

# **WE WILL NOT BE STOPPED**

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*Evangelical Persecution, Catholicism and  
Zapatismo in Chiapas, Mexico.  
by Arthur Bonner*

With a foreword by Rev. Charles Van Engen, Professor  
of Biblical Theology of Mission School of World Mission,  
Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California.

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## **DEDICATION**

For Marianna Slocum who, fresh out of college, was called to the trackless mountains of Chiapas to bring the Bible—in their own languages—to indigenous people suffering centuries of neglect. A few were transformed, then others and then still more in a never-ending chain so that tens of thousands have new lives.

And for Miguel Gomez Hernandez, known as Kashlan. When the Word of God lifted his burden of guilt, he dedicated his new life to bringing the Bible to others. For that alone he was brutally martyred.

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## FOREWORD

by Charles Van Engen

It was exactly 50 years ago that my parents, Rev. Garold and Ruth Van Engen, Reformed Church in America missionaries serving the National Presbyterian Church of Mexico, took me from Mexico City, where I had been born a few weeks earlier to San Cristobal de Las Casas in the mountains of central Chiapas. It became my home town where I grew up among a small group of “evangelical” Protestants, numbering at that time no more than a couple of hundred evangelicals in a town that in the 1950’s numbered around 65,000 inhabitants.

San Cristobal historically is a place where the clash of cultures, the struggle for religious freedom, and the search for new identity amidst conflicting political and economic interests has been ongoing for centuries. The spontaneous and explosive growth of indigenous evangelical churches throughout the region, including in San Cristobal itself, has changed the face of the central highlands of Chiapas. During the last forty years, this small colonial town has also been the center of religious persecution, especially of (Protestant) evangelicals. The story of persecution and church growth is the heart of this book.

Bonner does his reporting not in terms of mission promotion, nor as an evangelical trying to prove a case. Rather, he maintains objectivity as a news correspondent, while showing sympathy, insight and understanding of the issues involved in the persecution and growth of evangelical churches in Chiapas. This book is not about persecution as such, but about evangelical growth stemming from the courage and faith of new Christians who stake their lives on the Bible’s promises.

The book is a clear, readable and well documented account of the stories of real people, many of whom I have known personally. The persecution of evangelicals in the highlands of Chiapas has been going on for over forty years and the story has not been told. This story involves a number of Protestant denominations in the area: Presbyterians, Baptists, Nazarenes, Seventh-Day Adventists and Pentecostals. It is also intertwined with the mission work in the area by those denominations, along with Wycliffe Bible Translators/Summer Institute of Linguistics, Missionary Aviation Fellowship and others. The Reformed Church in America missionaries have cooperated with the Presbyterian churches of the area since 1925 and have been directly involved in the nurture, growth and development of the churches of the Mayan peoples among whom the most severe persecution has occurred. Yet clearly the growth of the indigenous churches happened because of the initiative, vision, courage and commitment of the indigenous Christians themselves. It has been a popular movement, guided more by the Holy Spirit than by any human agent.

As Bonner summarizes, the presence of evangelical believers and churches (and their persecution) is not a new phenomenon. Evangelical (mainly Presbyterian) churches in Chiapas date back to 1903 and 1904. The Reformed Church in America began to assist the Presbyterian churches there when John and Mabel Kempers arrived in 1925. By 1930 John Kempers and a Presbyterian

pastor from Tabasco, Rev. Jose Coffin, had traveled by horseback throughout the entire region that is covered by this book. The historical background is important to show that both the growth of evangelicals and their persecution in the Diocese of San Cristobal are not isolated or recent phenomena in Chiapas—they are a long pattern of courage and grace in the midst of suffering at the hands of political and religious leaders of the region.

Reading Bonner's book transported me back to my own childhood. I know the story Bonner tells in this book is true because my family's story is intertwined with many of the events recorded here. I remember my father talking at home of his involvement along with Rev. Daniel Aguilar Ochoa in trying unsuccessfully to get the five men falsely accused of burning the church in Tumbala out of jail. My father helped build the first clinic in Corralito for Marianna Slocum and Florence Gerdel. Many Wycliffe Bible Translators like the Jacobs, the Weathers, Marion Cowan and others, were family friends and often were guests in our home. I was there when we had several hundred new Presbyterian believers camping out in our yard because they had been expelled in the early 1950's and 1960's from Chanal, Chilil, Chenalho or Oxchuc.

Years later, I was in the procession of people and cars when we buried the one whom Bonner has called "The First Tzotzil Martyr," Miguel "Kashlan" Gomez Hernandez. We processed right through the middle of San Cristobal to get from Nueva Esperanza (New Hope) to the cemetery on the other side of town. The procession closed down all activity in downtown San Cristobal for over two hours. We passed in front of the cathedral and Bishop Samuel Ruiz's offices, and alongside the town hall where thirteen years later, in January, 1994, the Zapatistas would be throwing all the furniture and files out of the windows. As we slowly inched our way down the street a couple of Spanish-speaking young men stood on the sidewalk and commented:

The one observed, "Look at all the cars and people in that funeral procession!"

The other responded with awe, "It must have been a priest, or bishop or cardinal or something to have that many people." Months later, I would be back at Nueva Esperanza to participate in the ordination of 24 Chamula elders and 24 Chamula deacons who would be led by Salvador Lopez Lopez, a graduate of the Tapachula seminary where my wife and I taught at the time.

Several times in the book Arthur Bonner mentions Rev. Daniel Aguilar Ochoa, who pastored the Divine Redeemer Presbyterian church in San Cristobal from the 1950's through the 1970's. "Don Daniel," as we called him, was my pastor and one of my models of church leadership. He was one of the earliest "Ladino" evangelical pastoral supporter of the growth of the indigenous churches, who encouraged, trained and empowered the leaders and church structures in the Ch'ol, Tzeltal (Corralito and Tenejapa) and Tzotzil (Chenalho) areas. Pastor Aguilar Ochoa was directly involved in the legal defense of those who suffered persecution during the 1950's and 1960's. He was also the director of the San Cristobal Bible School mentioned in the book, where he taught and discipled many of the earliest indigenous leaders and pastors of these movements. For thirty years, my father and mother were administrators and teachers in the same school in San Cristobal.

It is also important to place the book in the larger framework of similar research

and study. First is the matter of faith in a Mayan context. Bonner is correct that much of what has for decades been trumpeted as uniquely Mayan is in fact a world-view that the Mayans of Chiapas share with many peoples of the world. The Chiapas context is one which in missiology we call “animist.” It is a worldview that sees the physical world and the invisible world of the spirits as intimately interwoven. In such a context, faith is integral to all of life and biblical conversion means the full, holistic transformation of persons and all aspects of their lives in a given culture. But this does not necessarily imply the loss of their cultural, linguistic or social cohesion. To the contrary. The stories of conversion and faith that Bonner retells in this book demonstrate how interwoven this faith is in lives and communities of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas—and how their new faith in the promises of the Bible has transformed all of life for them. In doing so, cultural cohesion is preserved. In a parallel context, Lamin Sanneh from Yale, for example, has demonstrated the same phenomenon going on in Africa. Bonner writes, “It is a misperception to see evangelical growth in Latin America as a movement of conversion from Catholicism. It is more accurately seen as an anti-shaman movement.” (pg 13) Here the author demonstrates profound insight that is right on target.

In the Mayan way of life, religious faith, both personal and communal, is integral to the interwoven fabric of the society, permeating all aspects of life. For many in Chiapas, this cohesion is disintegrating—but not for the evangelicals. The only major force that affirms indigenous cultural forms and fosters indigenous social cohesion in the various tribal groups in Chiapas is that offered by the growing indigenous evangelical churches. This book provides the reader with a careful reporting of first-hand accounts of persons who have been key actors in this search for new cohesion and life on the part of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas. The reader is allowed to look through a host of personal windows to see reality through the eyes of the indigenous peoples. We catch a glimpse of how the indigenous evangelicals themselves perceive how their biblical evangelical faith has provided the cultural, linguistic and social cohesion they seek.

This brings us to the second larger issue which this book addresses: evangelical growth. The growth of the churches in Chiapas is an excellent illustration of a much larger phenomenon going on in Latin America. The face of religion in Latin America is in the midst of staggering transformation. During the 1970's and 1980's, while both Roman Catholic and Protestant advocates of Liberation Theology were trumpeting the “option for the poor,” the poor of Latin America opted to become “evangélicos”—mostly Pentecostals. Only lately have social scientists paid attention to the phenomenal proportions of this religious change.

The rate of conversion to a personal, born-again, Bible-based faith on the part of Latin Americans has no precedent in the history of the church. This largely ignored process is now receiving attention by Roman Catholics and Protestants alike, led by folks like David Martin, David Stoll, Virginia Garrard-Burnett, Phillip Berryman, Edward Cleary and others.

The third large topic under which this book falls is the matter of religious persecution. Religious persecution is growing around the world. Of course, religious persecution does not only include the persecution of Christians by people of other faiths. There are instances around the globe of persecution of people of other faith

by Christians. Yet the majority of cases around the globe have to do with people of other faiths or of no faith persecuting Christians specifically because of their faith in Jesus Christ. More Christians have died because of their faith in the Twentieth Century than in all the previous nineteen centuries combined. The saddest kind of persecution is that perpetrated by those who would call themselves “Christian” against others who also are Christians. This has been the case in Chiapas, and especially in the highlands. This is also true in much of Latin America, where evangelical churches are growing dramatically under conditions of severe persecution: physical, social, economic, political and religious.

So why are people willing to suffer in this way? In the case of Chiapas, Bonner clearly demonstrates that older, mostly narrow anthropological, social, economic, political or religious explanations are neither appropriate nor acceptable. Bonner allows the people to explain why they are willing to suffer: in a biblical faith that springs from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ they have found a way out of the fear, domination, oppression and addiction in which they formerly lived. And together in this faith they have found a way to affirm and empower their language, culture, worldview and social cohesion and autonomy.

Arthur Bonner is right on target when he says the “... indigenous evangelicals, who are a major part of the population of the Highlands and the selva, have achieved autonomy in their families, churches, communities and seminaries. They have created spiritual and social spaces where they speak their mother tongues and follow traditional communitarian patterns of social organization” (p. 164).

Churches and mission agencies will be very interested in reading this book because of its mission and church background. It is a case study of the growth of the church under conditions of persecution. But pastors and members of churches will also want to read this book because it tells the stories of people with whom their denomination or mission agency has been associated for many years. However, this book has a wider impact as well. It is an essential textbook which students of religion in society, researchers of religious change, students of the present reality in Latin America, and students of missiology need to read.

Whatever their background or motivation, I know the reader will enjoy this book—and lives will be impacted by the stories of people whose faces I have seen, whose lives have touched mine, and whose stories demonstrate the transformative power of a biblical faith in Jesus Christ.

October, 1998

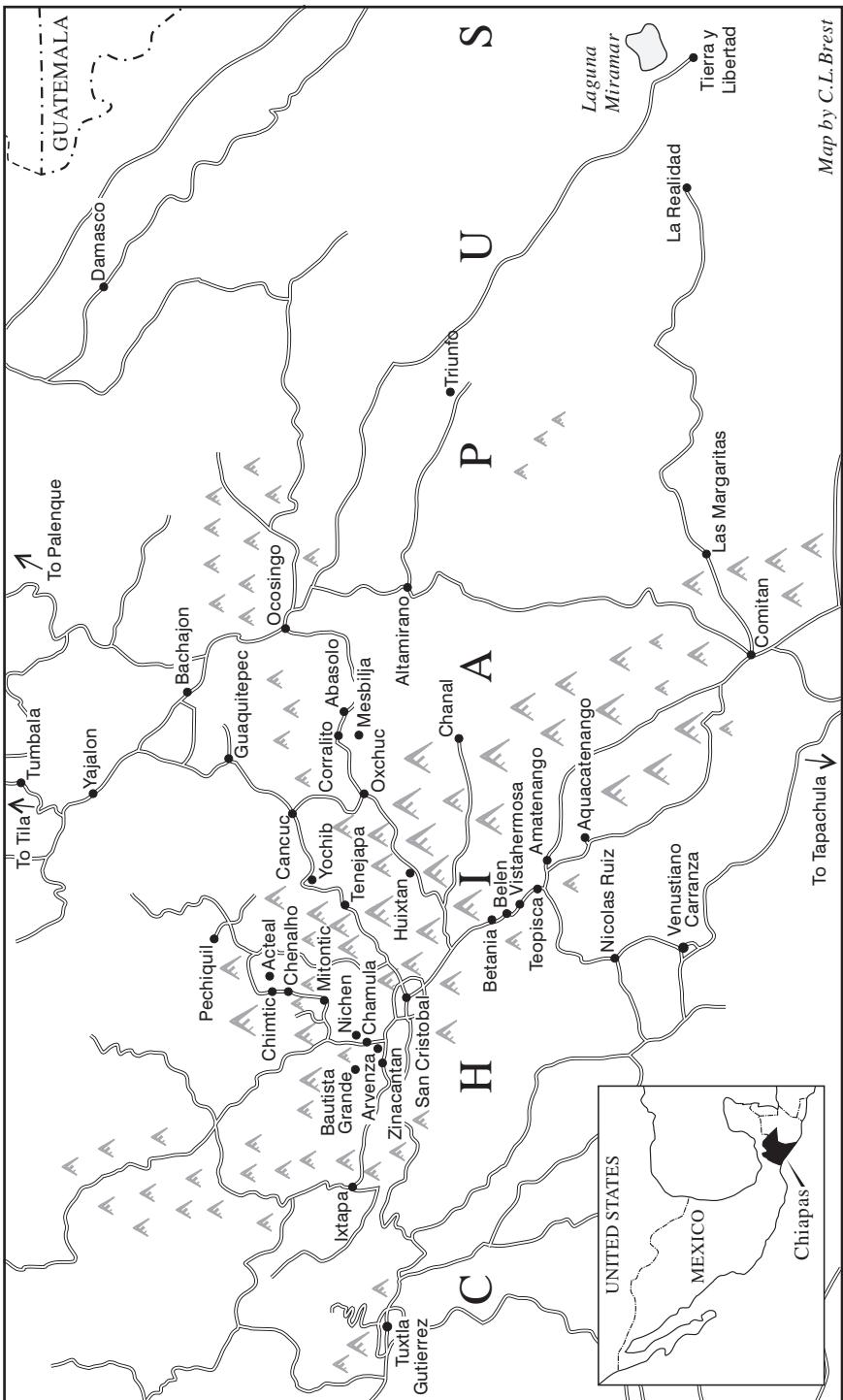
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Map by C.L.Brest

## INTRODUCTION

Evangelism is a history of Bible-inspired individuals. A major part of this book is the personal narration of those who felt themselves touched by the Holy Spirit and then, as apostles, evangelized others. It is a story of the planting of seeds and the flourishing of new congregations and churches. The book emphasizes practice as distinguished from theory—providing an empirical base for the study of evangelism. Focusing on individuals serves to diminish subjectivity and avoids trivializing religion as just another form of social movement.

Rosalva Aida Hernandez Castillo, in a critical review of books on Protestantism in Chiapas, cites some of the functionalist explanations given for evangelical growth: to “create a new community and better their economic resources;” “a crisis of world vision, brought by fertilizers and western medicine;” “a response to the situation of anomie;” “a search for power and authority;” and “the desire for prestige and social recognition” so that, in her words, “conversion appears to be merely a reflection of economic and political changes that affect indigenous communities.”

She writes that she once reasoned along these lines but now “I have changed my mind. I reject the essentialist vision of ethnic identity, analyzing conversions to Protestantism as part of a wider historical project in the context of conflict and negotiation between the state and religious institutions.”

She mentions “the silence of the voices of those who have been changed” and asks: “What is the living experience of the faith of the indigenous *Chiapanecos*? How can we speak of faith from the perspective of academic discourse and continue to see religious experience as a form of political struggle?”

The primary purpose of this book is to end this silence. A secondary purpose is to balance academic and journalist accounts of contemporary indigenous life in Chiapas. While much has been written about the revolt of Subcommander Marcos and Zapatista efforts to establish autonomous indigenous communities, few are aware that a major percentage—perhaps a large majority (precise quantification is impossible)—of the indigenous population has achieved autonomous social space and needs no one to liberate them, least of all the hundreds of foreigners attracted to Chiapas by glowing cyberspace accounts of the “Revolt of the Indians” and the need for living shields to protect the human rights of armed and masked revolutionaries.

The indigenous Mexicans of Chiapas are suffering a double tragedy. First there were the expulsions of at least 15,000 evangelicals from the municipality of San Juan Chamula and other areas. Now, with the weakening of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), there is an even more violent struggle between the PRI and its major challenger in south and central Mexico, the left-center Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) with the indigenous population being used as pawns trapped in the middle.

Dr Andre Aubrey, the director of archives for the San Cristobal diocese, describes this as:

... an attack of history on communities irremediably dismantled and fractionalized within and without by diaspora, modernity and global-

ization. This is not only a disintegration of individual identities but of collective identities as well. In the Indian culture, the *cargos* [responsibilities or offices] of civil society were balanced by a charismatic hierarchy called shamans, that is *curanderos* or healers. Now, among Protestants, even while you find a refusal to accept curanderos, many times there are healing ceremonies with prayers and the laying on of hands, but there is an important difference. Those converted to evangelist religions are not passive members of their churches. All of them are active members in their religious life; they are not objects. However, it should be kept in mind that the transition taking place among the Indians is not just a Protestant phenomenon. The catechist movement instituted by Bishop Ruiz here in Chiapas is also a modernizing process. Every member, as a living stone, is constructing his own church. I am speaking of a spiritual construction. The catechist movement is a movement of popular participation. The church is a part of a Catholic's community life. Often, what is referred to as a religious conflict is, in reality, a political battle between the exiting power structure and a new organization of civil society. The process of democratization and a new critical spirit recognizing the legitimacy of pluralism has entered through a religious channel.<sup>2</sup>

A religious norm shaped in this manner is autochthonous. This is what the "Indians" of Mexico did when they were forced to accept Catholicism. It was not a matter of "Gods Behind Altars," a continuing to worship ancestral deities. Within the first few generations, the names and attributes of the old deities were forgotten, but there was still a sacred geography of mountains and caves and shamans to ward off evil and cure ills.

The Swiss sociologist Jean-Pierre Bastian draws an analogy between this culturally created "traditional" Catholicism and the evangelical transformation:

The sects [evangelicals] and traditional Catholicism have a point in common: both are religious expressions by the indigenous people themselves under the guidance of Indian leaders . . . As is the case with traditional Catholicism, the new religious groups have a body of Indian religious specialists as pastors and evangelists . . . When these religious societies are inserted into a national and international religious structure, it appears that their local and regional autonomy is maintained . . . At the same time, these religious movements accept and reinforce the ethnic identity of their faithful through translating, for the first time, religious documents in the ethnic languages. In the context of illiteracy, they encourage access to a sacred text. In an equal manner, these churches help develop small projects on a local scale . . . In contrast to traditional Catholicism, the sects offer the advantage of inculcating a relative modernity without being anchored to the ancestral ways. While the traditional religion maintained the community under the double tutelage of the caciques and the state, the new religious movements offer a glimpse of possible autonomy.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Interview, Dec. 5, 1996. 3 (1996): 309-10.

Caciques, a title derived from the Caribbean culture encountered by the Spanish at the time of Columbus' initial voyages, represent an indigenous social structure that existed throughout Mesoamerica. Larger kingdoms or states were segmented into microstructures ruled by chiefs who extracted as much as possible from local labor and used this both to raise a military force to defend their tiny estates and to send gifts to ensure the friendship of the layer of authority above them. A social-scientist definition of Mexican *cacicazgo* is a patron-client relationship.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Evangelical Growth***

Paralleling Protestant growth throughout the Americas, there has been a massive increase in evangelicals throughout southeast Mexico. According to a 1989 survey conducted by Gilberto Gimenez for the Center for Anthropological Investigation of the Southeast (CIESAS), Protestants represent 45 percent of the population of Campeche, 40 percent of Chiapas and Tabasco, 35 percent of Oaxaca and 30 percent in Quintana Roo. The survey forecast that by the year 2000 half the population of the Southeast will be Protestant.<sup>5</sup>

The census of 1990 came up with a strikingly different finding. Out of the Chiapas population (over the age of five years), it showed 67.63 percent Catholic, 18.20 percent non-Catholic, 12.73 of no religion and 4.45 percent unspecified. Considering the proliferation of evangelical churches throughout Chiapas, the census results were obviously in error. And what does the 12.73 of no religion mean? Even pagans have a religion. As Rosalva Aida Hernandez Castillo commented: "The Gimenez book and articles by [Rudolfo] Casillas show [that] the government statistics have little credibility."



San Cristobal cathedral

<sup>4</sup> Marcus and Zeitlin (1994). 5 (1988): 7.

If religion is judged by church buildings and church participation, evangelicals in Chiapas far outnumber Catholics. They worship in churches they have built, often with their own hands, out of their own meager incomes. Whole families flock to evangelical services and, when it is time for Sunday School, about a quarter of the seats are vacated by children ranging up to the age of 13 or 14, who troop outside or to another room.

Tourists are attracted to Chiapas by the colonial charm of San Cristobal de las Casas in *los Altos* (the Highlands), with its narrow streets, pastel-colored houses and brightly costumed indigenous women selling handicrafts on the streets. The traditional central plaza has a bandstand, tall trees and patches of flowers. The cathedral is on one side, government buildings are on another and colonnaded shops make up the remaining two sides.

The cathedral, the most spacious Catholic structure in San Cristobal, can seat about 600 worshipers and has standing room for perhaps another 200 in the wide side aisles but it is rarely fully occupied. I once attended a Christmas Eve mass—a peak of the religious calendar—and could easily find a place to stand near the center of the church. The rear five or six pews were completely vacant. Many of the benches were occupied by foreign tourists. Other Catholic churches, which are grouped mainly in the central historic zone, seldom have more than 100 or 200 worshipers.

The numerous evangelical churches are on side streets. Where I lived, six blocks from the central square, there was a small Baptist church a block and a half away in one direction and a Presbyterian church two blocks away in another direction. Just behind it, with an entrance through a narrow alley, there was a non-denominational church that had split away from the Presbyterian congregation. Such churches, within the traditional boundaries of San Cristobal, are mainly for the growing evangelical middle-class or Ladino population. A more concentrated evangelical presence is along the *Periférico Norte* (the northern ring road) where indigenous families, expelled from their lands because of their beliefs, have established refugee colonies.

At one point on the Ring Road, I counted four churches without moving my head. Two such refugee churches have long rows of benches and can accommodate upwards of 1,000 worshipers. When I attended one of these—a Pentecostal church—on a random Sunday, I estimated there were 850 worshipers.

Based on many weeks of walking or driving through all parts of San Cristobal, and being particularly alert to the presence of churches, it seems safe to estimate that evangelical churches outnumber Catholic churches in the city by about ten to one. The Ladino population, the core of Catholic support, is only three percent in the Highlands and *selva* (plains and jungle), which have been opened by roads only during the past 20 years. In these regions, there are relatively few Catholic churches so that evangelical churches outnumber Catholic churches by upwards of 20 to one.

The basis for this differential is as much economic as it is spiritual. Catholic churches depend on institutional planning and financing. Funds are scarce to build new churches or repair old ones. The only extensive repairs done to Catholic churches is carried out by the government, on the grounds that ancient churches

are part of the nation's cultural heritage. But even if there were scores of new churches (and believers to fill their benches), who would staff them? For the entire diocese of San Cristobal, which includes almost half the geographic area of Chiapas, there are fewer than 100 priests and about 150 members of religious orders, (none of whom are indigenous, although the diocese has had a seminary for over 300 years).<sup>6</sup> There also were, according to a 1993 census, 208 Eucharistic Priests, that is, fully trained catechists who can perform all functions of a priest except administering the sacraments.<sup>7</sup>

Evangelical churches are built by the congregations that will use and staff them. Often, building a church is a matter of necessity. If there are roads, there is little public transport, and, even when there is, many indigenous families can not afford the fare. So, a church has to be within a community or no more than a moderate walking distance away.

Churches are social and spiritual spaces where indigenous evangelicals have reshaped their traditions. Many of those expelled from Highland municipalities were males enrolled in the ranked cargos to observe the fiestas of village saints. They progressively assumed more prestigious functions until they attained the status of elders (*principales*). Similarly, in evangelical churches, deacons are selected according to their abilities and probity and advance to the rank of elders and sometimes pastors.

In village society, curanderos prayed and chanted over the sick. A major reason for the growth of evangelism was that indigenous people became convinced that biblical curing was more effective than that of these shamans.

Evangelicals speak their mother tongues at home and in their churches, and women still wear their traditional elaborately embroidered blouses. However, evangelical and traditional societies are worlds apart in practice. Where getting drunk and having multiple wives were once the norm, evangelicals are ascetic and family-centered and Mexican *machismo* is a thing of the past.

### ***Reliving Christian History***

In Hebrews 13:8 there is the phrase, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." As I traveled through Chiapas, it often seemed as if I was experiencing some of those yesterdays, beginning with the days of the Apostles. Men and women heard the Word and made it part of their daily lives according to their individual needs and circumstances.

December is the month of Our Lady of Guadalupe (the vision of the Virgin Mary believed to have appeared on a cloak of an Aztec convert named Juan Diego in December, 1531). In 1954, Pope Pius XII proclaimed Mary the "Queen of Heaven." As Mexico's national saint, the title is given to Our Lady of Guadalupe. One night in San Cristobal, I watched processions of the devout, including children in imaginary biblical costumes, passing through the streets and up a hill to the church of Guadalupe. I later went to a Presbyterian church near the foot of the hill. The pastor took his text from Isaiah 2:8–9: "Their land is full of idols; they bow down to the work of their hands, to what their fingers have made. So man will be brought low and mankind humbled. Do not forgive them."

He went on to cite Jeremiah's denunciation of men whose wives had burned

<sup>6</sup> Floyd (1997): 121-22. <sup>7</sup> See Chapter 24.

incense to other gods, specifically “The Queen of Heaven,” a goddess whom Jeremiah denounces three times (44:17–19). The sermon ended with references to Paul, who almost caused a riot by preaching man-made gods are no gods at all to patrons of craftsmen who earned their living by making silver images and who proclaimed “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” (Acts 19:23–41).

However, to be precise, a question might be asked: Was the rioting in Ephesus touched off by Paul’s preaching “religious” persecution? The question is relevant because it might also be asked if the attacks on evangelicals in Chiapas are, strictly speaking, religious persecution.

The evangelical community estimates more than 30,000 believers have been expelled from their homes and properties in San Juan Chamula. The Mexican National Commission for Human Rights puts the number at 15,000. Numbers in Mexico are always tricky. After the initial mass expulsions, the caciques used individual threats, saying evangelicals would be killed if they did not leave. No one could doubt the validity of such threats: if they left, seemingly of their own will, they could at least carry some of their possessions with them. Thus, voluntary departure was actually expulsion.

Refugee communities have sprouted on the outskirts of San Cristobal and along the Pan American Highway leading to Guatemala. Seeing these large colonies, and knowing that many others of the expelled were relocated or migrated far from San Cristobal, the figure of 15,000<sup>8</sup> seems reasonable. (See Appendix I for the acts of expulsion from Chamula.)

The Bibles they read every day warned evangelicals of the consequences of refusing to honor traditional norms. Christ said: “Be on your guard against men; they will hand you over to the local councils and scourge you in the local synagogues” (Matthew 10:17), and, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also” (John 15:20).

Nevertheless, evangelical communities grew because, along with the warnings, there were promises of protection and a better life. In sermons in the churches built by the expelled, I heard texts cited again and again. A favorite was Joshua 1:5, “I will never leave you or forsake you.” Another is Isaiah 41:10, “Do not fear for I am with you . . . I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.” Still another was Psalm 55:22, “Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you. He will never let the righteous fall.” More than any other, pastors read out the final words of the risen Christ: “I am with you always to the very end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

Was this “religious” persecution or was it political persecution, in view of the obvious fact that the new evangelicals did not respect secular social norms?

It is the nature of *cacicazgo* that makes the Chiapas expulsions both political and religious. I discussed this with Dr Andres Fabregas Puig, the rector of the Autonomous University of Chiapas and one of the leading anthropologists of south-eastern Mexico during an interview at his office in Tuxtla Gutierrez:<sup>9</sup>

There is a legitimacy in the caciques. The Chamulans are people who have fought ever since colonial days to obtain respect from others. For example, there is a book published called *Auto del Pueblo de Chamula contra su Cura* (Act of the People of Chamula against its Priest), which is the story of a conflict that happened in the seven-

<sup>8</sup> (1995): 48. <sup>9</sup> Jan. 15, 1996.

teenth century. If you read it, you find exactly the same as what is happening now. It is the same claim: “let us alone, leave us in peace.” What I say is that one should understand the cultural basis of the cacicazgo and not only see it like a forced imposition. It is wrong that there are caciques, but caciqazgo is a phenomenon of Chamula society. It is a product of the history of the Chamulans.

Putting aside the violence of expulsions, I think the tendency to convert to Protestantism as a religious alternative is important in Chiapas. This is part of the many forces creating a new multicultural paradigm in Mexico. I think that what is going to happen is a similar process to what happened when the Spanish came to Mexico: a cultural process. The Indian communities are going to conform the evangelic message to their own culture and I think, as a result, a new way of looking at the world will be born. I think we are facing the birth of new cultural alternatives that will define the Indian world in the next century. The Indian cultures interpret the message according to their own culture and experience. Mexico, as many other countries, is heading toward multiculturalism.

Mexico is still a Catholic country but there is more than one line of Catholics. There are charismatic Catholics, traditional Catholics and Catholics who believe in an autonomous church reflecting Indian cultures as well as Apostolic Roman Catholics. All this is very important because it is the formation of new cultural realities. It is very important because it will bring changes in the existence of the people. We have to construct a more tolerant, flexible society. We should accept that other visions do not contradict the nation's progress. We have to accustom ourselves to live with people who think differently. All societies, all countries, are becoming multicultural. In a short time, 50 years or less, there will not be one country in the world that will not be multicultural.

## ***Plan of the Book***

Chapter 1 outlines the context of evangelical growth: Mayanist romanticism, poverty and the role of shamans in traditional curing. Chapter 2 traces the beginnings among the Tzeltals, the most numerous of the indigenous peoples of Chiapas. Marianna Slocum, the pioneering Summer Institute of Linguistics translator who spent seven years in remote mountain villages reached only by foot or mule back, devised a Tzeltal alphabet and written language and then searched for equivalent Tzeltal terms to express the Gospel message. At about the time that she completed her translation of the Gospel of Mark, Joy Ridderhoff, a former missionary in Honduras, developed a process for making Gospel recordings. Guided by Marianna and using Victrola “Talking Boxes,” Tzeltal evangelists spread the message from community to community so that, within a few years, there were thousands of believers and dozens of churches and congregations. Chapters 3 and 4 trace the beginnings among the second largest indigenous group, the Tzotzils, who would later suffer the greatest persecution.

All this is one stream of the history that runs through the book. The other stream is the Roman Catholic Theology of Liberation with its belief in a God who intervenes in history in order to break down the structures of injustice. Samuel Ruiz, who was just 34 when he was named Bishop in Chiapas in 1960, enlisted the support of Jesuits and other orders to train catechists to teach the Bible and Roman Catholic practices, but also to conscientize parishioners in the methods of political protest.

Chapter 5 chronicles the catechists' challenge to cacique traditionalists who dominated all aspects of life among Tzotzils of San Juan Chamula, employing both the cult of the saints and the clientelist largesse of the PRI, whose presidents have led Mexico without interruption since the party was founded in 1929. In the early 1970s, after catechists and their leaders twice attempted to have an opposition slate elected to the Chamula municipality, these reformed Catholic supporters, along with evangelicals, were loaded into trucks and dumped at the outskirts of San Cristobal. Later, the caciques evicted the entire Catholic apparatus and imported the bishop of a spurious Orthodox Church of San Pascualito to celebrate masses and administer baptisms.

Chapter 6 is the life and influence of Miguel "Kashlan" Gomez Hernandez, the leader of the Tzotzils. Before his conversion, he had worked on the coffee plantations of the Pacific coast and in Mexico City and had the reputation of a womanizer and heavy drinker. He became a believer when he met Ken Jacobs, another of the early SIL translators. Although the anger of the caciques was aimed specifically at the reformed Catholics, the mass expulsion swept up all those who appeared to challenge their leadership. Soon, since the evangelists did not dabble in politics, most were allowed to return to their homes, but not Miguel Kashlan. He found work as a translator in a hotel in San Cristobal, but he did not cease to evangelize. Among other things, he organized the first refugee settlement and church. In July 1981, he was seized, bundled into a car, tortured and hanged. Three days later, his coffin was carried in a procession through the main square of San Cristobal. An estimated 4,000 of the expelled followed it to the cemetery. He is now remembered as the first Tzotzil martyr.

Chapter 7 is the narration of a woman who was one of Kashlan's earliest believers. For her faith, she was shot, burned, and barely survived but, undaunted, went on, through prayer and faith, to become a successful business woman.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 are testimonies of individual believers and narrations on the manner of church growth and the selection of deacons, elders and pastors to staff the ever expanding congregations and missions. These narrations, and others in later chapters, are vital to an understanding of evangelical growth. They document the process of individuation together with the assertion of a primary responsibility to God and family. They also clarify the relationship between a pastor and his congregation. Strong, authoritative leadership is essential to any displaced community, not to mention one faced with sweeping economic and social changes. A pastor is a source of certainty. The process of training and selection from within the community ensures that the pastor is firmly rooted in the mores of his congregation. Finally, as the history of Protestantism demonstrates, if a congregation does not like its pastor it can easily break away and build its own church.

Chapters 11, 12 and 13 are the narrations of the three principal leaders of the expelled. One is Abdias Tovilla Jaime, a pastor who, when the expulsions began, became a lawyer. He formed the State Committee for Evangelical Defense in Chiapas (CEDECH) to defend individuals and attempt to use the legal system to force the national and state governments to stop the expulsions. The second is Domingo Lopez Angel, who has been instrumental in finding new sources of income for those without homes or land. Many became vendors of vegetables or handicrafts. Others acquired taxis or trucks. He fought to get licenses for their vehicles and places in the markets for their goods, always against the fierce opposition of established Ladinos. The third is Esdras Alonso Gonzalez, who became a Pentecostal Nazarene after he was cured, through prayer, of a lung tumor. He was the leader of a large church in Oaxaca. When he heard of the work of Abdias Tovilla, he came to San Cristobal to help him.

Chapter 14 is the narration of two Presbyterian pastors in the municipality of Ocosingo, which was briefly occupied in the Zapatista uprising of January 1, 1994. One was forced to leave his home and lands to the Zapatistas in an area west of Ocosingo. They agree on the need for social and economic reforms but are opposed to violence to achieve these goals.

Chapters 15, 16 and 17 return to the theme of the expulsions. More than 230 men, women and children of the community of Mitontic were forced from their homes, marched for three hours, kept for three days in a sweltering warehouse without food or water and then put into trucks and sent to San Cristobal. The government, instead of forcing officials to restore their lands and homes, sent them far away to live among people whose language they do not understand.

In contrast, because of a split among politicians in the community of Amatenango, a group forced from their lands and homes was allowed to return and given help to rebuild. Those who approved the expulsions were heavily fined.

Such justice, however, was rare. Pentecostals from the nearby community of Aquacatenango were expelled three times. Each time, they received government support to return to their lands and rebuild their homes, but each time local authorities expelled them again. After the fourth expulsion, they received government help and returned again. Their pastor says: "We will not be stopped."

Evangelicals called for justice from 14 state governors and five national presidents, always without result. In 1993, out of sheer frustration, they began direct action. Chapter 18 is the history of an almost year-long occupation by a large group of the expelled of the compound of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in San Cristobal. The authorities' failure to respond to this occupation led to a seizure of a Chamula official, which precipitated a mass cacique attack on the compound and the use, by someone inside the compound, of an Uzi submachine gun to kill one of the assailants. Although the expelled had used guns before, this was the first use of such a modern weapon. It made the caciques aware that they could no longer expect to attack the evangelicals and escape unharmed.

Then, on New Year's Day, 1994, a former professor calling himself *Sub-comandante* Marcos staged a brief seizure of San Cristobal and four smaller cities. This "Revolt of the Indians" drew international attention to the plight of indigenous peoples. The Mexican government was finally convinced it had to do some-

thing about the expulsions. Conciliation meetings were held with Chamulan leaders and a truce was declared.

Chapter 19 recounts a further clash in which six cacique attackers were killed, versus one evangelical defender killed. This convinced the caciques that the evangelicals, when attacked, would not simply await the "will of God" and they finally agreed to halt their attacks. Soon, evangelical life began again throughout Chamula.

The earlier chapters dealt mainly with the Presbyterian and Pentecostal churches. Chapters 20 through 24 are narrations to illustrate evangelical growth among other groups. The Mexican government generally discourages, through the withholding of visas, missionary efforts so that it is rare for new denominations to take root. Cusberto Perez was given a Bible by a traveling American missionary and, when he decided to commit himself, was accepted for a four-year course in a Baptist biblical school. After serving in the North, he returned to build a Baptist church in San Cristobal, where he was born

Another young man, Teodoro Vera Cortez, was 15 when he went to the United States "to look for my life but instead, I found sin and vices." With help, he became a Baptist, studied in a seminary and eventually came to Chiapas to find new believers from among the indigenous people and, with them, to build a Baptist church and school.

Seventh-Day Adventists have been in southern Mexico for more than 100 years. A regional official, Villaney Vazquez Alegria, says membership is expanding so sharply it has been necessary, for administrative purposes, to divide Chiapas into 58 districts, each with 20 to 40 congregations.

Pastor Jesus Castelazo Sanchez is a self-taught Pentecostal who was inspired to begin teaching the Bible in a saloon in central Mexico. He tells of coming to Tuxtla Gutierrez to turn a saloon and dance hall into a church. It expanded so greatly that he now has the *Templo Auditorio Cristiano*, which can seat 6,000. However, he now believes in small, neighborhood churches, especially for the indigenous population. He says he has 14 churches in Tuxtla and another 155 in the Highlands and the selva.

Rene Jimenez Guzman is the southern Chiapas administrator for the Nazarene church (the modern branch, which has grown away from its Pentecostal roots, as represented by Esdras Alonso Gonzalez). He believes the restriction on foreign missionary work was beneficial in that it encouraged the growth of churches that reflect Mexican culture. The Nazarenes have 105 congregations, 15 missions and more than 7,000 members in Chiapas.

Chapter 25 returns to the Catholic Church and its effort to develop communities guided by catechists. Bishop Ruiz had three main goals: the option for the poor, the training of catechists to evangelize indigenous peoples from within their own communities and the creation of something that approaches an indigenous autochthonous church. Msgr Felipe Toussaint Loera, the vicar general of the diocese, tells how catechists are chosen and outlines some of the principal obstacles to an autochthonous church, including teachings that the Church of Rome is the only true Church of Christ.

Chapter 26 relates the intertwined histories of Bishop Ruiz and Subcommander

Marcos. Catechists trained by the diocese played a major role in organizing groups clamoring for social and economic justice. Although there is no evidence that Ruiz's activism directly contributed to the rise of Marcos, the Zapatistas remain confined to the diocese of San Cristobal and are active nowhere else in Mexico. The government of Mexico dealt with the revolt by political negotiations while simultaneously organizing a war of low intensity, including paramilitary forces drawn from ranchers, small business owners and "individuals characterized by a high sense of patriotic duty." Then, just before Christmas, 1997, a paramilitary group massacred 45 villagers in the hamlet of Acteal.

The Zapatistas' foreign supporters are skilled in the techniques of the Internet. When news of the Acteal massacre spread through cyberspace, hundreds of foreigners descended on Chiapas to demonstrate support. They were promptly deported and a national debate began on the role of foreigners in Mexico's domestic affairs.

Chapter 27 deals with autonomy, the issue that led to the breaking off of peace negotiations. This is discussed by a foremost authority on indigenous affairs, Jacinto Arias Perez, an ethnologist and former Chiapas Secretary for Indigenous Affairs.

There are two appendices. The first details specific expulsions from 1966 to 1994. The second lists the extensive Internet Web sites created by Zapatista supporters and the nature of foreign support for their revolution.

### ***An Editorial Note***

A preliminary survey of Protestantism in Mexico, limited to Mexico City, Puebla, Cuernavaca and Oaxaca, was conducted in December, 1995 and January, 1996. Field research in Chiapas, including about 30 interviews and archival searches, was conducted in August and September, 1996 and from December, 1996 through February, 1997. The interviews were tape-recorded in Spanish and transcribed into English. For use in this book, questions were omitted, as well as material having no bearing on the topic discussed, but nothing was eliminated that would have altered the intent of the speaker.

# **1**

## **EVANGELICAL TRANSFORMATION**

Except for a handful of families within tightly restricted marriage circles, all Mexicans have ancestors who, if it were possible, might be traced to pre-Hispanic times. Mexicans are a distinctive blend of Hispanic and indigenous heritage. The Spanish conquerors fixated on race, with elaborate paintings to show *castas* (castes) according to the degree and type of ethnic mix. Eventually, the term Mestizo (mixed) was favored, but this seems to say that cultures are genetically coded. If a distinction has to be made, "Ladino" is a more accurate term, in that it points to social and cultural, rather than genetic, differences. A Ladino is someone who can be regarded contextually as not *Indio*, either because of his language, manners or color: that is, he is defined by what he does not have. *Indio* has been

replaced in official and polite society by the euphemism *indígena* (indigenous). This, of course, is meaningless, since all Mexicans are indigenous but it seems the least objectionable way to refer to an ethnic difference.

The indigenous population is disappearing. They are simply being absorbed into the majority Ladino population. The national census of 1895 counted 20.5% of the population over the age of five as "Indian" (or 2.7 million out of a population of 13.3 million). A 1995 estimate put the indigenous population at 5.4 million out of 80.2 million above the age of five. Adding those children, the indigenous population is currently estimated at seven million, or about 7.5 percent of the population. They are concentrated in the states of Yucatan (44.2%), Oaxaca (39.1%), Quintana Roo (32.2%) and Chiapas (26.4%), with smaller pockets in Hidalgo, Campeche, Puebla, Guerrero, San Luis Potosi and Veracruz.

Chiapas, with a population of 3.2 million (1990 census), has about 830,000 indigenous people scattered among 20,000 hamlets of fewer than 500 inhabitants. The two largest groups, the Tzeltals and Tzotzils, live in the Highlands: like a crumpled paper of steepsided mountains. Chols live in the northeastern municipalities of Palenque, Salto de Agua, Tumbala, Tila and Sabanilla. Zoques, a rapidly disappearing ethnicity, are found on the lower lands at the northwestern border of the Highlands. Except for the UN-sponsored Montes Azules Biosphere Reserve, much of the Lacandon selva has been inundated by an estimated 200,000 Tzeltals, Tzotzils, Chols, Tojolabals and Guatemalan refugees, and the forests have been cleared for cattle ranches and small farms.

Linguistic labels applied to indigenous groups must be read with caution. They primarily serve academic and governmental convenience and mask the segmentation perceived by the peoples themselves. For instance, there are two major dialects of Tzeltal and five dialects of Tzotzil—as Bible translators found to their pain when they tried to produce a single Tzeltal or Tzotzil New Testament. Linda King writes: "Indians, whose ultimate loyalty lies with the community and its leaders, express their identity through language. Tzeltal Indians refer to themselves as Tzeltal speakers of a specific community; other Tzeltal-speaking communities are classified as foreign, although linguistic similarity is recognized."<sup>1</sup>

While ethnically divided, all are united by marginalization. About half of the indigenous people of Chiapas live below the official poverty line. Chiapas is 75,634 kilometers square, which is about 3.6 percent of the area of Mexico, yet it has the highest ratio of illiteracy. The major causes of death are intestinal and pulmonary infections and malnutrition, which are easily remedied, and deaths from tuberculosis are the highest in the country; yet there is only one doctor for every 1,500 inhabitants, most of whom practice in nonindigenous regions. Chiapas has three of the four highest dams of the country and exports electricity; however about one-third of the state's population lacks electricity. The population is growing at the rate of 4.5 percent a year. Since 60 percent live in rural areas and depend on farming for their livelihood, the shortage of land for family-size plots grows worse; yet 6,000 cattle-ranching families control about half the rural land.

<sup>1</sup> (1994): 3, 5.

## **Romancing the Mayas**

The indigenous people of Chiapas, indiscriminately labeled as “Mayas,” have a special place among anthropologists. Robert Wasserstrom wrote: “Perhaps more than any other social group in recent memory, native peoples in highland Chiapas have been subjected to prolonged and continuous anthropological scrutiny.” He counted “no less than 30 books and monographs” about them.<sup>2</sup> At least a dozen more have been written since he wrote.

Evon Vogt of Harvard set the goal posts. He proposed that the “civil-religious hierarchies” of pre-Spanish Mesoamerica survived the conquest and lived on under the thin disguise of Catholicism. In his view, such expressions as “God,” “My Lord,” “My Owner” and “My Patron,” when used by the Tzotzils and Tzeltals, were not of Catholic origin, and that when they spoke of Christ they were really thinking of the Mayan sun god.<sup>3</sup> He also maintained that the cross venerated by the Tzotzils was not Christian but was a multipurpose boundary marker and a means of communication with the gods. In short, the Tzotzils and Tzeltals were living fossils, and by studying them, graduate students could unlock the secrets of the “Mayas.”

It was modern mythmaking. As Alan Knight writes: “Empirical evidence points to the great gulf of historical experience and cultural transformation which separates twentieth century Mexican Indians from their supposed sixteenth century forbearers, and which consigns any notion of a collective psychological inheritance to the realm of metaphysics.”<sup>4</sup>

An unfortunate corollary is that change, such as the adoption of new religious concepts, is decried as a corruption and a loss of culture. Anthropologists like Evon Vogt saw the cargo system of ranked civil and religious offices distributed through roles in saints’ festivals as survivals of Mayan polity. Reality was far different. Eighteenth century cargos were a means by which parish churches defrayed priests’ salaries and other expenses. When the church connection was dissolved, the cargo fiestas became the political instruments of local chiefs.

## **Sickness and Health**

In projecting the mythology of pre-Columbian fossils on the tribes of Chiapas, anthropologists whitewashed reality. They wrote admiringly of people who worshiped the sun and moon, who lived in a cyclical time warp, who shaped their lives by dreams and followed the spiritual guidance of shaman wise men, obscuring the fact that these same people cowered before ghosts and evil spirits and sought the protection of curanderos similar to the witch doctors of Africa. It is a misperception to see evangelical growth in Latin America as a movement of conversion from Catholicism. It is more accurately seen as an anti-shaman movement.

For all except a privileged few, being Catholic signified little more than being baptized. The conquered people shaped Catholic images and teachings to their own needs, blending the worship of nature with the worship of saints. Highly-educated priests seldom mingled with their parishioners and saw the round of festivities honoring saints as crude but harmless expressions of primitive minds. There was no incentive for the indigenous people to take a deeper interest in Catholic services. Latin, of course, was unintelligible and priests had no interest in learning Tzotzil or Tzeltal, so their sermons, delivered in Spanish, were equally a mystery.

2 (1983): 1. 3 (1969): 366–68. 4 (1990): 95

The most comprehensive study of popular beliefs in Chiapas is Jacinto Arias' 1991 book *The Numinous World of the Mayas: Structure and Contemporary Changes*. Arias, a Harvard-educated Tzeltal "Pedrano" of San Pedro Chenalho, has served as the Chiapas Secretary for Indigenous Affairs, with offices in San Cristobal. What follows is a summary of some of his findings.

The Tzeltals and Tzotzils believed mountains, fountains, rocks, trees, pieces of land and caves were spirits and gave them specific names. They thought of the Catholic mass as a Ladino ceremony similar to those that they performed to placate the gods of sacred mountains and springs and who, if not honored, would bring calamities. They believed that the soul is separate from the body and could occupy another space and that "when a person sleeps, the soul leaves the body and visits strange places, mainly those that are not accessible during the day when the soul is confined to the body." Baptism was a symbolic act, "to give children souls . . . The idea is that the soul is near but not yet totally fixed in the body."

They also believed the world has two harmonious orders with a shaman (*jílol*), whose "eyes are open" so he can see the visible and invisible worlds, serving as guardian of the harmony. Sickness occurred when someone fractured this harmony. This could result from bragging, defying or abusing someone, any kind of dispute, justified or not, a failure to carry out an obligation, or a failure to respect or placate powerful invisible spirits including the saints, ancestors and the sun and moon. Sickness could also result from fright or bad wishes, such as envy. In addition, shamans could direct sickness at will, both causing and curing it. Sickness could come in different forms. The soul could become lost. Sickness was a partial process of death. The lapse between fault and final punishment allowed the shaman time to practice his techniques to determine the source of the danger. One way he could do this was through his dreams. The curing ceremony, called "giving or augmenting the hours of life," could make the soul return to the body.

The world over, gibberish, like the word "Alakazam," is part of popular magic. Among illiterate Spanish-speaking Mexicans, the Latin of Catholic priests was seen as an exorcism against the devil. Shamans in Chiapas learned a few Spanish words and mixed them with their incantations over monolingual Tzeltals and Tzotzils to give them greater force in confronting the devils that were causing a sickness. It seemed the shamans believed that devils were like humans and only understood Tzotzil and Tzeltal. Should a person die, the soul would continue to exist, but in another world somewhat like this world except, since there was no longer two worlds to be fractured, there would be no punishment. Punishment and recompense took place in this world, not in the other.

In one respect, a *médico brujo* (witch doctor) was like a Western doctor: better or worse (stronger or weaker) according to his experience and knowledge in prescribing available medicines. All shamans used chickens, eggs and *posh* (the indigenous almost 100 percent alcoholic drink), although the quantity of these ingredients varied greatly, depending more on the wealth of the patient than the perceived difficulty of the cure. The traditional perception of sickness was almost the reverse of the modern view. It was not seen from the viewpoint of its physical effect, but from an invisible cause that was perceptible only to a shaman. There was nothing particularly "Mayan" about all this. Similar beliefs were prevalent in Africa. A marked

characteristic of tribal society is that “natural” misfortunes are ascribed to the evil wishes of witches or sorcerers, to the anger of spirits affronted by neglect of themselves or of a sufferer’s obligations toward kin, to breaches of taboo and omission of rituals and to rightful cures by appropriate persons.<sup>5</sup>

### **Traditional Culture and Drunkenness**

The Pedranos of Chenalho are Tzotzils. The more numerous Tzeltals live in the northern Highlands and the territory to the east that gradually descends to the Lacandon plains and the Guatemalan border. The earliest study of a Tzeltal community was conducted in 1961 in Tenejapa, 28 miles northeast of San Cristobal, by Andres Medina Hernandez, who presented it for a master’s degree from the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM).<sup>6</sup>

It was a clear-eyed view of reality by a Mexican, not the fuzzy mythology of foreign Mayanists. Medina wrote of “misery, disease, social and geographic isolation and the most ferocious exploitation.” He found that 85 percent of the population spoke only Tzeltal and 88 percent were illiterate. Only eight percent were bilingual while seven percent, undoubtedly Ladinos, spoke only Spanish.

Forty-four of these Spanish-speaking heads of families controlled 16,000 acres of land while 1,121 Tzeltal heads of families controlled 10,600 acres. That is, Ladinos, who made up about four percent of a population of 125,000, had a bit more than 60 percent of the land, while the remaining 96 percent, who were Tzeltals, had 40 percent of the land. Because of the shortage of land, most Tzeltal men planted corn on their little *milpa* (plot), and then migrated to the Pacific coast coffee plantations for from three to six months, and returned to harvest the crop on their own land. Their seasonal migrations earned them the nickname *golondrinas* (swallows).

The Tzeltals of Tenejapa believed men had two souls with different characteristics, a normal soul and a forest animal, known as *lab*. They were born at the same time and lived parallel lives, including having the same sicknesses. The death of one meant the death of the other. Not everyone knew his animal, but they could guess. A child who died young must have had the lab of a bird. A rich and powerful man would have more than one lab, including that of a tiger. On death, a person’s soul went to a resting place and later returned to repeat a cycle in the body of another person.

A persistent feature of all traditional societies is the way they segment into small units, making concerted action impossible. The municipality of Tenejapa was divided into 132 communities, each with its own name and sacred locations, with an *ojo* (often translated as “angel” but, more accurately a “spirit”) hovering nearby, which had to be placated with day-long ceremonies. An indispensable ingredient of ceremonies was the powerful posh, along with a beer known as *chicha*. The Tenejapans made chicha in their homes from sugar cane juice and wheat bran. Posh was imported and was expensive.

The most important festival was Carnival, a 12-day celebration in the community center simultaneous with 10-day celebrations in each of the communities. Like the traditional carnivals of Europe, there was a great deal of dressing up, with men wearing Ladino clothing and trying to sound as if they could speak Spanish

<sup>5</sup> Gluckman (1995): xxiii. 6 (1991, reprint).

and women wearing masks and men's hats. Carnival consisted of a series of marches within the community center and to several sacred spots, always accompanied by musicians playing a flute, drums and a rattle. In these marches, "they shout and talk in loud voices and grandly lift bottles of chicha to drink. A visit to all the sacred spots is long because neighbors invite the chief and his companions to drink chicha. Generally, they are offered a barrel of 20 liters. The group stays and dances in front of the house of the man who made the offer and can not leave until they consume all the beer, which means they are drunk during the entire festival."

In addition, a minor office holder had to donate food, a 20-liter barrel of chicha and a large bottle of posh. There were also annual three-day festivals for each of 11 images of saints that were cared for by six groups of *mayordomos*. These took place when the term of one set of mayordomos ended and the term of another set began. The surrender of offices opened in the church with offerings at the base of the saint to be honored. The former office holders then marched out to receive four bottles of posh and men and women began to dance to the tune of the musicians. They took clothing of the saint to a river to be washed by single women and daughters of the mayordomos while the incoming mayordomos sat watching and drinking posh and the musicians played endlessly. After that, they marched from house to house. When the food and drink were finished in one house, they went to another. The march was repeated on the second day and ended on the third day "*con grandes borracheras en las casas*" (with great drunken bouts in the houses). Being drunk was called a state of grace: "The state of grace allows the drunken individually to act in opposition to the norms of social conduct . . . When the mayordomos return to their houses they are met by their wives who recite the positions occupied by their husbands, but in the first person, making fun of the power and prestige of these important institutions. They sing in a drunken state, contrary to the code of humility and friendliness in which they act in other situations. Frequently during the fiestas, men and women beat each other and tear their clothes while they shout until some minor peace-keeper takes them to the *Ayuntamiento* [city center] where they are pacified by the municipal president. The next day they return to normal. They do not use arms. If there is a killing or serious dangerous wounds, it is called the work of a witch."

Friends and relatives would come down from the mountains to stay in a single house. They would shout and sing songs, and, in the darkness, there would be the writhing of bodies. The state of grace allowed all immorality.

Most Ladino land owners lived in San Cristobal or in Mexico City and did not even maintain houses in Tenejapa municipality. Of those who lived locally, "relations between the Ladinos and Indians were only what was necessary for market transactions . . . Both groups are said to be Catholics because they worship in the same church in the municipal center, but the Ladinos are in a completely different ecclesiastical structure, similar to the rest of the country, while the indigenous people maintain their autonomy at the community level, as can be seen in the fact that they have their own religious images completely different from those venerated by the Ladinos."

When, in 1949, a missionary of the Summer Institute of Linguistics established a base among Tzeltals in the adjacent municipality of Oxchuc, alarm bells sounded within the Catholic hierarchy in Mexico City. Two priests were sent to Tenejapa,