for assistance in returning to their native lands. They also demand that the *caciques* be held accountable for their actions. Jane Collier (1995) notes that in the 1980's, precisely when elites within African nations and separatist groups began to use traditional law to defend their claims for autonomy, anthropologists were emphasizing the historic colonial construction of the customary law of indigenous people. However, Ann Na'im (1990) argues that both local cultural values and international codes can be used to check the power of elites within indigenous societies.

In "A Cultural Approach to Human Rights among the Dinka" Francis M. Deng examines how the Dinka of the Sudan understand human rights and how they articulate with Western codes. The article provides a view of how local and Western rights codes might be combined. A central value in the Dinkas' religious outlook is that of *cieng* which means "to live together, to look after, to put in order, to inhabit, to treat a person well, and to be generous, hospitable, kind, and compassionate toward others" (Deng 1990: 266). *Cieng* provides standards for evaluating social conduct and its role in protecting a good moral order, and the concept is believed to be inherited from the ancestors and from God. It emphasizes such values as "dignity, integrity, honor, and respect for self and others, loyalty and piety, compassion and generosity, and unity and harmony" (Ibid). Referring to the concept of *cieng* among others, Deng asserts that there

are notions of human rights in the Dinka value system. Respect for human dignity is an important norm which guides human relations. However, he notes that there are shortcomings in the value system, most importantly in the inequalities inherent in the lineage system which stratifies individuals based on descent, age, and sex. Furthermore, the Dinka code has a condescending view of non-Dinkas who are considered incapable of sharing the benefits of Dinka cultural values.

With the emergence of nation-states in Africa, Western ideas of democracy and equality, and opportunities for education and employment, led to an internal reassessment of Dinka notions of human rights. While certain traditional ideas remained in effect, new practices and values for promoting human rights were developed by the Dinka themselves. In conclusion Deng suggests that in the Sudan, "a cross-cultural approach to developing new ethical values, which uses coexisting or interactive value systems and practices, would not only form a bridge between cultural contexts but would also enrich the process of universalization in the promotion and protection of human rights" (Ibid: 288-89).

These three views of how to protect the rights of special groups raise more questions than they resolve. However, all positions agree that defending the rights of special groups is a worthy enterprise and merits further investigation. Those arguing for exclusive protection of individual rights do not adequately address the specific codes of indigenous societies and the consistent threat to these societies posed by assimilation, while those arguing for special rights for indigenous societies do not take adequate account of the historic and political formation of these groups, and the way culture can be

manipulated. In my fieldwork in Chiapas, I examined how a group of Tzotzil Catholics understand human rights. As I describe in detail in the following chapter, Tzotziles mix individual rights, communitarian principles, and codes emanating from the Catholic Church. Following their definition, I find that it is most useful to combine Western and non-Western rights codes to protect the human rights of indigenous societies. I think it is necessary both to protect specific cultural rights and traditions, while at the same time checking the power of leaders within indigenous communities who can manipulate culture for their own benefit. The actual process of articulating and legislating differing human rights codes is complex. Currently, in Mexico -- due to the pressure of diverse indigenous organizations, most importantly the Zapatista Army of National Liberation -- constitutional changes are being debated at a national level in order to allow for the autonomy of indigenous groups within the nation-state. In order to sharpen this debate, it is important to define the issues surrounding universal and indigenous human rights codes. In the current debate about indigenous autonomy in Chiapas, women's groups have questioned the uncritical defense of autonomy, pointing out how traditions can validate oppressive patriarchal structures. For example, indigenous women note that the defense of custom should not be used to discriminate against women. In particular, they criticize the "customs" of forced marriage, polygamy, and domestic violence ("El Grito de la luna" 1994).<sup>6</sup>

One key issue often overlooked in the defense of cultural rights is that cultural

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<sup>6</sup> The issue of women's rights and indigenous autonomy is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

processes are inherently about exclusion and marginalization, just as they are about building shared values and norms. Kukathas (1992) claims that this is one reason why individual rather than communal rights should be respected. Kymlicka (1992) argues that communal rights codes should be respected only when they permit the freedom of individual members within the community. An-Na'im (1990) asserts that using local and international rights codes can check the power of local elites. The issue of how to deal with cases such as the caste system and suttee in India; the rights of women in Islamic societies; and African customs of bride wealth, arranged marriages, and child betrothal, among others, remains unresolved.

In the 1980's, scholars working in the field of juridical anthropology began to focus on the issues of history and power in law (Starr and Collier 1989). Rather than examining law and juridical procedures as processes which benefit society in general, this focus on history and power takes as a starting point that juridical institutions benefit the elites in maintaining social control (Collier 1995). Downing notes that human rights are closely linked to issues which are changing, that human rights themselves are also changing. "Recognizing that many human rights issues are ideological expressions of deeper social struggles, class conflicts, organizational and value differences, and economic confrontations within specific social organizations, and that they often become most volatile under conditions of socioeconomic stress, it follows that the logic of human rights is subject to considerable flux." (Downing 1988: 12-13). It is important to place the issues of history and power at the center of human rights. In Chiapas indigenous culture and tradition are manipulated to justify expulsion. Culture cannot be reified; it is

constantly in flux and is intimately linked to power relations. It is necessary to examine how specific cultural traditions are historically created and whom they benefit.

### **United Nations Treaties Protecting Indigenous Rights**

The first international law which took into account indigenous peoples was the 107 Treaty of the International Labor Organization (ILO) of the UN, adopted in 1957. It provided for the "protection and integration of tribal and semi-tribal populations in independent countries." This Covenant was not ratified until 1988 by twenty-seven member states of the UN. It established that States are obligated to develop programs which protect indigenous populations and further "their progressive integration in the life of their respective countries." The Covenant has been criticized for its ethnocentric and integrationist character. Its First Article refers to "tribal or semi-tribal populations" whose "social and economic conditions are at a less advanced stage than the stage reached by other sections of the national community. . ." asserting that development must proceed in a unidirectional manner following the cultural, economic, and political structure of the national society. Furthermore, the Covenant does not recognize the political and economic structures responsible for the oppression of indigenous populations. While it provides for the protection of the physical integrity of indigenous peoples, it is not directed toward preserving their culture nor their customary law. The Indian Council established by the Congress of Indian Movements of South America critiqued the assimilationist view of the Covenant in 1980, eight years before the Covenant was ratified. The Indian Council notes that the ILO treaty:

does not consider in its articles the right to self-determination. It seeks integration and assimilation, with total lack of respect for the dignity of every people and its right to freedom. Its aim is the destruction of our culture, of our traditions and of our languages. . . . It seeks to promote the individual which is contrary to the communal spirit of our peoples (Indian Council, cited in Van Dyke 1985: 83).

In response to criticism, Covenant 107 was revised in 1989 and substituted by the 169 Covenant. However, as of 1994, only four countries had ratified the new Covenant, and Covenant 107 continues to be in force in many countries. Mexico ratified Covenant 169 in 1990. This Covenant specifies that member states must adopt special measures which protect the people, institutions, goods, work, culture and environment of indigenous populations. Article Five notes that states must recognize and protect the social, cultural, religious, and spiritual values and practices of indigenous peoples and take them into account in addressing problems which are presented both collectively and individually. Article Six recognizes the right of indigenous populations to be consulted regarding legislative or administrative measures which will directly affect them. The right to customary law is recognized in Article Eight which notes that indigenous populations "shall have the right to conserve their own customs and institutions, when these are not incompatible with fundamental laws defined by the national juridical system or internationally recognized Human Rights." The right to land and resources is important in the revised Treaty which recognizes the special relationship of indigenous peoples with lands and territories, and establishes the obligation for governments to respect the spiritual, cultural, and collective value of land. Article Fourteen establishes that states must recognize the right of possession for lands which were traditionally

occupied by indigenous peoples.

These two Covenants are presented as being complementary to the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Covenant 169 broadens the individual and universal characteristic of the UN Declaration. It allows for respect of indigenous concepts of rights “when they are not incompatible” with national and international codes. The coexistence of customary and individual rights could effectively limit human rights abuses committed within indigenous communities. In practice, this coexistence presents considerable conflict. For example, can nations with laws respecting private property effectively respect the collective value of land? However, Covenant 169 represents a critical step in the international recognition of indigenous rights. Perhaps what is most problematic is not the Covenant itself, but the fact that it has only been ratified by few nations and that the regulatory laws for Covenant 169 have yet to be written in Mexico, negating its effective implementation.

### **Mexican Legislation and Indigenous Rights**

Mexico's 1917 Constitution, written following the Revolution of 1910 to 1917, is one of the most progressive of its time. It calls for fair elections, fair wages and working conditions, land for *campesinos*, and the right to education, among other reforms. The first 29 Articles, known as Individual Guarantees, provide for the protection of basic human rights, including the right to life, equality, liberty, education, social security, and juridical security. However, there is a great deal of difference in what is promised in the Constitution and what has actually been achieved by the Mexican government. Although

the PRI, which has held power since 1917, continues to employ the rhetoric of a social state. huge gaps remain in providing social services, carrying out land reform, assuring fair elections, and protecting against human rights abuses.<sup>7</sup> The 1917 Constitution contains no specific provisions for Mexico's Indigenous population; at the time it was believed that equality could be reached by granting all citizens, indigenous and *mestizos*, the same rights.<sup>8</sup> As we have seen, in the 1930's, the Mexican government adopted a policy of *indigenismo* which attempted to integrate indigenous peoples into one unified nation-state through assimilation. It was believed that if the Indian was educated and taught to accept the values of the West -- including language, economics, and politics -- the Indian would become part of the modern Mexican nation (Gamio 1960). The positive contributions from the indigenous past, such as art, were to be embraced. Indian and Spanish were combined to form the *mestizo* race -- named "La Raza C3smica" (the Cosmic Race) by Jos3 Vasconcelos in 1925 -- which was seen as the foundation for a new homogeneous national character. The policy of *indigenismo* did not consider Mexico as a

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<sup>7</sup>The commitment to neoliberal reforms and "structural adjustment" as promoted by the World Bank and the International Monetary Foundation, beginning with the administration of President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988) and continuing under the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) and Ernesto Zedillo (1994-present), led to a reduction in public spending on social services, the privatization of important industries, and the repression of the labor movement. These policies have caused and continue to cause a break with the state's revolutionary social pact. A large number of human rights violations, including arbitrary detention, torture, assassination, and political repression, among others have been documented by Amnesty International and other organizations.

<sup>8</sup>Article 27 of the Constitution recognizes the juridical personality of *ejidal* and communal populations and protects their ownership of land. Although the Article does not directly refer to indigenous peoples, this population has been identified with communal and *ejidal* ownership (Cruz Rueda 1994).

pluri-cultural nation, and hence did not grant specific rights to the Indians, nor did it formally recognize their custom and law. For better or worse, the programs promoting *indigenismo* did not effectively integrate indigenous populations into the dominant society nor did they resolve their problems of poverty and political marginalization.

Under the administration of President Salinas de Gortari (1992-1996), constitutional changes were introduced to expedite privatization and the reversal of revolutionary principles. On February 26, 1992 this administration passed reforms to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution which had promised agrarian reform -- the return of lands to *campesinos* -- and which recognized the need to protect *ejido* or communal lands to be worked to provide for autosubsistence. The reform of Article 27 led to several important changes in the structure of the *ejido*. First, it declared the end of agrarian reform; *campesinos* no longer have the option of soliciting the endowment or extension of *ejido* lands. In many areas of Mexico, particularly in Chiapas, large extensions of land are presently in the hands of plantation owners and cattle ranchers. With the reform of Article 27, there is no legal obligation to divide these lands for distribution back to *campesinos*. The second important change in the reform of Article 27 is that it allows for the sale of *ejidal* lands. For the first time, these lands can be bought, sold, conceded, transferred, rented, or mortgaged if the respective *ejidal* commissions agree. This change was made in preparation for the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement and foreign investment in the countryside. Those living in extreme poverty may opt to sell their lands and be left with the alternative of moving to urban areas and looking for work (Nash and Kovic 1996).

Numerous indigenous and *campesino* organizations, in addition to the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, protested the reforms to Article 27 and criticized the fact that they had not been consulted about the change in legislation. Perhaps in response to such mobilization the pluricultural composition of the Mexican nation was formally recognized in 1992, and a paragraph was added to Article Four of the Constitution to respect the rights of indigenous populations:

The Mexican nation has a pluricultural composition originally sustained by the indigenous *pueblos*. The Law will protect and promote the development of their languages, cultures, exercises, customs, resources and specific forms of social organization, and will guarantee their members effective access to the jurisdiction of the state. In the trials and agrarian procedures in which they participate, their practices and juridical customs will be taken into account in the terms which are established by the law.

The article is limited: it begins by recognizing indigenous customs in judicial procedure, but finishes by noting that these will be recognized only in the "terms which are established by the law," referring to positive law, not indigenous conceptions of law (Cruz Rueda 1994). Furthermore, the paragraph in and of itself does not have legal ramifications without a Regulatory Law which explains and develops the constitutional prescriptions (Beller Taboada 1994: 16). In 1996, a full four years after the article was passed, the Regulatory Laws remain to be written. The 1994 uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas has brought the issue of indigenous rights to national and international attention. The EZLN demand that they, as indigenous peoples, "be allowed to organize and govern ourselves with our own autonomy, because we do not want to be subordinated to the will of the national and foreign powers any

longer" and that "justice be administered by the indigenous peoples themselves, according to their own customs and traditions, without the intervention of the illegitimate and corrupt government" (*La Jornada*, February 21, 1994). Beginning in 1994, forums were held throughout Mexico to discuss the issues of indigenous rights and autonomy, one of the most important of which, the National Consultation on Indigenous Rights and Participation, was convened by the Zapatistas themselves in January of 1996. In response to pressure exerted by the Zapatistas and other indigenous organizations, the Mexican government is being forced to consider constitutional changes and new laws which will protect indigenous autonomy. How customary law and juridical law will be articulated remains to be seen.

### **Roman Catholicism and Human Rights**

The roots of human rights in the Roman Catholic tradition extend back to Thomas Aquinas, Augustine, the Bible, and Aristotle. The theological principle essential to human rights is that of human dignity, which is granted not by states but by God who created humans in his image. As children of God, all humans are deserving of respect and have "the right to a dignified life" which extends beyond Western-European notions of rights as individual guarantees. "As a child of God, the human person, in all his/her expanse and dignity, in himself/herself deserves to be respected, for the simple fact that he/she exists. Human beings, as created in the image and likeness of God, have a dignity which has to be recognized, and overall, respected by all. All violation or abuse of human dignity is also committed against God" (First Encounter of Latin American

Pastoral Workers on Human Rights 1994: 20). The concept of human dignity is deeply rooted in Catholic tradition. The Christmas Oration, the earliest collection of prayers in the Western Church, contains a prayer to be spoken during Holy Mass which begins: "God, who has wondrously created (or established) the dignity of human nature (or existence) and has even more wonderfully transformed it. . . ." (Cited in Traer 1991: 35).

It was not until the time of Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) that the Catholic Church as an institution began to explicitly address the issue of human rights. Leo XIII confirmed the importance of human dignity and the corresponding duties to defend these rights. His 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* "affirms as conditions of human dignity the right to a just wage, the right to use one's earned wages to purchase and own property, and the rights to adequate food, clothing and shelter" (Traer 1991: 34). In response to World War II, Pope Pius XII (1939-1958) proclaimed the importance of human dignity and respect for fundamental personal rights, including the right to religious formation, worship God, marry, work, and obtain material goods (Christmas address of 1942, cited in Traer 1991: 34-35). Following the passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, Pope Pius XII recognized the importance of a government which will protect human rights.

The encyclicals of Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) followed the works of previous Popes on human rights, but moved toward defining human dignity in social and structural terms as exemplified by his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1961):

Any human society, if it is to be well ordered and productive, must lay down as a foundation this principle, namely, that every human being is a person, that is, his nature is endowed with intelligence and free will.

Indeed, precisely because he is a person he has rights and obligations flowing directly and simultaneously from his very nature. And as these rights are universal and inviolable so they cannot in any way be surrendered (*Pacem in Terris*, 1963 Encyclical of John XXIII. Cited in Traer 1991).

The encyclical goes on to list rights following the Catholic tradition, including rights related to life and an adequate standard of living, and rights in the area of moral and cultural values -- religious activity, family life, economics (including work, humane working conditions, and a just wage), assembly and association, freedom of movement, and political participation.

John XXIII expressed some reservations about the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but also praised it:

For in it, in most solemn form, the dignity of a human person is acknowledged in all men. And as a consequence there is proclaimed, as a fundamental right, the right of free movement in the search for truth and in the attainment of moral good and of justice, and also the right to a dignified life, while other rights connected with those mentioned are likewise proclaimed (*Pacem in Terris*, cited in Traer p. 38).

In 1965, Bishops from all over the world met in Rome at the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) convened by John XXIII to discuss theological and pastoral issues internal to the Church, such as faith, style of public worship, and the Church's structure. However, issues 'external' to the Church were also addressed, most notably, peace and social justice, and the problem of poverty. The document *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), produced as a result of Vatican II, explicitly addresses human rights and the Church's role. Again, human dignity is emphasized, and specific human rights are recognized as a result of respect for human

life.

According to the documents of Vatican II, the Catholic Church has a concrete role in protecting human rights. The work of the Church must be to make the "human family more truly human" and one way this is to be done is through defending rights. This was presented as doctrine; however, a minority of priests or religious workers took concrete action at this time, namely those who were part of the more progressive sector and who later produced the theory and praxis of liberation theology.

*Gaudium et Spes* also denounces poverty and proclaims the right of all people to have what is necessary to live. Perhaps the strongest statement on this is: "God destined the earth and all that it contains for the use of all people. . . . Furthermore, the right to have a share of earthly goods sufficient for oneself and one's family belongs to everyone" (*Gaudium et Spes*. no. 69. Cited in Traer 1991).

The issue of culture was also addressed in the document in a chapter entitled "The Proper Development of Culture." Cultural pluralism is accepted; there is no division between civilized and uncivilized peoples. The Church must be open to other cultures: ". . . progress begins and develops primarily through the efforts and endowments of the people themselves. Hence, instead of depending solely on outside help, a people should rely chiefly on the full unfolding of their own resources and the cultivation of their own qualities and tradition" (*Gaudium et Spes*. 86.2 cited in Dorr 1992). However, the issue of culture was not fully developed. While the work on culture spoke of a new humanism with a more universal understanding of culture, it failed to tie culture to economic and political factors and did not distinguish between an ideal unification based on respect for

cultural difference, and the actual unification taking place in which wealthy nations exploit the cultures and peoples of poorer nations (Dorr 1992: 174). It was not until the later meeting of the Fourth General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate in Santo Domingo (1992) that the ideas of culture and human rights were more fully developed.

With the advent of liberation theology which followed the agreements of Vatican II, the issue of human rights became central to the work of some components of the Catholic Church. Sectors of the Church in Latin American worked to defend human rights, particularly against the repressive military regimes of Chile, Brazil, Argentina, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. In the process, priests, nuns, and lay workers were threatened, jailed, exiled, and assassinated (Lernoux 1982). At its center, liberation theology "contends that the Christian gospel, the 'good news,' is that God is working - and that God's people should therefore be working - in history to combat and eradicate all forms of oppression and domination, whether social, cultural, political, economic, or spiritual" (Smith 1991: 27). Not only does liberation theology proclaim that oppression and domination are wrong, but that the Church (God's people) should be working to protect human rights, especially in the defense of a dignified life for all human beings. Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia was profoundly influenced by liberation theology; he attended the meetings of Vatican II and Medellín, and incorporated the new view of the poor and liberation into his pastoral work in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

Liberation theology describes a God who takes the side of the poor and oppressed against the rich and powerful. "God is especially close to those who are oppressed: God

hears their cry and resolves to set them free. God is father of all, but most particularly father and defender of those who are oppressed and treated unjustly. Out of love for them, God takes sides, takes *their* side against the repressive measures of all the pharaohs" (Boff and Boff 1987: 50-51). Liberation theologians note that the Catholic Church has traditionally been linked to the established order and linked with ruling classes. It calls for a change in this stance, noting that the Church must act with the poor and be evangelized by the poor -- that it must learn from the poor and change its structure, viewpoints, and practices in order to reach the poor. Just as Jesus Christ himself was poor and chose to live with the poor, the Church must be an instrument of liberation by making a clear commitment to the poor and performing concrete deeds to change the social structure.

Liberation theology calls for structural change to break the cycle of exploitation and domination. Suffering is seen as the result of sin which is understood as the root cause of evil in the world and in history. Poverty, repression, and domination are all expressions of sin. In the liberation view, sin must not remain only at the individual level, but can also be a collective or structural act. Hence, the poor are not blamed for their poverty, but are suffering due to "structural sin" or "institutionalized violence." Gustavo Gutiérrez notes that "In the liberation approach sin is not considered as an individual, private, or merely interior reality. . . .Sin is regarded as a social, historical fact. . . . When it is considered in this way, the collective dimensions of sin are rediscovered." (Gutiérrez 1973: 175, cited in Smith 1991). Similarly, human rights violations must also be understood as part of a repressive social structure. "When human rights are violated

because the game rules governing relations among peoples, races, and social classes demand it, even the most recent social encyclicals agree that the denunciation ought not to be aimed so much at the violations (under pain of disqualifying the weak and oppressed) as against the structures that provoke the systematic commission of these violations" (Segundo 1993: 66).

The meeting of Santo Domingo in 1992 is important for its serious discussion of the role of indigenous peoples and the Catholic Church. Although the meeting did not focus on earlier themes of liberation theology such as alternative political and economic structures, it did directly address the need for a broad definition of human rights, solidarity with the poor, a redistribution of land, and the inclusion of the voices of women and Indians in the Church (Cleary 1993: 18). The documents resulting from the Santo Domingo meeting contain a section titled "Unity and Plurality of Indigenous, African American, and *Mestizo* Cultures." This section presents the goal of culturally-sensitive evangelization which calls for respect of the cultures of indigenous and African American peoples and notes that the Catholic Church should:

Foster an inculturation of the liturgy by appreciating and drawing on those symbols, rituals, and religious expressions of theirs that are compatible with the clear meaning of the faith, while maintaining the value of the universal symbols and in harmony with the Church's general discipline.

Promote within the indigenous peoples their own native cultural values by means of an inculturation of the Church so as to embody God's reign more fully (*The Santo Domingo Final Document* 1992: 248).

The section titled "The Earth: God's Gift" recognizes the importance of land as both an economic resource necessary for the continued existence of indigenous populations and

as a sacred space necessary for community life. The following description of the indigenous view of land demonstrates the Church's recognition of the importance of cultural elements in the protection of indigenous rights:

Within all elements that together form the indigenous community, the land is life, sacred space, and integrating center of community life. They live on the land and with it, and through it they feel in communion with their ancestors and in harmony with God. Hence, the land - their land- is a substantial part of their religious experience and of their own thrust in history. Indigenous people have a natural sense of respect for the land; it is mother earth who nourishes her children and thus, one must care for her, ask her permission to sow, and not mistreat her (Ibid: 172).

Furthermore, the section directs pastoral workers to:

Support all those persons and institutions striving to bring governments and those who own the means of production to create a just and humane agrarian reform and policy, one that can legislate, plan, and provide support for a more just distribution of land and for utilizing it more efficiently.

Support the organization of mediating groups, such as cooperatives, to serve as a means for the defense of human rights, democratic participation, and community education (Ibid: 177).

Not only is the importance of land recognized, but pastoral workers are urged to take concrete actions to support a more just agrarian policy. Here, culture is not presented in isolation. Instead, the structural problem of unequal land distribution is recognized as being detrimental to indigenous culture.

The view of human rights in liberation theology differs significantly from that of Western-European legal codes. The protection of human rights follows the liberating mission of Jesus Christ and extends beyond individual conceptions of rights. God is seen as a God of life, and Jesus says "I came so that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10, 10). Hence, the protection of human rights should include not

only access to material goods, but the ability of human beings to fully develop their potential. Liberation theology calls for a new type of society -- not merely reformism -- which involves both structural change and the transformation of individual human beings.

Although it rejects capitalist development for creating divisions of wealth and the concentration of social power, liberation theology does not spell out exactly how the new society should look. As O'Gorman notes "There is no blueprint for the building of a new society; no map for the journey toward justness. Inspiration from faith and from the reality of daily living are the sign-posts but the way has to be forged as people move along together" (1983: 41, cited in Smith 1991). Liberation theology is clear, however, in its condemnation of such human rights abuses as torture, arbitrary detentions, and assassinations, and in its advocacy of creating a new life based on solidarity and love among all. It stands closer to communitarian principles and duties than to individual rights.

### **Human Rights and the Diocese of San Cristóbal De Las Casas**

For the pastoral workers of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, the experience of living and working among the people of Chiapas led to the recognition of the necessity of promoting and defending the human rights of the poor and indigenous peoples. As discussed in Chapter 3, specific historical events, such as the Indigenous Congress of 1974, the assassinations of *campesinos* in Wolochan in 1980, the arrest of Father Joel Padrón in 1991, among others, increased the Diocese's involvement in the defense of human rights in the state of Chiapas.

In response to the countless human rights abuses reported to pastoral workers, the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" was established by the Diocese in 1989 in order to actively promote and defend the rights of the poor and indigenous in Chiapas. The Center, a non-governmental organization, was founded by Bishop Samuel Ruiz García who was and is the President of the Center. It is named after the first Bishop of Chiapas, Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (1474-1566), who played a critical role in securing the passage of laws to protect indigenous people from exploitation at the hands of colonizers. As a Christian organization, "the Center works to be loyal to the evangelical message of assisting, accompanying, and moving forward all humans in the revindication of their just demands, recognizing in them the presence of the Savior" (Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" 1994).

The Center works in two fundamental areas to protect and promote human rights: the first is in providing legal assistance for those presenting complaints of violations, and the second is in educating communities about human rights. Courses are held in indigenous and *campesino* communities to explain the law and to explore ways of preventing human rights violations within communities. As a result of this work, several local human rights committees have been established in the Diocese. The Human Rights Center does not explicitly address the theoretical question of how to define rights as they relate to indigenous communities. However, in practice the two areas of work use different approaches to human rights. In documenting and denouncing human rights violations, legal codes of the United Nations and the Constitution are closely followed. Publications, press releases, and legal documents refer to these codes and describe which

articles were violated. By contrast, the area of education combines the use of legal codes with indigenous understandings of rights. Classes teach legal definitions of rights and commonly examine the Individual Guarantees of the Mexican Constitution in detail. At the same time, course participants are asked to list what they consider to be their rights, and in turn, members of the Human Rights Center incorporate these views into educational material used for future courses. For the most part, the courses are taught in Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Zoque, and Tojolabal, with the use of translators when necessary.

In order to show how the Center works in denouncing human rights violations, I analyze the way the Center handled a case of expulsion in April of 1994. The case took place in the hamlet of Las Ollas, Chamula where a number of families were threatened with exile. This was one of nine cases of abuse of authority in Chamula documented by the Center for the first six months of 1994; in these nine cases, there were a total of 367 people affected by abuse of authority in Chamula (Archives of Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas").<sup>9</sup>

The problem in Las Ollas began on March 27, 1994 when the Municipal President of Chamula, Domingo López Ruiz, the Assistant *Agente* of Las Ollas, and the municipal police decided to expel various people from the community. Sebastián Cruz López was forced to give up several instruments which had been purchased to form a traditional musical group. Funds to purchase the instruments had been obtained through credit authorized by the National Fund of Solidarity for Enterprise (FONAES). Presumably, the

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<sup>9</sup> In this case, abuse of authority refers to any act in which a public servant causes violence, oppression or insult to a person without legitimate cause or employs offensive aims (Penal Code of Chiapas, Chapter II, Article 1927).

authorities of Chamula were angered that a group of people in Las Ollas had received money from the government for their project, and that this money never entered the hands of the authorities. After his instruments were confiscated, Cruz López was jailed, his house was burned, his belongings were destroyed by the *Agente* and thirteen municipal police, and he was expelled along with his family. This same day, three other families were expelled, and four families were threatened with expulsion if they did not pay a fine of 300 to 380 pesos (this fine represents about twenty to twenty-five full days work in the city). These families had also been involved in the project to create traditional music. In the following testimony -- taken from a letter that members of Las Ollas wrote to the Governor of Chiapas -- the expelled Tzotziles explain the motives for the violence against them.

On March 27 of this year, the municipal president [of Chamula] C. Domingo López Ruíz, called a meeting of all the residents of our hamlet, and in front of everyone, accused us of being Evangelicals, of being Zapatistas, of wanting to sell our hamlet, of belonging to "the organization of Domingo López Angel"<sup>10</sup> (clearly we are not any of these things nor are we tied to anyone, the people of our hamlet can confirm this). Since there is a lot of fear of the municipal authorities, the people of our hamlet accepted this, without arguing, neither in favor, nor against. We were also obligated to give up two accordions, two guitars, and a harp. We refused to do this, and due to our negative response, we were obliged to accompany the municipal police to see the municipal president, who said that we had to give up the instruments where we were. We did it for fear of being beaten; these instruments stayed in the power of the Assistant Rural *Agente*. Later and in the same act, all of those who make up the work group, men and women, were forced to pay a fine of 300 pesos per person, as a way of returning the money we had received from FONAES, . . . under the threat of being expelled, after everything (Letter to Governor

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<sup>10</sup>Domingo López Angel is the leader of CRIACH, an organization of the expelled which fights to protect the rights of the indigenous peoples in Chiapas. This group is described in detail in Chapter 8.

López Moreno, April 5, 1994).

The testimony contained in the letter is interesting for several reasons. First, the people are accused of being Evangelicals, Zapatistas, of wanting to sell their land, and of belonging to CRIACH, "the organization of Domingo López Angel." None of these things are illegal, and none are valid reasons for expulsion. The authorities of Chamula list them as reasons that these people are creating problems and should be forced to give up their instruments. The group of people being threatened does not point out that they legally have the right to freedom of religion and political association. Instead, they claim that these accusations are false. Implicit is the argument that if these things were true, they would represent a legitimate threat to the community cohesion of Chamula.

This case also clearly demonstrates the complete political and economic domination maintained by the Chamulan authorities. One thing mentioned is the fear that they can inspire. The testimony states that because of the fear of authorities, the people of the hamlet accepted the accusations against the group without argument, although they knew the accusations were false. The power held by the *caciques* is also evident in that they are threatened by the fact that a small group of families has received a loan from FONAES to buy instruments to play traditional music. This small cooperative in and of itself represents the possibility for further political and economic mobilization at a local level. This type of organization represents a threat to the monopoly of power held at the municipal level. Other cases have been documented in which Chamulan authorities expel

Tzotziles for participating in any type of local level organization.<sup>11</sup> The families who had taken part in the music cooperative were each required to pay a fine of 300 pesos to the Chamulan authorities. This fine represents a punishment for their action, but is also a way of returning all government funds to the hands of the municipal president.

The threats of expulsion from Las Ollas show that there are commonly political and economic motives behind the expulsions. The families who were fined, jailed, and threatened, are by their own testimony, traditionalists. They are neither converts to Catholicism nor to Protestantism. Nonetheless, they represent a threat to the monopoly on power at the center of Chamula, and hence were labeled Evangelicals. Labeling all political and economic dissidents as "Evangelicals" is a common tactic of the Chamulan authorities. Ironically, this label serves to legitimize expulsion since it is commonly accepted -- mostly by government officials as well as by some journalists and academics -- that Protestants threaten indigenous tradition. Furthermore, after the threats were lodged against the families in the musical cooperative, another man was jailed for 72 hours for verbally opposing the expulsion of the other families. This man paid a fine of 430 pesos (around thirty full days work) in order to be released, nonetheless, an order calling for his expulsion was written up by the authorities. The jailing of this man shows the level to which fear is propagated in Chamula, and the risk involved in going against the power of the *caciques*.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, in March of 1995, a group of women who work as traditional midwives and are involved with the cooperative J'Pas Joloviletic were threatened with expulsion from Bautista Chico and Tres Cruces, Chamula (Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" 1995e).

How did the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" intervene in the case? When the families threatened with expulsion first arrived at the Center, their testimony was recorded and relevant documents were copied. The lawyers working at the Center met to discuss the case. They proposed preparing an *amparo* (a legal document granting protection to someone under threat, similar to a restraining order) which would prevent the expulsion from taking place. If the *amparo* was accepted, it would mean that the families could return to their homes in Las Ollas. Under the terms of the *amparo*, if threats against the families continued, the state would be obligated to prevent their expulsion.

First the conditions, terms, and possible repercussions of the *amparo* had to be carefully explained to those threatened with expulsion. The group took time to discuss it among themselves and later agreed that it would be a good idea. The lawyers wrote up the legal documents; the *amparo* demanded protection offered by federal authorities for the families against the Municipal President of Chamula, the Assistant *Agente*, and the municipal police. The documents referred to the Mexican Constitution in listing specific rights which were violated in the threat of expulsion. After the *amparos* were read to the group from Las Ollas and they agreed to it, all of those threatened had to sign each page of the document. In total, there were six *amparos*, each protecting one family, a total of thirty-four people. I was in the Human Rights office when the men, women, and children from Las Ollas came to sign the documents. Since many did not know how to read or write, their fingerprints were placed on the documents, and it took hours to complete the process. Next the papers were sent to the Attorney of Justice in the capital of Chiapas,

Tuxtla Gutiérrez. The judge requested that the people from Las Ollas present themselves in his office to verify that they had agreed to *amparo*. The official reason given for this request was that they wanted to verify the fingerprints being that there were very few signatures. It was unclear if the request was simply a way to slow down the entire procedure since fingerprints are commonly accepted in lieu of signatures. However, the Center organized a trip to take the families to Tuxtla Gutiérrez; all expenses were to be paid by the Center. None of the women had ever been to the capital. I accompanied the lawyer from the Center and the women on this trip. When we arrived at the office of the Attorney of Justice, another problem arose. The women had brought their birth certificates, but did not have any form of photo identification. The birth certificates were not accepted on their own. We walked outside and entered a photo shop where everyone had their picture taken. Next, we entered another government office which, after lengthy explanations and a long wait, issued photo identifications to all the women. We returned to the office of the Attorney for Justice, showed the identifications, papers were signed and stamped, and finally, the *amparo* was accepted for consideration.

The next stumbling block was that some of those threatened with expulsion had to present themselves in the same office in Tuxtla Gutiérrez to serve as witnesses to the events described in the *amparo*. Questions were written beforehand by the lawyers at the Human Rights Center. Since several of the witnesses did not speak Spanish, the Center prepared for an interpreter to accompany them. Although the state is legally required to offer a competent translator, one is often not available. The testimony of the witnesses was successfully presented, and the next step was to wait. Finally, in late June -- three

months after the victims had arrived in the Human Rights Center -- the *amparo* was formally granted. This was the first time that any *amparo* had been successfully implemented against the *caciques* of Chamula. The families returned to Las Ollas a few months later, but were fearful that repression against them might continue. However, in this case, the *amparo* served its purpose; the families were allowed to live in peace in the community.

This case most strongly demonstrates the difficulties of working within the legal system of Chiapas in order to protect human rights. Without the legal assistance and financial backing of the Center for Human Rights, it would have been impossible for the group from Las Ollas to seek legal protection. They did not have money to hire a lawyer, nor the resources to make several trips to Tuxtla Gutiérrez to present the documents. Also interesting in this case is the fact that the people threatened with exile from Las Ollas argued that they were not Evangelicals, Zapatistas, or members of CRIACH. They defend that they are "not with anyone nor tied to anyone," implying that they do not present a threat to the Chamulan *caciques*. However, they were willing to file the necessary legal documents so that they could be allowed to return to their homes. Several months after the case of Las Ollas, another group of families from Chamula arrived in the Center. They had been threatened with expulsion because they were Catholic. They explained that they did not want to return to Chamula because they were afraid that they might be killed and mentioned a case in which three exiled Evangelicals were killed when they returned to their homes. This second group, unlike the group from Las Ollas, was aware that they would continue to be prosecuted for their religion, and they did not want

to take any risks. Although the *amparo* officially offers legal protection to the group from Las Ollas, it is predicated upon the political will of government authorities to carry out the order to protect the families. The people threatened with expulsion and the workers at the Human Rights Center are aware of the possible dangers for those who return to Chamula. Nonetheless, legal tactics are used in an attempt to protect human rights. Human rights violations are described in juridical terms following the Mexican Constitution and the UN Declaration of Human Rights.

By contrast, the Center's area of education offers a different approach to human rights which considers both indigenous and legal views. I analyze the *memorias* (literally, memories, or reports of the discussion) from thirteen courses given by the Human Rights Center from 1989 to 1991 in various communities of the Diocese. I also observed five additional courses from 1993-1995. Analysis of these courses provides a view of how the indigenous peoples of Chiapas understand their rights as well as of the way human rights are presented by the Catholic Church of the Diocese.

The courses commonly begin with the question "Why do we have rights?" The answers given in distinct communities are similar; people recognize that rights are given by God, not by states. The following list is a summary of the most common responses to this question.

- Because we are human beings.
- Because we are created in the image of God.
- Because we are free people capable of loving and thinking.
- Because we are sons and daughters of God.
- Because God Our Father sent his son to teach us to fight.
- Because Jesus taught us to say the truth and taught us to defend our human rights. God formed us and made us so that all could eat.

- Because God formed the world and made all free so that the great (or powerful) don't take advantage of the small.

The last three responses indicate that not only do rights come from God, but that it is necessary to fight to defend one's rights.

The course organizers ask participants to discuss problems that exist at three different levels: that of family, community, and municipality. Problems commonly mentioned at the level of the family include inequality between men and women, lack of respect for children, illness, poverty, and lack of work. At the community level, a lack of teachers, medical attention, roads, potable water, and organization are described. At the municipal level, divisions, corrupt authorities, and lack of markets for products are discussed. Just as problems exist at all three levels, rights also exist at different levels. In one course, the differences between the rights of people (or individuals) and communities were articulated. It was noted that as people:

We have the right to live, be equal, be free, work, be paid a just salary, enjoy the fruits of our work, be doctors or professionals, eat, talk, think, sleep, and rest; have dignity, education, a home; marry freely and have the children that we want; have religion; have a car and go up in a plane; go to other countries; advise others; live in the country or city; enjoy protection of the law, justice; organize in our homes; travel in the street, and work for the betterment of our family.

As a community, we have the right to have land, request land; grow fruit trees; have cattle; form collectives; have sports facilities, roads, electricity, potable water, health clinics, schools; buy goods cheaply; receive a just price for our harvest; cooperate in the community; speak our own language; receive respect for our culture; have fiestas in the community; organize ourselves; participate in solving problems in the municipality; elect our authorities; hold demonstrations; get rid of our municipal president if he doesn't work; have a political opinion, and occupy political positions.

These two lists of "rights" begin with what are commonly defined as rights: the right to life, equality, freedom, work, a just salary, freedom of religion, political participation, and education. The right to "speak our own language, receive respect for our culture, and have fiestas in the community" are included as rights which are specific to indigenous communities. However, the lists go well-beyond traditional definitions of rights; most notable is the inclusion of the "right" to "be doctors or professionals," and to "have a car and go up in a plane," which imply a keen awareness of the existing inequality between *mestizos* and Indians. According to course participants, indigenous people have the right to do these things, just as *mestizos* do.

Most of the courses contained a time to examine what the Bible says about human rights. The most common readings chosen for biblical reflection are Exodus 22, 22-27; Isaiah 10, 1-4; Amos 5, 10-15; James 5, 1-6, and I John, 3, 1-2.<sup>12</sup> After the presentation of a reading, people work in groups to discuss its meaning in their own lives, a method which has been used in Christian Base Communities in Latin America as part of the praxis of liberation theology. An analysis of the discussion of biblical readings reveals several common themes.

One important theme is that of solidarity and helping others as being part of rights. In discussing Matthew 25, 34-45, where Jesus describes the importance of helping the needy in order to serve God, one group notes:

It speaks to us of how God will bless our spirit of service with the most

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<sup>12</sup>Other biblical readings which were discussed include: Deuteronomy 24, 12-15; Proverbs 6, 3; Isaiah 25,6; Matthew 25, 34-45; Lucas 3, 1-14, and John 3, 27; 15, 1-6, and 19, 11.

needy because in sharing with them, God makes us, and He will recompense us in the heavenly realm. On the other hand, those who don't will be condemned.

Another common theme is that injustice is wrong and goes against the will of God. In discussing a reading from Isaiah, another group notes that it

Tells us that there shouldn't be unjust laws that oppress the poor, the people. God made an announcement to the powerful who organize the oppression and injustice.

In contrast to injustice, it is the will of God that all share in the riches of the world. One group presented this summary after discussing several readings:

The Word of God speaks of justice, equality and human rights. Also, God gives his word to the poor because we are those that live in a world full of corruption. He says that the rich must not be selfish and only see for their own good, but that they must become conscious of the needs of those who don't have things. Currently, we see that there are many who worship the 'god of money' and for this God makes war, killing innocents, and increasing poverty.

The Word of God hinders the selfish and the powerful because it goes against their plan of making wealth. Nonetheless, the Word of God teaches us to open our eyes, because it shows us the reality and asks us to unite forces to change the world by making it better.

Another theme which is discussed in all of the courses is the history of the struggle for the protection of human rights. The Revolutions of France, the United States, Russia, and Mexico, as well as the laws which resulted, are discussed. The notion of equality among all human beings in Mexican law is emphasized; on paper, rich and poor, men and women, Indians and *mestizos* are equal. With regard to Mexican law, course participants focus on the fact that they are not respected in practice. This is described both at a national level, where the indigenous are not granted the same rights as *mestizos*,

and within indigenous communities, where the rights of women are not respected. In other words it is not enough to know one's rights; people must work to defend them. For example, in concluding the discussion of laws, one group noted:

For us in front of our oppressors, we didn't value our dignity and accepted what was done to us and we walked not for our own good, not to free ourselves of that which our ancestors worked for. The people don't realize what rights they have and continue to accept things as they are. In knowing our rights we have the obligation to demand that others respect them so that we can change society.

Ironically, very few of the courses explicitly mentioned the relation between human rights and culture, although the topic was sometimes referred to in other discussions. This omission is striking in a human rights center which focuses its work on indigenous communities. Perhaps due to the overwhelming number of human rights violations and extreme poverty present in indigenous communities, the defense of cultural rights does not seem to be so urgent. One course did, however, directly deal with the issue of culture. A group from Comitán lamented the loss of traditional customs:

Things are no longer done as our ancestors did, there are no *fiestas* since the Word of God arrived, the teachers introduce other ideas, the [Protestant] sects cause disorganization, we are losing our customs. We are losing the Catholic religion, we are losing our form of dress and traditional medicine, we don't play tambour, the people are looking for other work.

Here, the conflict between Christianity (including both Catholicism and Protestantism) and indigenous tradition is evident. With sadness people note that when the "Word of God" arrived in their community, people stopped having traditional *fiestas*.

In contrast, a group from Huixtán noted that custom is problematic in the community and that traditional festivals have been modified:

We have gotten rid of the customs that we used to be obligated to carry out. Before the fiestas were obligatory, it was custom to drink alcohol, and those who had to pay for the *cargo* [burden] of the *fiesta* were poor. Thank God that now we continue with *fiestas*, but not as before, because that caused many people to be drunk and even die. When people drink they begin to fight in front of church with yelling. For the fiesta we name those in charge who look for money and give cooperation for sweets and cookies.

In sum, the courses stress that rights come from God and from laws. The idea that rights are given to all as "children of God" is powerful. It illustrates that the current political and economic system of Chiapas goes against God's will. Following this reflection is another powerful idea, that people must organize to defend their rights. At the end of each course, agreements are reached and commitments are made. The most common is that the participants of the course will share their knowledge with other members of their communities. They also agree to put in practice what was learned by "following the Word of God" and working in their families and communities to see that rights are respected. As the participants in one course concluded:

[We agree] to continue organizing ourselves and to have more communication; to unite so that we are not divided; to have hope for the future; to return to organize and to correct our errors and to be more conscientious; to put in practice [what we have learned] and to share with other communities.

The courses have a strong impact on the participants; as a result of classes, local human rights committees are created, demands are sent to government officials, and in some cases, acts of political protest are planned. Given the action-oriented focus of the courses, it is not surprising that government officials and the economic elite have accused Bishop Samuel Ruiz and the pastoral workers in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las

Casas of instigating the armed uprising of the National Zapatista Liberation Army. The Bishop has firmly responded that neither he nor other pastoral workers ever supported the use of violence. However, he added that if he had not helped to raise the consciousness of indigenous people about their rights in his thirty-four years as Bishop of the Diocese, that he had not effectively carried out his work.

### **Conclusion**

In order to serve its clients, the Human Rights Center combines definitions of human rights based on legal codes, Catholic tradition, and indigenous understandings. The use of these different conceptions of human rights comes out of praxis more than theory; members of the Center do not sit around debating the relative merits of communitarianism and individualism, or reading John Rawls. For practical reasons, legal codes are followed in the presentation of juridical denunciations of human rights violations. The Mexican Constitution and international rights codes (both focused on the protection of individual rights) are taught in indigenous communities so that people will be aware of their legal rights before the state. However, a communal notion of human rights along with a Catholic view of rights is also evident in courses. It is believed that people have rights because they are "created in the image of God" and that injustice and poverty go against the will of God. Communal rights and the importance of sharing goods and knowledge are stressed. Participants leave courses with the desire to unite in their communities and to demand that their rights be respected. Distinct notions of human rights -- including those from indigenous communities, from Catholic doctrine,

and from legal codes -- are not treated as competing notions but rather as coexisting definitions of rights, each with its own utility.

Similarly, the Mayas of Chiapas who have been exiled from their native communities combine views of human rights based on legal codes, religious doctrine, and indigenous views. They appeal to the Mexican Constitution and international human rights groups in presenting juridical complaints in an attempt to return to their native lands. At the same time, they decry the violation of community norms of respect and the lack of Christian brotherly love and they explore solutions to poverty and landlessness. The following two chapters return to the local view of Guadalupe in order to analyze how one community of Tzotzil Indians describe human rights and the act of expulsion.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### RESPECT AND EQUALITY: TZOTZIL UNDERSTANDINGS OF HUMAN RIGHTS

A man with a good heart knows how to speak well. He knows how to respect his companions and will set a good example. He will take his *cargo* [work on behalf of the community]. He knows how to unite with others. He will work well. Those who are content are those who know how to work together (Rafael).

All people, *Ladinos*, Chamulans, Oxchuqueros, those from Chenalho', Mitontic, and Tenejapa, all people are from the same blood of Christ. All humans are equal. Young and old. Everyone (Fernando).

The quote above from Rafael, a prayer leader in Guadalupe, expresses the importance of creating and maintaining a community in which all are united. This is based in a local indigenous conception of rights and is predicated upon forming a community in which each member has rights and duties toward other members. The second quote, from Fernando, a Catholic of Guadalupe, has to do with equality; he lists the groups of people who are familiar to him, and although they have different traditions, he states that all are equal. This universalizing notion of equality is based on Catholic principals, "all people are from the same blood of Christ." Conceptions of human rights in Guadalupe combine notions of communal rights and duties in which community members must respect others, as well as notions of equality. The ideas mix doctrine emanating from the Catholic Church, legal codes, and traditional indigenous views.

Some indigenous leaders and scholars have argued that communal values are paramount to the defense of indigenous human rights, since individual identity exists only within the context of the group and through commitment to community sharing.

Following this commitment, ". . . indigenous peoples believe that their communities have the right to determine their own destiny, government, and modes of advancing human dignity, determining which may overlap with international human rights in some respects but possibly deviate in others" (Kelsay and Twiss 1994: 55). In Guadalupe, as has been noted for other indigenous communities, there is a deep commitment to solidarity; rights are commonly expressed in terms of the survival of the group rather than of individuals. However, individual rights are also recognized. Hence, in Guadalupe definitions of human rights based on communitarian values and individual values coexist, albeit with some conflict. In this Chapter, I explain and analyze the view of human rights according to the Catholics of Guadalupe. I start with the importance they place on community, examine their response to the act of expulsion, and finally, discuss their universalizing notion of equality.

### **Respect for God and Others: Working in the Context of Community**

Asking about the indigenous understanding of human rights was difficult; in Tzotzil, there is no word which directly translates as rights as they are understood in a Western-European tradition. Rights are understood as responsibilities rather than entitlements. For example, in an interview in a Tzotzil community that had recently suffered numerous human rights violations related to land conflict, we asked an elder what "right" the *campesino* had to land. He responded, "The *campesino* has the right to care for the land" and then he proceeded to talk of the importance of not burning the land nor using fertilizer. "Caring for the land" was described as being important because

people cannot live without the food the land provides. The land is portrayed as a mother who provides milk to her children, and the children in turn must care for their mother. Similarly in a course given by the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" when *campesinos* were asked what right they had to food, they replied "We as children of God, have the right to share the little food that we have with the people who need it most." In Guadalupe, I found that rights were understood in the context of community where each member has *reciprocal* responsibilities toward others, just as one has responsibilities toward the earth which gives life. This idea of rights as responsibilities is based in the indigenous tradition of community and the commitment to solidarity. However, it is also congruent with the Catholic social doctrine of human rights which also sets up a correspondence between rights and duties. According to this doctrine, the respect for human dignity, and therefore human rights, is social and can only occur within a community of morally responsible citizens.<sup>1</sup> For example, a report written by a commission of Mexican Bishops after a visit to Chiapas emphasizes the importance of respect and community:

The human person and groups do not exist in isolation, but have their full identity in relation with God and others. Each of us, whilst members of unparalleled humanity, appreciate and respect the diversity between the people and groups oriented toward the good of society ("Caminos hacia la paz y la reconciliación," Committee of Bishops of the Mexican Episcopate, April 18, 1997).

In Guadalupe, the notion of respect is central to understanding rights. The notion of respect has two points of reference. One is historical; the Tzotziles, like other

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<sup>1</sup>See especially the encyclical of Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (1963), cited in Hollenbach 1979: 65.

indigenous peoples of Latin America, have not been respected by the dominant culture for over 500 years. Indigenous peoples have been excluded from political and economic power. The second is that all people are worthy of respect because they have dignity as human beings.<sup>2</sup> For the indigenous peoples, respect is always linked to personal dignity; the Zapatistas articulate this connection in demanding peace with justice and dignity. The term for respect in Tzotzil, *p'iso' taj muc*, translates as regarding (or measuring) someone as a *persona grande* (mature person, not a child) or *p'iso' taj vinik*. Hence, treating someone with respect means granting them dignity as a person.

Respect has meaning within the context of a community where each member carries out mutual responsibilities toward other members. Most importantly, treating someone with respect means not fighting, listening carefully to them and understanding them. Men and women in Guadalupe told me that to respect others involves listening, feeling, and understanding. In Tzotzil, the verb *a'iel* means to listen, to feel, and to understand. Evaluation of behavior is commonly described in terms of the state of someone's heart; a man or woman with a good heart knows how to respect others. It is important to work with one united heart and take into account other people in one's actions.

Respect starts at the level of the family. A man who respects his family works in

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<sup>2</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, the concept of human dignity is also deeply rooted in Catholic tradition. As children of God, all humans have dignity and the right to a dignified life because they are children of God. This similarity between Tzotzil and Catholic notions of rights does not necessarily indicate that the Indians learned this idea from the Catholic Church. In the case of Guadalupe, the notion of respect most likely originated in the indigenous tradition.

cooperation with his wife, provides food and other necessities for his wife and children, does not fight with or beat his wife, and will not leave his wife for another woman.

Likewise, a wife who respects her family works in cooperation with her husband to support her children and does not fight. Parents with respect know how to counsel their children and do not hit them. Respecting people in the community directly follows the model of respect in the family. Agustin, a catechist, told me, "It is custom to respect elders and children. One must respect each elder as if they are your father or mother, and each child as if they are your son or daughter." Community members who respect others work in cooperation, speak well, and share what they have with those who have less.

One concrete aspect of respect is the obligation to share what one has with the most needy. This most commonly involves sharing food, lending money, and assisting other families in building their homes.<sup>3</sup> Juan, a catechist, explained:

A good man will help others. They will share their maize, beans and clothing with others. They will not bother others, will not hit anyone.

However, there are limits to this ethic of sharing; a male is expected to provide for his family first, and then to give to others. In this sense, Juan lamented that sometimes people do not have enough for their families so that they cannot share with others. "Here there is nothing. We are poor. Some days there is no maize, one cannot share." Agustin, explained the importance of helping elders and single women. However, he emphasized that people would only give what they had available, they would take care of their own families first:

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<sup>3</sup>In Chapter 7, networks in which families share material goods, work, and moral support are described in detail.

Here we live in community. We are going to help out the elders when we have something to give them. If we don't have anything, we won't give to them. We also help out the divorced women, like Martha, my sister-in-law. We will share our food with her once in a while. We will also share advice about working. We are calm here, we are working well.

Juana, recounted that when she arrived in Guadalupe as a widow with three small children, Mateo, the founding catechist, shared his food with her. "Mateo was a good person, he had a very good heart. He did not get sad when he didn't have his food, or his maize. He shared his coffee, maize, and beans with others."

In many respects, each member of the community must work toward maintenance of the survival of the community itself, and this should override individual interests. In some cases, the rights of the community may even override individual rights. One problem discussed in the community was that of water. It was believed that the right to water should be equally shared by all community members. Since water is scarce, no one family should use more than their share and thereby put other families at risk. None of the homes have piped water; rather there are several tanks in Guadalupe, and every day the women and children must walk to the tank to fill their water jugs, carrying them back to their homes. Two families who live directly below the tank have used a hose to pipe out some water to their land for the cultivation of strawberries which are sold as a cash crop. Other families saw this as problematic and described it as not respecting the community since the water used for strawberries was not essential to the survival of the family. As Cristóbal, a prayer leader of the community, said, "The water is scarce and it is for everyone. We don't think that anyone should waste the water here." Resources of the community are seen as belonging equally to all, and each family should have access to

what is needed. Although there are no legal sanctions for using the water for cash crops, the action is criticized because resources are scarce.

The notion of respect for others within the community is similarly expressed by Tzeltales of Amatenango del Valle as described by June Nash (1967). She notes that individual behavior is evaluated by a moral code. A good man has "only one heart" and takes others into account in his actions. A man with a good heart is commonly described as one who knows how to "speak well." The idea of speaking well is important in other Tzotzil communities. Collier (1973) notes that men who speak well have more prestige; they know prayers for rituals, and are also able to resolve conflicts between community members. Similarly in Chamula, great importance is given to ritual speech, and those who can use it well are highly respected (Gossen 1974). In Guadalupe, speaking well refers to the ability to negotiate conflict rather than fighting. It is also used to refer to those who know the Word of God and are good at preaching.

Respect in the community of Guadalupe is also based in their shared faith. Working toward defending human rights means respecting God and working together to form a religious community.

If we have a good heart, we will work together to make a community of God. We will sing and celebrate the Word of God. Our hearts will be happy (Sebastian).

Some cited Jesus' words in the Bible, "Love thy neighbor as I have loved you" to explain what respecting God means. Love for God is expressed through helping those in need, working together peacefully, and uniting in community to understand the Word of God:

People with a good heart love God, love their neighbor, love all. We will

be united, we will work together, we will not be fighting (Lucas).

The image of "working together" evoked by both Sebastian and Lucas is commonly used to describe serving God. In some cases, the term "working together" is symbolic, representing the need to form a community where people treat one another with respect. In other cases, working together is literal; those who respect others will take their *cargo* (duty or responsibility), helping out in communal projects such as the construction of roads, schools, or chapels. In the time I conducted fieldwork in Guadalupe, I observed the construction of two local chapels. The first was in May of 1995, as described in Chapter 2, when the people gathered money to buy supplies to rebuild their chapel. For eight months, collections were taken up during religious celebrations amounting to over 2,000 pesos. Although all of the Catholic families made a contribution, the catechists were expected to give more money than the others. In this and other religious-based activities, the catechists take on a larger *cargo* to serve their community. By May there was enough money to begin building, and people were in a hurry to finish the project before the rains started. For an entire week the Catholic men gathered to build the chapel, working over nine hours a day, and giving up wage-earning jobs in the city. Once finished and painted, the new chapel was nicer than the homes of the majority of the local Catholics. All of the men who regularly attend religious celebrations in Guadalupe had worked to build the chapel and all families contributed money. However, some had worked during the week and only contributed labor in the afternoon and weekend. This was accepted, but criticized because it was expected that all men would give up their waged work in order to assist the construction. The problems

involved in getting all of the families of the community to contribute equally to the chapel's construction are just one example of how the idealized notion of respect breaks down in practice. Disagreements and quarrels led to temporary divisions among the Catholics; however, members of the community continued to work together.

When I returned to the community in June of 1996, I found people building a new chapel on another piece of land. I learned that Agustin, the catechist who owned the land where the previous chapel had been built, had decided he was now a Presbyterian and wanted to use the property for worship in this alternative way. Agustin's decision was, of course, strongly criticized by other members of the community, mostly for not following a community decision about the land and the chapel. According to the remaining catechists and prayer leaders, Agustin had previously declared that although the land legally belonged to him, it would remain in the hands of the Catholic community and the chapel belonged to all. The fact that he changed his mind was viewed as violating an important community agreement. Some told me that Agustin was putting his own individual interests before those of the community. He was accused of wanting to be a Presbyterian pastor since they are provided with a small salary from their parish, while Catholic catechists do not receive any monetary benefits for their work. Two families converted to Protestantism along with Agustin, but the rest remained Catholic. In fact, three other Catholic families who had stopped attending service in the community re-joined once Agustin converted.

With the aid of the Diocese, the Catholics bought another piece of land and materials to build a new chapel, this time out of concrete which took an entire month.

Ten male heads of households gave up any wage labor for the duration of the construction in order to work on the chapel. I spoke to them and their families, asking how they were surviving. They explained that the most important thing at the moment was the construction of the church, but lamented that they had no money. One family with five young children told me that they had only *tortillas* to eat; they did not have money to buy beans. Other male heads of household worked intermittently in the city to earn money, and helped with the chapel a few days a week. Again, this was accepted, but criticized. When it was time to mix and pour cement, women and children gathered to carry water up the hill to the chapel.

The new chapel is three times as big and better built than any of the homes in Guadalupe. Why is it that the people gave up weeks of wage labor and sacrificed daily necessities in order to build it? Men and women were excited and proud to have a new chapel; they informed me that Bishop Samuel Ruiz García had been invited to inaugurate it and would perform baptisms and first communions on the same date. A festival was planned to celebrate the completion of the project. The chapel itself represents more than a place of worship; it is the central meeting place of the Catholics of Guadalupe and the chief arena for what they consider their community. Religion is central to social cohesion. It sets guidelines for behavior, creates social ties between individuals, and provides an idiom through which daily life is understood. Human rights are embedded in this idiom; respecting others means that one is following the Word of God.

Carrying out mutual obligations to God and one's neighbor serves to establish and maintain community. In this sense respecting others signifies a respect for collective

rights shared by all members of the community. However, giving to the needy, working on communal projects, and "working well" with one's neighbor are all voluntary actions; they are not held in place by law but by strong moral sanctions. People who do not comply are criticized and in the case of a serious infringement of collective rights, the catechists and prayer leaders will make a visit to the home of the transgressing family to try to "change their hearts." In local conflicts, the religious leaders of Guadalupe are those who impose human rights. In extreme cases, people who do not comply with local norms of "respect" are excluded from the symbolic and geographic community, and may voluntarily decide to move elsewhere. One such case was that of Mateo, the founding catechist. When people lost confidence in him because he took a "second wife" and could not acquire the legal documents for the land of Guadalupe, he was rejected by the community and moved elsewhere. Another man left voluntarily in 1994 because, as he explained to me, "They scolded me all the time because I drank a lot." Through strong moral sanctions, not law, the Catholics of Guadalupe maintain community cohesion. In this regard, the ideology of respect does not conflict with national or international human rights codes, but rather is complementary.

One communal action which is sanctioned for noncompliance by a fine is the construction of roads, schools, and other public works in the community. For these projects, the government commonly provides the necessary materials and the community provides the labor. Agreements are made among Catholics and Protestants in Guadalupe about how the labor will be divided up, and each family must make a contribution. Those who do not take their turn in working will have to pay a fine to the local *Agente*. The

construction of public buildings with communal labor is common in indigenous communities in Chiapas. It allows the government to save public funds at the same time that it makes a show of respecting indigenous tradition. The custom of *tequio* -- a ritualized form of mutual aid in which one family or community helps one another through shared labor -- exists among numerous indigenous groups in Mexico including the Chinatecos, Tarahumaras, Truquis, and Yaquis, among others (Díaz Gómez 1988). The custom of *tequio* varies by indigenous group and geographic region. It includes such tasks as the construction of community buildings, roads, and bridges; clearing communal lands; or building homes. To the extent that the aid is mutual and voluntary, the custom does not conflict with national or international human rights provisions. The Constitution of the State of Oaxaca was revised in 1991 to recognize *tequio* as "Voluntary collaboration in unpaid collective labor for the benefit of the community to which people belong, especially in the case of catastrophes, earthquakes, floods, fires, etc., which implicates a voluntary and moral solidarity" (Article 24, Part IV, Constitution of Oaxaca, cited in Beller Taboada 1994:83). In Guadalupe, people describe their shared labor for the construction of the chapels in the same idiom as they describe the building of schools and roads. Although public buildings serve the community, they remain federal property, and in the long run, the government saves funds by relying on communal labor.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Similarly, in Zaire, the practice of communal labor with a supposedly traditional basis has been defended by the government, while in reality the practice dates to forced labor under the colonial period (Donnelly 1984).

### **Expulsion and Rights: the View from Guadalupe.**

As noted in Chapter 4, the act of expulsion violates both national and international human rights codes. In the interviews I conducted with the Catholics of Guadalupe, I asked how they understood the act of expulsion. Why had they been expelled? Did they see expulsion as a human rights violation? Were the authorities of Chamula justified in expelling them? In all cases expulsion was described as being wrong, and the authorities were strongly criticized for their actions. While the authorities of Chamula accused the converts of not respecting local custom and community cohesion, those exiled accused the authorities of lacking the respect on which they based their notion of community. The leaders of Chamula are accused of not attempting to understand people; instead, it is said that they are quick to fight and to throw people in jail. In relation to exile, the *caciques* are accused of not respecting people with religion. According to the people of Guadalupe, they were not lacking any respect in listening to the Word of God. Instead, in converting to Catholicism they had "changed their hearts," stopped drinking, and learned that one has to love others, as the Bible says. The authorities, rather than respecting their belief in Roman Catholicism, told them that they had to leave their homes if they were to continue learning the Word of God. Members of Guadalupe see this as wrong. Emiliano explained that he was jailed for having religion. He said, "We weren't going to rob anyone or do anything bad." The expelled Catholics feel that while they were respecting others, the authorities did not respect them in return, violating the norm of reciprocal obligations in community. From the point of view of the residents of Guadalupe, the traditionalists in Chamula do not have religion, and the traditionalists are negatively

called "people without religion." However, as anthropologists have pointed out, the traditionalists in fact have complex religious beliefs. Religion has tremendous significance in structuring daily life; they worship God, participate in festivals devoted to feeding God and the saints, and grant authority to the customs of their ancestors. The view of the expelled is exclusive -- only Christians (be they Roman Catholics or Protestants) "have religion" and follow the Word of God. The experience of exile has made the Roman Catholics of Guadalupe hostile toward the religious beliefs of traditionalists. In short, the Roman Catholics do not "respect" the religion of the traditionalists.

Manuela repeated what I had heard in other interviews: the authorities in Chamula do not have good hearts. I asked her why and she explained:

The authorities do not like the Word of God. They don't believe in God. Our Lord Jesus Christ doesn't want people to fight. The authorities speak badly. They don't respect the people. They speak with bad words. They rob and bother their companions. They don't listen to others. Some go and complain, and then we are sent to jail. They don't try to fix things. They don't talk. If they were good authorities, they would ask questions, talk about the problem, and then fix it.

In short, a good authority would resolve problems by constructing community cohesion, by working things out instead of sending people to jail and expelling them. "Speaking with bad words" is understood as fighting rather than looking for reconciliation.

When Agustin and I were talking about the problem of expulsion, he told me the following story to explain how it all began:

In 1965 the problem began in Chamula in the hamlet of Sac'sum near Tzontehuitz. They burned live people. A man named Mateo who now works in the Tzotzil-language radio station of PRODESCH [a government

office] was not burned, but his entire family was burned. He was the only one who survived. The throats of two children were cut. One woman who was 18 years old tried to escape, and she was thrown into the *temescal* [a small room used for steam baths] with two children. They threw daggers inside. One child who was ten didn't die, and he reported that it was Don Salvador who had attempted to burn him. This burning was done because people had religion. The authorities arrived and took the child to the town center of Chamula for interrogation. The child was very badly wounded. They asked him, "What did they do?" And the child responded that Don Salvador had burned them all. But they said that the child was telling lies. They asked him three times, but they didn't want to believe him. The child died because of his wounds. What happened is that the people didn't want Catholics in their community. All the community said that they did not want people with other religions, they said "We are of the religion of before, we respect the cross, we speak to the caves. The Catholics are not going to respect us, they neither pray in caves, nor burn incense or candles. They don't use *cuaranderos*, drink alcohol, or look for two wives." Then, the people with religion had to leave their land and their homes.

Although many Chamulans have been killed for their religious beliefs, I do not know if this particular incident happened exactly as Agustin recounted, or even if it happened at all.<sup>5</sup> Agustin was very young when the incident occurred, and he did not directly observe it. However, the fact that others told him the story and that he repeated it to me indicates its importance. Several themes of the story express the criticism of the authorities of Chamula. First, and most obvious, is the brutality of the incident. The violence was ruthless: live people were burned and others were cut with knives. To make it worse, young children were killed along with their parents. Second, when the incident was reported to the authorities in Chamula's town center, nothing was done in spite of the

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<sup>5</sup> For example, in 1969, the only Catholic family in the hamlet of Las Ollas, Chamula, was victim of violence. The mother, Dominga, and her eight-year-old son were assassinated. Another son was hospitalized due to wounds caused when his ear was cut off with a machete (Iribarren 1980). Dominga had been preparing for her first communion. The historic event in Las Ollas is similar to Agustin's story in that people, including children, were violently killed for their religious beliefs.

fact that the child identified the guilty party. The assassins were not punished, and the child was disbelieved, later dying from his wounds. Perhaps he was denied medical care or even killed to prevent him from telling more people about the incident. Third, the only reason given for the violence was that "people didn't want Catholics in their community." Perhaps in reality, there were other motives such as witchcraft. However, in Agustin's recounting of the event, religion was the only motive; innocent people were killed simply because they "don't use *curanderos*, drink alcohol, or look for two wives." Agustin ends the story by saying that people with religion have to leave their land and homes. This ties the story to his own life history and to that of the thousands of other expelled Chamulans. The constant reminder of violence, and even the threat of death, forces people to make their lives elsewhere.

What is left out of the story is as important as what is included. Those assassinated are religious martyrs who challenged the political and economic power of the Chamulan authorities. Similarly, the Catholics of Guadalupe think of themselves as martyrs, although they do not use the term. They attribute their suffering -- being jailed, being threatened, having their homes or crops burned, and losing their homes and land -- to their religious belief. At the same time, this is a source of strength. People recounted that their "hearts were strong" and they did not give up their religious beliefs, but instead suffered persecution and left Chamula. The inhuman character of the events defies explanation, as does the negligence on the part of state authorities which is never mentioned. According to Agustin, the responsibility for the violence remains within the boundary of Chamula.

Given Agustin's story and the violence suffered by many of the expelled families, it is not surprising that many accused the authorities of Chamula of not "knowing the Word of God."

The authorities of Chamula do not have good hearts. They do not listen to the Word of God. They are against it. I don't know why the authorities don't like Catholics. They don't study and they don't know the Word of God (Emiliano).

Knowing the Word of God means loving your neighbor and respecting others. In contrast, the authorities of Chamula are seen as making problems. They violate notions of respect and break community codes of human rights.

All of the twenty-six Catholic families of Guadalupe strongly criticized the authorities of Chamula for perpetuating expulsion and for their lack of respect, not for breaking the law or for committing human rights violations. The one exception is the mention of breaking the law of religious freedom. Because expulsion is understood as a religious problem, it is logical that the exiled cite this law.

The Municipal President of Chamula told us that we had to give up our religion but we said that we would never do that. The Municipal President was very angry. He doesn't respect the law. One must respect others. In Chamula there is no respect (Anita).

Given that people do not speak of expulsion as a legal violation of human rights it is logical that only one family, Javier and Magdalena, presented a complaint before juridical authorities. This is because they participated in a protest in which over 500 expelled people lived in the patio of the government office of PRODESCH for eleven months to pressure the authorities to find a solution to the expulsions. Javier and Magdalena were expelled from Chamula in 1992 along with their three children:

We went to live in the lowlands and to look for work there. When we returned in 1993, we went to live in Palestina [another neighborhood in the north of San Cristóbal inhabited by indigenous exiles]. We stayed there for a month, but we didn't find any place to live. Domingo López Angel said to us, "Why don't you come live in PRODESCH?" So we went to live there on August 15 of 1993. We had a small piece of plastic so that we weren't burnt by the sun, and the government sent rice, beans, and maize so that we didn't die of hunger.

The protest was a political act. Rather than searching for homes in the outskirts of the city, this large group of exiles chose to live in the patio of a government office to demand a solution to the problem. Living in protest with hundreds of other expelled Chamulans led to an understanding of the illegality of the act of exile. Press releases were regularly sent out during the eleven month sit-in, denouncing the negligence of government officials in dealing with the problem of expulsion. The protest was highly politicized by indigenous leaders and all the families received the necessary advice in order to present over fifty legal denunciations before the Attorney General for Justice of Chiapas. Javier and Magdalena's experience in the live-in protest explains why they were the only Catholic family in Guadalupe to present a juridical complaint.

The Catholics whom I interviewed contrasted the violent expulsions in Chamula with what happened in the neighboring municipality of Chenalho', where indigenous people were not exiled when they converted to Protestantism or Catholicism. Chamulans who lived near the municipality of Chenalho' often worshiped there, rather than walking to the church in the town center of Chamula. There they observed that people could worship as they pleased, without suffering repression. The case of Chenalho' is presented as an example of how people of different religions can live together in peace. Another

example is the community of Guadalupe itself. Catholics, Pentecostals, Presbyterians, and Seventh Day Adventists, among other Protestant groups, live together. Although the Catholics consider that those of their same religion form the center of their symbolic and affinal community, they claim that they all live together in peace. Rafael, a prayer leader, repeated what others had told me time and time again. "It is better to live here than in Chamula, because you are at peace. You can pray and be close to the Lord." While there are countless problems and divisions among the religious groups, there is no violence, and it is extremely peaceful in comparison to Chamula. Rights are based in respect for others, and this includes respecting people of other religions. In this sense, pluralism in religious affiliation is respected. However, although people live together peacefully, Catholics and Protestants seldom "work together" on a day-to-day basis. The majority of spiritual, moral, and material support, as well as personal relations, takes place within religions, rather than between them.<sup>6</sup>

Comparing Guadalupe with the hamlet of Candelaria, also composed of Catholics from Chamula, illustrates the complex relation between religion, tradition, rights, and respect for plurality. In the 1960's, as part of its work in the municipality of San Juan Chamula, the Catholic Church promoted the construction of a chapel in Candelaria, a hamlet where the work of evangelization had been most successful. As already noted, the construction of the chapel angered the authorities of Chamula and it was destroyed. However, the people of Candelaria wanted to continue to work with the Catholic Church,

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<sup>6</sup>Support among Catholics and between Catholics and Protestants in Guadalupe is discussed in Chapter 7.

and solicited the legal separation of their hamlet from the municipality of Chamula. In 1967, Candelaria was legally incorporated into the municipality of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. In spite of this, the people of Candelaria identify as Chamulans; they retain traditional dress, music, language, healing, and many religious practices of Chamula. The lands of Candelaria are legally classified as communal, and families farm traditional crops and also produce simple wooden furniture which is sold in the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas.

I made two visits to Candelaria in 1995 to examine how religion, custom, and rights were articulated in the community. My first visit to was on February 2, 1995. I arrived with a priest who was to celebrate mass for the Feast of the Virgin of Candelaria, the most important festival of the year for the community. Hundreds of people crowded into the small chapel, which was decorated with flowers and plants hanging from the rafters. Looking at the congregation I saw a sea of blue as women in their traditional blouses with blue shawls on their heads crowded into the small chapel. There were several statues representing the Virgin Mary and other saints, each dressed in the traditional clothing of Chamula. When I first entered the chapel with the priest, several people were gathered in front of the altar to burn rows of candles, just as is done in Chamula. The floor was covered with pine needles and the air suffused with incense. There are two indigenous deacons in the community who greeted us when we arrived, told us where to sit, and decided who would present and discuss the biblical reading.

When the mass began, people crowded inside. There were no benches in the center of the chapel, so people stood shoulder to shoulder, and many more crowded

outside, unable to fit in the chapel. At the beginning of the mass, a group of six *max* entered, playing traditional music.<sup>7</sup> The biblical reading was done in Tzotzil and afterwards four men from the community discussed it, also in Tzotzil. Communion was given out by the indigenous deacons.

After mass, the *max* led a procession outside the chapel, playing music and carrying flags. Behind them came women with candles and pictures of the Virgin of Candelaria. When the majority of the people were outside the chapel, dozens crowded around the altar and sixteen children and adults were baptized.

The mass in Candelaria is different from that in Guadalupe and from other masses of the expelled which I observed in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Most importantly, the traditions of Chamula are more evident: the burning of small candles, the presence of statues of saints, the presence of *max* with their flags and traditional music. Furthermore, the Catholics of Candelaria are not adamantly opposed to drinking alcohol, as are other communities of exiled, although the deacons and catechists of Candelaria do not drink. Indeed, the Candelaria Catholics complain that the other exiles are "too Protestant" in their rejection of alcohol, music, and other traditions of Chamula, just as the exiled Catholics of other communities complain that those of Candelaria are too much like the authorities of Chamula.

After mass, I sat with the priest, deacons, and chapel leaders to discuss

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<sup>7</sup> The *max*, or monkey assistants, play an important role in dancing, shooting fireworks, and carrying flags during traditional festivals in Chamula. They dress in a red and black waistcoat, dark sunglasses, and a conical hat with ribbons. The *max* are associated with beings who lived on earth before humans (Gossen 1974).

community issues. They explained that years ago when the people of Candelaria accepted the Word of God, there was a great conflict with the leaders of Chamula. One of the current catechists said that his father had initiated the fight so that they could legally separate from the municipality of Chamula in the 1960's and join that of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. The catechist recounted, "Imagine this struggle. My father doesn't speak Spanish, he can't read or write, but he still did it."

I asked if there were other religions in Candelaria, and the leaders explained:

No, we don't permit other religions here. In fact all who live here have to sign a paper stating that they will not follow other religions [aside from Roman Catholicism], and if they do, they must leave voluntarily. There have been problems in the past when people didn't want to cooperate with the fiesta, they didn't want to give money for it. For example, this year, the donation for the fiesta is 35 pesos per family. We voted and this was agreed upon by the community.

One year people were jailed in the community, well, actually they were jailed inside someone's house, for not giving their donation. These people appealed to the authorities of Chamula -- although Candelaria was already a separate municipality -- for help. When the authorities from Chamula arrived, the leaders of Candelaria said, "Aren't you in agreement with culture and tradition? This is why these people are in jail." They said they were. So the people of Candelaria said, "Well, you can leave, or we'll put you in jail too." And they left.

I returned to Candelaria on June 24, 1995 for the Day of San Juan, one of the most important festivals in San Juan Chamula. During this visit, the chapel leaders consulted with the priest about problems in the community. They recounted that the Catholics were accused of being "too political;" there were divisions between the believers and non-believers and even among the Catholics themselves. They agreed with the priest that it was important to work toward agreement with all.

In many respects, it appears that the community of Candelaria is more united than that of Guadalupe: all members of Candelaria worship in the same chapel, cooperate in religious festivals, and recognize the deacon and other religious leaders as moral authorities. Traditional customs of Chamula are also more strongly preserved in Candelaria as was evident in the festivals I observed. However, religious pluralism is denied in Candelaria, indicating that a false harmony is achieved through repression. The differences between the communities of Guadalupe and Candelaria raise several questions regarding human rights, pluralism, and culture. Is religious pluralism compatible with the maintenance of community? Is the protection of tradition necessary for preserving community? Indigenous communities are not and have never been homogenous; political and economic divisions have always existed. The difficulty is how these differences can be incorporated into a society based on community values.

### **Equality and Rights**

The concept of equality is fundamental to understandings of human rights in Guadalupe. The Catholics note that all human beings are equal and therefore have the same rights. However, their notion of equality differs significantly from the Western-European conception of equality in civil and political rights or due process before the law. Rather, the Catholics of Guadalupe use the term to mean that all members of the community have the right to food, shelter, and other basic needs, emphasizing their social and economic rights.

While the concept of respect is based on responsibilities held by members of the

local community, the concept of equality extends well beyond the community.

According to their understanding of equality, the people of Guadalupe recognize that in theory they are equal to members of other indigenous communities, to *mestizos*, to wealthy Mexicans, and to people in other countries. In doing fieldwork it was constantly repeated to me, "We are all equal, men and women, rich and poor, indigenous and *mestizo*." People in Guadalupe recognize that they have rights because they are equal to all Mexican citizens. This notion of equality reflects the work of evangelization in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas and is commonly supported by biblical references.

Juan, a catechist, repeated to me time and again:

We know that everyone is united. In the beginning, there were only two people, Adam and Eve. All people are descended from them and so we all have the same blood. Therefore, we are all united.

The idea that all people are united and have the same blood refers to the fact that all are equal as children of God. Hence, all humans have the same rights and should be treated equally. People commonly cited biblical passages which refer to love and the importance of loving your neighbor, pointing out that everyone is equally deserving of love.

This notion of equality is expressed at various levels, just as is the notion of respect. Within the family, men and women are described as being equal and should work together in unity. The different indigenous groups of Chiapas are also described as being equals. As Fernando the shoemaker said:

In Chiapas, there are Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Zoques, and Ch'oles. We don't even speak the same language as they do, we can't understand the Ch'oles, but they are our brothers and sisters because we all have the same blood.

Equality extends to *mestizos* and even to people from other countries like myself. While I

was conducting fieldwork, people often commented on the fact that I came from a different country and had different customs from theirs. Nonetheless, they constantly repeated that I am united with them because I am also a child of God.

The Catholics of Guadalupe believe that all humans are equal because they "share the blood of Christ" which was present when Christ died on the cross to redeem humans from sin. The symbol of blood as a metaphor for equality mixes Catholic and traditional symbolism. In the Catholic sacrament of communion, one drinks wine which represents the blood of Christ. All who participate in the sacrament are united in drinking the symbolic blood of Christ which was shed in his crucifixion.

The image of blood to describe the unity of all humans is a powerful one. Blood was an important symbol of life force, food, and healing in ancient Maya rituals. In current traditional ritual, alcohol has been substituted for the image of human blood (Eber 1995). It signifies the blood from the hands and feet of Jesus in his crucifixion, the good works of God, and of other powerful beings. In offering alcohol in rituals in Chenalho', people say "Drink the drops from the hands and feet of the Father, the flowery tree!" (Eber 1995: 24-25). Similarly, in Amatenango del Valle alcohol, blood, and Christ are closely associated. Some maintain that Jesus' body was washed with alcohol when he was removed from the cross (Nash 1967: 209-10). Hence, alcohol is viewed as a gift from God since Christ was taking on the sins of the world in his crucifixion.

For the people in the Catholic community of Guadalupe, the concept of equality has had two major effects on their lives: first, it creates a sense of self-esteem and self-worth, raising their consciousness that indigenous peoples need not suffer abuses at the

hands of *mestizos*. Equality expresses the need for structural change so that indigenous peoples can have rights within the wider society. Second, it shows the importance of uniting with others, particularly with indigenous communities, in order to work to attain equality. I was told, "Because we all are equal, we must work together following the Word of God to struggle to defend our rights" (Fernando).

Equality takes on a different meaning when applied to indigenous-*mestizo* relations. The experience of the people of Guadalupe is that indigenous peoples are not treated as equals of *mestizos* nor are they granted the same rights by the government. They believe that this inequality goes against the will of God who created everyone with the same flesh and blood. The people of Guadalupe told me that the *mestizos* do not "respect" us, whether at the personal, economic, or political level.

On a personal level, people complain that when *mestizos* pass them in the street, they do not show "respect." They do not look at them or exchange greetings and do not treat indigenous peoples as equals. An example of this is how the indigenous people are treated in government offices. The *mestizos* go to the front of the line while the indigenous people wait for hours and hours. However, *mestizo* lack of respect for indigenous peoples goes beyond a personal level; it is also understood to be a structural problem. Some *mestizos* are described as having a good heart. For example, I was told that Bishop Samuel Ruiz García has a good heart and helps out the indigenous; it is because he works for the rights of the indigenous that he is strongly disliked by many *mestizos*.

What is problematic in *mestizos* is that the *campesinos* do all the work and the

*mestizos* have all the money. For the people of Guadalupe, being indigenous is synonymous with being poor and being *campesino*. Although they do not use the word "class" they constantly use the terms rich and poor. The people of Guadalupe believe that it is unjust that they are the ones who work yet are poor, while the *mestizos* are the ones who have the money. Work is central to the lives of people in Guadalupe. As I was told, if one does not work, one does not eat or have money to feed one's children.

People in Guadalupe contrast the work that they do with the work of the *mestizos*. The *mestizos*, like myself, work in offices and at desks where they do not sweat or carry heavy loads or suffer injuries. The people of Guadalupe commonly work as *peones* (day laborers) where they carry stones, pour cement, or dig ditches for twenty pesos (about three US dollars) for a nine-hour day. The word in Tzotzil for work is *amtel*. Jacinto Arias (1991) notes that the term *amtel* refers to activities associated with the cultivation of maize. Although other types of work are included, they are not part of the original meaning of the verb. A man who knows how to work is one who has the aptitude to cultivate maize (Ibid: 27). The linguistic significance of the word *amtel* likely explains why the people of Guadalupe consider that the *campesinos* are the ones who work and that the *mestizos* do not work.

As noted in Chapter 2, the people of Guadalupe cultivate tiny plots of land but, for the most part, depend on wage labor to earn money to buy necessities. However, they still consider themselves to be *campesinos* since they know how to work the land. This work is not respected by the *mestizos* as it is poorly paid and the *mestizos* look down upon the *campesinos*. As Fernando who now works making shoes told me:

We are *campesinos* and we know how to work the land, how to plant and harvest. The *mestizos* do not know how to plant. We are maintaining the *mestizos*. If we didn't work, the *mestizos* would starve to death. They have money, but they do not know how to work the land to harvest their food. It is for the work of the *campesino* that the *mestizo* lives. But they do not respect us.

At the center of Fernando's criticism is that equality between humans is being violated. The Tzotziles of Guadalupe work hard, but they lack the necessary land and money in order to lead a dignified life. In contrast, the *mestizos* are accused of not working, yet they do not lack basic necessities.

Many of the men and women of Guadalupe have worked in the *fincas* or coffee plantations. Their recounting of the experience of working in the *finca* reveals their understanding of rights, freedom, and work. Working the *finca* is hard; in hot sun men and women harvest coffee, pull weeds, and trim the trees which provide shade to the coffee plants. The hours are long, and the pay minimal. Illness and hunger are common, and the housing is barely adequate. The owner of the *finca* provides food, but its cost is subtracted from one's wages.

Rafael, a prayer leader, tells about leaving his hamlet in Chamula to work on the *finca* to earn a little money:

I worked in the Finca Liquidambar harvesting coffee. Each day you have to get up at three in the morning and at four you leave to work. You return to the *finca* at 3:30 in the afternoon. There is a little house where you sleep. They don't pay you well, only about ten pesos a day. I worked in the *finca* about five or six years ago.

As I was talking with several men about *finca* labor they told me: "In the *finca* you have to carry the baskets with coffee and they weigh a lot. Sometimes you have to carry

seventy kilograms." Tzotzil men are small, and many weigh significantly less than seventy kilograms. They stopped their story and looked at me, asking, "Can you carry that much?" I replied that I could not, and they continued, satisfied that I understood the extreme difficulty of their work.

Sebastian describes the difficult work in the *finca*, and the way the owners mistreat the workers:

The owner of the *finca* would throw fertilizer, water, and pesticides on the people while they were working. If you sit down to rest, they scold you. It is hard. I have worked at several *fincas*. Thanks to God, I am now learning the work of a *peon*. In the *finca* you work from six in the morning until two or three in the afternoon.

Sebastian's relief that he no longer has to depend on working in the *finca* was repeated by others. Many contrasted working in the *finca* to working the lowlands -- in the Grijalva valley -- where one works the land and then pays a share of the harvest to the owner.<sup>8</sup> Sharecropping in the lowlands of Chiapas is commonly done by the indigenous of the highlands where land is scarce and not very productive (Collier 1975, 1994). Numerous families in Guadalupe had worked both in the *fincas* and the lowlands, and all agreed that it was better to work in the lowlands where one is "free." Lucas, the sacristan,

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<sup>8</sup>The practice of sharecropping has been declared illegal in several states of Mexico; in Chiapas it is still legal. Giving a share of the harvest to the owner rather than paying rent in cash up front permits the poor indigenous of the highlands to grow maize for their own consumption. However, the practice provides benefits to the owners of the land which renting would not allow. First, the *campesinos* clear the land so that it can later be used for cattle or the production of cash crops. Second, if the land was rented and the owner then decided to abandon it, the renter would have some legal right in the process of acquiring the land. One who works as a sharecropper does not have this right (Federico Anaya, lawyer of the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas." personal communication).

explains:

It is better to work in the lowlands than in the *finca*. In the lowlands, you work for yourself, there is no boss who will order you. There is no boss to watch over you. You are free. In the *finca* you are not free. They don't respect people on the *finca*. You are not free. Before, I was a slave on the *finca*. Now, I don't work in the *finca*. Before I didn't know any Spanish, I didn't know how to write, nothing. (Lucas)

Being free means that one controls one's own work; one decides the hours of work, one can rest at will, no one will give orders, and no one will be punished. Here, the idea of individual rights is evident. According to the people of Guadalupe, individuals have the right to work with fair wages and under favorable conditions. The notion of equality as the right to food, shelter, and other necessities is also expressed. Working in the *finca* -- with the long hours and under difficult conditions -- does not yield the wages necessary to survive.

Working as "slaves" in the *finca* is perceived as being unjust, as is the fact that the *mestizos* have the money, but the *campesinos* do the work. The men and women of Guadalupe are neither afraid of nor incapable of hard work; it comprises a part of their daily life. They are opposed to not being free, to not controlling work, to not being paid well, and not having their own land.

The understanding of the injustice in the difference between rich and poor extends to a political level: the government, like the *mestizos*, does not treat indigenous peoples as equals. The concept that indigenous and *mestizos* are equal is a threat to the social and economic status quo of the state of Chiapas and to established indigenous/*mestizo* relations in which the indigenous people still live as second class citizens. Juan, a

catechist, repeated to me time and time again, "The *campesino* suffers a lot." He blamed the government for this suffering:

Right now all of the prices are going up, except the price of corn and wages. The poor *campesino* is going to die of hunger. And the government doesn't care. They don't respect us.

Similarly, Sebastian said, "If the government was good, they would help us buy land so that we could plant corn." Another complaint about the government's lack of respect is that they lie and deceive people, making political promises to help the *campesino* which are not carried out after elections. Concrete actions taken by members of the Guadalupe community to protest injustice in Chiapas are discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

## **Conclusion**

In addressing the differences between Western and non-Western views of human rights, Josiah Cobbah (1987) notes that understanding basic Africentric "core values" can contribute greatly to the concept of human rights. He states that in African societies, the notion of respect, which is embedded in kinship, guides behavior in the society and that groupness, sameness, and commonality are emphasized. "Rather than the survival of the fittest and control over nature, the African worldview is tempered with the general guiding principle of the survival of the entire community and a sense of cooperation, interdependence, and collective responsibility" (1987: 320). Another central value is restraint, which contrasts with individual notions rights; restraint "means that a person does not have complete freedom" since "individual rights must always be balanced against the requirements of the group" (Ibid: 321). In short, Cobbah argues that the

debate over competing definitions of human rights should focus on “whether these cultural values provide human beings with human dignity” (Ibid 331).

Central to the Catholic’s understanding of human rights in Guadalupe is the notion of human dignity which is described in terms of respect. Embedded in the notion of respect is the right to live a dignified life; a concept which also has roots in Catholic doctrine. For the exiles of Guadalupe, equality is directly linked with economic and social justice where all are treated with respect and all have access to the means to make a living.

Catholics of Guadalupe understand their human rights as part of a community; it is within community that family life, religion, work, struggle for survival, and rights themselves take on meaning. Their broad understanding of economic and social rights is in marked contrast with the civil and political rights granted to individuals in Western societies. In Guadalupe, each person must work toward maintenance of the survival of the community itself, and in many respects this should override individual interests. As previously noted, those who walk with one heart will ideally emphasize the needs of the community rather than individual needs.

The notion of rights in a community which is based on shared religious and ethnic identity conflicts with the religious plurality of Guadalupe, which, like all communities of Chiapas, is not homogenous. There are differences in wealth, religion, and politics.<sup>9</sup> However, indigenous peoples continue to emphasize the importance of community life in

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<sup>9</sup> There are also divisions based on gender which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

which all share equal rights, problems are resolved at a local level, and shared values set the norms for behavior. In Chamula, the divisions in wealth, religion, and politics are extreme, and local leaders have taken an extreme solution to plurality -- they expel political and religious dissidents. In numerous communities in the Lacandon Jungle of Chiapas, political differences among members of the PRI, PRD, and Zapatistas have led to violent confrontations in which many people have been killed. Moreover, the case of Candelaria signals the danger of predicating notions of community on religious homogeneity. As indigenous peoples begin to play a role in governing their own communities in Chiapas, defining "community" in settings with several ethnic, political, and religious groups remains problematic. However, the notion of equality used in Guadalupe is, in theory, inclusive of all groups, and in some instances, Catholics and Protestants walk side-by-side, working to defend their rights.

## CHAPTER SIX

### INDIGENOUS TRADITION, HISTORY, AND POWER

In April of 1992 during a public hearing on the problem of expulsion convened by the State Congress of Chiapas, Enrique Gómez Patisthan, representative of Chamula and one of the most powerful leaders of the municipality, criticized conversion to Protestantism because it threatens local custom and tradition:

As indigenous peoples, we want to be taken into account when laws are made, because this has never happened. We cannot accept that the Protestants make fun of our images and our saints in the church, and then they insult our sacraments, which we consider are sacred and teach our children. Therefore, we believe that customs and traditions should define the law and not the reverse (Enrique Gómez Patisthan, Congreso del Estado de Chiapas 1992).

Although Patisthan only refers to Protestant converts and does not mention Catholic converts such as those of Guadalupe, both groups have been exiled from Chamula and are accused of going against local tradition. Patisthan's statement assumes that tradition, defined as an essential part of indigenous culture, is frozen in time; laws and the Protestant religion should not be permitted to interfere with this primordial tradition. What he ignores is that tradition is constantly changing. In fact, the saints and sacraments Patisthan refers to are a mixture of pre-Colombian Mayan belief and Catholicism.

Some anthropologists have similarly criticized Protestant missionizing within Chamula, claiming that conversion threatens the indispensable cohesion of indigenous communities where religion is inextricably linked to the social and political order (Arias 1992; Earle 1990; Fábregas Puig 1991). At the center of the criticism of religious

conversion is the argument that indigenous custom and tradition are important values which must be preserved. This raises a fundamental question regarding human rights and expulsion: if the converts threaten community cohesion,<sup>1</sup> can the human rights violations involved in the act of expulsion be defended in order to protect cultural rights? The issues of cultural relativism and local definitions of human rights are central to this question. If one accepts an extreme view of cultural relativism, then the expulsions can be defended as being necessary to protect indigenous culture and tradition.

For many anthropologists culture cannot be reified as a thing which stands on its own. Rather it is created, changes historically, and is linked to power relations (Roseberry 1989, Sider 1993). Historians and other social scientists point out that many supposedly traditional norms "were actually recent inventions or selective appropriations of past customs" (Collier 1995:64). These appropriations may be implemented by government authorities in order to effectively dominate indigenous populations, or may be manipulated by local indigenous leaders for their own political and economic benefit. In this chapter, I examine three domains of tradition in San Juan Chamula -- the *cargo* system, the use of alcohol, and gender relations. I select these three domains because they are most commonly mentioned in relationship to expulsion. The *caciques* of Chamula argue that the converts stop contributing to the *cargo* system and do not partake in the

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<sup>1</sup>As noted in Chapter 3, expulsion is mostly a political and economic problem veiled in religious terms. Many have been exiled for political reasons, such as for working with independent political organizations. The argument about not complying with customs may only be an excuse for expulsion. However, I discuss custom and tradition in this chapter because *caciques*, the expelled, government officials, and some academics continue to cite them as the reason behind expulsion.

ritual use of alcohol; rejection of these customs has been used as an argument to defend the act of expulsion. Those exiled most commonly mention abstinence from drinking and their "respect" for woman as the two factors differentiating them from traditionalists in Chamula. These three domains also demonstrate the problems of cultural relativism. If the preservation of culture is to be used as an argument against universal human rights norms then, one must ask, who defines culture? What happens when members of an indigenous community -- be it women or the exiled -- reject certain customs? Given that culture can be oppressive and can exclude, is it always compatible with human rights codes? And conversely, will the enforcement of a universal rights code threaten the continuity of indigenous culture and tradition? In this Chapter, I explore the reasons why the converted Catholics reject or change certain customs. I also examine the history of and the power relations embedded in these customs to investigate if and how expulsion is used to defend the power of *caciques* against the weakest members of Chamula.

### **The Cargo System in Chamula and Expulsion**

One of the strongest arguments in favor of exiling Catholic and Protestant converts is that they do not contribute to the *cargo* system which is the cornerstone of religious and political life. Chamula is one of the municipalities in Chiapas which has most strongly preserved the tradition of the civil religious hierarchy. In religious festivals in honor of important saints, thousands of people from the hamlets of Chamula, along with indigenous peoples from other municipalities and tourists, crowd into the town square to celebrate. At some time in their lives, most of the men of Chamula, with the aid

of their wives and kin, will take a civil or religious *cargo* position to serve the community, will take on one of the lesser *cargos*, or will assist others in the system.

Brenda Rosenbaum argues that the *cargo* system is a critical expression of Chamula's commitment "toward community and tradition."

In reacting to the negative experience they face daily because of their disadvantaged position in the *Ladino* world, they have carved out a space where they can make a bid for power in local arenas. Men and women feel they can affect, to some extent, the way they live their lives by establishing a network of people who respect them and who they, in turn can influence (Rosenbaum 1993: 151).

Recent works on the history of the *cargo* system assert that the religious and civil parts of the hierarchy developed separately and did not merge until the late nineteenth century (Chance 1990; Stephen and Dow 1990; Wasserstrom 1983). Today, civil and religious hierarchies in Chamula are separate, although they are linked in several ways. Political-administrative *cargos* consist of three major groups: the *principales*, the Regional Town Council, and the Constitutional Town Council. The *principales* have a wide-range of functions such as imparting justice, participating in the administration of resources, presiding in religious ceremonies, and organizing political life. The *principales* are also responsible for governing in the hamlets. The Regional Town Council works to preserve traditional values and resolve disputes in the hamlets. The Constitutional Town Council deals with the state and national governments and their agencies. The Municipal President of Chamula is a member of both the Constitutional and Regional Town Councils. Theoretically, all of these officers are elected; in reality they are chosen by the elite of Chamula.

The religious hierarchy is composed of dozens of officials who are responsible for sponsoring festivals to honor saints. The expenditures for festival sponsorship can be exorbitant. Religious *cargo*-holders must buy corn, beans, alcohol, candles, incense, firecrackers, and flowers, among other items. Both religious and civil *cargo* holders are allowed to sell alcohol in order to pay the costs; however, many have to borrow money in order to have the necessary capital. Supposedly all members of Chamula will participate in the *cargo* system; however, only the most wealthy will sponsor important festivals as poor families cannot afford to.

Since the 1950's there has been a debate regarding the relationship between the religious *cargo* system and the distribution of wealth in peasant communities. In a classic article, Eric Wolf (1957) noted that the hierarchy served as a mechanism for leveling wealth differences since surplus was redistributed through the sponsorship of the festivals. Several anthropologists continue to emphasize the function of the *cargo* system as being essential to maintaining community cohesion in Chamula (Earle 1990; Fabregas Puig 1991; Rosenbaum 1993). Duncan Earle (1990) argues that the system is critical to ethnic solidarity and slowing class divisions. Through the festivals:

Inequalities in productive potential are translated into status inequalities, ones that are blessed by the saint in exchange for proper "care and feeding." This inhibits the process of external appropriation of resources, as people are motivated to produce, distribute, and consume them locally, and also slows class divisions within the community through partial leveling and the periodic ritual reiteration of religiously based ethnic solidarity, symbolized in the public honoring of the saints (1990: 118).

However, other anthropologists argue that although the *cargo* system does redistribute surplus, it does not necessarily level wealth or class differences (Wolf 1987). In his study

of the religious cargo system in Zinacantán, Frank Cancian (1965) notes that rather than preventing social and economic difference, the system validates accumulation of capital by the wealthy who invest in public ritual, thereby displaying a commitment toward the community, and justifying their position. Hence, the "civil religious hierarchy provides a mechanism for economic stratification to be transformed to a force for social integration" (Rus and Wasserstrom 1980). Thus, while promoting internal social integration, the hierarchy may also serve the political interests of the state against the local community. As people go into debt to pay for *cargo* service, they are increasingly dependent on wage labor, assuring a cheap labor supply for commercial agriculture (Wasserstrom 1983).

Chamulan authorities and scholars claim that religious converts in Chamula reject the *cargo* system and thereby threaten the social cohesion of the community. During previously mentioned public hearing on the problem of expulsion held in April of 1992, Enrique Gómez Patisthan proposed that religious converts be forced to give up their religion. He notes that:

The people who are found practicing a religion other than traditional Catholicism for the first time will be warned so that they will suspend this practice. If they relapse a second time, this will be the motive for giving them a traditional religion *cargo* (*mayordomo*, *alférez*, etc.). When some members of the community do not comply with the anterior order, this will be motive for denying them their place of origin, that is, it will be a motive for their expulsion for not complying with the traditions and customs of the *pueblo* (Congreso del Estado de Chiapas 1992).

Those defending the importance of the *cargo* system in maintaining community cohesion rely on a notion of a homogenous community. However, economic and political divisions have existed and are increasing in Chamula; it is not a homogenous community.

Currently, local *caciques* have effective monopolies on the sale of alcohol, soft drinks, candles and other items used in religious festivals. As the poor buy these items, the leaders benefit. Further, the cost of bearing a *cargo* and the purchase of alcohol can quickly place community members in debt, and interest -- charged by local *caciques* -- accumulates at the rate of ten per cent monthly. To pay this debt, some are forced to sell their land, and again, it is the *caciques* who have the money to buy it (Tickell 1991). In some cases those accused of being religious converts are given *cargos* as punishment. Some are given one *cargo* after another until they are bankrupt. This serves the purpose of expulsion, since in the end, the community member is forced to leave (Tickell 1991). In one case documented by the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" a man who attended mass in the Catholic Church of Caridad in San Cristóbal de Las Casas was threatened with expulsion if he did not take responsibility for a *cargo*. Although he completed his obligation, he was later expelled because he did not give up his religion (Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" 1993: 32).

As noted in Chapter 4, in the courses given by the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas," the issue of the *cargo* system and human rights was discussed. In Huixtán, a municipality of Tzotzil- and Tzeltal-speaking Mayas, Catholics described the change in the *cargo* system as being one of the community's achievements in protecting human rights. Course participants note that: "We got rid of the customs which before were obligatory." The *cargo* system and festivals were not eliminated, but changed to make them more acceptable. Rather than investing large sums of money for alcohol and other items, people now give small offerings to buy sweets and cookies.

According to the interviews I conducted in Guadalupe, Catholic converts continued to give monetary contributions to the religious fiestas while living in Chamula. This was repeated by leaders of exiles from Chamula who held a protest of 582 people who were expelled in 1993. The leaders informed me that both Roman Catholics and Evangelicals who had been exiled were in agreement with giving contributions to *fiestas* but that once the leaders learned that they had converted they refused to accept their money (Interview conducted at *Asuntos Indígenas*, September 1994).

In Guadalupe, people emphasized that it is important to contribute to the *cargo* system and complained that the authorities refused to accept their contributions and then accused them of going against local tradition:

The authorities [in Chamula] don't like religion because they say people are going to lose their customs. The Municipal President gets angry when you don't drink, he thinks you have another religion. It's not true that we are going to lose our customs. We are still going to cooperate with the fiesta, we respect others, and help out for the *fiesta*. Sometimes the authorities don't want to receive our contributions [for the *fiesta*]. If they say we are not keeping the custom, it is their fault, not ours (Mónica).

The claim that those who change religion will not give up Chamulan customs is common:

The authorities of Chamula don't like religion because they say we are going to lose our customs. They say that we will not serve in the *cargo* system. But we will not lose our custom. We continue to make our contributions (Rosa).

In Guadalupe, there is neither a *cargo* system nor large festivals. However, festivals for life cycle events such as baptisms, weddings, and first communion are common.<sup>2</sup> Community-wide festivals are held on the religious occasions of Christmas

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<sup>2</sup> The change from holding community-wide festivals for saints to holding smaller festivals for life cycle events is also described for Zapotec region of Oaxaca (Steven

and Easter. People told me that they wanted to celebrate their first communion or confirmation, but were waiting to collect the money for the festival which would follow the event. As will be discussed in Chapter 7, these small, local festivals are important in maintaining community relationships and facilitate building the base for networks. Among the Catholics of Guadalupe, weekly participation in the celebration of the Word of God -- like the *cargo* system of Chamula -- serves to ritualize the individual's dependence on the community for survival. The work of catechists and prayer leaders is commonly described as a *cargo* or duty which one performs for the benefit of the community. The *cargo* of the catechist is similar to that of a festival *cargo*-holder in that it requires an investment of time and money. Catechists visit Catholics in their community and other villages in order to offer advice, moral support, and to share the Word of God. In Guadalupe, the catechists are also expected to give larger monetary contributions to community projects, such as the rebuilding of the Catholic chapel as described in the previous chapter. Catechists and festival *cargo*-holders are also similar in that both gain status from their role. In Guadalupe, catechists and prayer leaders are recognized as important community leaders. They are listened to for advice and sought out to mediate conflicts. Although the catechists of Guadalupe have not amassed the political and economic power of the *caciques*, the possibility exists that they can use the re-invented *cargo* of serving the Catholic Church to become powerful leaders. However, the status of catechist is predicated upon their serving the community; catechists can be and are removed from their position when people are not in agreement with their actions.

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1990).

This happened with Mateo, the founder of Guadalupe. Ideally, the catechists and other religious leaders should work to defend the rights of community members. In teaching the Word of God, their actions should follow community notions of respect and equality which are based in religious belief.

### **The Rejection of Alcohol: Drinking Versus Thinking**

In Chamula and other highland municipalities, drinking plays an important part of ritual life and social interaction; people drink "to create, maintain, and patch up relationships both among themselves and between them and their deities" (Rosenbaum 1993: 52, see also Gossen 1974; Pozas 1952; Siverts, ed. 1973). In public and private ritual settings -- particularly in important business, personal, or supernatural transactions -- a drinking ceremony is held with four objectives (Gossen 1974). First, equality is emphasized because all participants receive the same amount of alcohol. Second, the ceremony emphasizes rank, because alcohol is served according to the rank order of the participants. Third, "It literally produces and also symbolizes the heat that is considered desirable for human interaction with deities and with each other. Finally, it symbolizes solidarity among the participants, for the liquor has been given and received by members of a group that has a common objective or common interest" (Ibid: 174).<sup>3</sup> The drinking of *aguardiente* (sugar cane alcohol) or *chicha* (sugar cane beer) frequently takes place in well-defined ritual performances during festivals. In these events, "The participants are

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<sup>3</sup> The way the drinking ceremony marks rank in Chamula is similarly documented by Wilson (1973).

acting out a detailed ideology about the power of supernatural forces, and the celebration is carried out to control these forces and hence the fate of each one of the participants and their fellow *pueblo* members" (Kay and Metzger 1973: 30).

But, according to Brenda Rosenbaum, although drinking is accepted and encouraged in specific ritual contexts, both women and men consider that excessive drinking is problematic because it consumes money which should go toward the survival of the family. A man who is seen as "wasting his life away" may be given a religious *cargo* to moderate his drinking. The *cargo* places drinking in a religious context, and also forces a man to start working in order to save money for the expense of the *cargo* (Rosenbaum 1993).

Local obligations and traditions in indigenous communities are often tied to the exchange of liquor. For example, June Nash (1973) shows how the distribution and formalized drinking of liquor was important to courtship proceedings in the Tzeltal municipality of Amatenango del Valle; liquor was given as a betrothal gift. Similarly, Carter Wilson (1973) notes that in Chamula a litigant may present liquor to the town president after a satisfactory agreement in a legal dispute. Fines for misconduct are also paid in alcohol. Moreover, during funerals, the musicians, family of the deceased, and guests drink liquor as an expression of mutual obligation, status, and rank.

Alcohol also plays an important role in curing ceremonies. As previously noted, alcohol is given to *curanderos* as part of the payment for healing. Christine Eber (1995) notes that rum is an integral part of healing in Chenalho'; it is used to chase away demons and as an offering to the saints. Furthermore, drinking rum during festivals can cause

people to forget their disagreements and is said to bring warmth, courage, contentment, and intelligence (Eber 1995: 90). However, drinking too much is harmful; alcohol can “overheat the blood and burn the heart” (Ibid: 157). It also believed that the soul leaves the body when one drinks in excess, placing one at risk of illness and other misfortune.

In Guadalupe, Catholic converts adamantly reject all use of alcohol. They contrast drinking with the ability to think clearly and say that it leads to fighting; drinking is also criticized because buying alcohol consumes precious money that should go toward the maintenance of the family. The exiles of Guadalupe complain that in Chamula “you are not free” because you have to drink alcohol. Many noted that when they gave up drinking the local authorities were angered and threw them in jail, showing a lack of respect for their rights. The exiled Catholics of Guadalupe strongly criticize the use of alcohol in all contexts. Men and women recount the problems that alcohol created in their families when they were young. They remember seeing their fathers beat their mothers while intoxicated, and some even remember seeing their fathers die from excess consumption of alcohol.<sup>4</sup> This is evident in Juan's story of his father:

My father drank a lot. . . . My mother died when I was ten months old. They fed me *pozole* [ground corn and water] mixed with sugar. I was sick often as a child, but thanks to God, I didn't die. My father remarried and had six children with his second wife. He continued to drink, especially on Sundays. He beat his wife and me and the other children. We often went hungry because there wasn't money for food. My father drank a lot and his body swelled up from so much alcohol (from cirrhosis of the liver). My father died when I was very young. His body was very swollen

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<sup>4</sup>Juan Perez Jolote, a Chamulan leader, recounts that his father died from excess consumption of alcohol. In the end of his biography, he recalls that many arrived at his house to drink, he cannot stop drinking excessively, and he is afraid of dying from alcohol (Pozas 1952).

when he died.

Women recall being beaten by their husbands when they were drunk. Memories of the problems caused by alcohol -- including violence, poverty, and illness -- override any recognition of its ritual significance. Hence, it is not surprising that one of the most important factors of conversion to Roman Catholicism for the people of Guadalupe is the rejection of alcohol. Josefina recounted how her husband beat her in Chamula when he was drunk, a story which was repeated by many women:

Without the "Word of God" people continue to drink. When we arrived here [in Guadalupe] we gave up drinking. In our hamlet in Chamula, my husband hit me. He drank. Now, he doesn't drink, he has changed his heart. He hit me and his friends when he was drunk. Sometimes he would grab a machete and threaten people with it. Here we are at peace, my husband gave up drinking. Here, there is money to buy food. We aren't forced to buy soft drinks for the fiesta.

I was told that drinking prevents one from having respect for others. Most importantly, drinking does not allow one to think clearly or to be a hard worker. It leads to fights, domestic violence, and poverty. Men who drink a lot waste money on alcohol, but they also lose their ability to work to provide for their families. Emiliano contrasted the drinking of the authorities in Chamula with their ability to think clearly:

When you don't drink in Chamula the [Municipal] President asks "Why don't you drink?" He says that you are Evangelist if you don't drink. But, we want to learn well. When you drink a lot, you lose your ability to think clearly. The President drinks daily, so he does not think clearly. We want to work. We want to learn the Word of God. The drunkards are not going to work. They are going to lose their ability to think. When you drink a lot in Chamula, you can also be thrown into jail. The drunkards fight with their *compañeros*.

Others presented a stronger critique of the use of alcohol; Maria told me, "In Chamula

they are just drunkards." In Chamula and other highland communities, people may use drunkenness as an excuse for bad behavior. This is no longer accepted by the exiled Catholics of Guadalupe; new codes of behavior exist, and they apply to all, drunk or sober.

Alcohol is not sold in Guadalupe and there is strong moral pressure not to drink. However, drunks are not sent to jail, as long as they do not become violent. Drinking is said to go against the Word of God:

The Bible says that one should not drink. If people are drunkards, they are going to lose their ability to think. A man with a good heart does not drink. He knows how to help his wife and children (Andrea).

Some have argued that Catholic and Protestant converts in Chamula who reject alcohol -- and thereby reject an important part of festivals -- are going against an important community tradition. However, in order to understand the oppression caused by excess drinking, it is necessary to examine the historic changes in the use of alcohol among the Mayas of Chiapas. In pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica, alcohol was used across classes to cure illness and to arrive at communion with the Gods (Schele and Miller 1986, cited in Eber 1995). Mayan communities made fermented drinks from maize, honey, flowers, wild fruits, and tree barks. "Chroniclers' accounts suggest that rules, highly prescriptive and rigidly enforced, not availability and desire, set the parameters for drinking in indigenous societies before the Spanish invasion. Commoners living outside the purview of authorities may have drunk with fewer restrictions than nobles; however, as gifts from the Gods, alcoholic beverages and rules about their use were not to be taken lightly" (Eber 1995: 19).

The use of alcohol changed with the Spanish invasion; alcohol was one of the many means used to control indigenous communities. Rum was produced when sugar cane was brought from the Canary Islands, and the Spaniards were trying to market it. Beginning in the 1680's, artificial markets for rum were created when indigenous peoples were forced to accept rum and other commodities in exchange for cash crops such as cacao, cochineal, and indigo (McLeod 1989, cited in Eber 1995). In the early 1840's, *mestizos* migrated to the Highlands of Chiapas to become farmers. Some sold alcohol to the indigenous people, and as traffic in alcohol increased, indigenous people fell into debt. They were forced to give up their land, or mortgage future harvests at a two-thirds discount to get out of debt (Wasserstrom 1983). Men and women who worked on the *fincas* in Ocosingo in the late 1800's and early 1900's reported being paid two liters of alcohol each week in lieu of wages (Gómez and Kovic 1994: 40). These three examples demonstrate some of the ways in which alcohol was taken out of its ritual context, and was used by Spaniards and *mestizos* as a means of economic and social control of indigenous communities.

As noted in Chapter 3, the sale of alcohol was closely linked to establishing the PRI's hegemony among the local leaders in Chamula in the first half of the nineteenth century. By the second half of the 1950's, the Chamula scribes had been successfully co-opted by the state, and worked from within the community to serve the state against the indigenous peoples (Rus 1994). By the 1970's, the *caciques* of Chamula had obtained a monopoly not only over the sale of alcohol, but also over trucking, lending money, and the sale of soft drinks (Wasserstrom 1983). These leaders had access to the most fertile

land and earned large sums of money from the established monopolies which lead to a stratification in wealth.

Currently, Catholic and Protestant converts who give up drinking weaken the well-established monopoly on alcohol in Chamula, and thereby threaten the economic power of the *caciques*. Both scholars and indigenous leaders have cited this as a reason behind expulsion (Tickell 1991, Domingo López Angel, interview June 14, 1995). One Catholic in Guadalupe similarly noted that:

If you drink liquor or beer, you spend your money. During the *fiesta*, the people drink a lot of liquor and beer. They pay a lot for this, about 2,000 pesos a beer. That is how the authorities want it, they want us to spend our money (Alejandro).

However, most did not cite the economic reasons behind expulsion, but rather spoke of it in religious terms.

Giving up drinking is not exclusive to Guadalupe, nor to "converts" who are forced to leave Chamula. Indigenous Catholics in other municipalities, such as Huixtán, Oxchuc, Mitontic, and Chenalho', have initiated important movements against the sale of alcohol in their communities. In a workshop on women and human rights which I attended in Yajalón in the summer of 1994, women were asked to make a list of the problems they faced; all women emphasized the problem drinking presents in their families and in the community, and discussed ways to combat it. In the courses given by the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas," when people are asked to make a list of what causes suffering in their community, the problem of alcohol always appears. One group explained the problem like this: "We see that the poor stay poor

because of alcohol, and look for problems with others, and sell land for alcohol. In this, the authorities don't help us, they divide the community." Currently, the Zapatistas reject the sale of alcohol in the jungle and highlands, and have set up checkpoints in the municipality of Ocosingo and San Andrés Larraínzer to prevent alcohol from entering (*La Jornada*, April 24, 1996, p. 19). The fact that proponents of the Zapatista movement are opposed to drinking indicates that the indigenous people recognize that alcohol is linked to repression, as well as to disruption and other negative effects within their communities. Like the Catholics of Guadalupe, the Zapatistas reject all use of alcohol, not only excessive drinking. Ironically, as Protestant and Catholic converts of Chamula are accused of going against local custom and tradition for giving up drinking, the Zapatistas who reject drinking are fighting for basic human rights at the same time that they are revitalizing their identity as indigenous peoples.

### **Human Rights and Gender Relations in Guadalupe**

The unequal relations of gender within indigenous communities in Chiapas perhaps most strongly reflect the fact that these communities are not homogeneous and egalitarian. The defense of certain customs such as forced marriage and giving land inheritance exclusively to men has been criticized by indigenous women. In forums held on indigenous autonomy, women's voices are the strongest in questioning the uncritical defense of custom and tradition (*El Grito de la luna* 1994, see also Hernández Castillo and Garza Caligaris 1995, Hernández Castillo 1994). A question commonly asked in the courses given by the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" is "What

does God say of the rights of woman?" Women's rights were described as being an important human right, based on the notion of dignity which is shared by all. When asked about women's rights, one group stated:

We have the same dignity, men and women. We have to respect men and women because we are all children of God. Men shouldn't mistreat, hit, or beat women, nor women men. The women shouldn't be treated as slaves.

In another course, people similarly spoke of the necessity of respecting the rights of women. These rights are described as being given by God rather than by the law:

Man felt alone in paradise. God thought of giving him a companion. Woman has the right to life; she is a being of flesh and blood. . . Women have rights as human beings because they are also children of God and should have dignity. The two, men and women, should unite two heads to help each other. We see that it is sad that women are silent and don't give us their word.

During the courses when people were asked to make a list of the reasons for suffering within their families, the lack of respect for women's rights was often mentioned. Men and women criticized machismo, the fact that women often do not attend schools or community meetings, the lack of access to medical care for women, and domestic violence. In agreements reached at the end of the courses, it was decided that community members should educate women about their rights, and get rid of traditions which oppress women, such as not allowing women to inherit land, pressuring or forcing young girls to marry, keeping girls out of school, and not encouraging women to vote.

In these courses, the realization that all humans have rights led to a recognition of the need to protect women's rights along with men's. Women's rights were grounded in Catholic notions of human dignity and equality of all people as children of God. Western

notions of feminism and equality simply do not apply to indigenous communities; women reject movements which threaten their identities as wives and mothers. However, this does not mean that women lack rights. In Guadalupe people continually told me "we are all equal -- men and women, indigenous and *mestizo*, rich and poor." Men and women have specific rights within the family; both are expected to "respect" one another. A man who respects his family works in cooperation with his wife, works to provide for his wife and children, does not fight or beat his wife, and will not leave his wife for another woman. Likewise, a wife who respects her family works in cooperation with her husband to support her children and does not fight.

The Catholics of Guadalupe live in a patriarchal society; women's domestic work allows men to work for wages outside the home, and money is kept in the hands of men. It is practically unthinkable that a woman will not marry, and widows and women who have left their husbands in Chamula are dependent on the assistance of their older sons or other men in the community. However, both men and women have power in the community, and are interdependent in daily life. As Christine Eber notes for women in Chenalho', "Although no patriarchy allows women to act freely, the kind of patriarchy I saw in Chenalho' , makes men and women partners in most aspects of life, not just those necessary for survival" (1995: 239). Women in Guadalupe are protected and have rights; men are expected to provide money for food and other necessities.

The distinct yet complementary roles carried out by men and women are evident in the division of labor at the household level. The gendered division of labor in Guadalupe is similar to that in Chamula (see Rosenbaum 1983, Chapter 6). Women's

work includes preparing food, primarily *tortillas*. This process starts with cleaning maize, soaking it with calcium, grinding the corn, or taking it to a house with an electric grinder, making the dough, and finally, forming and cooking *tortillas* over a fire with smoke filling the small kitchen. Women also prepare beans, greens, rice and other foods. As already noted, women must obtain water for cooking, cleaning, and drinking from one of two tanks on the road of the community, carrying it home in plastic jugs; firewood for cooking is cut from the forest above the hill and carried back. Women and children are also responsible for washing clothes and cleaning their homes. They are in charge of caring for sheep, which means taking them out to graze in a pasture below the hill for several hours every day. Women are also responsible for making clothing for themselves and their families. This includes weaving woolen skirts for women and girls, ponchos for the men, and embroidering designs on the traditional blouses worn by women. All of these are made with wool from the sheep. Child care is also considered women's work, and they walk to and from market carrying produce and their children in a shawl tied around their shoulders. Women also participate in income-producing activities. As previously noted, the vast majority of women in Guadalupe make bracelets, belts, woven cloths and wool jackets, vests, and bags which are sold for small amounts of cash. The income from these ventures is used for household expenses such as the purchase of food and materials for clothing.

Men work in the city in paid occupations as described in Chapter 2. Through wage labor, men have access to money. However, the money is expected to go toward the maintenance of the family. Spending money on alcohol, which is described as

"wasting" money, is strongly criticized, and drinking is practically non-existent among the Catholics of Guadalupe. Furthermore, the jobs performed by the vast majority of men provide irregular employment at best, while the artisan work sold by women provides regular, if very small, sums of money.

For the most part, men are better able to negotiate relations in the *mestizo*-dominated city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas than women. The men of Guadalupe speak at least some Spanish, while none of the women do; this permits and also reflects male negotiation with *mestizos*. However, the process of exile and making life in a new setting permits or forces women to leave the community. They go to town to buy thread and yarn for embroidery, to sell their finished products, and to buy goods in the market. In the community, meanwhile, men have specific domestic tasks. They are responsible for building their homes, and repairing them as the roofs and walls are in need of replacement. Sometimes men help in gathering firewood. Both girls and boys are sent to school; however, girls may stay at home to help their mothers with child care and other domestic tasks. When I gave a literacy class in the community, I had eight to ten adolescent female students, one adult male, and one boy. The fact that the majority were adolescent girls indicates that they had gone to school for only a few years, if any. However, it also indicates that their parents allowed them to leave domestic tasks for four hours a week to attend the class. The value of education for girls is even more apparent in the urban setting (see also Nash and Sullivan 1991).

The gendered division of labor is well-established. It is rare, if not impossible that a man will perform a woman's task and vice versa. The exception is boys, but not men,

who sometimes make bracelets to sell. Scholars have pointed out that a gendered division of labor in and of itself does not indicate inequality between men and women; what is important is the status of the work assigned to each sex (Bourque and Warren 1981). In Guadalupe, the work of both men and women is considered indispensable for survival. Just as a woman cannot survive on her own, a man cannot survive without the work of a woman. A widower told me that he left Chamula to live in San Cristóbal de Las Casas when his wife died because he did not have a way to get *tortillas* there; in the city one can buy them. This reflects the fact that men's work is more proletarianized than women's work. In rural indigenous communities while a woman such as a widow can hire a man to help in the *milpa*, a man cannot hire a woman to do domestic work (Nash 1970). One catechist not only valued women's work, but also said that women have more work than men:

Men have less work, and women have more work. Women have to care for sheep, prepare maize, and carry water and firewood. There is a lot of work for women. They also have to wash clothes, grind maize, weave clothes, make food for their husbands, and make *tortillas*. Sometimes men will grab their wives so that they work with a machete. They work a lot. The man has less work to do. He plants, burns the land to prepare for planting. He has less work (Juan).

One of the most important ways in which men should "respect" their wives is by not hitting or beating them. Domestic violence is often associated with the consumption of alcohol. Men and women of Guadalupe commonly described being beaten as children when their fathers were drunk; women also described being beaten by their husbands before they heard the Word of God. Emiliano recalls that his relationship with his wife changed when he converted to Roman Catholicism and moved to Guadalupe:

When I came here, I began to live in peace with my wife. I didn't trouble her. I respect her and she respects me as well. We don't fight, and I don't hit her. Here we are united. Husband and wife must unite to work well together and with their children. When there are problems, we pray to God with our faith.

Brenda Rosenbaum found that domestic violence was common in Tzal Vitz, Chamula, the hamlet where she conducted fieldwork. She notes that "In some marriages, wife beating occurs only a few times in the woman's life; in other marriages, it happens frequently. Women often excuse mistreatment by a drunken spouse when it occurs on the husband's return from wage labor on the plantations" (Rosenbaum 1993).<sup>5</sup> A woman in Chamula who suffers domestic violence has several options. If she is young and does not have children, she can return to her parents' house. A woman who has been married many years may leave her husband, punish him, or take him to court. A man may be thrown in jail overnight and publicly shamed for beating his wife. Legally, a woman can receive a one-time payment for each child; however this does not leave a mother with enough money to support a child for even a year. While Chamulan women are expected to attempt to help their husbands change, they are not expected to be martyrs. "Indeed, people think that a woman who puts up indefinitely with a husband who drinks constantly, mistreats her harshly, and fails to support her economically must be under a spell of witchcraft. . . ." (Ibid. p. 55).

Jan and Diane Rus (personal communication) note that drinking and domestic

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<sup>5</sup>Christine Eber (1995) also documents domestic violence in the municipality of Chenalho'. Wives were beaten when their husbands were drunk (see especially Chapter 6). June Nash notes that in the municipality of Amatenango del Valle beating one's wife is tolerated, "particularly if it is done in drunkenness" (1967: 281). However, women beaten by men who were not their husbands were allowed to beat that man in court.

violence in Chamula cannot be seen only as an internal problem; there are important economic factors which can effect domestic violence and drinking. The harsh conditions of life in the *finca* and the economic insecurity faced by males struggling to support their families lead to an increase in drinking and domestic violence. Several women in Guadalupe reported that their fathers or husbands drank more after they returned from the *finca*:

When I was young, my father left to work on the *finca*. When he returned, he hit my mother, and spent money on alcohol. My mother said that it would be better if he stayed in the *finca* because then he wouldn't hit us. My father also hit us children, he would throw a whip. I was hit with a stick in the head, in the eye. My face was swollen. It is the custom of old. Now, things have changed. You have to teach your children well with the Word of God. Parents beat their children when they are drunk (Juana).

In Guadalupe, domestic violence is not accepted. If a man beats his wife he can be jailed for 24 hours by the local *Agente*; this happened to several men (reportedly Protestant) during the time I was conducting fieldwork in Guadalupe. The sanctions against hitting women are not only juridical, but also moral. A man who beats his wife is strongly criticized and shamed. Furthermore, a woman who leaves her husband because he mistreats her will be supported by the community. This is the case of Martha and Verónica, two single mothers who left their husbands because their drinking was excessive and they were beaten. Martha lives on the same of plot of land as her sister and brother-in-law. Her brother-in-law constructed her home and provides money for necessities. Martha earns what she can by selling artisan work.

Similarly, Verónica left her husband in Chamula because he hit her and went to live in Guadalupe with her four young children. She told me how things should be

between husband and wife in the eyes of God, and how her husband treated her:

According to the Word of God, one must respect his/her spouse. Husband and wife must live together united. A man should not hit his wife.

Here [in Guadalupe] there is much suffering because I have to support my children alone. We need food, there are not enough clothes. I left my husband in Chamula four years ago. My husband beat me a lot. He beat me even when he wasn't drinking. When he returned [from the fields] in the afternoon, I said to him, "Here is your food, your pozole [a drink made from ground corn], your tortilla and beans." But he didn't want to eat. He hit me and kicked me. My face swelled up from being beaten.

He didn't give me money to buy maize, beans, and clothes. He would go to work in the *finca* and return to scold me. However, I forgave my husband. But he continued to beat me. So I left him. I left because I didn't want to be beaten any longer. I was without food and went to live in another hamlet in Chamula.

My husband now lives in Tlaxcala [a settlement in the north of San Cristóbal de Las Casas]. When we were married, he looked for another wife. My husband now has five wives. He only lacks one wife to make half a dozen.

Verónica stopped to laugh at the black humor in her situation. Then she began to tell me how she was expelled from Chamula:

When I left my husband he spoke to the authorities in Chamula. He told them that I was following another religion [Catholicism]. I was thrown into jail, it was my husband's fault. I was in jail one night. Then I returned to the hamlet for two more months. I waited for my children to finish school, and then we left and came to Guadalupe.

I am praying to God, asking for forgiveness. I have made my first communion, and marriage as well. My son helps me out when he can.

Neither Martha nor Verónica are criticized in Guadalupe for leaving their husbands; instead their decisions to work to "follow the Word of God" are praised.

Verónica's husband was criticized both for taking a second wife and for beating her. She

earns money from a small store where she sells such items as rice, oil, and soft drinks to members of the community. Her oldest son who is married and a leader in the chapel also offers financial support. The fact that the catechists and other members of the community of Guadalupe will take the side of a woman who is being mistreated is perhaps the strongest sanction against abusive husbands. In other words, women's rights are enforced by the community's disapproval of treating women badly.

Another important aspect of respect between husband and wife is that they work together to understand the Word of God. In their homes, husband and wife discuss the Bible together and pray together. When married adults receive the sacraments of first communion and confirmation, they are expected to receive them as a couple. Men and women regularly attend religious celebrations together, with men sitting on the right side of the central aisle and women on the left. However, when a man's work requires him to be away from the community at the hour of weekday celebration, his wife will attend with her children. At the dozens of celebrations I observed, there were more women than men present. When men do not regularly attend religious celebrations, women say that their hearts are sad. This was the case of Lorenza, whose husband is the only Catholic male in the community who drinks:

Before I heard the Word of God, I drank a little. My husband drank more. After I heard the Word of God I stopped drinking. But my husband still drinks. I have a little sadness because I go to church alone here. My husband does not come to listen to the Word of God. I want us to go together, but he doesn't want to go with me. At five in the afternoon, I go to the religious celebration and he remains seated in the home. He drinks, but he doesn't hit me.

Being married by the Church is considered to set an important example to other

members of the community. However, the majority of the couples in Guadalupe were married before age eighteen and before they converted to Roman Catholicism, so they wed according to local custom without being officially married by the Church or the state. While I was working in the community, Emiliano and Pascuala were married by the Church after living together for over 15 years and having six children. Other couples were saving money in order to be officially married by the Church.

The marriage of Cristóbal's daughter in April of 1995 also illustrates the new importance that is being placed on church marriage. Since she was 15 and a half years old, younger than the 18 years prescribed by Church doctrine, she could only be married in an unofficial ceremony in the community. But her parents were already planning a Catholic wedding with a priest.

I asked the catechists in the community what happens when a man wants to marry in Guadalupe. They explained:

When a man wants to marry, he has to go to the house of the woman's parents. He arrives with his own parents and also with the catechists as well. All discuss the wedding together, and if they agree, they share soft drink to celebrate.

If a young couple "marries" without their parent's permission, they can both be jailed by the local *Agente*. The emphasis on parental consent for marriage provides protection for young girls since their parents should be certain that the husband-to-be is capable of providing for their daughter and has a "good heart." At the same time, this limits female decision-making.

This procedure was followed in the petition for Cristóbal's daughter. The

catechists and prayer leaders visited Cristóbal's house along with the parents of the suitor. They asked the girl and boy if they wanted to get married, and they agreed that they did. The parents were also in agreement. Then all drank soft drinks, provided by the suitor, to seal the agreement. It was agreed that the suitor's family would pay a brideprice of 200 pesos. Agustín, the lead catechist of Guadalupe, said that Cristóbal should not ask for a larger brideprice since they were Christians. "They are not going to pay for the bride like she's a cow."

This marriage petition in Guadalupe follows a much abbreviated version of the same tradition in Chamula. When a man wishes to marry a woman there, he visits her home accompanied by his parents who speak on his behalf. The woman's family asks about the suitor; he must prove that he is a good worker in order to be capable of supporting their daughter. The petitioners make numerous visits to the house of the woman, pray outside the home for hours, and offer gifts of food and liquor. If the woman's family accepts a wedding petition, they open the door to their home to the suitor and his parents, invite them inside, and accept the gift of two liters of liquor. The groom gives brideprice in the form of money, gifts, or labor to the girl's family.<sup>6</sup>

The process in Guadalupe is significantly shorter, costs less money, and involves mediation on the part of the catechists who assure that all parties are in agreement. When I asked the catechists of Guadalupe what happens if the woman doesn't want to marry the man, they told me: "She doesn't have to marry him. She explains that she doesn't want to

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<sup>6</sup>This description of the courtship pattern in Chamula is taken from Rosenbaum (1993), Chapter 5.

and the woman looks for another husband, and the man looks for another wife." This is cited as an important change from Chamula where girls are forced to marry against their will.<sup>7</sup> The catechists in Guadalupe also emphasized that it is important that a girl wait until she is at least eighteen before she marries:

It is bad when people marry when they are too young. A girl does not know how to think clearly when she is young. If the man does not yet have money, he may have to go away to get money to support his wife, and this is bad.

Since I observed the marriage of only one young couple in Guadalupe, it is hard to judge to what extent these ideals are held up in practice. Cristóbal's daughter was well under 18 when she married; however, she did not marry against her will. Nonetheless, the majority of girls who are between seventeen and nineteen remain unmarried.

Respecting one's wife in Guadalupe also means that a married man will not take a second wife; this is a rejection of polygamy and of leaving one's wife and children for another woman, acts which are considered by the community to violate women's rights. People in Guadalupe claim that polygamy is common in Chamula, but according to Rosenbaum, although taking two or three wives does happen, "The community in general, condemns men who look for additional wives" (1993:57). Women in particular reject polygamy: "They say that it brings sadness to their hearts, a rage that makes them sick and eventually kills them" (Ibid: 57). Men and women in Guadalupe described the

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<sup>7</sup>According to Brenda Rosenbaum (1993), a girl's parents in Chamula may make the decision and then try to convince their daughter to accept it, or a woman's father may force the daughter to marry against her will. One way that a father will coerce a girl to marry the mate he has selected is to promise to protect her if the mate treats her badly. If the daughter selects a different mate, he will not offer any protection if her husband constantly scolds or beats her.

difficulties faced when their fathers left their mothers when they were young, particularly the poverty they experienced without the money a male is expected to provide. Lorenza told me the story of how her father left her mother. She emphasizes not only the poverty she lived in without her father, but also the personal pain of being rejected by her father:

My father has five wives. He left my mother to look for another wife when I was young. We suffered a lot. My father is rich, he has his own truck. I don't know him well because he left my mother when I was a little girl. When I see him in San Cristóbal, he doesn't talk to me. Now he has another wife. He didn't leave me any land in our hamlet. When I was little I lived with my mother. She had to work to buy *tortillas*. She sold firewood in San Cristóbal and made wool jackets to sell in the market. My father didn't leave us anything -- not a single soft drink or even a sweet. There was no money. My father married a third time to a *mestizo* woman, and then twice more.

My mother looked for another husband and married again when I was nine years old. The second husband drank a lot, he hit us and kicked us the same as my father did. He died.

In Guadalupe, husbands are expected to provide for their wives and children, hence they should not leave them. In the community, the *agente* may jail men who leave their wives, a sanction that applies to both Catholics and Protestants. This is not the case in Chamula where polygamy is permitted by local authorities. When Mateo, an ex-catechist and the founder of Guadalupe, took a second wife, he lost his moral authority in the community and was forced to leave to avoid further conflict (see Chapter 2). More recently, Antonio left his wife and took up with a Catholic widow of the community. When his wife, Manuela, complained to the *agente*, Antonio was put in the local jail for twenty-four hours as punishment. Since being in jail, he has returned to Manuela, has repented his actions, and feels shame.

Another case of a Pentecostal man who took two wives is particularly interesting for the way the conflict was resolved. His two wives got into a fight in front of their house. They were yelling and pulling each other's hair, and many people in Guadalupe saw them. Both women were taken to the *agente* where a public audience was held. After much discussion and explanation, it was decided that the husband would be punished. He had to pay the "fine" of three truckloads of sand which would be used to make repairs on the dirt road in the community. Since he was to pay a fine, he did not have to go to jail. He also agreed to return to his first wife. Because the case was resolved with a public audience, it sends a message to all men of the community about what may happen if they look for a second wife. The fine which was agreed upon would serve the entire community and also allow him to reintegrate himself.

Respecting women is given as a strong reason for conversion to Roman Catholicism and also as one of the most important differences between 'traditionalists' and Roman Catholics. Women often convert first, and then their husbands follow.<sup>8</sup> Most important in regard to women's rights is that under the Word of God, men give up alcohol, do not beat their wives and children, and do not take more than one wife. Micaela describes how her husband hit her before he converted to Catholicism, and how her husband initially rejected conversion:

In our hamlet in Chamula my husband hit me. But here [in Guadalupe] this is not a problem. In the hamlet in Chamula my husband hit me hard, he didn't know the Word of God. The *agente* said that they wanted us to

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<sup>8</sup> Rosenbaum (1993) and Sullivan (1995) document that women in Chamula often initiated religious conversion from traditional Catholicism to Protestant religions, and then convinced their husbands to convert.

go to a meeting; four times we had called his attention. Don Lucas [my husband] decided to leave his religion for four weeks. But I didn't. I said that I was going to continue with the Word of God. Don Lucas left it because he was afraid, there were so many problems. I continued to go to the Church of Caridad.

The expelled commonly criticize the customs of Chamula which leads to drinking, taking more than one wife, domestic violence, and finally, expulsion itself. The critique of custom is particularly strong from the perspective of women. In May of 1994, the Women's Group of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, the Organization of Indigenous Doctors (OMIECH), the Artisan Union S'paz Joloviletik, and the Women's Commission of CONPAZ convened a workshop on women's rights and customs in San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Over fifty indigenous women, including Tzotziles, Tzeltales, Tojolabales, and Mames attended the meeting, and the document "El Grito de la luna" was prepared for presentation at a public forum for discussion on constitutional reform regarding indigenous rights. The women affirmed that there are good things about custom. For example, the respect for land, language, and traditional medicine practices:

We must work the land with care, conserving it and not burning it. It is good that we do not lose our language, to demonstrate that we are indigenous and that we think differently from those who speak Spanish . . . The government must pay the *parteras* [indigenous midwives] because they perform a job which is very important for the community ("El Grito de la luna," *Ojarasca* 1994: 27-31).

However, there are several aspects of custom which the women criticized:

The customs that we have should not do harm to anyone. We do not like the custom when the authorities make crooked deals and they are the ones who decide how to distribute the land. The authorities do what they want and we cannot always defend them (Ibid: 31).

Women complained that custom should not be used to permit discrimination

against women. They note that in places land is given only to males and donations taken from the community for the ill are only taken for males. Indigenous women criticize domestic violence, forced marriage, and alcohol:

Some say that it is custom to force us to marry even when we don't like the man. Sometimes, it is custom to exchange a cow for a woman. It is custom that men hit their wives and pay a fine of a day's work and then come back to hit them again for complaining (cited in Hernández Castillo 1994: 51).

Those who participated in the workshop on the rights of women in customs and traditions had been active in the local women's organizations and are likely more conscious of their rights than the majority of the women in Guadalupe. However, the criticisms of being forced to marry against one's will, domestic violence, and the use of alcohol remain constant. The rejection of certain customs by women underscores how indigenous customs cannot be accepted uncritically since custom and tradition can serve to benefit men or local leaders.

## **Conclusion**

As noted, the act of expulsion itself has been defended by government agencies and Chamulan leaders with the argument that it is necessary to preserve indigenous tradition. Behind this argument is the defense of cultural relativism as an ethical stance which "assumes that there is no one culture whose customs and beliefs dominate all others in a moral sense" (Howard 1995: 52). This view negates the application of universal human rights codes to indigenous communities. However, the problems with cultural relativism are evident in this chapter. While the *caciques* of Chamula argue for

one definition and defense of custom, the Catholics of Guadalupe hold another definition. Which custom is to be preserved? The Catholics find the customs of Chamula to be repressive and have re-created traditions and practices in a new setting. Rather than the traditional *cargo*-system, Catholic festivals take place and religious leaders serve as *cargo*-holders. Alcohol is rejected, and new guidelines for gender relations are established.

One cannot argue that the view of the Catholics is any less authentic than that of the Chamulan *caciques*. The people of Guadalupe identify themselves as Tzotziles and consider their new traditions to be fundamental to their survival as a community. These Catholics, like all Tzotziles and indigenous peoples, change and re-adapt tradition as they struggle to survive in conditions of extreme poverty and exploitation. Accepting ancient Maya tradition as somehow being more authentic ignores the fact that the Maya have experienced dramatic changes for the past 500 years, and have been impacted by regional political and economic forces. Furthermore, tradition can divide as well as unite; it may be used to repress or marginalize the weakest members of a community. This is demonstrated in the case of expulsion, and in the fact that the people of Guadalupe reject some traditional customs of Chamula. The uncritical acceptance of indigenous tradition and cultural relativism is antithetical to the defense of the human rights of the Catholics of Guadalupe.

Custom and tradition have been effectively manipulated in Chamula in order to protect the power of local *caciques*, often at the expense of the poorest members of the community. The *caciques* benefit from manipulating tradition at the same time that the

state and federal government benefit from the fact that the leaders of Chamula assure that the vast majority of local votes are delivered to the PRI. On July 2, 1994, close to five thousand Chamulans in traditional dress gathered in their town center to welcome the then Governor of Chiapas, Eduardo Robledo Rincón, who presented his plan for economic development of the municipality. The governor dressed in a *chuj*, the wool poncho used by Chamulan men, and began his speech with a few words in Tzotzil. All of the light posts on the road to the center of town were adorned with images of Robledo and Zedillo. When the Chamulan women spoke, they informed the governor that "All those of San Juan Chamula would vote for the PRI" and that they needed mills, markets, and support for production. Manuel Gómez Hernández, leader of the PRI in the municipality, spoke in Spanish about the dangers of the Protestant sects "which come to cheat us" in Chamula. He stated, "we are PRI-istas and we are Catholics; these two things have united 80,000 Chamulans of 96 communities" (*La Jornada*, July 3, 1994). Later, in marches organized by the PRI in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chamulans carried banners stating that the PRI is tradition in their community. Ironically, the PRI is no less "external" to Chamula than the Catholic and Protestant Churches. The fact that the Catholics and Protestants are rejected as alien institutions while the PRI is taken to be a uniting force of ethnic identity clearly demonstrates how tradition is historically constructed and tied to power relations both within and outside indigenous communities.

**PART III**  
**RIGHTS IN ACTION**

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### WORKING AND WALKING TO SERVE GOD: NETWORKING IN GUADALUPE

For you have delivered my soul from death,  
my eyes from tears,  
my feet from stumbling.  
I walk before the LORD  
in the land of the living. (Psalm 116, 8-9).

The catechists and prayer leaders of Guadalupe regularly walk to other Tzotzil communities to aid in prayer and to offer moral support to indigenous Catholics. While conducting fieldwork, catechists told me of their visits to Buena Vista -- a hamlet in the municipality of Chenalho' -- where they were helping a group of Catholics to found a new chapel. One cold and rainy Saturday in July of 1995, a group of thirty people from Guadalupe boarded a truck to travel to Buena Vista to assist in the inauguration of a recently built chapel. Buena Vista is at the top of a hill and can be reached by a difficult hour and a half walk or by taking a truck up a rocky dirt road during the dry season. On this day the group from Guadalupe rented a truck so that the women and children could travel and musical instruments could easily be transported. Each family attending had contributed thirty pesos (which for most represented more than a day's wages) for the cost of renting the truck. Three catechists, the sacristan, and other men made the journey along with their wives and children. Earlier, donations had been collected in Guadalupe for the people of Buena Vista to help organize the *fiesta* for the chapel's inauguration; chicken soup, *tortillas*, and soft drinks were purchased. On the way to the hamlet, the truck stopped in the center of Chenalho' to bring Father Chanteau, the priest of the

municipality, to the community so that he could bless the new chapel. On the following Sunday during the religious celebration in Guadalupe, there was a lively report of the visit to Buena Vista. The congregation was animated by the strength of the people who had struggled and succeeded in founding a new chapel, and the importance of helping one's brothers and sisters in other communities was emphasized in this discussion.

The visit to Buena Vista clearly held strong significance for the people of Guadalupe; it required an important investment of their time and money. This event was only one of the many that I observed in which the people of Guadalupe worked to assist other indigenous peoples: they had established several important inter- and intracommunity networks, primarily through the Catholic Church. In these visits people are working and walking to serve God. As previously noted, Juan a catechist of Guadalupe once explained to me, "As *campesinos* we have to walk a lot. Sometimes there are no roads, sometimes we don't have money to pay for transportation. . . . Catechists have to walk to visit families and communities to share the Word of God. The work of the catechist never ends." Like the visit to Buena Vista, supporting Catholics in other indigenous communities is work because it requires time and energy. When the residents of Guadalupe walk during these visits, they are also working so that they may be united with fellow Catholics, or "walk with one heart." Juan explained, "When we walk with only one heart, we are strong."

As I began to get to know the people of Guadalupe, I observed that they were constantly visiting family and friends in their community, Chamula, and other villages; Catholics from outside Guadalupe often attended religious ceremonies to bring news and

moral support; and the religious leaders of Guadalupe regularly visited several indigenous municipalities to offer spiritual guidance. I observed that these visits were important not only in maintaining social relationships; they were also linked to the understanding of "rights" of the indigenous and their struggle to defend these rights. People in the community see other indigenous as their Christian "brothers and sisters" and hence attempt to help them when they can. In Guadalupe, informal networks form connections: they create social bonds, provide economic and moral support, and lay the base for political mobilization.<sup>1</sup> For the Tzotziles of Guadalupe, networks represent the dependence of the individual on the community for survival, and they demonstrate how rights are embodied within this community instead of in the individual. Through networks, it is possible to examine how the discourse on human rights described in Chapters 5 and 6 articulates with concrete actions to defend rights. This chapter and the next focus on these networks and address three central questions:

--First, how is the creation and maintenance of networks related to indigenous understandings of rights and actions to protect these rights?

--Second, what roles do religion, ethnicity, and class play in these networks?

--Third, how are these networks related to political mobilization?

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<sup>1</sup> Following Denoeux, the term network refers to "informally organized groups of individuals linked to one another by noncontractual and highly personal bonds and loyalties" (1993a: 147).

### **Networks in Anthropology**

For the past twenty years, anthropologists have argued for a more contextualized view of indigenous communities in the highlands of Chiapas, once described as closed and corporate (Nash, ed. 1995; Rus 1994; Wasserstrom 1983). The study of networks is an important methodological step in linking research at the community level to regional, state, and national structures. The links among indigenous communities have existed for centuries and were historically based on the pilgrimages of saints, *cargos*, commerce, and other exchanges. In this section, I analyze the participation of the people of Guadalupe in networks which start at the local level and extend to other indigenous communities, Diocesan organizations, and political groups. Through these networks, the importance of trans-local political and religious structures in the community of Guadalupe and the interrelated mobilizing forces of ethnicity, poverty, religion and the act of expulsion are evident. At times, one identification is more important than others; often several are inextricably linked.

The work on new social movements describes "collective identities"-- based not only in class identification, but also on cultural characteristics such as ethnicity, religion, and gender -- as important factors leading to mobilization (Laclau 1985; Laclau and Mofe 1985; Touraine 1981, 1985). According to this literature, new social movements differ from the earlier class-based movements in that they are founded on identities which do not necessarily follow socio-economic or occupational identities. As Arturo Escobar points out ". . . contemporary social movements in Latin America have a multiple character, as economic, social, political, and cultural struggles. The boundaries and

dependencies among these domains are blurred, in some cases indistinguishable. In particular, it is important to be open to the deeply cultural character of these struggles" (1992: 82). However, the work on new social movements has been criticized for not paying adequate attention to class, albeit together with other mobilizing forces (Knight 1990; Nash 1995a). This is evident in the case of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, an ethnic and class-based social movement in which the respect for cultural autonomy is being demanded along with fair wages and social services (Nash 1995a). Similarly in Guadalupe, class identification *together with* identifications based on religion, ethnicity, and being a victim of human rights violations are all important mobilizing forces: at times, these identities cannot be separated. As this chapter demonstrates, each of these forces plays a significant role in establishing networks. The Tzotziles of Guadalupe often express their oppression in terms of being poor: poverty becomes a mobilizing force uniting them with indigenous peoples outside their own community.

It is important to point out that while the people of Guadalupe are involved in political mobilization -- they are conscious of their oppression and are involved in protest against the *mestizo*-dominated political and economic structure of Chiapas -- their actions cannot be said to constitute a social movement. Chapter 8 describes the relationship of the inhabitants of Guadalupe to CRIACH and *Pueblo Creyente*, two political groups which do constitute part of a wider social movement working to defend the human rights of the indigenous peoples in Chiapas.

As noted, informal networks in Guadalupe create social bonds, provide economic

and moral support, and lay the base for political mobilization. Networks have been analyzed by social scientists who note their social, economic, and political importance in Third World cities, particularly among the poor.<sup>2</sup> Much attention has been given to the economic role of social networks in providing mutual support among the poor. Larissa Lomnitz's *Networks and Marginality: Life in a Mexican Shantytown* (1977) examines the role of networks in Cerrada del C6ndor, a poor neighborhood in Mexico City comprised of recent migrants from rural areas. Lomnitz describes the networks of reciprocal exchange of goods and services as having both social and economic importance. She found that kinship ties, both in the nuclear and extended family, were critical connections through which networks were created and maintained. Relationships of reciprocity were also formed with neighbors, especially in cases in which no kin lived in the neighborhood. These networks serve a variety of purposes. People exchange information (including opportunities for residence and employment, gossip, and general orientation to urban life); lend money, food, work instruments, clothes and other items; share services such as lodging, food, and care for family members; and gave moral support to one another. These networks were critical to the survival of the families in the shantytown.<sup>3</sup> Although Lomnitz's study emphasizes that the urban poor are actors, she does not directly

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<sup>2</sup> Networks were first examined in anthropology by members of the Manchester School who noted that the categories of structural functionalism were not adequate for studying "complex," particularly urban, societies. The Manchester School studied networks in order to analyze the social, political, and economic context for the societies being studied (see for example, Barnes 1969, Cohen 1969, Epstein 1962, Mitchell 1969).

<sup>3</sup> The importance of networks in the survival of poor communities has been documented in other anthropological works (see Kearney 1986).

address the relationship between networking and political participation.

The political importance of networks is, however, well-documented. Informal networks can provide a means of political participation in areas where access to formal political organizations which control public and private resources are closed to the poor. Furthermore, networks supply a space in which people can discuss common problems and aspirations which can facilitate the formation of collective identity and a basis for mobilization. In *Rituals of Marginality: Politics, Process, and Culture Change in Urban Central Mexico, 1969-1974*, Carlos Vález-Ibañez (1983) demonstrates how networks (based on kinship, fictive kin, residence, and friendships) were used to gather support for a political struggle for land and services in a poor neighborhood of Mexico City.<sup>4</sup>

Involvement in local networks does not always lead to political mobilization: in fact, networks can exert a "stabilizing" rather than mobilizing influence (Bienen 1984, cited in Denoeux 1993a). In some cases networks cut across wealth and income differences, hence they can preempt class consciousness among the poor. In Mexico, informal networks are often co-opted by government authorities, who promise goods and services in exchange for the political loyalty of the community. Wayne Cornelius' work on low-income communities in the outskirts of Mexico City (1975, 1977) documents the process by which the government co-opted and controlled the local leaders. These leaders, the *caciques*, link local informal organizations with the state and, in exchange, are "expected to maintain 'control' of his settlement -- to keep order, avoid scandals and

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<sup>4</sup>Earlier works also demonstrated the importance of networks in political and economic struggles. Abner Cohen (1969) shows how the Hausa of Nigeria used ethnic/religious networks to control the trade route between the savanna and forest belt.

public demonstrations embarrassing to the government, and head off any other type of occurrences which might disrupt social tranquility or undermine confidence in the regime" (Cornelius 1977: 347-8). Furthermore, each *cacique* assures that the local community will deliver votes to Mexico's ruling party.

Vélez-Ibañez's political ethnography demonstrates how elites who are part of the formal economic and political sector articulated with the informal organization of the community through "patron-client relationships, brokerage, political friendships of convenience, and other favor-producing exchanges" (1983: 2). In the organizational process, as these elites coalesced with the informal organization, it became controlled by the elites and, therefore, dysfunctional for organizing the local population. As the elites became co-opted by the Mexican government and began to give up their independent political power for concrete benefits, it became politically advantageous for the marginalized population to withdraw their support for this mobilization. Nonetheless, the community's experience in political action was not in vain, since the local population gained an important sense of autonomy and social power from it.

The networks established at a local level in Guadalupe do not have ties to the government, which negates the possibility that they be co-opted. However, this also lessens their ability to receive benefits from the state and to work toward political change. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the organization of CRIACH has considerable political power, but its leaders are at risk of being coerced by the PRI, exchanging political and economic benefits for the loyalty of the group to Mexico's ruling party.

The role of religion in establishing networks which can lead to political

mobilization has also been examined.<sup>5</sup> *Comunidades eclesiales de base* (CEBs), or Christian base communities, were established as prayer and reflection groups for Catholics in Latin America from the late 1960's onward, and their structure is similar to informal networks. The terms base and community have double meanings. Base refers both to the base of the Church, or the *people* of God who make up the Church, and also the base, or the poor, of society. Community refers to a geographically defined social group and to the fundamental goal of CEBs which is to create community. Although CEBs were not created for political motives, through their participation in CEBs people often recognize that they share problems, learn leadership skills, and can mobilize to change their situation. In several Latin American countries, particularly Nicaragua, Brazil, Chile, Guatemala, and El Salvador, CEBs led to movements which challenged repressive regimes. It is important to note that not all who join CEBs become politically mobilized: "People participate in base communities not out of some desire to change the society at large, but rather because of their religious faith" (Mainwaring and Wilde 1989: 5). Nonetheless, in several cases, participation in CEBs led to political participation; for example, in Nicaragua CEBs played an important role in mobilizing people in the Sandanist revolution.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Again, Abner Cohen's ethnography on the Hausa (1969) demonstrates the importance of Islamic belief and practice in establishing trade networks.

<sup>6</sup>Similar to the CEBs, Guilian Denoeux (1993a) describes informal networks created for the study of Islam among the urban poor in Iran and Egypt. These organizations promoted solidarity and unity, economic assistance, and collective identity. Building from a social and religious base, these groups became powerful forces of political opposition. On Christian Base Communities and political mobilization in Latin America, see Azevedo 1987; Cleary 1985; Hewitt 1991; and Lancaster 1989.

In the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, CEBs are not common in indigenous communities; however, those who identify as Catholic (particularly Mayan Catholics) are united through ideology and the reading of the Bible, forming part of a community of faith.<sup>7</sup> The Catholics of Chiapas feel connected to Catholics around the world because they all share similar beliefs, participate in similar rituals, and are (or should be) helping to construct the Reign of God. This community of faith begins at the local level, and extends to the regional, the state and -- at least ideologically -- the international level because Catholicism is an international religion. The geographic and organizational structure of the Diocese facilitates the formation of both formal and informal networks among the indigenous communities. In Guadalupe, the notion of belonging to a community of faith facilitates involvement in networks. Catholics within the community share economic and moral support with their "brothers and sisters" in Christ. At the same time, belonging to a community of faith aids the creation of networks beyond the community. Catechists and prayer leaders walk to other communities to share the Word of God with Tzotziles in Chenalho' and Betania. People participate in political mobilizations with other indigenous groups -- including Tzeltales, Tojolabales, and Zoques -- of Chiapas. Through the community of faith, people are united in their common vision of working toward the establishment of the Reign of God, a world with justice and equality for all.

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<sup>7</sup>Several pastoral workers of the Diocese explained that an attempt was made in the 1980's to establish Christian Base Communities in rural and urban areas following the model of other Latin American countries. Although the Base Communities grew in urban areas, particularly among *mestizos*, pastoral workers realized that rural indigenous communities were effectively Base Communities already.

In Guadalupe, the economic, political, and religious purpose of networks are intertwined. The necessity of providing economic assistance to those in need is commonly articulated as part of the Christian ethic of sharing. Similarly, the necessity of participating in political mobilizations, albeit on a small scale, follows the belief that all humans are equal under God, and that the present social order in Chiapas in which a small group of *mestizos* have monopolized political and economic power goes against God's will. In the words of the catechists and prayer leaders of Guadalupe, sharing the Word of God, giving to those in need, and participating in political acts are all part of "working and walking" to serve God. Working and walking are a necessity for the Mayas of Chiapas. They walk long distances to reach communities where the only means of access is a narrow dirt paths, they walk to market and to the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas when they lack the money to pay bus fare, they remember walking for days to the *fincas* to earn money, and many walk for hours on Sundays to attend religious celebrations. Working to cultivate *milpa*, to make *tortillas* and artisan products, and to perform wage labor are some of the tasks essential for survival. The long hours of walking and the difficult conditions of work are two aspects of life used by Tzotziles to describe the difference between the *mestizo* and indigenous populations; these two aspects also refer to the poverty which unites the indigenous or *campesino* populations. In establishing and maintaining networks, the people of Guadalupe are working and walking to serve God.

### **Networks Within the Community of Guadalupe**

Within the community of Guadalupe, strong local networks have been established in which mutual assistance is exchanged in the form of information, work, material goods, and moral support. In several ways, these local networks are similar to those described by Lomnitz (1977) and in other works on poor communities. The support is a necessity for the survival of people who live on the edge of subsistence. As noted in Chapter 2, the birth of the community itself was based on networking. The founder, Mateo, bought the land for the community in order to help out fellow Catholics who were being exiled from Chamula. When families first arrived, he gave them a place to live and helped them build their homes. He also helped widows out with food and gave them land. This type of mutual support -- the exchange of information, food, and services -- continues in Guadalupe, helping to establish community at both the literal and metaphorical levels.

People often arrive in Guadalupe because family or friends have informed them of the possibility of living there. At times kinship is an important factor; if several households are related by kinship, they are likely to exchange assistance. Once one family is established with land and housing in Guadalupe, other families come to live there. This was the case with Santos and his two younger brothers. Over a period of several years, the three families moved to Guadalupe and now live within a few hundred yards of one another. Another similar case is that of Agustin, the lead catechist, who has lived in Guadalupe for ten years. When his sister-in-law, Martha, left Chamula and needed a place to live, he invited her to live with him. Since she is a single mother who

left her husband because he beat her, Agustin gave her land to live on, and built her a home. Recently, the brother-in-law of Roberto went to live in Guadalupe as well. Again, his housing and land was arranged by Roberto. Among these seven extended families, kinship is critical in forming networks of sharing services, food, and money.

In my work, I found that religion is often a more important basis for networks than kinship. Aside from these three extended families, the people of Guadalupe do not have more than their nuclear families present. (This includes grandparents who often live with the nuclear family). The majority of their family members -- brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins -- still live in Chamula and cannot be regularly counted on for support because of the geographical and theological distance among them (most of these family members are traditionalists rather than Roman Catholics). Furthermore, the people of Guadalupe describe the process of expulsion as being based on religious motives (as discussed in Chapter 2), hence religion became an idiom which is as at least as important as kinship. I found that mutual support was most commonly, although not always, shared *among* Catholics; in some cases support was shared between Catholic and Protestant families.<sup>8</sup>

Catholic families commonly helped one another with work, particularly with rebuilding their homes or roofs. When the families first arrive in Guadalupe without money and belongings, they construct their homes of *cartón* and wooden boards. When and if they accumulate money, they rebuild the roof with corrugated metal. Juan, a catechist, spent several work days helping his neighbor, also Catholic, build a new roof

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<sup>8</sup>The division between Protestants and Catholics is discussed later in this chapter.

on his home. When I asked Juan if he was being paid for the work, he said "No, that's just how it is. We help out when we can." Since Juan didn't have any paid work at the time, he was able to help out. Among the Catholic families, people commonly lend money, particularly to new families in the community or when someone is sick. Women help one another with several tasks. When one family is preparing a *fiesta* for a baptism, wedding, or first communion, a group of women and girls -- commonly the wives of the leaders of the chapel -- gather in the home the day before and spend all morning making *tortillas*.

Information about work opportunities was constantly shared in the community. Since the majority of the men in Guadalupe work irregularly, primarily as day laborers, they are dependent on information about job openings. When one person heard of work, he would tell others and they would walk together from the community to the work site in the city. The *albaniles* (carpenters) often heard of work for *peones*, and would bring other men from the community to work together on a project.

Much of the networking occurred in direct relation to the Catholic Church -- an important center for catechists, prayer leaders and their wives who regularly organize assistance for religious events such as births, deaths, illnesses, and weddings, in which moral support, prayer, and food are shared. Through such religious events, assistance is ritualized; giving to others is not an individual event, but a communal and ritual act of support demonstrating the individual's dependence on others, and the work of serving God.

I commonly observed this type of assistance in Guadalupe. When the father of

Emiliano was sick, two catechists, the sacristan, and several other men walked up the hill to his house to pray for him. They carried food, and stayed several hours into the night praying for his health and offering spiritual support.

People also shared moral and economic support when someone died. One day I had an appointment with Juan to assist in translation. When I arrived at his house, his wife explained to me that he was not there because he had gone to help bury the child of Maria who had died at birth. Again, it was the catechists who helped with the physical labor of burial and who performed the religious ceremony. Several of the men missed a day's work in order to support the grieving family.

The ritualized support and sharing among the Catholic families of Guadalupe was evident in a wedding I attended one rainy Saturday in late August. Preparation for the wedding began weeks before the event. Emiliano and Pascuala, the couple to be married, began to borrow money from other Catholics to buy the items necessary for their wedding such as rings, clothing, and food for a festive meal. The godparents, Rosa and Juan, helped to prepare the couple through reading biblical texts and discussions; they also made a small financial contribution. Several days before the wedding, the godparents arrived at my house with Emiliano and Pascuala at 7:00 am. They were on their way to the market to buy the food necessary for the *fiesta* after the wedding. The godparents would help select the food and carry it back to the community. Emiliano and Pascuala have six children, and the older ones could have easily helped with this task. However, it was important that the godparents participate. Juan explained to me they were to be the godparents in marriage, a relationship which would continue for life. The two couples

were not related through kinship, although they came from the same hamlet in Chamula. Juan told me that this was the first time they were to be *compadres*, and he and his wife were proud to have been chosen. Other members of the community had lent money to Emiliano and Pascuala to purchase the food for the party.

On the day of the wedding, I arrived in Guadalupe with a Catholic priest and two pastoral workers who serve the community. We entered the chapel where just a few days earlier, the men of the community had worked for two days to pour the concrete on the dirt floor so that it would be ready for the visit of the priest who would perform the wedding. This was to be a special mass: one couple would be married, seven children would be baptized, and four people would receive first communion. As the people gathered in the chapel, the priest wrote down the names and birth dates of all the people who would receive sacraments, and then listened to the confessions of a group of men and women. The catechists selected the readings from the Bible which would be presented during the mass.

Emiliano and Pascuala, sat in the front of the chapel dressed in their best clothes; Pascuala had a new white blouse, a traditional garment of Chamula, for the wedding. The godparents sat on either side of them. Godparents had also been selected for the children who would be baptized and who would celebrate their first communion. Mass was celebrated, mostly in Spanish, with parts translated to Tzotzil by the catechists. Of particular interest were the readings -- I Corinthians 12. 31, 13. 1-8 and Matthew 22. 35-40-- which were translated and were about love, appropriate for a wedding. "... If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." During the

homily, women commented on the importance of demonstrating love through helping others.<sup>9</sup>

After the mass, we all walked up a steep hill to the house of Don Emiliano to celebrate his recent marriage. It had started to rain, and we struggled not to fall on the muddy path. The house of Don Emiliano has walls built of wooden slats, a roof of corrugated metal, and a dirt floor. The walls do not reach the roof of the house, nor do they cover its four sides, so the cold and rain entered. Emiliano and Pascuala do not have beds, and they and their six children sleep on the floor of the home; they are one of the poorest families in the community. Nonetheless, they had spent a large amount of money to prepare the traditional food of festivals: chicken soup, *tortillas*, and soft drink. There was enough to feed all of the people who gathered around the house after the mass. A group of women of the chapel had gathered the day before to help make the *tortillas* for the wedding.

The wedding had been a community effort in many respects. The families had cooperated to give the money to buy concrete for the floor of the chapel; godparents had been selected for the people who would receive sacraments, forming new *compadrazgo* relationships; and the women had worked together to prepare the meal which followed the wedding. Above all, the vast majority of the Catholics of the community participated in the mass and the meal which followed. Why was it that Emiliano and Pascuala, one of the poorest families of the community, had invested so much money in the wedding?

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<sup>9</sup> Normally, the priest is the only person who speaks during a homily. In this case, the people attending the mass were asked to comment on the readings.

They had been living together as husband and wife for over fifteen years and already had six children. In part, as they explained to me, it was important to be married by the Church so that their children could receive the sacraments and to set a good example for other Catholics in the community. The religious event cemented Emiliano and Pascuala's relationship with the Catholic community of Guadalupe. After the wedding, Emiliano and Pascuala were central to the network of catechists and prayer leaders. Emiliano began to sit at the altar in the front of the chapel during religious celebrations, a place reserved for catechists, prayer leaders, and the sacristan. His wedding had changed his status in the community of Catholics. Here, the paradox between the idealized local notion of equality -- as described in Chapter 5 -- and the real division between members of the community is evident. Prayer leaders and catechists are those who take on a *cargo*, or burden, to serve their community. At the same time, this service elevates their status.

### **Limits of Networks: Protestants and Catholics**

Although Protestants and Catholics in Guadalupe also share mutual support, this was much less common than that among Catholics, and did not lead to the establishment of permanent networks. The Catholics of Guadalupe, particularly the religious leaders, have a well-established discourse about the importance of working together with people of all religions. However, there is often a significant difference between what people say and what they do. During my first visit to the community of Guadalupe, the religious leaders gathered in the house of Manuela and Antonio to talk about the community and

the work I hoped to do there. It was of great importance to the men that I understood that the Protestants and Catholics in the community had to work together, "We are all children of God, and we all read the same Bible, the same version in our language [Tzotzil]. The *caciques* of Chamula exiled both Catholics and Evangelicals for having religion." While conducting interviews in Guadalupe, people often repeated this ideology of unity, explaining that all had been expelled, all were indigenous, and all were believers, so that divisions were a mistake and do not follow the Word of God.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, both religious groups share the beliefs that drinking is wrong, that one must "respect" women and only take one wife, and that one should not be forced to go into debt due to participation in the *cargo* system. These three beliefs are the most common reasons given for conversion to Catholicism and Protestant religions, and also the reasons behind expulsion. In spite of all of these apparent reasons for unity, the Catholics commonly complained about the Protestants in the community. At times they accused them of drinking or of taking more than one wife; sometimes it was said that they really did not understand the Bible since they worshiped God differently. Although religious differences greatly limited networking between the two groups, I did observe several examples of cooperation between Catholics and Protestants.

For example, one day when I was visiting a Catholic family in Guadalupe, we heard someone speaking in Tzotzil over the loudspeaker of the community. A child had

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<sup>10</sup>The Mexican government also encourages religious and/or political division to minimize the strength of independent organizations. The way religious division is used to weaken organizations was discussed in interviews with a priest in Ocosingo (November 1993) and another priest in San Cristóbal de Las Casas (June 1996). Neil Harvey (1989) describes the government's attempts to create political divisions in popular organizations.

died, and a donation for the burial was being solicited. The child was from a Protestant family, but both Protestants and Catholics made a small financial contribution to help out.

For a short time, some of the women of Guadalupe participated in a weaving cooperative established by the government. Both Catholic and Protestant women met at the home of one woman to organize their work. Together, they made a trip to Tuxtla Guitérrez, the first time many had been to the city, to consult with authorities about the cooperative.<sup>11</sup>

Several important projects had to be carried out at a community level, such as the construction of a new school and the continuation of the road. In both cases, Protestants and Catholics met in the town hall and agreed who would work on the projects. Men of both religions worked together. The catechists explained to me that the two groups now worked together peacefully, and do not have the conflicts which were present when the church first divided. The conflict between Protestants and Catholics reached its peak in 1990. In the years following this conflict, the personal relationships between members of the groups were slowly re-established.

The organization CRIACH, discussed in detail in the following chapter, is one important example of Catholics and Protestants working together for common goals. In this organization, indigenous peoples in the highlands of Chiapas from a variety of Christian religions work together to defend their economic, political, and religious rights. The uniting factor is that of expulsion -- the vast majority of the members of CRIACH

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<sup>11</sup>In the end, the attempt to establish a cooperative failed. The women complained that the government never came through with its promise to provide the necessary materials for artisan work.

have been exiled from their native communities -- which affects both Protestants and Catholics.

However, the divisions between Catholics and Protestants in Guadalupe are stronger than the ties which unite them. The Catholics repeat that "all are equal in God," and hence all must work together, but they see this ideology as part of Catholicism, in turn the "true" religion. Therefore, Catholics unite as Catholics, leaving the Protestants behind. The indigenous communities of Chiapas have multi-religious affiliations, making political mobilization through Catholic identity problematic. In his description of the work of the Catholic Church in organizing the 1974 Indigenous Congress, George Collier notes that ". . . the catechists' effort met with the limitations of their association with the Catholic Church in a landscape of religious pluralism. However much the Catholic Church hoped to speak with a universal voice, it could not do so persuasively while attempting to win people away from other religions. Only a truly secular movement appealing broadly to pluralism and democracy could hope to galvanize the indigenous and peasant community across its religious diversity" (Collier 1994: 64-65). Bishop Ruiz García has made a consistent effort to include Protestants and Catholics in his work; members of CRIACH often laud the work of the Bishop in support of the expelled, referring to him as "our friend" and even as "our Bishop." However, as people unite on the basis of identification as Catholics, Protestants are left out.

### **Intercommunity Networks**

The people of Guadalupe have links to other indigenous communities, primarily through the Catholic Church. They regularly support the Catholics in several chapels in the municipalities of Chenalho' and Teopisca, and often attend religious ceremonies there to assist in prayer and to mediate in community conflicts. These visits have more than religious significance; catechists share information on political events and are creating networks of support of those who will work together to defend their rights.

Two communities of Teopisca, comprised of Tzotzil Catholics who were exiled from Chamula, are regularly visited by the catechists and prayer leaders of Guadalupe. The primary purpose of these visits, which most commonly take place on Sundays, is to assist in prayer and to share their faith in God. One week Juan and Agustin spent four full days with the people of one of these communities in order to participate, along with twenty-five others, in a three day fast, held to give moral support to the single catechist of the community. His wife had recently died and he was left alone with six young children. He could not work because he had to care for his children. The people in the community were afraid that he would loose his faith, so they decided to hold a fast to support him. Juan told me that the catechist was still very sad, in fact he was crying during the fast. With the support of Juan and Agustin, the community held a celebration of the Word of God three times each day of the fast. They were there to support the people of the community, and most importantly to see that the catechist did not lose faith.

One of the strongest ties is with the community of Buena Vista, a hamlet in the municipality of Chenalho'. The people in Buena Vista are also Tzotziles, hence sharing a

common language and tradition of the people in Guadalupe. Although they have not been exiled from their native lands, they are also extremely poor. Church leaders from Guadalupe make regular visits to assist the Catholics of Buena Vista and sometimes people from Buena Vista arrive in Guadalupe to attend religious celebrations. The link with Buena Vista demonstrates both the strength and weakness of building networks through the Catholic Church. The notion of a community of faith facilitates exchange of economic support, religious ideas, and information on current events. However, the fact that the community is imagined as Catholic excludes those who do not belong to their religion.

One day I asked Agustin, the lead catechist, how and why the people of Guadalupe had become involved in the hamlet of Buena Vista in Chenalho'. He began to tell me the history of his work in the community:

About a year ago, I was visiting the center of Chenalho'; I was playing music for the Sunday mass. Some people came up to me to tell me about a group of Catholics in the hamlet and they asked if I couldn't go visit in order to help preach. There were three catechists in Buena Vista. When I got there, the people were suspicious. They said to me "Who is this man who has come to preach from San Cristóbal? Is he here to make trouble for us?" I said "No, I'm not here to make trouble. We are all equal, we're all children of God, and I've only come to preach." But there was a group of people who didn't want me to preach. They said that I had been expelled from Chamula for being Evangelical, and that I would cause more problems in Chenalho', just like there were problems in Chamula. They said that we don't use candles the same as they do, that we don't respect the images of the Saints. So this group decided that they didn't want me there. They wanted me to leave. So, I said "OK, I'll leave, but first I am going to preach because that is why I'm here, I've come to preach and can't leave without preaching." So after I preached, and I did well, they decided to ask who wanted me to keep coming and who didn't. Well, 35 people wanted me to keep coming and five people didn't. So they said that I could still come, but that the 35 people in favor of my preaching

would have to leave to go to another church, and so the community split in two, and since then we have been going to the hamlet.

Agustin continued to make regular visits to Buena Vista, and later other members of Guadalupe joined. In June, about a year after Agustin's first visit to the community, the new chapel was constructed and the group from Guadalupe visited to participate in its inauguration.

When I asked Agustin to explain the causes for the division in the church, he resorted to religious terms, saying that those who opposed his preaching did not understand the Word of God:

They said that people are different, that whites eat white corn and the indigenous dark corn, but this isn't true. The group of 35 families who left the church liked me because I went with my Bible in hand and I preached the Word of God. The division was also political; the people who left belong to *sociedad civil*, and the others to the PRI.

The term *sociedad civil* or civil society has been used in Chiapas since the Zapatista uprising of 1994 to refer to those who oppose the current PRI government. In Buena Vista as elsewhere, the interaction of religion and politics is evident: those who supported the PRI remained in one religious group and those supporting *sociedad civil* joined a separate religious group.

On Tuesday in July of 1995 I was talking with Juan and he told me of a recent visit to Buena Vista where he has maintained strong ties because he lived in Chenalho' for eight years. As he described the people of Buena Vista, I realized that it would be very interesting for me to visit, and asked if it would be possible to accompany him. I was not sure how Juan would respond; I thought that perhaps the people of Buena Vista would

not like to see a stranger in their community and that my presence might aggravate the existing conflicts. However, Juan was thrilled at my suggestion and said, yes of course I could visit, in fact, why didn't we leave that Sunday. He agreed to stop by my house at 7:00 am and we would walk together to the market of San Cristóbal to take the bus to Chenalho'. His one concern was that I be prepared to walk up the steep hill to Buena Vista once we arrived in Chenalho'. As he had repeated to me time and time again, he and other indigenous people were accustomed to walking long distances, however the *caxlanes* like myself don't have that custom. I assured him that I could walk up the hill, although perhaps not as quickly as he.

On Sunday, Juan arrived at my house at 6:45 a.m. with his two oldest daughters, ages ten and twelve. We walked from my house through the market, stopping to buy a kilogram of *tortillas* which one daughter placed in her bag to take on the trip. When we arrived at the place where the buses leave for Chenalho', we found one which was just ready to go. The trip to the center of Chenalho' took an hour. Then Juan said we should eat something in the market before we went to the hamlet because we would need strength for the steep climb to the community. We walked through the market looking for a place to wash our hands, and finding a spigot in front of a house, we washed and ate the *tacos* and *tortillas* we had earlier purchased.

When we began the ascent, Juan looked at his watch to see what time it was. We climbed at a fast pace, at least for me. It was a very steep hill. Juan's daughters, unlike me, did not have any trouble climbing even though the youngest was barefoot. At first, the path was very muddy, I slipped several times but did not fall. As we climbed, Juan

asked me how to say words in English, and he taught me how to say words in Tzotzil. I asked him what I should say when we reached the community, and he told me that I should just greet the people, and introduce myself. He told me not to worry because, although the people of Buena Vista do not speak much Spanish, he would translate for me. When we got to the top of the hill, Juan looked at his watch again; the climb had taken us 45 minutes. He said that was a good record, the same as he usually does, and he was impressed that I had been able to walk so quickly. Juan told me that he used to walk five hours from Chenalho' to San Cristóbal de Las Casas before the road was built.

I was glad to hear that now we would not be climbing uphill anymore, just following the path to the community. We walked another 45 minutes, which was actually more climbing, but it was not as steep as the first part of the walk. We could see the town of Chenalho' below, and the countryside was beautiful. Juan said that it must be like Paradise, because the Bible describes a place that is very beautiful just like this. He began to tell me about the community of Buena Vista to prepare me for our arrival:

The people in Buena Vista don't grow coffee, it's too cold at the top of the hill. Only the people who live below where it is warmer can grow coffee. Life in the hamlet is very difficult because the people have to walk up the hill. There is a road that reaches the community, but you need a truck because there is no public transportation. No one in the community has a truck, and furthermore, you can't get by in a truck during the rainy season.

On the path, we passed several people, and stopped to exchange greetings. All of the women were wearing their traditional dress, red striped blouses with embroidered designs. The majority of the men and almost all the boys were also wearing traditional dress, the short white cotton pants and blouses.

Finally, we arrived in Buena Vista at 9:30. The celebration of Word of God was to start at 10, but the people were already standing outside the chapel. There were several benches near the chapel where children and men were seated, talking and laughing. Juan introduced me to Diego, a catechist, and to another prayer leader. The most important thing in his introduction of me was that I am a believer and that I had contacts with the Human Rights Center of the Bishop. Again, my fears about being an "intrusive anthropologist" were wrong. The catechist, prayer leader, and other members of the church were happy that I had come to visit and to share in worship. The fact that I am Catholic was important in that it connected me to the members of the community in spite of our obvious ethnic difference. The community of faith extends beyond the local and includes people from other countries, such as Father Chanteau, the priest of Chenalho', who is from France. Ideally, all Catholics in this community of faith are children of God and share common values. The fact that I knew the people in the Human Rights Center with the Bishop was important in that the members of Buena Vista feel that this Center and the Bishop are working to defend their rights as indigenous and poor.

The chapel, built of wooden boards with a roof of corrugated metal, was brightly painted in pink, yellow, and blue. A sign painted above the door read, "Second Catholic Church, John 14,6." The original Catholic Church, about a hundred yards away, was constructed of adobe and people were preparing to enter Sunday celebration there. Reinforcing the story I had already heard, Juan explained to me that the people in the first chapel are *PRI-istas* and for that reason, the members of *sociedad civil* had built the second chapel. Although the members of the PRI chapel are also Catholic, they are called

traditionalists and differ from the other Catholics in that they drink alcohol and continue to participate in the *cargo* system.

We went into the chapel to start the celebration at 9:45. The men told me that I should sit at the altar in front of the chapel, and I complied. I was the only woman seated at the altar. Obligated to introduce myself at the beginning of the ceremony, I said who I was, and that I was happy to be there to celebrate the Word of God with them. The catechists mentioned that we are all brothers and sisters of God, and that even though I came from the United States, far away, I was a believer and we all share the same blood as children of God. Then, they started to play music and sing. There were three men playing guitar, and another playing tambourine. They sang several songs which are also sung during the Sunday celebrations in Guadalupe. The chapel was almost full, but even so, there were only about thirty people inside. All the women wore their traditional red striped blouses, typical of 'Chenalho'. Two women from Chamula attended the celebration; their blue blouses stood out in contrast to the red and white ones used by the women of 'Chenalho'. Juan explained to me that they had walked to Buena Vista from a neighboring hamlet in Chamula.

After the music, everyone knelt to participate in a "collective prayer" -- at once individual and communal. Each person prayed out loud, simultaneously offering their desires, faults, and wishes to God. After this prayer, Juan was asked to share a reading from the Bible. He had selected the First Letter of John, 4, 7-12 which is about love. "Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love."

During his sermon, Juan explained that Agustin couldn't come because he was in Teopisca to help another community with prayer.

When Juan finished preaching, Diego (the prayer leader from Buena Vista) began to talk, and soon he started to cry. I struggled to understand the Tzotzil, at first thinking that someone had died. It turned out that he was sad because a man had left the chapel and had begun to drink. Diego was also lamenting that the people of the chapel are no longer united. He complained that the catechists do not follow the agreements about who will lead prayer, that they sometimes go to market when it is their turn, leaving the chapel without a celebration on Wednesdays. The formation of personal relationships has strong social implications for the construction of a community of Catholics, and hence, breaking these ties causes sadness as it threatens local cohesion. Afterwards, Juan commented on the public crying; he told me that everyone knows that they are sad, and that the people in the community have to unite. It was clearly of great importance that Juan had attended the celebration; he led the opening and closing prayers. Older than the other catechists and with much more experience in the Church, he was respected for his age and knowledge.

After the celebration, we returned to the benches outside the chapel where we had sat in the beginning. Most of the people were congregated in front of the chapel; it was the central meeting place in the community. One man began to explain to me how poor they were, how they had nothing but a little land on which they cultivated *milpa*, and I saw *milpa* planted all the way up the hill and in every corner. The homes had "Civil Society, Neutral Zone" painted on their exterior walls in large white letters, indicating the

fear of possible military conflict in the region. All of the homes in the community were made of adobe walls with straw roofs.

We waited outside for a while, and then were invited to eat in the house of a family of the chapel. Juan, his daughters, the family, and I walked together up the hill to the family's home. We sat down on small stools and were each given *tortillas*, scrambled eggs, and a soft drink. While the women and girls made *tortillas*, the father of the family talked non-stop with Juan. The men discussed the problems in the chapel and the importance of maintaining unity.

After we ate and thanked the man and his wife, we began to climb down the hill, stopping at the chapel to say good-bye to the people who were still talking at the benches a good hour after the celebration had finished. We walked down the hill very quickly, reaching the bottom in 45 minutes.

In the town center of Chenalho', we walked to the place where the buses leave for San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Juan and his daughters waited with me until a bus arrived, and then they said good-bye. It was after 2 p.m. and I was exhausted. Juan explained that he wasn't going back to San Cristóbal until the next day. He was going to visit his brother-in-law in another hamlet of Chenalho', involving another walk of an hour and half in the rain, in order to help with a prayer group. But, as he explained to me, since he is a catechist and it is his job to help others with prayer, Sunday is a very busy day.

The reasons for Juan's visits to Buena Vista are complex. Although he has to pay for transportation (the equivalent of half a day's labor if he makes the trip alone), make the steep climb uphill, and leave his family and community for the day, he goes to Buena

Vista at least once a month. The catechist Agustin, as well as other people from Guadalupe, also make regular visits. The primary reason behind the visits is religious; Juan and others arrive to preach the Word of God and to offer moral support to the Catholic community-in-formation. For the people of Buena Vista, the time and effort given by Guadalupe is a public affirmation of the importance of their project. While I was in the chapel of Buena Vista and Juan preached about the necessity of loving one another in order to know God, I realized that one important motive was serving God by loving and serving his brothers and sisters in Christ. In short, the visit to Buena Vista makes the community of faith a reality.

Ethnic identification unites the two communities; both are comprised of Tzotziles who share a common language, tradition, and history as well as the discrimination they suffer at the hands of *mestizos*. The chapel of Buena Vista unites indigenous Catholics from the municipalities of Chamula and Chenalho'. Poverty is another factor uniting the two communities. Unity is created not only between people as individuals, but also between the communities, Guadalupe, Buena Vista, and those in Teopisca. The communities are united in their shared situation and understanding of poverty. This unity creates deep roots for the foundation of political mobilization, as is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

The political dimension of the link between the two communities cannot be ignored. The community of Buena Vista is divided along both political and religious lines. I was told that the largest group in the community consists of people of *costumbre* -- those who follow traditional Mayan religious beliefs, who explicitly (and sometimes

violently) forbid participation in Protestant religions and the post-Vatican II Catholicism of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, and who are commonly affiliated with the PRI. This group rejects participation in civil society be it the Zapatista movement or independent organizations which resist the PRI. Those who follow *costumbre* consider themselves to be traditional Catholics, but are separated from the Catholics of the chapel I visited. There is also a small group of Protestants in the community, and finally, the post-Vatican II Catholics I visited.<sup>12</sup> The people of Guadalupe made the decision to support the Catholics of Buena Vista who consider themselves to be part of civil society. The visits from Guadalupe serve not only for preaching, but also for sharing information on political events, including the process of negotiations between the government and Zapatistas, and concrete data on marches, pilgrimages, and other events which support the process of peace in Chiapas. These visits legitimize both the religious and political choice of the people of Buena Vista.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, the network between Guadalupe and Buena Vista establishes a base for political mobilization. Through these visits, members are constantly reconstituting their shared identity as indigenous people, poor, and Catholics. The discourse on equality and unity between human beings which is a fundamental part of the Tzotzil definition of

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<sup>12</sup> It is possible that the people of Buena Vista are directly or indirectly involved with the Zapatistas. When I asked Juan why the homes in Buena Vista were painted with "Civil Society, Neutral Zone," he said, "*Así es*" (that's just how it is), indicating that he did not want to say more. For the protection of both communities, I did not ask about possible involvement in the armed uprising.

human rights is put into practice through visiting other communities, sharing moral and economic support, and giving time to assist those in need. Because the networks are woven among people who share the same faith, they create ties based on common values. The result is a stronger base for political mobilization than temporary alliances created for political purposes. Fernando explicitly links his religious beliefs to the struggle for liberation:

I've been living in Guadalupe for five years now. Before I heard the Word of God, I wasted my time drinking. Now, my thoughts are with God. One has to be with God to be struggling at his side. . . . We have to fight. This means listening to and understanding the Word of God. God will free us from our enemies.

However, as noted above, mobilizing along religious lines has its limitations.

Because the networking is at once political and religious, the divisions between the groups in Buena Vista are emphasized. The Roman Catholics and Protestants who self-identify as members of civil society because of their opposition to the PRI often fail to unite due to religious differences. The traditionalists who affiliate with the PRI do not unite with those who affiliate with civil society because of their political differences. If all united on the basis of an ethnic affiliation or identity as poor *campesinos*, the divisions would be less apparent.

Several days after our visit to Buena Vista, I spoke to Juan. He wanted me to know that the people in the hamlet of Buena Vista were pleased that I had gone there to visit. When I returned to San Cristóbal, he had walked an hour and a half in the cold and rain to the house of his brother-in-law to preach with another group of Catholics. He returned to Guadalupe the next day with a fever and a cold. The walk had been difficult

for his daughters. He hoped that one day I could go with him to visit a third group of Catholics in the center of Chenalho'. Juan began talking again about how much the *campesinos* have to walk. "It is difficult, but that's how it is. We walk to share the Word of God. Serving is walking the narrow path." Walking is part of networking with other communities who are united in their religion, ethnic identity, and poverty. In the work of creating unity and supporting fellow Catholics, it is also a critical part of walking the path to justice and dignity. The goal of this work, helping construct the Reign of God where all can live a dignified life, is a goal based in the defense of human rights. In the following chapter, I describe how the same ideology and structure which facilitates participation in informal networks also facilitates participation in formal networks at the regional, state, and Diocesan level, beyond the local community.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### THE PATH TO JUSTICE AND DIGNITY: POLITICAL MOBILIZATION OF THE EXPELLED

The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field: it is the smallest of the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches (Matthew 13: 31-32).

[In May of 1991] the Tzotziles, Tzeltales, Tojolabales, Ch'oles met. And it was a very important moment in our journey. We found that our suffering was similar in different areas, and we also felt the strength to walk together. The *Pueblo Creyente* grew like a mustard seed that has become a tree in which the birds of the sky come to eat its seeds. In it are different brothers and sisters from many organizations so that we can see how to live in unity without being demanding on one another and to understand that unity covers up our differences when we have only one united heart. We want to dialogue and it is easy because we don't do it with our own strength, but with strength from God. Unity is a gift from God, but it is also the work of humans, and with the help of God we can achieve it (Meeting of *Pueblo Creyente*, February 25-27, 1993. Documents at INAREMAC)

The second quote above is from a meeting of *Pueblo Creyente* (People Who Believe) when members recalled the foundation of the group in 1991. They emphasize the importance of finding "the strength to walk together" with "only one united heart" in an organization with members of different ethnic groups (Tzotziles, Tzeltales, Tojolabales, and Ch'oles) and several political affiliations. Their unity comes from recognition of their common suffering and poverty as well as their faith in God. Pastoral workers of the Diocese of San Cristóbal also promote the idea of unity as a method in working with impoverished indigenous communities.

This chapter focuses on two grass-roots political groups in Chiapas: the Regional Council of Indigenous Representatives of the Highlands of Chiapas (CRIACH) and

*Pueblo Creyente*. CRIACH demands an end to expulsion and works to defend the rights of indigenous peoples; a large number of the 30,000 members of CRIACH are expelled, both Catholic and Evangelical. *Pueblo Creyente* is a group of Christians (predominantly Catholics) who work through their faith to address issues of poverty and political repression. People are mobilized to participate in these two organizations through several interconnected issues: their faith as Christians, ethnicity, poverty, and identification as victims of human rights abuses. Both groups work to defend the human rights of indigenous peoples and define these rights broadly. As will be discussed below, the groups' definition of rights includes concrete issues such as an end to expulsion, an end to illegal detentions, a defense of freedom of religion, and access to land for cultivation. However, broader and more radical demands also became part of these organizations, both of which fight for the right to a "dignified life" for the indigenous poor of Chiapas, meaning justice, equality, and an end to exploitation. This broad definition of human rights comes out of the shared experience of the participants at the same time that it serves to unite people of different religions (Catholics and Protestants) and different ethnic groups.

Both groups were started by the Catholic clergy of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, although the groups have gone in their own directions as people at the base took control. In fact, CRIACH now has more Protestant members than Catholics. Even so, the Catholic Church still plays an important role in providing resources and institutional support through legal advice, training in leadership skills, contacts with government officials, and access to the media, among other resources. Susan Eckstein (1989) notes

that progressive sectors of the Latin American Catholic Church serve as an intermediary which provides an institutional connection for political mobilization and that urban social movements which succeed in resisting co-optation are often initiated by outside groups such as clergy, student militants, political parties, and Catholic base communities. Although protest grows out of dissatisfaction with local conditions, national movements depend on an alliance with urban intelligencia. As will be shown in this chapter, the organizational structure of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas facilitates the formation of networks beyond the local community and political mobilization of indigenous peoples and *campesinos* from diverse ethnic groups.

Residents of Guadalupe participate in the activities of both groups, namely, the sit-ins, marches, and road-blockings of CRIACH, and the pilgrimages of *Pueblo Creyente*. Through their contact with the Church of Caridad in the center of San Cristóbal de Las Casas and regular meetings with Tzotzil catechists in the region, they learn, for example, of the activities of *Pueblo Creyente*. At least some residents participate in every event organized by this group. The people of Guadalupe are not as closely linked to CRIACH. Although the majority approve of its activities, participation in its events is sporadic.<sup>1</sup> Exceptions are activities demanding public services for the exiled, such as access to electricity or potable water and the right to sell goods in the

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<sup>1</sup> One notable exception is Mateo, the catechist who founded Guadalupe. He was one of the founding members and leaders of CRIACH. Interestingly, one of the complaints against Mateo when he left Guadalupe in 1990 was that he was "too political" or manipulative. He was criticized for accepting government concessions for the expelled -- in this case housing -- rather than fighting for people to return to Chamula (see Chapter 2).

market.

### **Organizing to Defend Our Rights: the Formation of CRIACH**

CRIACH was formed out of the attempt by the Catholic Church in the Diocese of San Cristóbal to prevent expulsion and defend the rights of the expelled. From 1974 to 1977, the Catholic Church tried to defend the human rights of Chamulans through epistolary relations between the ecclesiastical authorities and the Chamulan authorities (see Chapter 3). Ecclesiastical authorities, including priests, nuns, and Bishop Ruiz García, met with Chamulan leaders as well as state authorities to negotiate the Church's role in Chamula and to denounce expulsion. However, the expulsions continued and the Chamulan authorities were increasingly hostile toward the clergy. Hence, in 1977, the Catholic priests and nuns changed their approach; they began to focus on pastoral work, particularly on the sacrament of baptism and on assisting the expelled Chamulan catechists (Letter from Andres Aubry to Pablo Iribarren, September 30, 1980, INAREMAC). The Church also initiated social programs, such as local credit unions and cooperatives, within Chamula and in communities of the expelled (Morquecho Escamilla 1992).

In order to encourage the expelled to defend their rights, a group of Dominican priests and sisters of the congregation The Divine Pastor supported the creation of the *Comité de Defensa de los Amenazados, Perseguidos, y Expulsados de Chamula* (Committee for the Defense of the Threatened, Persecuted, and Expelled of Chamula) in September of 1982. The group was composed of Tzotzil catechists from Chamula who

worked to publicly denounce expulsion and other aggressions of the *caciques*. With the formation of this group, the pastoral workers would no longer serve as the representatives of the exiled in dealing with government officials; instead the indigenous peoples would have their own organization to fight for their rights. Nonetheless, the pastoral workers played an important role in encouraging people to join the group, setting up meetings with government officials, and providing general institutional support.

Mateo, the founder of Guadalupe, told me how he joined the Committee:

In the city of San Cristóbal, I went to a catechist course in Nueva Primavera [house of the congregation, The Divine Pastor]. There we spoke of how we could return to our homes in Chamula. Later, Father José Luis [a Dominican priest] told me that it would be a good idea if I was responsible for the Committee for the Defense of the Expelled.

In October of 1982, thirty members of the Committee and several Catholic priests went to the state capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, to meet with Juan Sabines, then Governor of Chiapas. At this point in the organizational process of the Committee, the struggle for rights was focused on returning expelled persons to Chamula. A group of *caciques* from Chamula also attended the meeting. The expelled demanded peace in the region, respect for freedom of religion, and the return to their homes and land. Governor Sabines replied that although he was not in agreement with the expulsions, he would respect the customs of Chamula. He offered the expelled lands outside Chamula, but they refused it, asserting that they would not “sell their freedom” (Morquecho Escamilla 1992). Members of the Committee were not willing to agree to settle elsewhere; their fundamental demand was that they be allowed to return to their homes in Chamula. They were not asking for the right to any land, but the right to live freely in the land where they had historic ties.

Mateo recalled this meeting with the Governor:

We went to speak to the Governor Juan Sabines, but he didn't want to offer a solution to the problem. He told us that it would be better if we went to live elsewhere. But we said, "No. We want to return to our land." We made many trips to Tuxtla Gutiérrez to speak with the authorities. We also spoke with leaders in Chamula.

Meanwhile, the *caciques* returned to Chamula saying that they had won the struggle since the Governor did not take action to denounce expulsion or to aid the exiled in returning to their homes.

After visiting the Governor, the Committee continued to organize. Traveling to Tuxtla Gutiérrez and being received by the Governor was an empowering experience, in spite of the discouraging results of the meeting. Initially the assemblies of the Committee were very small, with as few as three people attending, but the Committee grew little by little, and by the end of 1982 there were 100 to 120 members (Morquecho Escamilla 1992: 27). At first all members of the Committee were Catholic, but later Protestants joined. In 1983, the Committee published a booklet detailing its purpose and goals. The introduction to the booklet states that the Committee was formed to "help ourselves, organize and defend our rights." It notes that in 1974 when the first large violent act of exile took place, the Catholics and Protestants did not unite to defend themselves; in contrast, the goal of the Committee is to work with both groups. It is clearly stated that the motives behind expulsion are political and economic and not religious: "We insist that the *caciques* are abusing their authority. They want more money for their commerce -- drink, candles, soft drinks, loans, beer, and fines. We say that the problem is economic" (Booklet of the Committee for the Defense of Threatened, Persecuted, and Expelled of

Chamula 1983, INAREMAC). Defining the problem as a political-economic one served to point out that all the expelled -- Catholics and Protestants -- suffered similar abuses at the hands of the *caciques*. Hence, it is necessary for both groups to work together to struggle to defend their rights. Although this was recognized as the ideal, in practice many conflicts between the two groups developed.

The work of the Committee is detailed in the booklet in a list of seventeen goals. The long list reveals concern not only with the issue of expulsion, but with a broad defense of the human rights of indigenous people. This was a significant change from their demands during the meeting with Governor Sabines in 1982. As the booklet states:

The work of the Committee is

1. To end expulsions, threats, persecution of individuals by the *caciques* and Chamulan authorities.
2. To end pressure to take *cargos* by force.
3. To end unjust imprisonment.
4. To end fines.
5. To return to our communities peacefully.
6. To create peace in religion.
7. To create peace and liberty in all hamlets.
8. To fight so that the *caciques* and authorities don't become accustomed to expelling each year.
9. To fight, not only so that we are not humiliated in Chamula, but also so that in other cities we aren't mistreated because we are indigenous.
10. To be paid well in our work.
11. To fight to overcome alcohol which causes suffering and bad spending of money.
12. To fight so that the *Ladinos* don't mistreat us in the market and pay us well for our products.
13. To fight for the liberty of women, so that they can study, learn, and work.
14. To fight so that women are treated as people and not as animals.
15. To fight so that *Ladinos* don't abuse the women who work in their

homes.<sup>2</sup>

16. To fight so that we aren't forced to marry against our will.

17. To fight so that they don't speak badly of women and so that they don't call us bad words for being indigenous

(Booklet of the Committee for the Defense of Threatened, Persecuted, and Expelled of Chamula 1983, INAREMAC).

Most of these goals deal with the defense of human rights. The first eight goals address the problem of expulsion; they demand that it be stopped and that freedom of religion be respected in Chamula. These eight goals denounce the indigenous *caciques* of Chamula as responsible for expulsion and other injustices. The last nine goals extend well-beyond the problem of expulsion. Goals nine, ten and twelve refer to discrimination against the Tzotziles at the hands of the *Ladinos*, noting that they should be paid well for wage labor as well as for their products. This is an issue affecting all indigenous peoples of Chiapas, expelled or not. The struggle against alcohol is also important because it causes "suffering and bad spending of money." Here the use and abuse of alcohol is not described as a human rights issue, but rather as an internal problem of indigenous communities. Women's rights are addressed in the last five goals which are not directly related to expulsion, but affect all indigenous women. Several goals deal with gender oppression within indigenous communities, demanding that women be given the right to education and work, and that they not be forced to marry against their will.

Discrimination against women by *Ladinos* is also addressed. The central goals of the Committee -- an end to expulsion, an end to forced cargos, rights for women, and limits on alcohol use -- are the same issues that are of central importance in Guadalupe and are

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<sup>2</sup> Women from Chamula work as domestic servants in the homes of *Ladinos* in San Cristóbal de Las Casas in order to supplement their household income.

described in detail in Chapters 5 and 6.

On February 11, 1983, the Committee organized a march through the streets of the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas with three demands: (1) an end to the expulsions, (2) the freedom for the expelled to return to Chamula, and (3) freedom of religion according to law. Following the march, members of the Committee met Daniel Sarmiento Rojas, the Municipal President of San Cristóbal at the time. One month later, the Committee met with the new Governor of Chiapas, Absalón Castellanos Domínguez, who claimed that he could not take action because he was not informed of the problem in Chamula, but he promised to study it.

The growth of the Committee was not without internal conflicts and divisions. After the march through San Cristóbal, some Protestants began to pull out of the Committee, claiming that it was affiliated with political parties and that their religion prohibits participation in politics (Morquecho Escamilla 1992). This continued to be a problem not only in the Committee but later in CRIACH where some Protestants cited the Biblical reading Romans 13: 1-2, as a reason not to be involved in politics.<sup>3</sup> Another reason for the hesitancy of Protestants to participate in the Committee is that until 1991, the Presbyterian hierarchy from Tuxtla Gutiérrez instructed the expelled from Chamula to avoid participating in the political struggle against expulsion, hoping to keep Presbyterians from being involved in politics. Morquecho Escamilla (1992) points out

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<sup>3</sup>The reading states: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."

that this reason could have been a pretext, masking other motives, such as growing divisions in the leadership of the group. Domingo López Angel, a Tzotzil pastor of the Seventh Day Adventist Church and one of the key leaders in the Committee, was accused of aiding the 1981 assassination of Miguel Caxlan, a Presbyterian minister from Chamula.<sup>4</sup> Mistrust of López Angel led many to pull out of the Committee.

### **"For the Dignity of the Indians": The Work of CRIACH**

On September 6, 1984, CRIACH was formally constituted from the organizational process and members of the Committee. On September 7, 1984, CRIACH wrote a letter to the office of *Asuntos Indígenas* (Indigenous Affairs) presenting the group and listing their demands. They asked that the government (1) guarantee the unconditional return of the expelled to their communities of origin in thirty days, (2) guarantee freedom of religious thought and exercise penal action against those not respecting this freedom, (3) prevent all future expulsions, and (4) form a commission of federal, state, and municipal representatives to analyze the problem and find a solution. This letter opened an important political space for CRIACH; in the ten months after it was received, the group held six meetings with Governor Absalón Castellanos Domínguez and three meetings

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<sup>4</sup>The story of how Miguel Caxlan became a Presbyterian pastor is described in Gary Gossen's "Life, Death, and Apotheosis of a Chamula Protestant Leader: Biography as Social History" (1989). According to my Protestant informants, the *caciques* of Chamula offered a reward for the killing of the Pastor, and Evangelical exiles living in the city of San Cristóbal kidnaped and murdered him to cash in on the reward. This is just one example of how the violence perpetuated by the negligence of government authorities is turned inward, resulting in violence between the expelled and those residing in Chamula.

with leaders of Congress.<sup>5</sup> In August of 1985 a meeting was held with President Miguel de la Madrid in Mexico City about the problem of expulsion in Chiapas.

CRIACH united people from different hamlets and religions, attempting to bring together Indians from municipalities other than Chamula. In a meeting in Yabteclum, Chenalho', held on November 28-29, 1987, members of CRIACH expressed the necessity to unite to overcome differences which could divide them. "We want to unite, we must unite without distinction regarding clothing, language, religion, political party, work, or custom" (cited in Morquecho Escamilla 1992).

On July 12, 1985 CRIACH founded the newspaper *Indio* which was dedicated to the problem of expulsion. It contained articles in Spanish and Tzotzil about recent expulsions, the activities of CRIACH, and the plight of the expelled in the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Literary and historical pieces about pre-Colombian Mayas were also included, emphasizing the achievements of the Mayas. The first edition claimed that no longer would the Indians of Chiapas remain silent. The theme of the paper was "For the Dignity of the Indians." Its seventh edition noted that the law is for all Mexicans, Indians and *mestizos*, and that members of CRIACH continue to fight for the rights and liberty of all people. Pastoral workers of the Catholic Church were important in helping found the newspaper and contributed articles.

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<sup>5</sup> For example, a meeting held on October 17, 1984 with Governor Absalón Castellanos Domínguez culminated in a visit to Chamula from a government delegation. The leaders of Chamula argued that the expelled could not return because they caused violence and had a different religion from the people of the municipality. As a result of the visit, the Governor promised to end intermediaries in mercantile activities and to buy an organ for the temple of San Juan Chamula (*El Caminante* October/November 1984).

ORIACH, the Regional Organization of Indigenous Representatives of the Highlands of Chiapas, was formed in January of 1988. It splintered off from CRIACH in conflicts over leadership and financial matters, and the majority of the expelled joined ORIACH. However, in 1989 in a second conflict over leadership, the expelled returned to CRIACH. In October of 1988 ORIACH's involvement in a fast transformed a religious event into a political protest. The idea for the fast began when a large group of people were jailed, beaten, threatened, and finally expelled from the hamlet of Romerillo in the municipality of Chamula. The group went to the city of San Cristóbal and immediately organized a fast in local temples and chapels to ask for assistance from God for the safe return to their land and homes. ORIACH became involved in the fast and decided to move it to the building of the Municipal Presidency in the city, hence converting the religious protest into a political act. For twelve full days, men, women, and children took turns fasting for three full day periods. Although it had been recommended that nursing women and children not participate in the fast, they did anyway, stating that if they did not, they might remain without the favor of God. A few days into the fast, a group of Tzeltales from El Carrizal began another fast in the shadow of the city's main cathedral, protesting their violent eviction from their lands in the municipality of Ocosingo.

After a few days, the head of *Asuntos Indígenas* arrived to ask the members of ORIACH to end the fast; he offered to buy land for them outside of Chamula. However, the offer was refused, just as it had been in 1982; the central demand was to return to Chamula. Several families from Guadalupe participated in the fast of 1988. Salvador remembers the event:

In 1988, we were in a fast asking for a solution to the problem in Chamula. I was fourteen years old at the time and had been expelled from Chamula with my family. There were about 200 people who were expelled from Romerillo along with us. We didn't want to leave our village. We were like Jesus who suffered for us. There were more than 200 people involved in the fast. The government didn't offer us a solution to our problem. We realized that we couldn't return to Chamula and so we ended the fast. We came here [to Guadalupe] to look for land. When you are in a fast and protest, where are you going to get money? We were discouraged and left the protest one by one. We were very tired.

The fast ended on October 22 without the demands being met. The national elections were just a month away and the government was not willing to risk the loss of some 15,000 votes from Chamula by attempting to end the expulsions or to punish those responsible. Nonetheless, Morquecho Escamilla (1992) points out that the strike was a success even though the exiled could not return. First, it made the complaints of the expelled public; complaints were directed to the *Asuntos Indígenas*, the Municipal President of Chamula, Governor Absalón Castellanos Domínguez, and Patrocinio Gonzalez Garrido, the PRI's candidate for Governor of Chiapas. Second, the Protestant pastors slowly began to approach the movement and to become involved in offering support to the expelled. Third, the event received daily coverage in the newspapers, and editorials appeared which demanded a solution to the problem of expulsion. In spite of the internal divisions in CRIACH and ORIACH, members had worked to make their suffering a public issue. Of particular importance is the unity between Protestants and Catholics in the fast.

With some 30,000 members, CRIACH is currently an important indigenous organization in Chiapas. The group draws on its members to hold numerous protests

every year in the form of marches, sit-ins, and road-blockades to insist that the state government meet its demands. People in Guadalupe often participate in CRIACH's mobilizations. The focus of the demands continues to be an end to expulsion and a dignified life for the expelled living outside Chamula. Domingo López Angel is the current president of CRIACH. Although he was accused of participating in the assassination of Miguel Caxlan, the accusation could never be proved and many believe that it is only a rumor. Perhaps López Angel's skills in mobilizing people and in getting results from the government caused people to trust him as a leader, albeit with some reservations.

In an interview I conducted with López Angel in June of 1995, he spoke of the achievements of CRIACH:

We've obtained the services for our neighborhoods, only through our own work, with the force of the people, not from the government. We have talked with non-government organizations on human rights. We have published what is happening in the national, international, and local papers and with organizations.

CRIACH has worked with the exiled in order to file dozens of legal complaints against government authorities (for negligence) and the *caciques* of Chamula (for expulsion).<sup>6</sup> It also has ties to international human rights groups which have directly or indirectly -- through contact with the Church and the human rights groups -- brought the issue of expulsion to the Interamerican Commission for Human Rights, Amnesty International.

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<sup>6</sup>For example, thirty-eight legal complaints related to expulsion were filed with the Attorney General of the State of Chiapas in October of 1993 (Estrada Martínez 1995:112). All of these legal documents were filed with the assistance of the organizers of CRIACH.

and America's Watch. In 1993 the leaders of CRIACH appealed to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees asking for assistance for the exiled.<sup>7</sup> Members of CRIACH also support the goals of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. In May of 1994, the leadership of CRIACH sent a letter to Sub-Comandante Marcos informing him of the situation of the expelled and asking that he negotiate with the government to find a solution to the problem. Support for the Zapatistas was emphasized, "We identify with your just struggles, and we are with you." The letter also asked that the Zapatistas defend the expelled militarily from the *caciques* of Chamula who were threatening to attack (Letter to Sub-Comandante Marcos from Domingo López Angel and CRIACH, May 24, 1994).

Currently, CRIACH is composed predominantly of Protestants; however, Catholics also participate. López Angel spoke of CRIACH's positive relationship with Bishop Ruiz García: "We've brought our problems to the Bishop. He is our friend, he listens to us, and he protects us." The Bishop, as president of the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" has denounced the expulsions as human rights abuses. In addition, López Angel reiterated CRIACH's search for justice for the expelled:

We are asking for justice, but there is no justice. They [the *caciques*] forced us to leave our homes where we were born. We don't have work. Here there isn't land to plant crops, we only have lots of ten by twenty meters for our homes. Chiapas is a rich state, there are a lot of natural resources, but here there is only poverty. Only a few governors take the wealth to other countries. We've been mistreated. The market is packed with people trying to sell their goods. They send in the police to rob us.

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<sup>7</sup>The request was denied since a refugee is technically defined as someone who lives outside their nation of origin for fear of suffering repression. For the most part, the expelled remain in Mexico once they are forced to leave Chamula.

They take our fruit to the stalls of the administrators.<sup>8</sup>

His criticism of injustice in Chiapas is not only that of forced exile (or in other words, civil and political rights), but also of economic inequality whereby the resources of the state are concentrated in the hands of the few (or social and economic rights). López Angel complained that the exiled were not treated as human beings: "The government treats us like animals. But at least an animal -- like a dog -- has a home, food, and milk. We don't." Living in exile from their native lands and lacking employment opportunities in the city, the expelled lack the minimum necessities for a dignified life. Without explicitly using the term "human rights" López Angel describes the way that CRIACH is struggling to defend the rights of the indigenous. This struggle involves demands for an end to expulsion, an equitable distribution of wealth in Chiapas, and the right to a dignified life for indigenous peoples.

In the past few years, Domingo López Angel has accumulated a strong base of political and economic power as the leader of CRIACH. Some question whether he continues to serve the interests of the expelled, however, or only his own interests. Noting that he has an expensive truck and a two story concrete house, it is suggested that he could be a *cacique*. In 1995, the local government granted concessions to drive taxis in the city of San Cristóbal to him and a small group of his followers. This and other reports of his accepting concessions from PRI leaders for his personal benefit have led many to ask if López Angel, although ostensibly opposed to the PRI, has been co-opted

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<sup>8</sup>When someone sells in the market without an official permit, their goods are commonly robbed by the police or market administrators as a way of exacting a fine.

by the government.

As is already apparent, there are many divisions among the expelled and López Angel is a focal point of conflict. For example, he was elected state congressman in October of 1995 under the auspices of the PRD, but in May of 1996 he violently disrupted the PRD's state convention, arriving with a group of armed people. This resulted in his expulsion from the PRD, and the loss of his seat as congressman.<sup>9</sup> As a result, some of the expelled have pulled back from CRIACH, although it is important to note that the government also plays a critical role in fostering division among the expelled. The PRI constantly attempts to co-opt independent groups, granting concessions in exchange for political loyalty.

López Angel has also been criticized for threatening to use violence against the *caciques* of Chamula when violence itself is at the center of CRIACH's criticism of expulsion. It is well-known that a group of the expelled are armed and prepared to defend themselves; this was demonstrated in July of 1994 when the expelled occupying the Offices of *Asuntos Indígenas* in protest were threatened by dozens of Chamulan men who arrived in several trucks. Under the argument of self-defense, the expelled resorted to violence to protect themselves, and two Chamulan men were killed as the expelled fired

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<sup>9</sup> López Angel's relationship with political parties has been fraught with conflict for years. He has criticized all parties, those on the right as well as those on the left, for using the indigenous peoples to achieve political goals. In a letter written to presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas prior to the 1988 election, he stated "From the official party [the PRI] to the opposition parties, we have been offered the sky and the stars, but these are only words. From now on, we are against parties. We simply want to express our thoughts so they can be analyzed and discussed" (Morquecho Escamilla 1992: 66-67). It is likely that López Angel joined the PRD only to get financial and institutional support for winning his campaign.

automatic weapons. Rumors have circulated that the expelled are armed with high powered weapons and will use them to defend themselves. Divisions within CRIACH and the criticism over the use of violence continue to weaken the group. It remains to be seen whether this organization will continue to attract members or if a new group working to defend the rights of the expelled will develop.<sup>10</sup>

### **"Growing like a Mustard Seed": The Formation of Pueblo Creyente**

The organization *Pueblo Creyente* was born from a diocesan concern about representing the voice of the poor within the institutional structure of the Church. In the Diocesan Assembly of 1991,<sup>11</sup> pastoral workers realized that in order to decide how to construct the Church of the poor, it would be necessary to take into account their point of view.<sup>12</sup> For the first time, they invited indigenous peoples and *campesinos* to attend the Diocesan Assembly. In May of 1991, representatives from over thirty communities met in San Cristóbal for three days. From this group, seventeen delegates with the mission of

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<sup>10</sup> Most recently, the expelled have formed the Organization of the Evangelical *Pueblos* of the Highland of Chiapas (OPEACH). It remains to be seen if and how this new organization will relate to Catholics and to CRIACH.

<sup>11</sup> A Diocesan Assembly is a meeting of priests, nuns, and other pastoral workers where decisions are made regarding the direction of religious work. As a rule, these meetings are held once a year, although special assemblies are held during times of crisis.

<sup>12</sup> For a Diocese which formally committed to "the option for the poor" in 1975, it is surprising that it took sixteen years to give the poor a formal voice in the decision-making process. According to the pastoral workers, the indigenous and poor were incorporated in the process at the parish meetings held in advance of the Diocesan Assemblies.

sharing their thoughts with the Assembly were selected. When the Assembly was over, the delegates returned to their communities in order to share information about the meeting: from these delegates the group *Pueblo Creyente* was formed. Two or three meetings were held in 1991, but the group did not grow in strength and number until the arrest of Father Joel Padrón. It was out of the struggle for the freedom of Father Padrón that members of *Pueblo Creyente* saw the power they had as a united group.

Father Joel Padrón, the parish priest of Simojovel de Allende since 1979, was arrested by two state judicial police on September 18, 1991. He was taken to the jail in Tuxtla Gutiérrez where he was accused of possessing illegal arms, robbery, damage to property, inciting peasants to take land, and conspiracy, among other crimes (Gómez and Kovic 1994: 165-167). The charges were clearly fabricated.<sup>13</sup> The governor's decision to arrest Father Padrón was a direct attack against *campesino* organization. Since the 1970's Zoque and Tzotzil *campesinos* who worked on coffee *fincas* in the region of Simojovel and Huitiupán had been organizing, demanding better working conditions and access to land. Simojovel was a strategic choice for the mobilization as it represented one of the first regions to take on this struggle against *fincas*. The event leading up to Father Padrón's arrest was the invasion of several plots of land in Simojovel; the priest was

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<sup>13</sup> The arrest of Father Padrón was based on political motives as demonstrated by the fact that the government agreed to release him only under the following conditions: (1) the pastoral workers evacuate lands which had recently been taken in Chiapas, (2) the Diocese emit a declaration stating that there were no human rights violations in his arrest, (3) that the Diocese condemn the occupation of lands by *campesinos*, and (4) after his release Father Padrón not be allowed to preach in Mexico. None of the demands are acts which legally correspond to the duties of the Diocese, and all were rejected (Gómez and Kovic 1994, Fazio 1994).

accused of inciting *campesinos* to take the land. However, the arrest of Father Padrón was also an attack against the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. In 1989 Bishop Samuel Ruiz García had established the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" which denounced the huge number of human rights abuses committed by the government. Four days before the arrest, Bishop Samuel Ruiz García held a press conference in which he denounced the serious human rights abuses committed by state and federal officials in Chiapas.

On October 18, 1991, around 500 *campesinos* from Simojovel began a pilgrimage of 123 kilometers to Tuxtla Gutiérrez to protest the detention of Father Joel Padrón. When government officials asked Bishop Samuel Ruiz to prevent the pilgrimage, he spoke with the pilgrims in Simojovel. They replied: "We want to pray with penitence and to walk so that our sadness can be seen. We want to convey our prayer so that our sadness is seen. You cannot stop us from making penitence" (Fazio 1994: 174). During the journey toward Tuxtla Gutiérrez, *campesinos* -- including Tzotziles, Tzeltales, Ch'oles, Tojolabales, Zoques, and *mestizos* -- from other communities joined in and a total of 18,000 united in Tuxtla Gutiérrez on October 21 (Ibid.). There they attended a mass at the cathedral of San Marcos, then remained for three days of prayer and penitence. Some continued to the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City where Archbishop Miguel Pérez Gil and Bishop Samuel Ruiz co-celebrated a mass with the participation of some fifty priests. Father Manuel Velázquez, representative of a network of over 300 Mexican Catholic ministers, spoke of the detention of Father Padrón.

Why would the indigenous Catholics of Chiapas sacrifice so much for Father

Padrón? They were not being pressured by the Bishop; on the contrary, the Bishop even requested that they not to take part in the pilgrimage. It seems that they were well aware of what Father Velázquez expressed at the Basilica in Mexico City: the work of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas was an "annoyance" for those who wanted to see the Indian and poor "always as subjects, silent, and exploited. We do not believe in a God who is deaf to the cries of his *pueblo*" (Ibid: 179). For the indigenous peoples of Chiapas, the attack against Father Padrón was not only an attack against an individual priest or an attack against Bishop Ruiz García. It was an attack on indigenous rights; most explicitly the right to land.

Father Padrón was released from jail on November 6, 1991, largely as a result of the pilgrimage to Tuxtla Gutiérrez and Mexico City. Indeed, the pilgrimage and release represented a critical moment in the organizing of the indigenous Catholics in Chiapas. As in the Congress of 1974, the ethnic groups saw that they shared similar problems and goals and that in their unity they were more powerful. As a result of the pilgrimage, *Pueblo Creyente* grew tremendously, attracting members from twenty-five municipalities in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Because the organization can mobilize thousands of people throughout the Diocese to attend pilgrimages and other events, the state and national governments view it as a threat to repressive political and economic systems which have been in place in Chiapas for decades.

The institutional structure of the Diocese of San Cristóbal facilitates the mobilization of thousands of people through *Pueblo Creyente*. Through the Catholic Church, people at the base learn leadership skills, establish relations with members of

diverse communities, and perhaps most importantly, hold regular meetings at the local and regional levels where decisions are made. Guadalupe, like other communities in the Diocese, belongs to a complex network that embraces the levels of the Diocese and the Catholic Church as is illustrated in the following table. This structure legitimates and institutionalizes the informal networks which members of Guadalupe establish with other communities.

**Table 4: Guadalupe in the Diocesan Structure**

Catholic community of Guadalupe (27 families)
<i>Diaconías</i> (35 communities) meet in Church of Caridad, city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas
Tzotzil Pastoral Team - (11 municipalities)
Diocese -- (Comprised of 7 Pastoral Teams: Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Ch'ol, Chab, South, Southeast, Center) One Million People
National Mexican Catholic Church
Universal Roman Catholic Church

Guadalupe is one of thirty-five communities which comprise the diocesan group called *Diaconías*. This name refers to the fact that some of the first indigenous deacons were from this region. In all of the thirty-five communities, Tzotzil is the native language. The majority of the communities are in the municipality of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, but a few from the municipality of Teopisca are also included. Many of the communities are comprised of people who were expelled from Chamula or who are Chamulans who separated from the municipality for economic or political reasons. The catechists of the *Diaconías* hold meetings every two months where decisions are made

and information is shared. Two representatives from each community, including Guadalupe, are expected to attend these meetings. Once a year a course is held for the catechists of the *Diaconías*. In this course, readings from the Bible and their significance for course participants are discussed. Community problems are also addressed and people try to find a solution based on the Word of God.

As noted in Chapter 2, several families from Guadalupe regularly attend mass or service at Caridad, a chapel in the center of San Cristóbal which serves as a central meeting place for Tzotzil Catholics residing in or near the city. Their connection to this chapel brings news of what Catholic *campesinos* in the region and the state are doing. For example, one Sunday in February of 1995, several catechists from Guadalupe took up a collection of maize and beans from their community to bring to Caridad where they would be distributed to the poor communities in the Lacandon Jungle suffering from a strong military presence. The collection had been organized by the catechists of the *Diaconías*; maize and beans were collected from many communities in the Diocese, with each parish coordinating the event at a local level. At times, catechists from other communities within the *Diaconías* attend the chapel in Guadalupe in order to preach and to share news from their communities.

The *Diaconías* form part of the Tzotzil Pastoral Team which is made up of parishes from eleven municipalities in the Tzotzil-speaking zone. Indigenous representatives from each municipality in the team meet annually to discuss problems in their communities, to share information, and to make decisions on united actions. The Tzotzil Pastoral Team is one of seven teams in the Diocese: Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Ch'ol, South,

Southeast, Chab, and Center. A lay representative from each of the Teams attends the annual Diocesan Assembly. Other committees such as *Pueblo Creyente*, Indigenous Theology, and the Areas of Women, Health, and Human Rights are organized through these seven pastoral teams, each of which has lay representatives for the committees. Meetings are held at the community level, at the level of the team, and at the Diocesan level, with elected representatives attending each assembly. It is this structure which allows *Pueblo Creyente* to have participating members throughout the Diocese. Members of *Pueblo Creyente* meet in their communities, then send representatives to meetings organized at the level of Pastoral Teams and finally, send representatives to the Diocesan-wide meetings which are held at least once a year. This facilitates a fluid exchange of information among the communities -- such as Guadalupe -- and *Pueblo Creyente*. When a particular event is planned, communities are quickly informed, promoting broad-based participation.

The Diocesan structure also links *Pueblo Creyente* to the national and international Catholic Church. The link is most evident in work of the Bishop, priests, and nuns. The Diocese sends out news of important events to Bishops and other church leaders from throughout the world. At times, pleas for prayer and/or others forms of solidarity are made through the international network of people who support the Diocese's work. Bishops, theologians, and other religious figures are invited to attend important events such as pilgrimages (discussed below), the Synod (a Diocesan-wide meeting called to reflect on and make decisions about the direction of pastoral work), and annual Diocesan Assemblies.

For people at the base, such as the Catholics of Guadalupe, the national and international network of Catholics is rarely seen of course. Nonetheless, I found that people perceive the Catholic Church as a universal institution, and feel part of a wider community of faith; the Catholics of Guadalupe feel connected to Catholics around the world because they share similar beliefs and participate in similar rituals. This was expressed to me time and time again when I was conducting fieldwork. For example, on Ash Wednesday, Juan and I were discussing when we would go to church to be marked with ashes symbolizing the beginning of Lent. Juan pointed out that Catholics in the U.S., in Chenalho', and in Guadalupe all receive ashes on the same day to commemorate a single event. This was seen as uniting Catholics all over the world.

Although the Catholic Church as an institution is based on a hierarchical structure of authority, Catholics of Guadalupe recognize themselves as equal to all other Catholics. People would often comment "Christina is from another country, but she is a Catholic just like us; we all share the same blood and the same belief in God, and therefore we are all brothers and sisters in Christ." During pilgrimages when Bishops and church figures from other parts of Mexico and foreign countries are present, people from Guadalupe actually observe evidence of a universal Church. More importantly, the community of faith of Catholics -- who share religious belief and sacraments -- serves to legitimate the struggle of the indigenous people for justice. Their project in Chiapas, namely to work to help construct the Kingdom of God, is viewed as being shared by Catholics throughout the world. This project is intimately linked to the defense of human rights, that is to promote a dignified life for all. The notion of the community of faith carries with it the

idea that all humans are worthy of "life and life in abundance."

### **The Work of Pueblo Creyente**

Just a year after the march in protest of the detention of Father Padrón, on the 500th Anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in Latin America -- October 12, 1992 -- over 10,000 indigenous people from throughout the state of Chiapas marched into the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. The march began in the Plaza of the San Francisco Church at the monument to Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, remembered as the Dominican priest who defended the rights of indigenous peoples against the interests of the Spanish, and moved to the plaza of Santo Domingo where the statue of Diego de Mazariegos, the Spanish conqueror who founded the city of San Cristóbal, was dismantled in an important symbolic event. Although *Pueblo Creyente* did not organize this historic event, many participated and were impressed with the power resulting from the unity of *campesinos* and Indians of different ethnic backgrounds.

The objective of *Pueblo Creyente* is to "search for unity among the poor." The members of this group have no set political affiliation and selected the name *Pueblo Creyente* to include all Christians, Protestants as well as Catholics. Although the majority of members are Catholic, Protestants participate in meetings and actions of the group. According to representatives of the group, what unites them is their faith. In the words of Bishop Ruiz García:

*Pueblo Creyente* is made up of the lay people who are organized in the Diocese, in parochial structures or from a political commitment which is non-partisan. In other words, they are expressing a political dimension of

their faith, but without belonging to a determined political movement. Beginning with the incident of Father Joel, when they just began to meet, they found spirit and illumination in their faith for their commitment to life. And so this *Pueblo Creyente* has grown, with its subsequent actions, and with a very wide articulation (cited in Fazio 1994: 184).

In a meeting of *Pueblo Creyente* in February of 1993, members discussed the differences and similarities between their group and political organizations. They noted that *Pueblo Creyente* differs fundamentally from political organizations in that it "was born from the Word of God." This links religion, human rights, and politics, since according to members of *Pueblo Creyente*, the Word of God recognizes the fundamental dignity of all human beings and the necessity of working to defend one's rights. In defining how *Pueblo Creyente* is similar to political organizations, they noted:

We want to be free and we are all brothers. We all want liberty, unity, life, social change, a new system. We fight for our communities, we want equality, we fight for human rights. We are all human beings, we are all children of God (Meeting of Representatives of *Pueblo Creyente*, February 25-27, 1993, INAREMAC).

Bishop Ruiz García, like the members of *Pueblo Creyente*, does not separate politics from faith. Instead he speaks of "a political dimension" of faith with a "commitment to life." The goals and actions of *Pueblo Creyente* are explicitly political, but come from the Word of God. Working for life, equality, unity, and social change is a political goal, but is also seen as helping to create the Kingdom of God.

Those who participate in *Pueblo Creyente* note that the divisions in rural communities cause weakness; their goals, similar to the Indigenous Congress of 1974, are to create unity and justice. *Pueblo Creyente* is formed primarily of indigenous peoples -- Tzotziles, Tzeltals, Tojolabales, and Ch'oles -- but also includes *mestizos*. At a meeting

in February 1993, members spoke of the formation of the group as "a very important moment in our path where we felt that our suffering was similar in different places, but we felt the strength to walk together." They further noted, "This is a difficult moment in Mexico and Chiapas. Some want us to be divided, one against another, so that we will not be able to affect change. We have to walk together in our difference, but [also] in our unity." *Pueblo Creyente* has been important in uniting *campesinos* from different ethnic groups, municipalities, and political organizations. At the 1993 assembly, people remembered the goals which were set out when *Pueblo Creyente* was established in 1991:

- 1) To dialogue with other organizations in order to help us to know what our objectives are.
- 2) To reach agreements on how we can support ourselves and create solidarity out of our problems which arise from our poverty. Respect for others is necessary when we take into account that the *Pueblo Creyente* and organizations have different ways of working.
- 3) To maintain constant communication in order to know the problems and progress and hence, to walk united to advance our communities (Meeting of Representatives of *Pueblo Creyente*, February 25-27, 1993, INAREMAC).

All of these focus on unity and agreement. The second emphasizes creating solidarity based on poverty. Members of *Pueblo Creyente* may differ in their political affiliation and ethnic group but they are united in poverty. They do not need to read theories of social movements to know that their shared poverty is a unifying force and that unity among different ethnic groups is essential in order to overcome their problems.

The growing strength of *Pueblo Creyente* presents a threat to the state and federal governments. To government officials at the center of federal power, the Bishop of San Cristóbal was "a democratic leader of civil society of the state of Chiapas, a state where a

semi-feudal regime still prevailed, tacitly" (Fazio 1994: 185). Since the Bishop and the pastoral workers of his Diocese are seen as being responsible for the formation of *Pueblo Creyente*, the Bishop was attacked. Government officials expressed their concern to the Papal nuncio of Mexico, Monsignor Girolamo Prigione. According to Fazio, this was the beginning of the offensive against Bishop Ruiz García, which culminated in the appointment of a coadjutor bishop in 1995. The government's annoyance with *Pueblo Creyente* was also expressed in February of 1995 when Jorge Santiago Santiago, a key advisor of the group, was arrested and taken to the maximum security prison in Tuxtla Gutiérrez. Santiago was accused of being one of the military commanders of the Zapatista Army for National Liberation, when in reality he is the director of DESMI, a non-governmental organization in San Cristóbal de Las Casas which supports economic development projects in indigenous communities. There were countless irregularities in juridical procedure, and on April 14, 1995 (Good Friday), Santiago was released due to a lack of evidence that he was guilty of the charges against him.<sup>14</sup>

### **Pilgrimages of Pueblo Creyente**

One of the most public actions of *Pueblo Creyente* has been their mobilization of people in the municipalities of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas to participate in pilgrimages, and the Catholics of Guadalupe usually go as a group to these events.

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<sup>14</sup>Like Father Joel Padrón, Santiago was a political prisoner detained in order to attack the work of the Diocese of San Cristóbal. He was charged with sedition, rioting, rebellion, conspiracy, and terrorism. However, the only witness who apparently had evidence that Santiago was guilty as charged never appeared in court (Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" 1995a).

Pilgrimages demonstrate how the poor walk with one heart. At a literal level, the pilgrims walk for hours from their communities to the site where the event is to begin; then they walk as a united group to their destination, usually a church. At another level, the pilgrims walk with one heart in the struggle to defend their human rights. In their journey, they pray together asking for peace and justice at the same time that they demonstrate to the government their numbers and strength. The pilgrimages are extremely important in demonstrating how the exiled of Guadalupe mobilize, and for two reasons. First, the events mix political and religious motives, as well as class and ethnic identity. Second, the pilgrimages represent the most important public action of *Pueblo Creyente* and have a political impact on state and national government authorities. In fact, the *Pueblo Creyente* pilgrimages are often the largest in Chiapas. In numbers alone, they have more mobilizing force than any other political organization in Chiapas.<sup>15</sup> This group can rapidly recruit thousands of Indians because of the Diocesan structure and networks. Furthermore, since *Pueblo Creyente* is not officially affiliated with any one political party, it reaches a broad base of supporters.

The pilgrimage, a journey to a sacred shrine for religious purposes incorporating elaborate rituals and symbols, is common throughout Latin America. Although most current pilgrimages are overtly Catholic, its roots are found in such diverse groups as the European Christians, pre-Colombian indigenous populations, and African slaves, among

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<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the Zapatista Army of National Liberation has more members than *Pueblo Creyente*. Since it is a clandestine group, it is not possible to know how many Zapatista supporters are in Chiapas.

others (Crumrine and Morinis 1991).<sup>16</sup> When pilgrimages are undertaken by a specific group "The ritual, iconography, myth, and meaning of a pilgrimage are usually wholly representative of patterns within the area from which the pilgrims are drawn" (Ibid: 4). The sacred place selected as the destiny of the pilgrimage has important significance for the collective group of pilgrims who will undertake the journey. Pilgrimages are common among the Mayan populations of Chiapas. They are carried out to commemorate important dates in Catholicism (such as the second Friday of Lent), but also occur during critical stages of the growing season for maize (Adams 1991). Pilgrims walk to pray for plentiful harvests and rain.

Crumrine and Morinis as well as Victor Turner (1992) note that although the pilgrimage is not a true rite of passage, the two events share important features. First, both are transformative processes. Crumrine and Morinis state that the pilgrimage mediates between the sacred and the profane. The sacred is the goal of the pilgrimage -- the shrine or sacred place -- while the profane "is located in the mundane, everyday home life of the believer, with all its entanglements, confusion, and sorrows" (Crumrine and Morinis 1991: 10). The sacred pole is accessible through pilgrimage. The pilgrim must separate from home and the profane in order to be transformed to the sacred. Turner describes pilgrimage as a transformative process which is a metaphorical death or separation from "the negative alienating aspects of system and structure," leading to a metaphorical rebirth of the spirit (Turner 1992: 31-32). During the journey, the pilgrims

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<sup>16</sup> In the *Florentine Codex* there is mention of Aztec processions to temples to honor gods on their feast days (Sahagún 1982).

no longer "occupy social positions in a hierarchical or segmentary structure of localized status roles; now they are assigned to a class of anonymous novices or plainly and uniformly garbed pilgrims, all torn or self-torn from their familiar systemic environment" (Ibid: 30). Like initiation, pilgrimage is important for the formation of community; pilgrims are united in that they all occupy the same position and carry out a single act -- that of walking to a shrine. However, Turner notes that pilgrimage differs from initiation. Although pilgrims leave their home to become part of a class of pilgrims, they do not necessarily form a "communitas of pilgrims" (Ibid: 38).

The pilgrims of *Pueblo Creyente* are united in their journey, both symbolically and in practice. Members of indigenous communities walk for hours -- some walk all night -- in order to reach the city of San Cristóbal, while others arrange to ride together in buses and vans. Commonly, two or more places at the outskirts of the city are selected to begin the walk, with people being organized into groups based on their respective Pastoral Team. The pilgrims walk together, carrying banners, singing songs, burning incense, and playing traditional music. After a journey of about two hours, all of the pilgrims meet in the Cathedral in the center of the city where they attend mass.

Another important aspect of pilgrimage is that it "is conceived of as an important means by which individuals can gain access to the sources of power believed to control their destiny;" this way they seek goals which "do not appear to be attainable without the direct blessing of the grace of God" (Crumrine and Morinis 1991: 14). The pilgrims often ask for the intercession of a mediator, such as a saint, to reach their goal. The pilgrims in Chiapas appeal to the Virgin of Guadalupe, the dark-skinned manifestation of the Virgin

Mary. Pilgrims carry banners bearing the face of the Virgin of Guadalupe, chant "*Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe*," and sing a song called "*La Guadalupeana*" which tells the story of her appearance to Juan Diego.<sup>17</sup>

The pilgrimages organized by *Pueblo Creyente* are religious and political events; they are differentiated from *manifestaciones* (or demonstrations) which are only political. In some way the pilgrimages are separated from political parties; this is evident in that members are not allowed to show their support of political parties during their walk and no party propaganda or political chants are allowed. At the same time, religious acts are noteworthy: people carry crosses, burn incense, sing religious songs and, finally, finish their journey in a church, usually the main Cathedral of the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, where a mass is held. Bishop Ruiz García often celebrates the mass, but

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<sup>17</sup> According to folklore and Catholic doctrine, the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego, an Indian in central Mexico, on December 9, 1531, just ten years after the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan fell to Hernan Cortés (Taylor 1987). When Juan Diego appealed to the Bishop to construct a church on the site of the Virgin's appearance, religious authorities questioned that the event had taken place. Juan Diego returned to the spot where he had first seen the Virgin; she appeared again and her image was miraculously imprinted on his cloak. This convinced the Bishop and a church was constructed to commemorate the miracle. The Virgin Mary was also an important symbol in indigenous revitalization movements in Chiapas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (see Bricker 1981; Wasserstrom 1983). William B. Taylor (1987) notes the paradoxical use of the symbol of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico's history. She was a sign that the Indians were a chosen people, challenged the political and social order of the privileged, and was associated with the Independence War as well as the Revolution of 1910. At the same time, the Virgin as mediator between God and humans served as a "model of acceptance and legitimation of colonial authority" (Taylor 1987: 20). An individual was expected to approach the Virgin humbly, to give her time to right injustices, and not to take matters in one's own hands. In the pilgrimages of *Pueblo Creyente* in present-day Chiapas, the image of the Virgin Mary is used as a symbol of the importance of indigenous tradition and is seen as a protector of the indigenous people. However, the symbolism and social history of the Virgin of Guadalupe among the indigenous peoples of Chiapas merits further research.

indigenous pilgrims participate by translating the biblical readings into their languages, speaking during the homily, giving out communion, playing traditional music, and sometimes performing traditional dance. Important church leaders including Bishops and priests from other parts of Mexico and even from other countries attend the mass. However, the political importance of the pilgrimage is also recognized by *Pueblo Creyente*. This is evident in the motives listed for pilgrimage which often include a critique of government actions. Furthermore, press bulletins are printed to be sent to the media on the day of the march and members of *Pueblo Creyente* hold press conferences. Working with the media clearly goes beyond asking for the intercession of God.

While I was in Chiapas, I observed numerous pilgrimages, including the massive ones of November 24, 1993 and March 26, 1995.<sup>18</sup> Well over 20,000 people -- Indians and *mestizos* -- from throughout the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas participated in each of these events. The pilgrimage of 1993 was organized in support of Bishop Samuel Ruiz García in response to a threat of separating him from the Diocese. In 1995, the pilgrimage similarly supported the work of the Bishop and called for peace in Chiapas. I also observed three smaller pilgrimages: one in August of 1993 in celebration of the Bishop winning an international human rights award, one in March of 1995 in celebration of the opening of the synod, and one in July of 1995 to ask for the return of three foreign

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<sup>18</sup>A large number of Catholics were among some 25,000 Indians who attended the march on October 12, 1994 organized to demand respect for human rights 502 years after Columbus' landing in the Americas. This political event was not organized by *Pueblo Creyente* although many of its members participated.

priests of the Diocese who had been expelled from Mexico.<sup>19</sup> On these three dates, pilgrimages and religious celebrations were simultaneously held in all the parishes of the Diocese.

In the pilgrimage of March 1995, over 20,000 members of *Pueblo Creyente* walked from diverse points in the city to the Cathedral. The pilgrimage took place at a time when political tension was high. In February of the same year, thousands of soldiers had entered the Lacandon Jungle and committed numerous human rights violations against indigenous communities, Jorge Santiago had been arrested as a political prisoner, and the pastoral work of the Diocese was under increasing attack. Leaders of *Pueblo Creyente* distributed a press bulletin explaining the motive for the pilgrimage:

We are celebrating the centenary of the crowning of Our Mother Mary of Guadalupe who still works with the children of the smallest ones. As children of Mary, we continue working so that Peace and Justice with Dignity come to our *pueblos* today. We do not want this dirty war. We want to live as the words of Jesus say 'To have life and life in abundance' (John 10,10).

Our life today continues to be diminished and threatened because the *pueblo* continues to endure persecution, arbitrary detention, slander, aggression, torture, assassination, confrontations between brothers, defamation, threats, hunger, imprisonment, and human rights violations. . .

The force of this pilgrimage is so that we can pray together, in order to support and show our solidarity with *Tatic* Samuel Ruiz García, and his pastoral work. We are participating in this pilgrimage also to ask for the

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<sup>19</sup> On June 22, 1995 the priests Rodolfo Izal Elorz (of Spanish nationality), Loren Riebe (of U.S. nationality), and Jorge Alberto Barón Guitein (of Argentinean nationality) were detained by the Federal Judicial Police in Chiapas. On the following day they were expelled from the country. They were accused of being involved in illicit activities which were not authorized by their visas. The detentions and expulsions were taken to be a political attack on the work of the Diocese of San Cristóbal (Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" 1995b).

unconditional liberty of our brother Jorge Santiago and of other brothers who are prisoners for their commitment with justice and truth. (Press Bulletin, *Pueblo Creyente*, March 26, 1995, INAREMAC).

I observed this pilgrimage as part of my fieldwork in San Cristóbal. A week before the event, the Catholics of Guadalupe met to discuss who would go to the pilgrimage and to make the necessary arrangements. A group of about fifteen men and a handful of women and children walked from Guadalupe to the Chapel of Caridad where they met up with other Tzotziles who live on the outskirts of San Cristóbal. Trucks were provided to transport people to a gathering point north of the center of town. There people from Guadalupe met up with others from the *Diaconías* and the Tzotzil Pastoral Team. As we waited, a large truck filled with men and women from Zinacantán arrived. On the front of the truck above the cab was a huge sign reading PRD (the left of center opposition party in Mexico). There was movement and discussion over the sign. It was decided that the people could participate in the pilgrimage, but that they could not bring the sign. A large group of people from CRIACH also arrived, led by Domingo López Angel, to join in the pilgrimage.

As people arrived, they began to form a single-file line. Pastoral workers assisted in organizing people in groups. Although the initial planning of the pilgrimage was done by *Pueblo Creyente*, pastoral workers played an instrumental role assisting in the logistics of its organization, such as helping to make arrangements for security, to contact the press, and to invite religious workers from outside the region. Each community walked together as part of their Pastoral Team. Hence, residents of Guadalupe walked in a group which comprised part of the *Diaconías*, which in turn comprised part of the Tzotzil

Pastoral Team. Once everyone was in formation, the two hour walk to the center of town began. Some carried white lilies, banners bearing the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, signs in support of the Bishop, or incense. Others played traditional music. Almost all of the women, who constituted a major part of the procession, and many of the men wore the traditional dress of their communities, and when I climbed the steps of one church to get a better view, the sharp contrast in colors separating one community from the next was astonishing.

The different Pastoral Teams arrived at the Plaza of the Cathedral at the same time. A temporary stage had been set up in the plaza in front of the church since all the pilgrims could not fit inside. Bishop Ruiz García welcomed the pilgrims and officiated at the mass. Bishops from other Latin American countries and from Europe were present on the stage and expressed their support of the Bishop and the fight for justice in Chiapas. Indigenous representatives from each of the Pastoral Teams had prepared a part of the celebration. This pilgrimage was important in demonstrating the power of the indigenous voice both to the indigenous communities themselves and to the dominant *mestizo* society. As the streets of the city of San Cristóbal filled with indigenous peoples peacefully demonstrating and realizing the power in their numbers, the *mestizos* of the city began to fear revolt. As Juan, a catechist from Guadalupe said to me, "When we arrived at the plaza of the cathedral there were a million people from all over the state of Chiapas, everyone in their traditional dress so that you knew where they were from."

## Conclusion

The organization process and actions of the *Comité de Defensa de los Amenazados, Perseguidos, y Expulsados de Chamula* and *Pueblo Creyente* demonstrate how the institutional structure of the Catholic Church in the Diocese of San Cristóbal facilitates mobilization at the base. Both groups were formed with the encouragement of pastoral workers of the Diocese. *Pueblo Creyente* continues to be an important group working for justice and equality of the poor of Chiapas. In a meeting held in February of 1996, participants shared information on the situation in their communities. Of particular importance was the fragile state of the dialogue between the Zapatista Army of National Liberation and the government, and the violence perpetuated by paramilitary groups in the northern region of Bachajón. At the end of the meeting it was agreed that: (1) a letter would be written to President Zedillo asking for the release of political prisoners and the creation of conditions which would support a continued dialogue, (2) a pilgrimage at the diocesan level would be organized, and (3) periods of prayer would be held to support the dialogue (*El Caminante* 1996). In this meeting, as in earlier ones, religious and political actions were combined. Through *Pueblo Creyente*, the local networks described in Chapter 7 are linked to regional, diocesan, and to some extent, international networks. The Diocese's institutional structure creates, maintains, and legitimizes these ties.

The *Comité* began as a group of Catholic catechists from Chamula, but as it grew, Protestants also began to participate. Although the *Comité* no longer exists, CRIACH continues to work for the rights of the expelled. However, divisions within the group are presenting difficulties in the organizational process. The government fosters divisions by

offering concessions to members in exchange for their support. Nonetheless, CRIACH still has considerable power. When members block roads to protest treatment of the exiled, the government usually tries to negotiate, since the threat of thousands of CRIACH supporters taking the streets is a reality.

The actions of CRIACH and *Pueblo Creyente* also reveal the way that political mobilization can be based simultaneously on religious, ethnic, and class identification, which are often inseparable. Above all, shared poverty and repression are experiences which unite people of different ethnic groups and different religions. At the center of the demands of both groups is a broad definition of human rights for the indigenous, based on the notion of a right to a dignified life. Members of these groups identify as victims of human rights abuses, which is most explicitly evident in the exiled who join CRIACH. Because the problems people face -- expulsion, poverty, and discrimination -- are understood as political and economic injustices rather than as local conflicts within indigenous communities, the struggle for justice and dignity necessarily is a struggle for structural change. This broad definition of rights also sets the goals of the groups, most importantly, the struggle "To have life and life in abundance," which is seen as part of helping to build the Reign of God on earth. Prayer and faith are important steps to attain this goal. However, members of CRIACH and *Pueblo Creyente* believe that political mobilization is not only necessary, but is part of the will of God.

## CHAPTER NINE

### WALKING WITH ONE HEART

[The Gospel] invites us to continue with one heart, to work and to approach the Word of God that will give us that which we ask for, so that we will not lack anything.

The Word of God encourages us to continue following this path in spite of many problems, seeing that together we can reach our objective. It encourages us to strongly defend our faith; surely as a *pueblo* we have the hope of one day constructing the Reign of God, seeing that our struggle is communitarian and coordinated with the spiritual struggle to achieve a dignified life. We are enlightened to not be discouraged by conflict in the presence of new divisions and new challenges (*Meeting of Pueblo Creyente*, February 1996, in *El Caminante* 1996: 20).

The exiled Tzotziles of Guadalupe have created an indigenous Roman Catholic community in which they identify a broad range of human rights and work to defend these rights. Central to the creation of community consciousness are local notions of working and walking with one heart. Walking is a physical act shared by the poor in Chiapas; they walk because they are poor and cannot pay for transportation, or because they must reach communities where there are no roads. On a symbolic level, the poor state that their situation forces them to walk to make the path which will lead to respect, equality, and a dignified life. In Guadalupe people recalled walking for hours to attend religious celebrations, to visit indigenous Catholics in other communities, and to work in the *fincas*, the Grijalva valley, or the city. Walking is also work; women and men sweat as they carry their children and belongings on slippery, narrow paths up and down steep hills. In addition, difficult physical labor -- be it washing clothes while bent over a stream, planting and harvesting *milpa*, working on the *fincas*, or constructing roads,

houses, and chapels -- is also part of daily life. Walking with one heart is working to defend one's rights, following the narrow path toward justice and dignity. It is because of their work in performing physical labor, creating community, worshiping, and defending their way of life that the Catholics claim they are deserving of basic human rights. In this final chapter, I explore what the case of Guadalupe and the Diocese of San Cristóbal contributes to the debate about the defense of human rights in indigenous communities.

### **Defining Human Rights: Lessons from Chiapas**

While anthropologists are paying increasing attention to the effects of global forces on local communities, indigenous peoples are also seeing the strategic value of framing their demands in global terms. As Michael Kearney states:

Numerous indigenous groups have been able to reframe their disadvantageous relationships with the nation-states that encompass them by redefining their projects in the global space of environmentalism and human rights. . . . and by defining their problems in terms of violations of their human rights, many indigenous groups have been able to gain support from the international human rights movements, which is able to put pressure on renegade states that abuse indigenous peoples (1995: 560).

In Chiapas, this is case for the organization of CRIACH as well as the Zapatista Army of National Liberation, both of which appeal to an international audience for the defense of their rights. Relativistic anthropological approaches to diverse cultural customs and practices are challenged as indigenous people with distinctive cultural values cast their demands in terms of universal human rights.

In contrast, although the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 remains one of the most important documents in promoting human rights, certain

groups claim that the rights laid out in this document are not universal, but rather are Western-European. For example, at the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, various states -- including Asian and Muslim states -- challenged the universality of the United Nations human rights standards, claiming that they are ethnocentrically Western. The final conference declaration recognizes that regional, historical, cultural, and religious differences should be taken into account in human rights standards (Kelsay and Twiss 1994: 34). The move away from Western-European liberal doctrine is evident in the fact that the document does not make reference to individual rights, but rather speaks of the person and human dignity (Pollis 1996). While specific violations such as torture, arbitrary executions, inhuman and degrading treatment, and arbitrary detentions are denounced, the Vienna document does not mention individual civil and political rights such as freedom of speech, assembly, or religion (Ibid). Paradoxically, while the document recognizes that human rights are universal in nature, it also suggests the necessity of incorporating non-Western historical, cultural, and religious traditions into rights' standards.<sup>1</sup>

These two trends raise several questions about the universality of human rights which are central to this dissertation. Do cultural, religious, and regional differences preclude the formulation of universal rights codes? Is it necessary to reformulate human

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<sup>1</sup>The Bangkok Declaration (1993) written in preparation for the Vienna conference similarly notes that Asian definitions of human rights differ from Western-European definitions. According to this Declaration: "While human rights are universal in nature, they must be considered in the context of a dynamic and evolving process of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural, and religious backgrounds" (cited in Pollis 1996: 331).

rights language to incorporate diverse traditions? Are Western-European, individual-based codes compatible with indigenous notions of community-based human rights? The case of expulsion in highland Chiapas reveals the tremendous complexity of relying on either universal or particularistic definitions of rights in order to protect indigenous peoples. The Mexican state as well as indigenous *caciques* have successfully used the argument of cultural relativism and local autonomy to permit the human rights violations which take place in the expulsions. The *caciques* expel dissidents under the pretext of preserving authentic indigenous tradition, while the government, for the most part, maintains a hands-off policy on the issue, declaring its respect for indigenous custom. In order to prevent the expulsion, it seems to be necessary to defend individualistic rather than communitarian definitions of human rights. However, indigenous peoples themselves, including the expelled of Guadalupe, continue to define their rights based in a community where each member has duties and responsibilities toward other members. In fact, they criticize the *caciques* of Chamula for violating the norms of respect inherent in community, not for violating their individual human rights.

William Roseberry has eloquently argued that community cannot be seen as a given or as something existing outside history, "but as a political association formed through processes of political and cultural creation and imagination -- the generation of meaning of contexts of unequal power" (1989: 14). In analyzing the case of expulsion and the formation of indigenous communities of exiles, I show that tradition and community cannot be accepted uncritically, for power relations are embedded within them. As traditions and communities are constructed and re-constructed, some gain

power while others are excluded or exploited.

### **Contextualizing Violence: Cultural Relativism and Power Relations**

Defining human rights according to specific customs and traditions is extremely problematic since tradition itself can be used to justify human rights violations (see for example, An-Na'im 1990; Collier 1995; Howard 1993, 1995; Kukathas 1992). At a time when many indigenous peoples in Chiapas are insisting on the necessity of protecting and promoting the traditions of their ancestors, indigenous women are voices of dissent, claiming that some of their native customs and traditions cannot be defended. At a workshop on women's rights held in San Cristóbal de Las Casas in May 1994, a group of indigenous women criticized many "traditional" customs, stating that:

. . . We have to reformulate our customs. The law should protect and promote only the actions and customs examined by the communities and organizations if they are good. The customs that we have should not do harm to anyone. . . . Violence (beatings, rape) is not good. It is not just that we are sold for money. These were the customs from earlier times, but we also have to change. When we do not want to marry, it is better that we talk with our fathers and the man; marriage should not be forced because it ruins the woman, worse if there are children later. We do not like the custom that men drink a lot because they scold us or beat their wives, and spend the money needed for food. The same government carries out transactions for alcohol or gives permits. We do not want bad custom (El Grito de la luna 1994: 31).

In the case of expulsion, Chamulan tradition has been privileged by government officials because of its "indigenous" identity. However, the indigenous elites (*caciques*) have successfully manipulated ethnic sentiment to benefit themselves or to take advantage of other members of the community. Justifying human rights violations in the

name of tradition and autonomy obscures the fact that these leaders continue to gain power at the expense of other community members through coercion, monopolies on the sale of items used in ritual, and the use of violence. The *caciques* maintain their political and economic power by expelling those who challenge them. The expelled are accused of threatening indigenous custom and tradition by giving up alcohol, failing to participate in the elaborate *cargo* system, using different healing techniques, or worshiping in distinct ways. Tradition includes as well as excludes, and definitions of what constitutes tradition often have more to do with power relations than they do with indigenous custom. As stated in Chapter 6, Chamulans have claimed that Mexico's ruling party, the PRI, is part of local tradition, while Protestants and Catholics are rejected as alien to tradition. This contradictory notion reveals the problems of defining "authentic tradition" as well as the way that tradition can be manipulated to serve the interests of the state and its co-opted leaders.

Moreover, Mayan tradition, like all tradition, is and always has been changing. As shown in Chapter 6, some traditions -- particularly that of alcohol -- have changed considerably in the past fifty years in ways that reflect the domination of forces external to the community. It cannot be argued that those who remain within Chamula are somehow more authentic as "Indians" than those who are forced to leave since the Catholics of Guadalupe continue to identify themselves as indigenous peoples.

While tradition can lead to exploitation within indigenous communities, government officials can similarly justify repression in the name of preserving tradition. In writing about the ways that states use violence in order to manage resistance and

maintain control, Carole Nagengast points out that it is often the countries with the worst record of human rights abuses that use arguments of cultural relativism to criticize universal standards of rights. She notes that “Cultural relativity is now code in some circles for permission to oppress people and peoples and to maintain women as second and third class citizens in the name of ostensible tradition and lack of cultural equivalence” (1994:128). Nagengast's point is an important one.<sup>2</sup> Granting validity to states' arguments against universal human rights can give them the space to continue committing violations.

In Chiapas, government officials have argued that they cannot take action against the expulsions because they are necessary to protect indigenous culture. In fact, as noted in Chapter 3, during the first large expulsion in 1974, the office of *Asuntos Indígenas* directly participated in the act by providing trucks to transport the exiled from Chamula. Those exiled had voted against the PRI-candidate for the municipal election. Twenty years later, when some five hundred indigenous exiles returned to their homes in Chamula after spending eleven months living in protest at the installations of *Asuntos Indígenas*, the government refused to assist in transportation, arguing that the safety of the returning exiles could not be guaranteed. The exiles arranged for transportation through CRIACH and other non-governmental organizations. The Chamulans who returned in 1994 were also opposed to the PRI and were returning to their homes, in part,

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<sup>2</sup> June Nash makes a similar point in noting that most arguments for the maintenance of universal human rights standards come from activists concerned with women and indigenous societies (unpublished presentation at Fairfield University, 1993).

to vote in the 1994 presidential election.

The government's use of expulsion to negotiate hegemony is evident in the recent actions of Mexico's National Commission of Human Rights (CNDH). With the advent of the Zapatista uprising in January of 1994, the Mexican government began to consider seriously the demands of the expelled. On April 19, 1994, the CNDH put out its first recommendation on the problem of expulsions from the Municipality of San Juan Chamula.<sup>3</sup> Since 1990, its first year of work, the Commission has received a series of complaints about violations of human rights related to expulsions. The CNDH makes no mention of why it took four years to respond to the complaints, although the 1994 recommendation seems clearly linked to the demands of the Zapatistas and the recognition that many of the expelled were sympathetic to the Zapatistas.<sup>4</sup> The recommendation states that "The acts of expulsion always constitute a violation of the Human Rights consecrated in our constitution" and that the municipal authorities of Chamula are responsible for these violations (CNDH, Recommendation 58/94: 48). Recommendations were made at three levels: to the Governor of Chiapas, to the President of the State Congress, and to the Municipal President of San Juan Chamula.<sup>5</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup>The National Commission of Human Rights was founded by President Carlos Salinas de Gortari in 1990 in order to respond to human rights violations in the country.

<sup>4</sup>The Zapatista Army of National Liberation demanded justice for the expelled in the "Commitments for Peace" of March 1, 1994; they demanded that expulsion be stopped, that the expelled be guaranteed a peaceful return to their homelands, and that indemnity be paid for their lost goods ("Compromisos por la Paz," Communication from the EZLN, published in *La Jornada*, March 3, 1994).

<sup>5</sup>The CNDH recommended that the Governor of Chiapas carry out penal action against the crimes mentioned in juridical complaints dealing with expulsion, that the

Governor of Chiapas and the State Congress formally accepted the recommendation. The municipal president of Chamula did not answer the recommendation within the legal period, indicating that he had not accepted it. By September of 1995, neither the Governor nor the State Congress had carried out the recommendation which they had accepted.<sup>6</sup> This reflects the lack of political will on the part of government authorities in Chiapas to attempt to end the expulsions. As several scholars have pointed out, the government's tolerance of expulsion is a political trade-off. While Chamulan *caciques* ensure that votes are offered to the PRI, the government does not interfere in local affairs (Morquecho Escamilla 1992, 1994; Nash and Kovic 1996; Rus 1994). In short, the government's defense of expulsion in the name of protecting local custom and tradition serves as a smokescreen to maintain political hegemony.<sup>7</sup>

One of the problems with the state's negligence in relation to the problem of expulsion is that it leads to an increase in violence. Expulsion and other forms of violence continue in Chamula to the present. What appears to be internal fighting among

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response be satisfactory to the two parties in conflict, and that the return of the expelled to their native communities be guaranteed. They recommended that the President of the State Congress investigate whether the expulsions violate the state law and that he suspend Chamulan authorities found responsible for violating the law. Finally, they recommended that the Municipal President of Chamula abstain from continuing the expulsions and guarantee peaceful tolerance among members of the community.

<sup>6</sup>This reflects the fundamental limitation of the CNDH -- it can make recommendations, but has no power to see that these recommendations are enforced.

<sup>7</sup> It is also interesting to note that in other parts of Mexico, the government has not permitted human rights violations in the name of protecting indigenous tradition. The strongest example is state prosecution of those killing people who are accused of being witches. Magdalena Gómez Rivera (1988b) analyzes several cases in which those who killed witches were punished according to Mexican law.

indigenous peoples is intimately tied to the state's negligence and their political alignment with the *caciques*. As Carole Nagengast notes, political violence includes actions which are not directly taken by the state, but for which the state is nonetheless responsible:

For example, ferocity between the Hutus and Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi; between Ladinos and indigenous peoples in Guatemala; between Israelis and Palestinians in Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip; or among Croats, Serbs, and Muslims in the Balkans, insofar as it is tolerated or encouraged by states in order to create, justify, excuse, explain, or enforce hierarchies of difference and relations of inequality, are acts of state violence, even though states themselves may not appear on the surface to be primary agents (Nagengast 1994: 114).

This provides an excellent description of what happens in Chiapas as government authorities allow the expulsions to continue through negligence and impunity. As the violence escalates, *mestizos* stereotype Chamulans as being dangerous and unruly which reinforces the hierarchy of inequality between them. Furthermore, the lack of action on part of government officials to prevent expulsion and to punish those responsible has caused the expelled to take justice into their own hands, sometimes leading to tragic consequences.

As noted above, in an attempt to force the government to seriously consider their demands, a large group of indigenous exiles returned to their homes in Chamula in August 1994, a few weeks before the presidential elections. One month later, three people who had returned were killed in the hamlet of Icalumtic; according to members of the community, the municipal president gave the order for the assassination (Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas" 1995e). While this appears to be internal violence between two disputing indigenous groups, the government's refusal to respond to

the problem of expulsion and to guarantee the safety of those returning clearly played a role.

Ironically, the use of culture and tradition to defend human rights continues to be a problem even in communities of people who once suffered violations at the hands of the Chamulan *caciques*. This is most dramatically evident in the community of Candelaria which was legally incorporated into the municipality of San Cristóbal de Las Casas in 1967 due to ongoing political and religious conflicts with the Chamulan authorities. In spite of the fact that Candelaria separated from Chamula because the *caciques* would not permit them to worship as Roman Catholics, the leaders of Candelaria now state that they will not allow any Protestants to reside in their community. They claim that this is necessary to maintain culture and tradition.

In the community of Guadalupe, freedom of religion is currently observed. Roman Catholics live side-by-side with people of various Protestant religions and with traditionalists (also negatively referred to as "people without religion"). However, some are excluded from the symbolic community because of their behavior. Most strongly criticized are those who drink or who leave their wives for another woman. If people refuse to change their behavior to conform to community standards, they will be isolated and marginalized from others, and many choose to live elsewhere. This happened to Mateo, the founding catechist of Guadalupe, who left due to community discontent when he took a "second wife" and was accused of corruption over securing the legal title for the land. Another man left voluntarily in 1994 because, as he explained to me, "They scolded me all the time because I drank a lot." Through strong moral sanctions, not law, the

Catholics maintain community cohesion. In this regard, the ideology of respect does not conflict with human rights codes within Guadalupe. However, given the case of Candelaria, it is possible that one day the people will decide that traditionalists can no longer live within the community. Being that the people of Guadalupe were themselves exiled from Chamula, it is difficult to think that they would violently exile others, rather they may exclude people from the symbolic community or ask them to leave.

The conflict between individual human rights and community rights raises important questions. Does community necessarily involve the negation of at least some individual rights? If this is so, can human rights violations be justified in order to protect community? There is no simple answer to these questions. One of the tasks of anthropologists is to uncover the historical, political, and economic context of specific customs embedded in community in order to better understand them (Messer 1993). Critical to this is analyzing who supports the customs and what benefits it offers them.<sup>8</sup>

### **Rights in Community: Respect and Dignity**

As I spoke with the Catholics of Guadalupe about their experience of exile, they told me of the tremendous loss they suffered, of the poverty they experienced after leaving Chamula, and finally, of the peace they continue to find living in a new

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<sup>8</sup>Ellen Messer notes that studies of customs which can harm women, such as genital mutilation or selective food deprivation, show that they do not have historical depth or "great cultural historical importance," but rather benefit certain individuals. In these cases, males in male-dominated societies benefit in adjusting to scarce resources. She suggests that "Improving economic conditions may eliminate the need for the custom without destroying the culture" (1993: 234).

community. Of all the human rights abuses that people had suffered in expulsion -- arbitrary detention, threats, destruction of property, mistreatment -- the one that remained the most difficult in their lives and enduring in their memories was leaving everything behind and having to start anew.

However, their stories of expulsion are not only stories of suffering and pain, they are also stories of hope. The residents of Guadalupe saw the hope for constructing a new life and a new community; they stress that there is respect for their religion and for the new norms of behavior in the community. Although Chamulan *caciques*, several scholars, and government officials argue that expulsion is justified to protect community solidarity in Chamula, the expelled go on to establish new communities in semi-urban areas away from their native lands. Catechists and prayer leaders continually explained the importance of unity within the community where people are expected to work together in order to "walk with one heart."

It is within this community that the Catholics of Guadalupe define and defend their rights; each person must work toward maintenance of the survival of the community itself, and, in many cases, this should override individual interests. The idea of respect is central to the local understandings of human rights; each person belongs to and gives to the community while the community, in turn, gives something to each of its members. The demands of the indigenous peoples for respect is a call for the government and *Ladinos* to recognize the rightful place of indigenous peoples in the national society, just as each indigenous person is given their place in the local community. In criticizing those responsible for expulsion, the Roman Catholics of Guadalupe note that the *caciques* lack

respect for others, the same respect on which the Catholics base their notion of community. Respect correlates with the notion of dignity which is embedded in Catholic doctrine; all humans have dignity and the right to a dignified life because they are children of God. Part of respecting each person within the community is recognizing their inherent dignity. As Bishop Ruiz García has stated, "The worth of the human person is all-encompassing. All possess an inviolable dignity which must be respected for itself, and the rest must respect it and make it be respected unconditionally" (1993: 40).

This notion of community-based rights can enhance Western-European approaches based on the individual. An example is the dispute in Guadalupe about the use of water. Since water is scarce in the community, it is believed that no one family should use more than their share and thereby put other families at risk. One family who used water to irrigate strawberries which were sold as a cash crop was criticized for "wasting" the water. Resources are seen as belonging equally to all, and each family should only have access to what is needed for their survival. As people throughout the world are becoming increasingly aware of the scarcity of resources and ecological movements are gaining popularity, the idea of community access to resources -- rather than individual access -- provides an important model, for in the long run, it is only through seeing that there are sufficient resources for the community that individual access to resources can be guaranteed.

The problem of water extends well beyond the local community of Guadalupe. In the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, access to clean water is a problem for many.

Nonetheless, upper- and middle-class *mestizos* in the city do not experience water scarcity in the same way that the indigenous do. Although water may stop for short periods of time in certain areas of the city, these *mestizo* families are assured almost constant access to water. Furthermore, these families use much more water than the indigenous families do. If water was distributed more equitably in the city, there would be less concern about having to conserve it in Guadalupe. Although the Catholics of Guadalupe did not mention the need for a general redistribution of water, in discussing access to work and just pay, land, and other resources, they note that there must be a fundamental change in the political and economic order in Chiapas if all are to be equal and to live dignified lives. This change is necessary for the continued survival of their and other indigenous communities.

Access to water and other resources are fundamental economic and social rights which in Western-European doctrine are considered less important than civil and political rights. "Despite the [U.N.] Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the adoption of disputed social welfare programs, Western nations do not consider the right to food, clothing, and shelter as fundamental" (Pollis 1996: 319).<sup>9</sup> If the economic and social rights of the 1948 United Nations Declaration were seriously implemented, it would necessitate fundamental structural change, both within nation-states and between them (Hollenbach 1979; Price Reavis n.d.). This change is necessary in order to

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<sup>9</sup> Western nations, including the U.S., have been reluctant to approve covenants protecting economic and social rights. Some political philosophers argue that economic and social rights should be considered ideals and cannot be defined as rights (see Cranston 1988).

guarantee equal access to rights and freedoms "without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other option, national or social origin, property, birth or other status" (Article 2); the right to social security (Article 22); the right to work and just and favourable pay (Article 23); the right to education (Article 26); and the right to "a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family. . . ." (Article 25).

It is difficult to imagine that these rights can be protected within the current global economic system, particularly with the neoliberal reforms being implemented in Mexico as well as other countries. With the negotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the early 1990s, the human rights situation in Mexico became a point of concern for the governments in the three countries involved in the agreement who viewed the respect of human rights -- primarily civil and political rights -- as an important element in Mexico's transition to democracy. At the same time, neoliberal reforms in response to global integration are reversing Mexico's postrevolutionary promise of social and economic rights. The Zapatistas -- whose uprising in 1994 was sparked in part by the implementation of NAFTA -- simultaneously demand the autonomy to govern themselves according to their own traditions as well as economic rights. As demands by civil society and Zapatista activists are forcing the Mexican government to consider changes in the Constitution to protect cultural rights, economic rights are being eroded with structural adjustment policies.<sup>10</sup> In this context,

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<sup>10</sup> Perhaps it is no accident that the first *Mesas* (literally Tables) of Dialogue between the Zapatistas and government were organized around the issue of indigenous autonomy. The government is certainly more willing to concede cultural rather than

the Catholics of Guadalupe complain that although they perform hours of physical labor daily, they do not have the material means to live a dignified life. In response, they unite with poor people in Chiapas to demand their economic and social rights.

### **The Catholic Church in Chiapas: Promoting Indigenous Rights**

The Catholic Church has been responsible for the violation of human rights in indigenous communities, particularly in the destruction of native culture and in the exploitation of indigenous land and labor during the colonial period in Latin America. Yet, there have always been voices within the Church arguing for the protection of human rights of the indigenous people through appeals to their common humanity. Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, the first bishop of Chiapas, was an early defender of the rights of the indigenous against the abuses committed by the Church and the Spanish Crown. He did not arrive in Chiapas as an advocate of indigenous rights; in fact, he once owned Indians as an *encomiendero*. His position changed from one of oppressor to advocate as he was converted by his experience of living among the indigenous poor.

Bishop Ruiz García was similarly converted. When he began his work in Chiapas in 1960, his goals were to assimilate and Westernize indigenous peoples; he proposed teaching them Spanish, giving them shoes, and changing their diets. Although these goals were well-intentioned, they promote assimilation and assume that the poverty of indigenous peoples will be solved by making them more like *mestizos*. The work of the

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economic rights, and the danger is that indigenous groups could accept the former in exchange for the later.

Chamulan Mission from 1966 to 1969 also followed this model of modernization. Indigenous custom and tradition were criticized, even ridiculed, and seen as an impediment to evangelization. The Catholic Church contributed to the problem of expulsion, mostly by justifying the *caciques*' claim that converts to Catholicism would not respect the indigenous tradition and community. The Church's actions to oppose the Chamulan *caciques*, particularly in the municipal elections of 1974, served to aggravate problems rather than to alleviate them.

However, the work of the Catholic Church changed in the 1970's. Bishop Ruiz García attended the meetings of the Second Vatican Council (1965) as well as the Latin American Bishops' Conferences of Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979), and was profoundly influenced by liberation theology. He incorporated the new view of the poor and their liberation into his pastoral work. Seeing the poverty and marginalization of the indigenous and *campesinos* in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas also had a tremendous impact on the Bishop and pastoral workers. In 1975, the Diocese formally chose to implement the preferential option for the poor. This involved taking an active role in promoting and defending the human rights of the indigenous peoples of the Diocese. Little by little, the Bishop and pastoral workers were "converted" by the experience of walking with the poor.

In their definition, conversion represents a commitment to work with the *pueblo* and their process; this entails "accompanying" rather than directing the poor in their struggles, and taking on their struggles as one's own. Liberation is viewed as being fundamental to this process as is learning to respect indigenous culture. However, the

process of conversion was not without its errors as is indicated by the Chamulan Mission among other examples.

The indigenous peoples and *campesinos* of Chiapas commonly call Bishop Ruiz García “El Caminante” (“One Who Walks”) for several reasons. This literally refers to the fact that the Bishop walks at least part way to the communities he visits so that he can place his feet in their reality and know what the people experience. On a symbolic level, the Bishop walks with or accompanies the peoples on their path in their struggle for liberation.

In working with people at the base, namely in the community of Guadalupe, I saw that people introduce ideas from the Catholic Church in their conceptions of human rights, and that the Church provides an institutional link through which people mobilize to defend their rights. Notions of equality and community were predicated upon and defended by religious doctrine. In mobilizing to defend their rights, the Catholics in Guadalupe believe that they are united with other Catholics through their shared beliefs and ritual practices, and are (or should be) helping to construct the Reign of God.

The Tzotzil term *Sc'op ti Dios* (the Word of God) is a breakthrough in indigenous thought and provides for unity among indigenous Catholics which extends well-beyond the community of Guadalupe. In contrast, the language of Tzotzil is called *batsil c'op* or the “true language” and is spoken by *batsil vinic*, “the true men,” indicating the simultaneous glorification and isolation of this ethnic group. *Sc'op ti Dios* provides the framework for unity with other indigenous groups (including Tzeltales, Tojolabales, Ch'oles and Zoques) and with *mestizos* since all are seen as “children of God.” Unity

was explicitly promoted by the Diocese of San Cristóbal beginning with the Indigenous Congress of 1974 which concluded that only through the unity of the *pueblos* could liberation be attained.

Unity is the foundation of a “community of faith” which begins at the local level, and extends to the regional, the state, and the international level.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the organizational structure of the Diocese -- with its pastoral teams, meetings, and economic resources -- facilitates the formation of both formal and informal networks among the indigenous communities. Belonging to a community of faith helps the people of Guadalupe create of networks within and beyond the community. Through this community, people are united in their common vision of working toward the establishment of the Reign of God -- a world with justice and equality for all. This is reinforced as the Catholics of Guadalupe unite with other people in Chiapas for political mobilization based on shared poverty, ethnic identity, and human rights violations. A broad definition of rights also sets the goals for mobilization, as is shown in the case of *Pueblo Creyente* and CRIACH, and their struggles for justice, dignity, and economic equality. The fact that the indigenous of Chiapas believe that political mobilization is not only necessary, but is part of the will of God, serves to legitimate these struggles.

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<sup>11</sup>However, the community of faith as a Catholic concept is also limiting; it excludes the many indigenous Protestants in Chiapas. Although the Catholic church and its followers have made sincere attempts to incorporate Protestants in mobilizations for indigenous rights -- most visibly in the case of *Pueblo Creyente* -- these efforts have met with limited success.

### **Participant Observation and Advocacy: Toward a New Ethnography**

In conducting fieldwork on human rights, I found it to be important to work at two different levels. First, I examined violations at the level of the state of Chiapas through research at the Center for Human Rights "Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas." In talking to victims of human rights abuses, recording testimony, examining documents, analyzing statistics of how many and what type of violations were occurring, and observing human rights courses in indigenous communities, I gained an important overview of the human rights situation in Chiapas. I saw that human rights abuses are not isolated cases carried out by a few corrupt authorities, but are acts which serve to maintain a repressive power structure. The state creates alliances with large landowners and the political-economic elite of Chiapas. It was particularly important to observe how the PRI supports corrupt leaders at the local level to protect votes. This leads to internal divisions which in many cases become violent.

The second level of research was my fieldwork in the community of Guadalupe where I explored one indigenous community's understanding of rights. I listened to stories of expulsion, recorded the history of the community, and engaged in participant observation in order to comprehend the role of rights in their daily lives. Equally important, I was able to observe how people were mobilizing to defend their rights, albeit on a small-scale. Only through fieldwork in the community was I able to observe the local and regional networks, created and maintained with other indigenous Roman Catholics, which serve as the base for mobilization in defense of rights.

In describing how anthropologists can create mutually supportive relationships

with informants, Christine Eber lists four things that anthropologists have to offer. First, we can let people teach us about their understandings. Second, we can describe the local and personal level of events. Third, we can contextualize these local events within history. Finally, we can take the message of our informants to the public (Eber 1996). All of these are evident in my fieldwork. I listened to people's understandings of human rights, recorded their stories of hope and suffering, and observed the way people work and worship. Conducting fieldwork in Guadalupe allowed me to observe how human rights abuses impact daily life. It is one thing to know someone has been detained, tortured, or exiled, but it is another to observe what this means in their day-to-day existence. However, it is not enough to collect stories of expulsion, it is also necessary to contextualize these abuses in order to explain their causes and trajectory. In Chamula, expulsion is closely tied to the history of bilingual teachers and *caciques*, the economic marginalization of the municipality, and the political goals of the PRI.

As I was engaged in participant observation, I was compelled to attempt to give something back to the people of Guadalupe. I could not listen to their stories of expulsion and see the poverty experienced in daily life without hoping that my work as an anthropologist could somehow benefit the community. On a small scale, I tried to give back what I could; I taught a literacy class, paid for visits to doctors and bought medicine, wrote a booklet in Tzotzil and Spanish on the history of the community, and made contributions for the construction of new chapels. However, I also saw my role as a participant observer as one of an advocate who could take the message of the expelled to the public through writing and collaboration with international human rights groups in

order to analyze the policy implications of human rights issues.

In marked contrast to my fieldwork experience, Kirsten Hastrup and Peter Elsass argue that there is “an inherent dilemma in anthropological advocacy” since “anthropology is concerned with context rather than interest, while advocacy means making a choice among interests within the context” (1990: 307). While conducting fieldwork among the Arhuacos (an indigenous group) of Colombia, Hastrup and Elsass were asked to promote a development project to introduce intensive agriculture before the Bureau of Indigenous Affairs. Further investigation revealed that this project would defend the interests of the Arhuaco “modernists” over the “traditionalists.” As anthropologists, Hastrup and Elsass argue that they were forced to acknowledge both groups of Arhuacos and their versions of history without privileging one over the other. They state that “It is not possible by means of anthropological analysis to determine which is right and which is wrong, although we may identify their different possible consequences. In anthropological terms, they are equal” (Ibid: 307).

In the case of expulsion, I did “make a choice among interests” in focusing on the view of the expelled rather than that of the *caciques* and by exploring the context in which expulsion takes place. John Kelsay and Sumner Twiss note that “In order to understand properly the nature of human rights debates in general and the debate about universality versus relativism in particular, it is essential to distinguish the perspectives of various classes of speakers or claimants” (1994: 37). They argue that the most important speakers in the debate are the oppressed whose rights are being violated: “It is our belief that their suffering entitles them to be authentic witnesses about what oppression is like

and how it works" (Ibid: 39). Perhaps the most useful contribution of anthropologists to the human rights debate is analysis of the historical, political, and economic contexts in which abuses take place. In order to provide meaningful information to assist policy makers, anthropologists can provide in-depth analysis of the interests involved and the situations which contribute to abuses. One cannot naively argue that practices such as expulsion in Chiapas, female circumcision in Africa and the Middle East, or bride-burning in India be outlawed and therefore ended. Without altering the structures which keep these practices in place -- including, patrilineal societies, notions of family honor, land scarcity, the power of *caciques*, and poverty -- little change can be expected. Pointing out the power structures underlying human rights abuses is fundamental to working toward their eradication.

Commenting on Hastrup and Elsass' article on the contradiction between anthropology and advocacy, Merrill Singer argues: "From another perspective, however, advocacy, in the broad sense of putting knowledge to use for the purpose of social change, is the explicit aim of the anthropological endeavor" (1990: 548). My hope is that in exploring the causes of expulsion and the exiles' project to re-create an indigenous community in which they work to defend a broad range of human rights, this thesis can contribute to social change. My goal is not to speak *for* the people of Guadalupe, but rather to walk *with* them in their struggles to defend human rights.

**APPENDIX**

**WALKING WITH ONE UNITED HEART:  
THE CATHOLICS OF GUADALUPE**

**A History of Guadalupe  
written in Spanish and Tzotzil for the Catholics  
of the community**

**TA XANAVIK BATEL TA SJUNUL YO'ONTIK:  
LI JCHANK'OPETIK TE TA KOLONIA  
GUADALUPE.**

**CAMINANDO CON SÓLO UN CORAZÓN:  
LOS CATOLICOS DE  
GUADALUPE.**



**TA XANAVIK BATEL TA SJUNUL YO'ONTIK:  
LI JCHANK'OPETIK TE TA KOLONIA GUDADLUPE.**

*Veno, a li li'o oyunketik ta xka'ibekutik sk'op ti Dios oyunkutik mas ta jtojob muk'tik krisyanoetik ti li' nakalunkutik li' ta kolonya Guadalupe, li' ta yosilal jobele. Pero yu'un nutzbilunkutiktal ta jparajekutik te ta yosil ti muk'ul San Juane, yu'un ta xka'ibekutik sk'op ti Dios.*

**K'ALAL TA XKA'IBEKUTIK SK'OP TI DIOS.**

*K'alal ta xka'ibekutik sk'op ti Dios epunkutik oy talemik jyanlumetik, talem jch'enal'etik, te ta Iglesia Caridad, pero xchi'uk jcol k'opetik, xchi'uk juch'unilajeltik talemik ta kolonya kantelario ta yesilal jkaxlantenetik, schi'uk talemik yan krisyanoetik ta yosilal muk'ul San Juan ta Chamula. K'alal chka'ibekutik sk'op li Dios ta jel ko'ontonkutik.*

*Yu'un chik'otkutik k'alal ta ch'enal' chka'ibekutik sk'op li Dios te ta Iglesia ti bu oy li Jalaltotik Chanteau. Pero li Ch'enal'o'e yu'un toj nom ja' chib ora li xanabal ti yo' chijk'ot o ta ch'enalho' ti buy oy ti jparajee yu'un puru muyet tajmek.*

*Yu'un oy xa ta sbalunebal a'vil chka'ibe sk'op ti Dios. Yu'un te la jchan ta Iglesia Caridad. Va'i un lik jchanbe sk'op ti Dios yu'un oy jun chamel te ta jparaje ti bu nakalune. K'alal la jka'ibe sk'op ti Dios, mu'yuk xi iaj mas.*

**CAMINANDO CON SÓLO UN CORAZÓN:  
LOS CATOLICOS DE GUADALUPE.**

*Somos mas de 20 familias católicas que vivimos aquí en San Antonio del Monte, en el municipio de San Cristóbal de Las Casas. Somos refugiados, fuimos expulsados de nuestros parajes de San Juan Chamula por escuchar la Palabra de Díos.*

**CUANDO ESCUHAMOS LA PALABRA DE DIOS.**

*Escuchamos la Palabra de Dios en varios lugares, en el municipio de Chenalho', en la iglesia de Caridad, y por catequistas y creyentes de Candelaria y Chamula. Cuando escuchamos la Palabra de Dios cambiamos de corazón.*

*Llegamos a Chenalho' para escuchar la palabra de Díos en la iglesia allí donde esta el Padre Chanteau. Es dos horas de camino para llegar a Chenalho' de mi paraje - pura subida.*

*Hace 9 años yo escuché la Palabra de Dios. Lo aprendí en la iglesia de Caridad. Empecé a escuchar la Palabra de Dios porque tenía una enfermedad en mi paraje. Cuando escuché la Palabra de Dios, yo no enfermé más.*

Oy jun mol te nakal ta kolonya kantelario li schanubtas ta sk'op li Dios. Yu'un li vo'onkutike chik'otkutik ta Iglesia Kantelario chka'ibekutik sk'op li Dios. Yu'un chixanavkutik oxib ora ti bu oy ti jparajekutik ta Chamula k'alal ta Kantelario.

*Oy yan jchi'iltak ibat ya'ibe sk'op Dios yu'un toj ip cha'i tajmek.*

A li vo'one yu'un toj ipun tajmek, lubul pich'il no'ox mu xu' xiabtej. K'alal la jka'ibe sk'op ti Dios, kol ta ora ti chamele. Entonse li krisyanoetik la jyilik ti mu'yuk xa ipune, entonse la sjak'bikun, k'ucha'al mu'yuk xa ipote. Entonse la jkalbe, "a li vo'one yu'un chka'ibe sk'op Dios." Yu'un ja' no'ox xpoxtaotik li kajvaltik Jesukristoe.

A li vo'one oy xa ta oxlajuneb a'vil chka'ibe sk'op Dios. Oy un jnich'on ta oxib u pero batz'i ip tajmek yu'un la jsa' jun jilol buch'u sna' xk'elwane. Yu'un li jiloletike syemre tzk'an stojolik. Ta mas vo'nee y'un tzk'an stojolik lajuneb, o mi jtob mil pexu. Ta orae tzk'anik stojol lajuneb yoxvinik pexu. Pero li jilole mu'yuk bu xkol yu'un li chamele. Yu'un ti vo'nee jech nopem xa'iik ta sa'ik jilol. Yu'un ta sk'anik alak, pox, kantela. Pero ti jnich'one mu'yuk bu xleol ta j ilol: yu'un ti jnich'one yu'un ta ox xcham. Va'i un libatkutik ta jun jloktos ta Ch'enalho' yu'un vo'on la jsa' li poxile. Entonse ti jnich'one ikol. Va'i un libatkutik ta ch'ul na ta ch'enalho'. Yu'un oy jun ora xchi'uk jtob minuto yalel muyelun ta xanabal mas ta chib ora ta skotol. Entonse te ta ch'ul na ta ch'enalho' ep ikok' jchi'iltak ta jparaje ti bu likemuntale.

Un señor de Candelaria nos enseñó la Palabra de Dios. Nosotros llegamos a la iglesia de Candelaria para escuchar la Palabra de Dios. Es tres horas caminando de nuestro paraje en Chamula a Candelaria.

*Algunos de nosotros escucharon la Palabra de Dios por la enfermedad.*

Yo estaba muy enferma, mi cuerpo estaba muy débil y no podía trabajar. Cuando escuché la Palabra de Dios, pasó la enfermedad. La gente vió que yo no tenía enfermedad y preguntaron -- ¿Por qué no tienes enfermedad? Les dije que ya tengo Palabra de Dios. El único que cura es nuestro Señor Jesus Cristo.

Yo tengo 13 años con la Palabra de Dios. Un hijo mío de tres meses estaba enfermo y busqué a alguien para curarlo. Siempre los curanderos van a cobrar. Antes, cobraron 10 o 20 mil pesos. Ahorita cobran 50 mil pesos. No se sanó con el curandero. Es costumbre de antes usar curandero. Van a pedir gallina, trago y vela. Pero mi hijo no sanó con el curandero; mi hijo iba a morir. Fuimos a un doctor en Chenahlo' y yo busqué medicina. Así mi hijo sanó. Fuimos a la iglesia de Chenahlo'. Es una hora y 20 minutos bajando y más de dos horas subiendo. Muchas familias de mi paraje salieron a la iglesia de Chenahlo'.

*Veno, k'alal chka'ibekutik sk'op li Dios, mu xa jk'ankutik xkuch'kutik pox, yu'un li jchi'ilkutike ta xkich'kutik ta muk'.*

K'alal mi ta jelkutik li sk'op Dios, ta jel ko'ontonkutik noxtok. Yu'un toj lek xa no'ox ko'ontonkutik. Yu'un lik stak'inik tzaljesik ta poxe, yu'un ch'abal sve'elik. Yu'un li buch'u chuch' poxe, mu sna' sman ve'lil. Mu sna' sman ixim, chenek', yu'un ch'abal sve'el ta jmojel. K'alal mi cha'ibe sk'op Dios yu'un tznop xa lek ta sjol. Ti mi yu'un ta xch'un ti k'usi ta xal ta viblae, ti yu'un mu xa xu' xuch' poxe. Yu'un mu xu' sjut k'op. Yu'un ak'o yich' ta muk' xchi'iltak. Yu'un jech ta xal ta viblae.

#### A LI JABTELETIK TA JTEKLUM CHAMULAE.

*K'alal ta xka'ikutik li sk'op Dios, a li perserente ta jteklum xchi'uk li alkalteetike batz'i ilinik ep tajmek k'ucha'al ti mu'yuk ta jch'unikutik ti mantal ti k'uxi komem o no'ox ta vo'nee.*

A li ta jteklum chamula, yu'un mu'yuk kolemot. Yu'un chavuch' pox ta persa. A ti mi yu'un mu'yuk chavuch' pox ja' no'ox chak'el a viblae yu'un mu'yuk chavuch' pox ja' no'ox chak'el a viblae yu'un mu'yuk kolemot te. A ti mi mu'yuk chavuch' pox servesae, yu'un chlok' a tak'in. Yu'un ta jujun k'ine, toj ep krisyanoetik chyakubik. Yu'un li poxe toj ep ta stojik tajmek.

*Con la Palabra de Dios, ya no queremos tomar trago, y respetamos a nuestros compañeros.*

Cuando cambiamos de religión, cambiamos de corazón. Ya estamos alegres. Con el dinero que gastan en trago, no hay comida. Cuando uno está tomando, no saben comprar comida. No hay maíz, frijol, nada de comida. Con la Palabra de Dios ya piensan bien. Si crees en la Biblia, no puedes tomar. No puedes pegar. Hay que amar a otras personas. Así dice la Biblia.

#### LAS AUTORIDADES DE CHAMULA.

*Cuando escuchamos la Palabra de Dios, el Presidente Municipal y las autoridades de Chamula se enojaron mucho por que dice que no estamos respetando la costumbre.*

En Chamula, no eres libre. Tienes que tomar trago. Si no tomas trago o lees la Biblia no eres libre allí. Si toma trago o cerveza, va a salir su dinero. En las fiestas, mucha gente toma. Tiene que pagar mucho para el trago.

A ti jabteletik ta jteklum yu'un ta xalik yu'un la chba jsa'kutik yan banumil bu xu' ta jpaskutik ti orasyon sventa ti sk'op kajvaltik Dios. Pero la jkalkutik un ti ja' no'ox ta jchanbekutik ti sk'op ti Dios. Yu'un mu'yuk chi elk'ajkutik mu'yuk k'usi ta jpaskutik ch'abal. Pero li krisyanoetike yu'un mu sk'anik li sk'op Dios.

Yu'un oy jpaivanej ta jpaivanej ta sjunul jteklum chamula. K'alal mi li jochotik ta jun ch'ul na, k'ucha'al ta karidad, entonse li jpa'ivanejetike ch-och sk'elik. Entonse ta yan k'ak'al un ti mi yu'un lak'ot ta snae, ta stzakvanik ta ora ta xak'botik jun kastiko noxtok. Xchi'uk ta sk'anbotik jmultatik jujun vinik noxtok, antz o mi vinik, ja' ti buch'u chk'ot ta ch'ul nae.

Yu'un li jabteletike mu sk'anik sk'op Dios yu'un ta xalike yu'un ta la xch'ay li k'uxi sna'ojik ta mas vo'ne cha k'ucha'al ti stot sme'ike. Yu'un li peserente ta jteklum chamula yu'un la li krisyanoetike ak'o la sa'ik jilok, yu'un toj chopol chil ti k'alal mu'yuk chtun yu'nik jilol li buch'u jch'unilajeletike. Ja' jech xtok li peserentee mu sk'an mi mu'yuk chkuch'tik poxe, yu'un ta xilin tajmek, yu'un ta snop mi oy yan sk'op Dios jchanojbetik. Ja' jech xtok mu ta mehluk ti yu'un ta xch'ay ti tradisyon ku'untike. Yu'un ta to xak' skoperasyon sventa jujun k'in, schiluk ta sichi'ik ta muk' komiteetik sventa abtel. Yu'un li vo'onkutike u'un syempre chkak'kutik koperasyon sventa jujun k'in. Pero li jabteletike oy bak'intik mu sk'an stzakile li jkoperasyonkutike. Ta xal ke yu'un mu xa bu kich'ojkutik ta muk' jtalelalkutike, o mi ja' li kostumpree, yu'un li vo'onkutike mu'yuk k'usi jmultutik, yu'un ja' ta smul stukik li jabteletike.

Las autoridades nos dijeron que teníamos salir para buscar un lugar para orar. Dijimos que sólo vamos a aprender la Palabra de Dios. No vamos a robar o hacer nada mal. Pero la gente no quiere la Palabra de Dios.

Hay vigilantes en todos partes de Chamula. Cuando entras en una iglesia, como la Caridad, los vigilantes van a ver. El próximo día cuando llegas a su casa, te van a agarrar y a castigar. Van a cobrar una multa a cada persona, mujer o hombre, que va a una iglesia.

Las autoridades no quieren la religión porque dicen que la gente van a perder su costumbre. El Presidente Municipal de Chamula quiere que la gente usen curandero. El Presidente se enoja cuando no tomas trago, piensa que tienes otra religión. No es verdad que van a perder costumbre. Todavía van a cooperar en la fiesta, respetan y apoyan en los comités de trabajo. Nosotros siempre vamos a dar la cooperación para la fiesta. A veces las autoridades no quieren recibir nuestra cooperación. Si dicen que no estamos cumpliendo con el costumbre, no es nuestra culpa, es la culpa de las autoridades.

K'alal mi mu'yuk chkuch'kutik poxe, a li peserentee ta xal "K'ucha'al mu'yuk chavuch'ik pox." Mero jvanjelistaunkutik. Pero Yu'un mujk'an xkuch'kutik pox, a li buch'u ta xuch'ik ep li poxe, yu'un ta xch'ay sjolik ta una ves, mu xa sna' k'usi ta xalik. A li peserentee yu'un ta xuch' pox jujun k'ak'al, yu'un ja' stuk li peserente mu xa sna' k'usi ta xal. Yu'un oy yan ta melel li buch'u toj ep chuch' li poxe mu xa xich' ta muk' xchi'iltak. pero yu'un jech nopem o xa'i ti toj ep chuch' li poxe.

A li peserente ta jteklume la jyalbunkutik yu'un ta la jkomeskutik li sk'op Dios. Pero la jkalbekutik yu'un mi ja'uk jkomeskutik sk'op li Dios. Pero la jkalbekutik yu'un mi ja'uk jkomeskutik sk'op li Dios. Yu'un ta xkak'bekutik yipal mas li sk'op Dios. A li peserentee yu'un mu xak' ta muk' li leye yu'un toj sonso.

#### K'ALAL NUTZBIL LI LOK'KUTIKTAL.

*K'alal nutzbil li lok'kutiktal ta jlumalkutike, toj ep la jkat ko'ontonkutik. Pero yu'un te la jkomes, kosilkutik, xchi'uk jnakutik. Ta tz'akal un la jyalbunkutik xu' la xisutkutik batel ta jlumalkutik ti mi yu'un ta la jkomeskutik ti sk'op ti Dios. Pero la jkalkutik un yu'un mu jkomeskutik sk'op Dios. Pero toj ep li ochkutik ta chukel sventa sk'op Dios.*

Cuando no tomamos trago, el Presidente dice "¿por qué no toman?" Nos acusan de ser mero Evangelistas. Pero no queremos tomar. Cuando toman mucho, van a perder su pensamiento. El Presidente toma diario, es el Presidente que no tiene su pensamiento. Uno no sabe amar a sus hermanos cuando toman mucho. Pero es costumbre tomar mucho.

El Presidente Municipal nos dijo que hay que dejar su religión. Pero dijimos que nunca vamos a dejarlo. Queremos seguir con la Palabra de Dios. El Presidente no respeta la ley.

#### CUANDO FUIMOS EXPULSADOS.

*Cuando fuimos expulsados de Chamula, pasamos mucho sufrimiento. Teníamos que dejar nuestras tierras y casas. Nos dijeron que podíamos regresar a nuestras parajes si dejamos la Palabra de Dios. Pero dijimos que nunca la íbamos a dejar. Muchos de nosotros fuimos metidos en la cárcel por tener religión.*

Ja' jech xtok li ajenteetike ik'otik ta jparajekutik la stzobik ta ora li krisyanoetike. La jyik'unkutik batel k'alal ta jteklum li stik'kutik ta chukel ta ora komo vakib ora k'alal li lok'kutik ta chukele, ja' xa no'ox li yak' bunkutik permiso oxib k'ak'al ti te ta jparajekutike, entonse li lok'kutiktal. Entonse ta yoxibal k'ak'al, mu'yuk xilok'kutiktal yu'un icham jnich'on. Entonse otra ves li yik'kutik batel ta jun muk' ta kamyon k'alal ta chukel ta jteklum chamula.

Entonse li ochkutik ta chukel ta jteklum chamula yu'un ja' ma sk'anik ti ta jchanbe sk'op ti Dios. Mi ja'uk sventa katoliko, mi ja'uk sventa vanjelista yu'un muk'u sk'anik. Ja' no'ox tzk'anik chkuch'tik pox, cha k'ucha'al ti kostumpre ta jsa'tik yan antz, omi ta jsa'tik yan kajniltik.

Entonse ta sjunul k'in san machyo la stzob sbaik skotol ajenteetik, schi'uk skotol mayoletik. Va'i un k'ot ta jnakutik tajjipik ton ta sba jnakutik xchi'uk ta xchik'ik ta k'ok'. A li naetik ta lamina ta karton la xchik'ik ta k'ok' jech li texa ochem ta jolna la svok'anik. Ja' yu'un ta orae mu'yuk sutmunkutik ta jnakutik. Yu'un lijatavkutik batel ta te'tik. Pero ja'o yora vo' tajmek ta yal setyempre, yu'un ja' o yora vo' tajmek. Xchi'uk ch'abal jve'elkutik, ch'abal jk'u'kutik noxtok. Yu'un ja' no'ox kich'oj irevoso. Pero li ok'kutik ep tajmek.

K'alal li stik' ta chukele, li spuj ta tek'el libalch'uj. Pero batz'i toj k'ux la jka'i, oy nan komo chanibuk viniketik chpujvanik ta tek'el.

Los agentes llegaron a nuestro paraje y juntaron la gente. Nos llevaron hasta Chamula y nos encarcelaron por unas 6 horas. Cuando salimos de la cárcel, nos dieron un plaz de 3 días para salir de nuestro paraje. A los tres días, no salimos porque murió mi hijo. Otra vez me trajeron en un camión a la cárcel de Chamula.

Estabamos metidos en la cárcel de Chamula porque allí no quieren la religión. Ni católico ni evangélico. Sólo quieren tomar trago, hacer costumbre y buscar otras mujeres.

Duante la fiesta de San Mateo todos los Agentes y Mayores se reunieron. Llegaron a nuestras casas para tirar piedras y quemar. Las casas de cartón se quemaron y las tejas de techo se quebraron. Entonces, no regresamos a nuestras casas. Huimos al monte. Hubo mucha lluvia porque era septiembre, el tiempo de lluvia. Estábamos sin comida, sin ropa. Solo tenía mi rebozo, nada más. Lloramos mucho.

Cuando me metió en la cárcel, me dió patadas y me caí. Tenía mucho dolor, eran como cuatro personas echando patadas.

A li vo'one tik'ilun ta chukel xchi'uk oxib kalab ti jun mal k'akale. Pero toj ep la jkat ko'onton tajmek yu'un la jnop mi chismilik. Pero oy ep krisyanoetik tajmek, oy komo vo'ob syen krisyanoetik, pero mu'yuk ochemik ta chukel. Ja' no'ox toj ep chavanik tajmeke. Entonse la jyalbikun mi ta jkomes ti sk'op Dios, entonse mi la jkomes ti sk'op Dios xu' la chisut batel ta jparaje, pero mi mu la bu ta jkomes ti sk'op Dios, yu'un chilok' o la batel. Entonse, la jnop un ja' mas lek ta xkak' persa xchi'uk li sk'op Dios, va'i un la jkak' persa. Entonse ti ko'onton une solel itzatzub tajmek.

Pero k'alal tik'ilun ta chukele mu'yuk xive' jutebuk, yu'un ja' no'ox ta xkat ep ko'onton tajmek. Ja' no'ox chiok'kutik, yu'un mu'yuk buch'u chk'ejin ta chuklebal, ja' no'ox ta xat yo'ontonik tajmek.

Va'i un ta jun rominko un ti k'alal lilok' ta chukele, libat ta ch'ul na karidad. Va'i un k'alal lilok' ta ch'ul nae ibat k'alal ta jparaje otra vez, entonse ja' jech te ilik o li k'op une. Oy un jpa'ivanej la sk'opon sbaik xchi'uk peserente ta jteklum chamula. Entonse li slok'esik ta jparaje un yu'un mu'yuk bu la jkomes ti sk'op Dios. Entonse li yalbikun un ta la jpas pirmar jun vun yu'un la muxu' xikom ta jparaje ja' la ti oy xa jchanoj ti sk'op ti jtetik Dios. Va'i un k'alal laj xa jpas pirmar ti vune yu'un mu xa xu' xikom te ta jlumal chamula. Entonse ta yoxibal k'ak'al un lik stzob sbaik li krisyanoetike. Va'i un ta ox sk'an xi smilik ox un. Pero lli krisyanoetike batz'i ep tajmek. Yu'un li xi' tajmek. Entonse li sutbatel ta jna un yu'un te komem kalab bik'itik va'i un libat ta te'tik jnak' jba un. Pero li xanav chanib ora ta ak'obaltik pero jtuktuk. Pero li ok' ep tajmek xchi'uk li kalabe.

Yo estaba metido en la cárcel con mis tres hijos por una tarde. Yo estaba muy triste porque pensé que me iban a matar. Había mucha gente, como 500 personas, fuera de la cárcel. Ellos estaban gritando mucho. Me dijeron que si dejaba mi religión, podría regresar a mi paraje, pero si no dejaba mi religión, tenía que salir. Decidí, mejor seguir con mi religión y seguir luchando. Estaba duro mi corazón.

No comimos nada en la cárcel, había mucha tristeza. Lloran mucho, no van a cantar en la cárcel porque hay mucha tristeza.

Un día domingo después de que salí de la cárcel, llegé a la iglesia de Caridad. Regresé a mi paraje otra vez, y así empezó el problema. Un vigilante habló con el Presidente Municipal de Chamula. Me sacaron de mi paraje porque no dejé mi religión. Me dijeron que yo tenía que firmar un papel diciendo que no podía quedarme en la paraje porque ya tenía religión. Cuando el papel ya tiene firma, no se puede quedar en Chamula. En tres días la gente se juntó. Quisieron matarme. Había mucha gente. Yo tenía miedo. Regresé a mi casa por mis hijos chiquitos y salí a monte para esconderme. Caminé cuatro horas solita por la noche. Lloré mucho con mis hijos.

Ja' jech xtok ti k'alal li och ta chukele yu'un toj krisyanoetik te ta chuklebal, baluneb vinik, vaxaklajuneb antzetik. Pero puru jch'unilajeletik svanta kat'oliko ta ch'ulna. Va'i un k'alal li lok' ta chukele li sut batel k'alal ta jparaje ti bu nakalune. Va'i un liyak'bikunto vo'lajuneb k'ak'al permiso xkaltik, ta tz'akal un lilok'talel ta jlumal chamula. Pero ti k'alal lilok'talele la stob sbaik skotol ajenteetik. Ja' jech xtok ti k'alal lilok'talele yu'un ta ak'obaltik lilok'talel. Pero toj ep la jkat ko'onton tajmek yu'un ch'abal jna, ch'abal kosil, ch'abal k'usi oy ta jmoj.

K'alal lilok'talel ta jlumal ta chamulae, li xanavkutiktal ta kokutik xchi'uk kajnil, xchi'uk jnich'nab. Li xanavkutiktal vo'ob ora puru ta kokkutik. Entonse li och ta chukel ta jlumal ta chamula, xchi'uk ta li moxjol.

Ja' jech li kajnil xtoke yu'un ochem ta chukel ta jteklum chamula. Ja' no'ox jech xtok ep antzetik ochemik ta chukel xchi'uk yalabik. A li bik'itik ololetike yu'un ok'ik ep tajmek. Entonse ta tz'akal un li sjak'bikun, mi chakomes la relijyone o mi jo'oj. Xiik un, entonse li vo'one la jkalbe un, mu'yuk yu'un mi ja'uk ta jkomesbe li sk'op Dios, skut un. Pero li kajnile batz'i ok' ep tajmek, yu'un mu sk'an skomtzan li kosilkutike. Pero k'alal lilok'tale toj ep la jkat ko'ontonkutik tajmek xchi'uk li kajnile. Veno, oy to yan jchi'iltak te ikomik ta slumalik yu'un mu xa sk'anbe sk'op Dios asta aora te oy.

Yo estaba en la cárcel con mucha gente, 9 hombres y 18 mujeres. Todos Católicos. Después de salir de la cárcel, regresé a mi paraje. Me dieron un plazo de 15 días para salir de Chamula. A los 15 días se juntaron los Agentes. Yo tenía que salir en la noche. Estaba muy triste sin mi casa y sin mi tierra.

Cuando salí de Chamula, caminé con mi mujer y mis hijos. Caminamos durante 5 horas. Sufrimos mucho. Dejé mi tierra y mi casa en Chamula.

Estaba en cárcel en Chamula y también en Teopisca. Mi esposa también estaba encarcelada en Chamula. Había muchas mujeres con sus hijos en la cárcel. Los chiquitos lloraron mucho. Después me preguntaron, ¿Va a dejar su religión o no? Yo le dije, -- No, nunca voy a salir de Palabra de Dios. Mi mujer lloró mucho, no quiso dejar nuestra tierra. Cuando salimos, sufrimos mucho. Otras personas decidieron quedar en Chamula y no seguir con su religión.

## K'ALAL LIK'OTKUTIK TA GUADALUPE.

*Pero k'alal lik'otkutik Guadalupe, toj ep la jkat ko'ontonkutik tajmek. Yu'un ch'abal jnakutik, ch'abal kosilkutik, mu'yuk k'usi oy.*

Yu'un toj abol jbakutik. Yu'un ta lumtik chivaykutik yu'un ch'abal jtemkutik. Yu'un ch'abal tak'in sventa stojol ixim, chenek', xchi'uk ch'abal stojol sk'u' jnch'nab. Yu'un ch'abal jk'u'kutik. Va'i un ipajik ti ololetike. Va'i un la jmetzan jbej jna ta lamina de karton. Batz'i yu'un ch'abal tak'in tajmek. Jech ti k'usi oy ku'une te ikom skotol ja jlumal ta chamula. Yu'un mu xvul ku'un ti k'usi oye. Yu'un toj ep la jkat ko'onton tajmek. Ta jlumal chamula oy jutuk kosil te, yu'un ta jtz'un isak'. K'alal libatkutik ta Guadalupe oy jchilom, pero ti jchitome icham skotol. K'alal li vultalel li'e ch'abal jnakutik, ch'abal kosilkutik, mu'yuk k'usi oy. Yu'un toj ep la jkat ko'onton tajmek.

## SVENTA ABTEL.

*A li li'e jutuk no'ox abtel oy. Yu'un oy ep jchi'iltak ibatik k'alal ta Nasyonol, oy yan batik sa'ik abtel ta pinka. Yu'un toj ep at o'onton. Yu'un chi abtejkutik ta jobel ta peon yu'un jalvanil. A li tojile jutuk, pero li abtele toj tzotz. A li antzetike ta xchonik pulsera, vorxail, chohon k'ucha'al artesano xkaltik, chaleko, serviyeta, chamaro, kotal k'usi ta xchon ti antzetike. Pero li abtele toj ep oraetik pero toj jutuk tzotojik tajmek.*

## CUANDO LLEGAMOS AL GUADALUPE.

*Cuando primero llegamos a Guadalupe, estábamos muy tristes. No teníamos casa ni tierra, nada.*

Aquí somos pobres. Dormimos en el suelo porque no tenemos cama. Necesitamos dinero para maíz, frijol, nuestros hijos y ropa. Estábamos sin ropa. Así, enfermaron. Primero construimos una casa con nylon y cartón. Hay poco dinero. Yo dejé todas mis cosas en Chamula. No podía llevar mis cosas. Estaba muy triste. En Chamula teníamos tierra, cultivamos papas. Llegamos a Guadalupe con nuestros puercos pero murieron. Aquí, al inicio, no teníamos casa, tierra, nada. Hay tanto sufrimiento.

## TRABAJO.

*Aquí hay poco trabajo. Muchos de nosotros salimos a la Nacional o a las fincas para trabajar. Sufrimos mucho. Trabajamos en San Cristóbal como peones. El pago es poco y el trabajo duro. Las mujeres venden artesanía, pulsera, chaleco, servilleta y chamarro. Pero son muchas horas de trabajo y pagan poco.*

Pero yu'un chi abtej ta persa yu'un tzk'an sve'el ololetik. Mi mu'yuk xi abteje yu'un ch'abal ve'lil. Yu'un li vo'one yu'un kampsinoun, yu'un jna' xitz'unilaj ita jchon jutuk noxtok. A li jkaxlanetike mu sna' stzunilajik. A ti jech mu xi abtejkutik li vo'onkutike a li jkaxlanetike ta xchamik ta vi'nal. Pero li jkaxlanetike oy stak'inik, pero mu sna' x abtejik ta banumil stz'un sve'elik. Pero mu xiyich'kutik ta muk' li jkaxlanetike.

A li vo'one li abtej ta pinka ta k'ixin osil. Pero jutuk mu licham ta vi'nal te. Yu'un toj chopol tajmek, tee toj ep chamel, oy k'ak'al sik, xchi'uk oy ep usetik te xtok, oy bik'it us, oy xenen, oy chon.

A li vo'one li ay ta abtel ta pinka likilampra ay jtul kajvel. Pero jujun k'ak'al chilik ta oxib ora ik'luman, entonse ta chanib ora ik'luman chilok'batel ta abtel. Entonse chisut tal ta abtel ta oxib ora xmal k'ak'al. Pero mu stoj lek yu'un ja' no'ox tztoj lajuneb pexu ta jun k'ak'al.

A li vo'one li ay jtul kajvel ta pinka. Pero li abtele yu'un toj tzotz tajmek. A li kajvel ta pinkae ta xak'be avono li skajvele (pero li vo'e ch'abal chak'be) ta xak'be pora yu'un ja' yabtel li viniketik chk'otike. Ti mi chotolotik jlikeluk istaotik li kaporale ta x ilin ta ora. Yu'un toj tzotz li abtele. A li li'e kol no'ox iyal ti kajvaltik Dios syakel xa ta jchan jutuk abtel sventa peon yu'un jalvanil, pues ja' jech kabtel ta pinka.

Tenemos que trabajar para sostener a nuestras familias. Si no trabajamos, no hay para comer. Somos campesinos, sabemos sembrar y cosechar. Los mestizos no saben sembrar. Si nosotros no trabajamos, los mestizos van a morir de hambre. Ellos tienen dinero, pero no saben trabajar la tierra para sembrar su comida. Pero ellos no nos respetan.

Yo trabajé en una finca en la tierra caliente. Uno se puede morir de hambre allí. Es dura, hay mucha enfermedad, hay paludismo y muchos animalitos.

Yo trabajé en la Finca Liquidámbar cosechando café. Cada día tenía que levantarme a las 3 de la madrugada y a las 4 salíamos para trabajar. Regresábamos del trabajo a las 3 de la tarde. No se paga bien, sólo unos 10 pesos diarios.

Yo estaba cosechando café en la finca. Es muy duro el trabajo. El dueño de la finca va a echar fertilizante, agua, porra en la gente que trabajan. Si estás sentado para descansar un rato, te van a regañar. Es muy duro. Gracias a Dios, ya estoy aprendiendo el trabajo de peón y no debo trabajar en la finca.

Yu'un li nakikutik lajcheb a'vil te ta muk' ta vitz ta selva, xchi'uk ta nasyonal, yu'un ta jtul kajvel. Pero yu'un toj nom tajmek xchi'uk yu'un ch'abal karo xijbat o xchi'uk oy chon te ta Nasyonal, xchi'uk toj muk' li chone, yu'un jech smuk'ul k'ucha'al jun te' yu'un sna' sti' nene' vich. Ja' jech li banumile yu'un toj k'ixin tajmek. Ja' jech xtok oy bolom, leon, ok'il, max, te'tikal chitom, mailchon. Inatab te ta Nasyonal. A li mailchone toj lek ta ti'el ko'ol xchi'uk chitom (ma'uk xchi'il alak').

#### OY SK'OP DIOS TE TA GUADALUPE.

*Yu'un li' ta jtzob jbakutik ta ch'ul na chka'ibekutik sk'op ti Dios. Ja' jech xtok yu'un oy xa ep jch'unilajeletik li' ta kolonya Guadalupe. Oy yan jch'unilajel sventa katoliko mu'yuk xa chk'ot ta jtemplokutik.*

Ja' jech xtok buch'u chehol k'op yu'un li Dios ja' Mateo pero ja' sa' li banumil li' ta kolonya Guadalupe. Yu'un ja' la sman skotol li banumil li'e. Yu'un li jlorensoe yu'un toj lek yo'onton, la jyak' kajvel, ixim, chenek' ta jkotoikutik. Yu'un ti mas vo'nee mas to'ox jutuk jch'unilajeletik, entonse ta orae oy xa ep jch'unilajeletik. Entonse li Mateo k'alal ilok'e, la sjel yo'onton li jch'unilajeletik ti k'alal ilok' li Mateo.

Entonse ta tz'akal un ti k'alal ilok' lli jlole. Entonse ja' ikom ta btel Agustin li' ta kolonya, entonse ta orae sna' xa stij vob xchi'uk sna' xa xk'ejin. Batz'i jun xa yo'onton tajmek.

Vivimos 12 años en la tierra de la Selva, en la Nacional, tapiscando café. Pero es muy lejos y no hay carro para transporte. Hay culebras en la Nacional, son muy grandes, como un árbol y comen los pollos. La tierra es muy caliente. Tambien hay tigres, lcones, coyotes, monos, cerdos de monte, armadillos e iguanas en la Nacional. Se puede comer el armadillo, es como pollo.

#### LA PALABRA DE DIOS EN GUADALUPE.

*Aquí nos reunimos en la iglesia para celebrar la Palabra de Dios. Ya hay muchos Evangélicos en Guadalupe. Hay católicos que ya no llegan a nuestro templo.*

El Catequista Mateo buscó la tierra aquí en Guadalupe. El compró toda la tierra aquí. El tiene buen corazón, dió su café, maíz, frijol a los otros. Antes había pocos Evangélicos, ya hay muchos. Cuando Mateo salió, la gente cambió su religión poco a poco.

Después que Mateo salió, Agustin empezó a trabajar aquí, ya sabe tocar la guitarra y cantar. Está muy alegre su corazón.

Ja' jech li krisyanoetik li'e yu'un toj lek xich'vanik ta muk. Yu'un livre xa oyunkutik, yu'un jna' xa xik'opojkutik jutuk xka'ibekutik xa xi sk'op Dios. Yu'un muxa xko'laj k'ucha'al ta paraje ta Chamula, yu'un li li'e yu'un ja' toj mas lek li li'e. Ja' jech li li'e yu'un sna'ik xa sk'oponik jtetik Dios ta vinajel.

*Ja' jech xtok ta oxlajuneb mayo ta ya'vilal 1995 itzutz ku'unikutik smeltzanel ach' ch'ul na. Yu'un li viniketik li' ta kolonya yu'un ja' iabtejik jujun xemuna ta smeltzanel li ch'ul nae. Ta jkotoikutik la jtzobkutik tak'in sventa smeltzanobil li ch'ul nae. Ja' jech xtok ta jujun Melkulixe ta xba'ibekutik sk'op Dios, xchi'uk ta yernex, yu'un chib velta ta jujun rominko.*

K'alal ti yu'un tzobolunkutik jkotoikutike. Yu'un jun no'ox ko'ontonkutik tajmek, yu'un oy lek yipal ku'unikutik.

Aquí la gente sabe respetar. Somos libres, podemos orar y escuchar la Palabra de Dios. No es igual como en el paraje de Chamula. Es mejor vivir aquí que en Chamula, porque aquí es más tranquilo. Aquí pueden orar y estar con el Señor.

*El trece de mayo de 1995 terminamos construyendo la iglesia nueva. Los hombres de la comunidad trabajaron toda una semana para construirla. Todos cooperamos para juntar el dinero para la iglesia. Tenemos celebración de Palabra de Dios cada Miércoles, Viernes, y dos veces cada Domingo.*

Cuando estamos unidos con sólo un corazón, estamos fuertes.

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