

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:

**FROM LIBERATION THEOLOGY TO  
*TEOLOGIA INDIA*: THE PROGRESSIVE  
CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SOUTHERN  
MEXICO, 1954-1994**

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Philosophy, 2021

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This project traces how the Mexican Catholic Church opened itself to tolerating and embracing indigenous catholicisms, how activists built a Catholic multiculturalism from the ground up (1960s-1990s), and how the Vatican recognized their decades of work by accepting Náhuatl as an official liturgical language in 2015. This history is inseparable from the Latin American experiences of Liberation Theology, its theological offshoot of Indigenous Theology, and the progressive Catholics who insisted that the Catholic Church could shed a reputation of serving the rich to instead opt for the poor, the marginalized, and the indigenous. A pair of questions guided this project. What impact did Liberation Theology and its practitioners have on rural, indigenous Mexico? How did the concrete actions and experiences of indigenous peoples shape the pastoral programs and cultural-political orientation of Mexico's Catholic Church?

Beginning in the mid-century, Church hierarchs vied over approaches to the “indigenous question.” Following the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, the Bishops of the Pacific South Region opened a regional seminary, SERESURE (1969-1990), in Tehuacán, Puebla to train priests to work in the indigenous realities of the region. I argue that the everyday interactions between progressive Catholics from SERESURE and indigenous Nahua villages created a multicultural pastoralism that tried to alleviate the economic crisis of neoliberal structural change *and* incorporated indigenous culture and religiosity into Mexican Catholicism.

My dissertation challenges a historiographical focus on the conservative elements of Mexican Catholicism to reveal ideological struggle within the institution and show how progressives shaped the Church. I redirect the geographical focus of analysis on Mexican Liberation Theology away from Bishop Samuel Ruiz in Chiapas and toward a regional project of progressive Catholics centered in Tehuacán, Puebla. I innovate on studies of religion and social reform in late twentieth century Mexico by foregrounding how indigenous popular religiosity shaped liberationist activism. I also reassess the long-term reverberations of Liberation Theology in Latin America and argue that the indigenous cultural activism of progressive Catholics in southern Mexico shaped the multiculturalism that emerged in the transition to neoliberalism at the end of the Cold War.

FROM LIBERATION THEOLOGY TO *TEOLOGIA INDIA*: THE  
PROGRESSIVE CATHOLIC CHURCH IN SOUTHERN MEXICO, 1954-1994

by

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## List of Abbreviations

ACJM - Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana  
ACM - Acción Católica Mexicana  
AGN - Archivo General de la Nación  
AGEP - Archivo General del Estado de Puebla  
AHAM - Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de México  
AHPM - Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de México de la Compañía de Jesús  
ANCIEZ - Alianza Nacional Campesina Independiente Emiliano Zapata  
CCI - Centro Coordinador Indigenista  
CDI - Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas  
CEB - comunidad eclesial de base  
CEHILA Comisión para el Estudio de la Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina y el Caribe  
CELAM - Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano  
CEM - Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano  
CENAPI - Centro nacional de pastoral indigenista  
CENAMI - Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas  
CEPI - Comisión Episcopal para los Indígenas  
CEPS - Comisión Episcopal para la Pastoral Social  
CICOP - Catholic Inter-American Cooperation Program  
CIDHAL - Comunicación, Intercambio y Desarrollo Humano en América Latina  
CIESAS - Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social  
CIRM - Conferencia de institutos religiosos de México *or* Conferencia de Superiores Mayores de Religiosos de México  
CISEN - Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional  
COCEI - Coalición Obrera, Campesina, Estudiantil del Istmo  
COMAR - La Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados  
CONPAZ - Coordination of Non-Governmental Organizations for Peace  
CTM - Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos  
DFS - Dirección Federal de Seguridad  
DT - Archive of the Diocese of Tehuacán  
DT/SM - Archive of the Seminario Mayor de la Diócesis de Tehuacán  
EAPI - Enlace de Agentes de Pastoral Indígena  
EZLN - Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional  
III - Instituto Indigenista Interamericano  
ILO - International Labour Organization  
INEGI - Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática  
INI - Instituto Nacional Indigenista  
IPLA - Instituto Pastoral Latinoamericano  
JCFM - Juventud Católica Femenina Mexicana  
LAB - Latin American Bureau  
MEP - Movimiento Estudiantil Profesional  
MFC - Movimiento Familiar Cristiano  
NCWC - National Catholic Welfare Conference  
PAN - Partido Acción Nacional  
PAVLA - Papal Volunteers for Latin America

PRD - Partido de la Revolución Democrática  
PRI - Partido Revolucionario Institucional  
RSS - Red de Solidaridad Sacerdotal  
SEP - Secretaría de Educación Pública  
SERESURE - Seminario Regional del Sureste  
SIL - Summer Institute of Linguistics  
SSM - Secretariado Social Mexicano  
UCM - Unión Católica Mexicana  
UFCM - Unión Femenina Católica Mexicana  
UMAE - Unión de Mutua Ayuda Episcopal  
UNS - Unión Nacional Sinarquista  
USCCB - United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

# Introduction

## The First Náhuatl Mass?

All the major papers carried the news in October 2015.<sup>1</sup> For the first time, the Mexican Catholic Church officially celebrated a mass in Náhuatl, the language of the Mexica, the original peoples whose empire and trading circle stretched from central Mexico to parts of Guatemala on the eve of the conquest.<sup>2</sup> Felipe Arizmendi Esquivel, Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, gave the homily. The time and place were no accident. The mass was on the Sunday closest to Dia de la Raza, the Latin American holiday celebrating the indigenous peoples and heritage of the Americas that the United States persists in recognizing as Columbus Day.<sup>3</sup> And it took place in Tepeyac, at the Basilica of Guadalupe, where the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to indigenous peasant Juan Diego, spoke to him in Náhuatl, and asked that a chapel be built in her honor.

After centuries of an uneasy relationship between Roman Catholicism and indigenous catholicisms, the Mexican Catholic Church had become open to a celebration of indigenous religious practice, with Vatican approval, at the most important holy site in the country. The Vatican's sanction of Náhuatl as an official liturgical language would be

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<sup>1</sup> "Celebra Arizmendi primera misa en náhuatl en la Basílica," *La Jornada*, Oct. 14, 2015; "Ofician primera misa en náhuatl en la Basílica de Guadalupe" *El Universal*, Oct. 14, 2015; "Celebran primera misa en náhuatl en la Basílica de Guadalupe" *El Sol de México*, Oct. 13, 2015; "Basílica de Guadalupe ofrece por primera vez misa en náhuatl," *El Financiero*, Oct. 13, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> On the Aztec Empire, the Mexica, and the conquest, see the classic volume, Charles Gibson, *The Aztecs Under Spanish Rule: A History of the Indians of the Valley of Mexico, 1519-1810* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964).

<sup>3</sup> I return to this in the final Chapter of this dissertation. The Catholic Church spent considerable resources and energy in the 1990s opposing Dia de la Raza in favor of Columbus Day and a commemoration of the "encounter" of the colonizers with the Americas.

published later that year, in December, to coincide with the Virgin's feast day.<sup>4</sup> But how and why that relationship changed is still far from clear. This dissertation traces, over the second half of the twentieth century, how the Mexican Catholic Church opened itself to tolerating and embracing indigenous catholicisms, how determined activists built a Catholic multiculturalism from the ground up, and ultimately, how the Vatican embraced their decades of work. This story, one among many in the diversity of the Catholic Church, is inseparable from the Latin American stories of Liberation Theology, its theological offshoots, and the stories of liberationists who embraced the possibility that the Catholic Church could shed a long reputation of serving the rich in order to be otherwise and opt for the poor, the marginalized, and the indigenous.<sup>5</sup> As such, this dissertation is guided by a pair of central questions. What impact did Liberation Theology and its practitioners have on rural, indigenous space in Mexico? And, how did the concrete actions and experiences of indigenous peoples, in their interactions with liberationists, filter up into the pastoral programs and cultural-political orientation of the Catholic Church? In a more basic form: how did Liberation Theology change indigenous Mexico, and how did indigenous Mexico change Liberation Theology?

In tracing the ways in which the relationship between the Mexican Church and Mexico's indigenous peoples changed over the course of the mid-to-late twentieth century, I demonstrate that the Church's opening to other ways of being Catholic was a

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from Archbishop Arthur Roche, Secretary of the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, to Archbishop of Guadalajara Mons. José Francisco Robles Ortega, President of the Mexican Bishops Conference, Vatican Prot N. 724/13, Dec. 12, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Penny Lernoux, among others, made this observation that the change in orientation of the Church as occurred at the CELAM Medellín meeting was a distinct break from the historical triangular alliance: Church-Military-elite. Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People: The Struggle for Human Rights in Latin America—The Catholic Church in Conflict with U.S. Policy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1982), 37.

contentious process. I track the conflicts and ideological divisions that coursed through the Mexican Church in the twentieth century, the emergence of Liberation Theology, the multiple directions and activities that liberationists took their spiritual and political commitments, the ways in which indigenous communities were both subject to and agents of change in the Church in the post-Vatican II era, and how liberationists in southern Mexico became important agents in the indigenous cultural resurgence and social movements of the 1980s and 90s.<sup>6</sup>

These conflicts interacted with global shifts in the secular world: the post-Second World War economic boom, the Cold War and its attendant anticommunist and revolutionary movements, questions over economic and political development, economic crisis, and a structural shift to neoliberalism in the 1980s and 90s.<sup>7</sup> And there is a

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<sup>6</sup> I aim for caution in my use of Liberation Theology as a descriptor and/or analytical category, primarily because “liberation theology” is too often deployed in a good/bad dichotomy. To progressives mostly external to the Church, “liberation theology” has come to stand for all things “good” that the Church and its agents undertake. To conservatives and traditionalists inside and outside of the Church, “liberation theology” stands alongside “communism” as catchall terms, rarely defined, that signal existential threat.

In place of Liberation Theology then, I instead use “liberationist,” “progressive,” or the “popular Church” to describe those who align themselves with Liberation Theology, drawing a distinction between the theology itself and the people involved. Crucial to the liberationist activism on the ground was (and is) a deep commitment to pastoralism and evangelization in the form of accompaniment, religious activism outside of the chapels and churches that dot communities across Mexico. However, evangelization and pastoral engagement were also centerpieces to the conservative papacy of John Paul II. Bishop Samuel Ruiz of Chiapas, one of the bishops most popularly associated with Liberation Theology, too refused to be categorized as such, instead preferring to identify with indigenous ministry (*pastoral indígena*) that was necessarily liberationist, and a liberationism that was necessarily indigenous while rejecting the label of “liberation theology.” The point here is not to discard “liberation theology” as a descriptor, but to strive for greater analytical precision.

Jorge Puma’s forthcoming dissertation on Catholic activism in Torreón deals with this analytical conundry at greater length, arguing for the need to look more precisely at the intersections between theology and marxism, and carefully apply analytical labels correspondingly.

<sup>7</sup> I rely primarily on David Harvey for the succinct understanding of neoliberalism as a theory of individual freedom grounded in private property and free markets, implying a retreat of the state from economic activity and regulation. David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). However, I recognize that scholars have critiqued Harvey for not entirely accounting for the ways in which neoliberalism was not so much a retreat of the state as a redeployment of state power and resources in defense of the market, private property, and facilitating the movement of capital. See Quinn Slobodian, *Globalists: The End of Empire and the Birth of Neoliberalism* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 2018). Shannon Speed argued further that neoliberalism in the Americas has taken on the logic of settler capitalism in its legal and political structures that enable violence upon the most vulnerable victims of what

distinctly Mexican story here. La Reforma, the liberalism of the nineteenth century, the Mexican Revolution (1910-20), revolutionary anticlericalism, and the Cristero Wars (1926-29, 1934-38) created distinct social, political, and cultural fields, unique in Latin America, that shaped the contours of religion and religious conflict in Mexico's twentieth century.

The Catholic Church hierarchy approached these global and local questions from a distinct perspective, grounded in a Catholic Social Doctrine that dated to the 1890s, always anti-communist but never fully orthodox in its adherence to liberal capitalism. As the Vatican emerged from the Second World War, it grappled with its inaction in the face of the Holocaust, the solidification of the Soviet Union, the emergence of the Cold War, and a modern world that was increasingly leaving the trappings of the old Church behind. And so, when Pope John XXIII announced the second Vatican Council, an opening (*aggiornamento*) of the Church to the modern world, the conflicts within the Church that had been roiling beneath the surface burst into the open.<sup>8</sup> On one side was a obstinate conservative minority, determined to change nothing, willing to lose believers in order to maintain "tradition."<sup>9</sup> In the middle was a moderate majority, increasingly open to, if sometimes suspicious of, the technological advances of modernity and the ways in which everyday life was unquestionably changing. And on the left was a growing progressive wing, a young generation of Latin American theologians, trained in Europe in France and

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she calls "neoliberal multicriminalism." Shannon Speed, *Incarcerated Stories: Indigenous Women Migrants and Violence in the Settler-Capitalist State* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> See John O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> See Cowan, Benjamin. *Moral Majorities across the Americas: Brazil, the United States, and the Creation of the Religious Right*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), chapter 1, for the Brazilian ultraconservative wing at Vatican II.



Belgium, who would bring back to Latin America the social Catholicism of Cardijn and Maritain, marry it with Marxist social sciences, and ask how the Church could actively build a more just world.<sup>10</sup>

It is this last group that primarily concerns this dissertation. But the progressive wings of the Mexican Catholic Church are not understandable except in relation to and in dialogue with their coreligionists and ideological competitors.<sup>11</sup> After all, as others have noted, the fiercest opponents within the Catholic Church shared a loyalty to their institution and to their faith even as they diverged in their interpretations of the commitments that such faith entailed in the world.<sup>12</sup> Only recognizing that can one begin to grasp how, for example, Bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo of Cuernavaca and his support for Christians for Socialism coexisted with the Christian Family Movement (*Movimiento Familiar Cristiano*, MFC), a stridently anti-communist lay organization that the Mexican intelligence services deemed “semi-fanatic.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*; Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Lilian Calles Barger, *The World Come of Age: An Intellectual History of Liberation Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Stephen Andes and Julia Young, eds., *Local Church, Global Church: Catholic Activism in Latin America from Rerum Novarum to Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University Press, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> The majority of scholarly work on the Mexican Church and catholicism in the second half of the twentieth century deals with the conservatives and conservative organizations. See Luis Herrán Ávila, “Las Guerrillas Blancas: Anticomunismo transnacional e imaginarios de derechas en Argentina y México, 1954-1972” *Quinto Sol* 19, no. 1 (Jan-Apr 2015): 1-26; Luis Herrán Ávila, “The Other ‘New Man:’ Conservative Nationalism and Right Wing Youth in 1970s Monterrey” in *Revolutionaries, Radicals, and Repression During the Global Sixties and Subversive Seventies*, eds. Jaime Pensado and Enrique Ochoa (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 195-214.

<sup>12</sup> Kautzer captures well the commitment even some of the fiercest critics of the Church feel toward the Church, leading strident reformers to remain within the Church alongside, if rarely in agreement with, their institutional opponents. Kathleen Kautzer, *The Underground Church: Non-violent Resistance to the Vatican Empire* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> On Méndez Arceo, see Lya Gutiérrez Quintanilla, *Los volcanes de Cuernavaca: Sergio Méndez Arceo, Gregorio Lemercier, Iván Illich* (Cuernavaca: La Jornada Ediciones, 2007). On the MFC, the Mexican intelligence services, the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS), was, in 1963, trying to figure out how exactly the Christian Family Movement coexisted in the same umbrella organization of Catholic Action as the Mexican Social Secretariat (Secretariado Social Mexicano, SSM), which was, as discussed in Chapter 5, turning more progressive in the 1960s. DFS, “Memorandum,” January 22, 1963, Archivo General de la

And so, while always recognizing that the Catholic Church was, and is, far from monolithic, I look to the progressives, liberationists, and Catholic agents who were determined to restructure the relationship between Church and Mexico's indigenous peoples. In doing so, this dissertation accomplishes three things. First, I reevaluate Liberation Theology, and particularly Liberation Theology in Mexico, not only showing that it mattered in Mexico, but showing how it took different forms than elsewhere in Latin America precisely because of the interactions between liberationists and indigenous communities. Above all, Liberation Theology in the Americas was predominantly known for ecclesial base communities (*comunidades eclesiales de base*, CEBs), small groups engaged in gospel study, drawing on Freirian pedagogy, to examine everyday life through the gospel and the gospel through the struggles of everyday life.<sup>14</sup> Liberationist activism, in its different forms, often sought to address economic inequalities through the formation of cooperatives and community savings banks (*cajas de ahorro*). But it also forcefully denounced human rights violations and the abuses of military dictatorships across the continent, a political commitment that created martyrs out of the men and women religious targeted for assassination.<sup>15</sup> However, as I demonstrate here, Liberation Theology in Mexico, as it met the particular and specific realities of indigenous southern

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Nación (hereafter AGN), Movimiento Familiar Cristiano, Versión Pública. Collection Dirección Federal de Seguridad (hereafter DFS). Legajo Único, Caja 286.

<sup>14</sup> The classic theological tract on base communities and the ways in which Nicaraguan peasants, in conversation with Ernesto Cardenal, analysed their realities through the gospel was Ernesto Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010). See Roger Lancaster, *Thanks to God and the Revolution: Popular Religion and Class Consciousness in the New Nicaragua* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*.

<sup>15</sup> The assassination of Archbishop Óscar Romero in El Salvador, who publicly called on soldiers to disobey unjust orders, is one of the most emblematic cases in the disturbingly long list of churchfolk murdered by military and paramilitary forces. See Matt Eisenbrandt, *Assassination of a Saint: The Plot to Murder Óscar Romero and the Quest to Bring his Killers to Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

Mexico, was transformed by indigenous religious practice in ways unique in the Americas for its demand for an indigenous church (*iglesia autoctona*), embracing other ways of being catholic.

Second, I challenge the general understanding of the Mexican Church as a stalwart conservative institution that mostly remained on the sidelines of public life as a legacy of the Cristero Wars and revolutionary anticlericalism. Rather, I show how the Church in Mexico, across the ideological spectrum, was deeply engaged with the pressing questions of rural development, economic inequality, and social, cultural, and political rights. The Church's engagement with these issues was rarely conflict-free, but rather repeatedly ignited ideological fights within the institution. However, I demonstrate how liberationist and indigenist priorities, as practiced on the ground level in southern Mexico, filtered up into Church institutional pastoral programming and priorities.

Finally, through a community case study in the Náhuatl village of San Antonio Cañada, Puebla, I show how indigenous peoples themselves shaped liberationist Catholicism in ways that responded to the necessities of the everyday, often in ways that the liberationists did not expect. A generation of clergy, trained in Liberation Theology, marxist social sciences, and an active pastoralism, ventured into their parish assignments in indigenous communities throughout southern Mexico in the late 1970s and early 1980s. In these spaces, the clergy and their pastoral teams arrived with ideas of upending capitalism and building a kingdom of heaven on earth. What they found in the Náhuatl villages of the Tehuacán region were communities, struggling through economic crisis, that sought greater connection to the world for better economic opportunities, an end to exploitation by middle-men that siphoned off the wealth of rural agricultural production

and artisan crafts, a respect for and recognition of indigenous cultural and religious practices, an end to the discrimination and racism against the indigenous, and an end to *caciquismos* that circumscribed community political agency. It was precisely here, I argue, that indigenous Mexico shaped a Catholic activism built on intertwined pillars of socio-economic improvement and indigenous cultural revitalization. And it was out of the marriage of activism that a group of indigenous Catholic priests and the active laity in the region organized the first Náhuatl mass, celebrated in 1992 to coincide with 500 years of indigenous resistance, over twenty years prior to Vatican approval.

Taken together, this dissertation draws a throughline from the moment of colonization and conquest to the present. I address the ways that, into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Latin America and Latin American Catholicism was still grappling with the long-running question over the “success” of religious conversion, religious syncretism in the Americas, and the ways that indigenous peoples shaped the structures of governance - colonial, secular, and religious.<sup>16</sup> Ultimately, I suggest that the meetings of long-running colonial anxieties over indigeneity and indigenous religious practice, liberationist activism, and indigenous Mexico transformed our present moment toward a legal and cultural multicultural pluralism that is the hallmark of the twenty-first century.

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<sup>16</sup> Osvaldo F. Pardo, *The Origins of Mexican Catholicism: Nahua Rituals and Christian Sacraments in Sixteenth-century Mexico* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 2004); Ryan Dominic Crewe, *The Mexican Mission: Indigenous Reconstruction and Mendicant Enterprise in New Spain, 1521–1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019); Erick Langer, *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree: Franciscan Missions on the Chiriguano Frontier in the Heart of South America, 1830-1949* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009); Guillermo Wilde, *Religión y poder en las misiones de Guaraníes* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sb, 2009); Alejandro Cañeque, *The King's Living Image: The Culture and Politics of Viceregal Power in Colonial Mexico* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Pamela Voekel, *Alone Before God: The Religious Origins of Modernity in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

## Liberationism, Indigenous Catholicism(s) and Mexico

Let us return to the Basilica. It was quite the scene.<sup>17</sup> Bishops, male religious, and diocesan clergy led the procession of thousands into the Basilica. The highest representatives of the Church, many of them not remotely associated with catholic progressivism, were adorned in necklaces and crowns of marigolds, the flower long used in indigenous religious practice and now most commonly associated with altars for Day of the Dead.<sup>18</sup> Their stoles (clerical scarves) were embroidered with indigenous patterns, symbols, and images. And the music was distinctly folk, the sounds of the violin heard in rural Mexico accompanied the procession to the altar. In other words, the sights, sounds, and symbols of indigenous religious practice were no longer on the margins of the Catholic Church. They were no longer dismissed by the hierarchy as “idolatry and superstitions,” a colonial concern that was repeated by bishops such as Lucio Torreblanca (Chiapas, 1944-59) well into the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup>

The Basilica and its surrounding neighborhood are a physical manifestation of the contradictions of Mexican Catholicism, representing a historical meeting place between indigenous and colonial Mexico. It was here where the Virgin appeared in December 1531 to the indigenous Chichimec peasant, Juan Diego, and requested that a chapel be built in her honor.<sup>20</sup> He traveled to tell the Archbishop of Mexico, who dismissed the

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<sup>17</sup> The Basilica also streamed the mass live, and a recording is still available on Youtube. *Basílica de Guadalupe A.R.*, “Primera Misa en Náhuatl en la Basílica de Guadalupe, 13 de octubre de 2015,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ8I9\\_\\_cS3M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQ8I9__cS3M)

<sup>18</sup> On Day of the Dead celebration, and death more generally in indigenous religiosity, see Kirstin Norget, *Days of Death, Days of Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>19</sup> “Letter from Archbishop Torreblanca (Durango) to the Episcopal Committee,” October 3, 1959, Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de México (hereafter AHAM), Base Dario Miranda (hereafter Base DM), caja 75, expediente 6.

<sup>20</sup> On the Virgin of Guadalupe, see David Anthony Brading, *Mexican Phoenix: Our Lady of Guadalupe: Image and Tradition across Five Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). See also

indigenous man. The Virgin appeared and reappeared, and each time the Archbishop was skeptical, inclined to believe, but asking for further proof. Finally, in her fourth apparition, she directed Juan Diego to the top of Tepeyac to collect flowers where normally only cactus and scrub would be found. He did as told, gathered them in a mantle cloth, and took them to the Archbishop. Upon opening his cloth, the flowers fell out and imprinted upon the cloth was the Virgin's likeness, enough proof for the Archbishop to sanction veneration of the Virgin and build her chapel.<sup>21</sup>

In the nascent center of colonialism in New Spain, the Mexico City center was reserved for colonists, the outskirts for indigenous subjects.<sup>22</sup> Even with the considerable disconnect between residential segregation regulations and the lived reality, the appearance of a Marian figure in the indigenous outskirts of the city to an indigenous man just ten years after the conquest illustrated the tensions and ambiguities between colonial power, European Catholicism and indigenous culture that would continue to shape Mexican culture and Mexican Catholicism for the centuries to come.

Today, the Basilica lies in the midst of dense urban sprawl, a sprawling bus station, blocks of housing, a colonial-era aqueduct, and one complex after another announcing the residences and offices of religious orders, and the offices of the Mexican Episcopate, the modern proliferation of administrative and bureaucratic structure of the Mexican Catholic Church. It is the site that draws thousands upon thousands of pilgrims every year for the Virgin's saint day (December 12), with worshipers streaming in from

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Timothy Matovina, *Theologies of Guadalupe: From the Era of Conquest to Pope Francis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>21</sup> The story of the Virgin's apparitions was told in the *Nican Mopohua*, written in classic Náhuatl, some decades after the apparitions. See Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City, 1660-1720* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010).

across the country on foot, bicycle, and motor, fulfilling *mandas* (promises) to the Virgin, many carrying images of the Virgin, often crawling the final hundreds of yards on hands and knees.<sup>23</sup> Tepeyac and its surrounding neighborhoods are, it appears, a coexisting past and present, a modern bureaucracy and the centers of intellectual and theological production co-existing adjacent to missionary orders, cloistered nuns, and popular devotion to the indigenous Virgin, all mere metro stops from the centers of secular power and the federal government.

The Virgin's apparitions raised questions that remain unanswered, even in the twenty-first century, over incorporation and tolerance of indigenous religious practices in orthodox Catholicism. In a colonial project built on the twin pillars of military and spiritual conquest, the almost immediate appearance of an indigenous Marian figure could be seen as a triumphant exclamation of colonial evangelization. However, it quickly became evident, much to the consternation of the Franciscan missionaries, that christianization of the indigenous was far from the success that they had hoped. As veneration of the Virgin grew, drawing worshipers to the chapel on the hill of Tepeyac, Franciscans feared that "the Indians might imagine that a mere painting had some divine power and hence return to idolatry."<sup>24</sup> Fray Bernardino de Sahagún, the Franciscan missionary who learned Náhuatl and spent decades studying and compiling knowledge of indigenous culture and religious practices, also feared that the veneration of the Virgin

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<sup>23</sup> Carrying of images and crawling on knees are quite common repertoire in Mexico folk catholicisms. Often, individuals ask the particular saint (including folk saints unrecognized by the Vatican) for help, assistance, or intercession in temporal problems. And in return for the saint's aid, the petitioner promises public acts of devotion to repay the favor. Paul Vanderwood calls it a reciprocal relationship in which the saint's "status" is enhanced by those repaying the *mandas*, or promises, made. Paul Vanderwood, *Juan Soldado: Rapist, Murderer, Martyr, Saint* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 226-248.

<sup>24</sup> Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*, 1.

masked pre-Colombian religiosity in the guise of Catholic Marian devotion.<sup>25</sup> Little could Sahagún have known that his nervous hand-wringing would persist in the rhetoric of official Catholicism in the centuries to follow. But in the twentieth century, Mexican liberationists would begin to flip the script, asking less about conversion of the indigenous and more about conversion of the Church itself.

### **On Liberation Theology**

As broadly understood, Liberation Theology emerged as a powerful force for social change in Latin America in the late 1960s, responding to the changes in the Catholic Church put forth at the Second Vatican Council, as well as to the revolutionary and reformist currents in Latin America that sought to transform the unequal relationships of power, domination, and dependency. Drawing upon a combination of scriptural reflection and Marxist social sciences, Liberation Theology most often focused on class and class struggle, subsuming questions of gender, race, and ethnicity to analyses of the social sins of inequality and exploitation.<sup>26</sup>

Early Liberation Theology seemed to assume a utopian future that brought the poor and the oppressed into an egalitarian, socialist modernity. The final document from the Latin American Bishops 1968 meeting in Medellín, heavily influenced by the liberationist advisors to the bishops, while calling for a renewed commitment to the indigenous, spoke of the need to correct the backwardness of the marginalized indigenous peoples of Latin America: "They should be liberated from their prejudices and

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 2.

<sup>26</sup> For broad overviews of the theological literature that comprised liberation theology, see Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987); Paul Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy or Revolution?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).



superstitions, from their obsessions and inhibitions, from their fanaticism, from their fatalistic sense, from their timid incomprehension of the world in which they live, from their trust and their passivity."<sup>27</sup> Similar to early Mexican educational proposals that Latin America's indigenous citizens required elite guidance toward modernization and assimilation, early liberationist proposals for collective action also imagined that the indigenous required proper education and guidance to bring them into a religious modernity.<sup>28</sup> By the late 1970s and early 1980s, a new offshoot of Liberation Theology had begun to emerge: *teología india*, or Indigenous Theology.

Along with Feminist Theology and Black Theology, Indigenous Theology critiqued Liberation Theology for its failure to incorporate the realities of alternate identities that could not be subsumed solely under a socio-economic class analysis.<sup>29</sup> Yet similar to Liberation Theology, the nascent Indigenous Theology proposed a dialectical praxis in which concrete indigenous experience and culture would inform theological development, which in turn would further assist in developing locally appropriate pastoral programs, what would be called *pastoral indígena*, or indigenous ministry.

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<sup>27</sup> CELAM, *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council* (Bogotá: Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, 1970), section IV, "Education," paragraph 3. On the involvement of liberationist advisors to the bishops, see Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, Chapter 7.

<sup>28</sup> On twentieth century manifestations of these judgments, and the assimilationist policies of the state, resisted and shaped as they became by indigenous peoples themselves see Alexander Dawson, *Indian and Nation in Revolutionary Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2004); Mary Kay Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution: Teachers, Peasants, and Schools in Mexico, 1930-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997); Gema Kloppe-Santamaría, *In the Vortex of Violence: Lynching, Extralegal Justice, and the State in Post-revolutionary Mexico* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2020).

<sup>29</sup> Among other essays on ethnic, gender, and race-based theologies as critiques and expansions upon Liberation Theology in the following volumes, see in particular, Juanita Vásquez, Manuel Amboya, and Gregorio Vásquez, "Indigenous Mobilization and the Theology of Liberation," in *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities: Papers from the International Ecumenical Congress of Theology, February 20-March 2, 1980, São Paulo, Brazil*, eds. Sergio Torres and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1981); and for earlier iterations of similar critiques, Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, eds., *Theology in the Americas* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976).

Within this methodological model, Indigenous Theology argued for a "concrete and integral theology" that used as its starting point indigenous religious practices, cultural traditions, and contemporary realities.<sup>30</sup> As such, Indigenous Theology often bore little resemblance to classical Thomist theology, but instead sought to build bridges between indigenous religiosity, its roots prior to the conquest, and contemporary Catholic engagement with indigenous peoples.<sup>31</sup> The theology varied widely across the continent, drawing from specific ethnic heritages. Nahuatl theology differed from Maya theology, which differed from Quechua theology, and so forth. The theologies often drew upon a combination of locally articulated religious practices and the surviving precolonial and colonial resources, such as Fray Sahuaguan's codex, documenting indigenous cultural and religious belief.<sup>32</sup>

In other words, the adherents of Indigenous Theology offered an unprecedented openness of Church agents towards the indigenous cultural and religious practices that had long been maligned by both Church and state elites. Rather than seek the assimilation of the indigenous into a Western Catholicism, practitioners of Indigenous Theology argued for an *iglesia autoctona* (autochthonous Church), in which the question was not how to catholicize the indigenous, but how to indigenize Catholicism.<sup>33</sup> And, it is no accident that Indigenous Theology, as a body of work systematizing existing indigenous

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<sup>30</sup> Eleazar López Hernández, "Prólogo: Teología India Hoy," in *Teología India: Primer Encuentro Taller Latinoamericano, México*, ed. CENAMI (México, CDMX: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, 1991). For the emergence of Black Theology in the United States as a dialogue with Latin American Liberation Theology, see Calles Barger, *The World Come of Age*.

<sup>31</sup> Eleazar López Hernández, "La teología india en la matriz latinoamericano," paper prepared from CENAMI, 2009.

<sup>32</sup> On the Maya, see Thomas Hart, *The Ancient Spirituality of the Modern Maya* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> For the experience in Chiapas, see Jean Meyer, Federico Anaya Gallardo, and Julio Río, *Samuel Ruiz en San Cristóbal, 1960-2000* (México, CDMX: Tusquets Editores, 2000), particularly Chapter 4.

ministry, emerged in the late 1980s and into the 1990s at the same moment that indigenous rights movements were demanding collective rights, autonomy, and self-governance.<sup>34</sup>

Indigenous Theology and its liberationist *pastoral indígena* both emerged from the intersection between the global intellectual debates on Liberation Theology and the concrete experiences on the ground of men and women religious working in indigenous communities. However, focusing on the ground-level interactions, this dissertation rarely discusses the theological and intellectual body of work that makes up Liberation Theology and its theological offshoots. Rather, I am far more concerned with the problem that Jennifer Scheper-Hughes noted over a decade ago when she wrote that the "the grassroots origins of liberation theology have yet to be thoroughly understood."<sup>35</sup> And, I argue, the grassroots origins are to be found in the everyday work of Catholics, some of them indigenous, who imagined that the Church could provide answers to and support for the problems that faced Mexico's twentieth century.

### **Historiography**

As this project deals primarily with the Church as an institution, one that was riven by competition and ideological diversity, its largest contributions are in the realm of religious history. In doing so, I engage in a double displacement, one conceptual and ideological and the other geographic. In the first, I challenge a historiographical trend of focus on the conservative elements of Mexico's Catholic Church and Mexican

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<sup>34</sup> López Hernández, "La teología india en la matriz latinoamericano."

<sup>35</sup> Jennifer Scheper-Hughes, "The Catholic Church and Social Revolutionaries," in *Religion and Society in Latin America: Interpretive Essays from Conquest to Present*, eds. Lee Peynak and Walter Petry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 250.

Catholicism to demonstrate the depth of ideological disagreement and struggle within the institution as well as the ways in which progressives, always the minority, shaped the Church. In the second, I redirect the geographical focus of analysis on Mexican Liberation Theology away from Chiapas and Bishop Samuel Ruiz and toward a regional collaborative focus centered in Tehuacán, Puebla. In doing so, I account for the impact of popular religiosity on Mexico's liberationists, an element that has not yet been fully incorporated into histories of Liberation Theology in Mexico even as such analysis has been a mainstay of religious history in the early twentieth century. Beyond Mexican religious history, this project also speaks to the broader scope of Mexico's twentieth century, the history of Liberation Theology in Latin America, and to the emergence of multiculturalism in the neoliberal era.

*Writing Catholic Histories into Mexico's Late Twentieth Century*

Matthew Butler recently observed that "the history of the Church in Mexico after 1940 remains significantly to be written."<sup>36</sup> I count myself as part of a cohort of scholars engaging in groundbreaking research on the Catholic Church after the Cárdenas administration (1934-1940), particularly regarding the years after the Second Vatican

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<sup>36</sup> Matthew Butler, "Montezuma's Children: Seminary Exiles and the Transformation of Catholicism in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1937-1965," *Catholic Southwest: A Journal of History and Culture* (forthcoming).

Council (1962-65).<sup>37</sup> This trend is not unique to Mexico.<sup>38</sup> The election of Pope Francis in 2013 has been, I believe, an instigator of the reevaluation of the Latin American Catholic Church in the era after Vatican II.<sup>39</sup> The elevation of a Latin American bishop, one whose humility stands out even as he brushes off association with Liberation Theology, marked a distinct change in the Vatican.<sup>40</sup> After two successive conservative papacies, it remains to be seen just exactly how far Pope Francis will go in reforming a Church that had walked back many of the advances that emerged from the Second Vatican Council. Pope Francis has embraced some signal issues of the contemporary moment, such as climate change, but he may in fact be more conservative than many progressive Catholics would like to admit.

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<sup>37</sup> See Bradley Wright, "The Counternarratives of Doña Lucha: Popular Politics, Democracy, and Citizenship on the Peripheries of Guadalajara, Mexico, 1965-1994," (PhD dissertation, Middle Tennessee University, 2020); Saúl Espino Armendáriz, "Feminismo católico en México: la historia del CIDHAL y sus redes transnacionales (c. 1960-1990)" (PhD dissertation, El Colegio de México, 2019); David Yee, "Shantytown Mexico: The Democratic Opening in Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl, 1969–1976," *The Americas* 78, no. 1 (January 2021).

I am also particularly excited to see the forthcoming work that includes dissertations from Jorge Puma at Notre Dame and Madeleine Olsen at University of Texas, Austin, as well as Jaime Pensado, "The Silencing of Rebellious Priests in Cold War Mexico: The Case of Rodolfo Escamilla García," *The Americas* (forthcoming).

<sup>38</sup> Christian Büschges, Andrea Müller, and Noah Oehri, eds., *Liberation Theology and the Others: Contextualizing Catholic Activism in 20th Century Latin America* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021); Matthew Peter Casey, "The Religion Question: How Christians Shaped Society During Peru's Long Cold War," (PhD dissertation, UC Davis, 2018); Theresa Keeley, *Reagan's Gun-Toting Nuns: The Catholic Conflict over Cold War Human Rights Policy in Central America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2020); Robert Sierakowski, *Sandinistas: A Moral History* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019); Susan Fitzpatrick-Behrens, *The Maryknoll Catholic Mission in Peru, 1943-1989: Transnational Faith and Transformation* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012); Bonar Hernández Sandoval, *Guatemala's Catholic Revolution: A History of Religious and Social Reform, 1920-1968* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018).

<sup>39</sup> Kathleen Sprows Cummings, Timothy Matovina, and Robert Orsi, eds., *Catholics in the Vatican II Era: Local Histories of a Global Event* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>40</sup> "Liberation theology finds new welcome in Pope Francis' Vatican" *National Catholic Reporter*, September 10, 2013. Pope Francis, like Samuel Ruiz, speaks the language of Liberation Theology while refusing the label. Conservatives have been upset that the Pope, early in his papacy, met with Gustavo Gutiérrez, the Peruvian liberation theologian. And Pope Francis has done other symbolic gestures, such as presiding over a ceremony at the tomb of Bishop Samuel Ruiz in Chiapas.

Emerging research is helping to illuminate the contradictions of a Church that housed both elements that supported the military dictatorships and others that vocally and forcefully fought for human rights and accompanied victims of state violence. The same Church witnessed both the flowering of Liberation Theology and its condemnation within a span of two decades.<sup>41</sup> New research, not only building upon the solid understandings of multiple Catholicisms, and conflicts between Church, state, and Catholic actors in early twentieth-century Mexico, but also reassessing the long-term reverberations of Liberation Theology, is helping rewrite both the place of religion in Mexico's twentieth century and the initial assessments on Liberation Theology in the Americas.

In Mexico, religious history in the twentieth century has predominantly focused on the immediate aftermath of the Mexican Revolution and the armed Catholic resistance (the Cristero Wars) to the post-revolutionary regime that roiled the late 1920s and into the 1930s, until the Church and President Cárdenas negotiated a *modus vivendi* in 1938. It has followed an overarching trajectory that understands the role of the Church in Mexican society to have transformed from intersection of Church and governance in the colonial period, to conflict between religion and the secular state in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, albeit conflict that forced adjustments in ruling hegemony.<sup>42</sup> Yet, this

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<sup>41</sup> Stephen Andes and Julia Young, "Toward a New History of Catholic Activism in Latin America," introduction to *Local Church, Global Church: Catholic Activism in Latin America from Rerum Novarum to Vatican II* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), xii.

<sup>42</sup> On colonial Catholicism, see Cornelius Conover, *Pious Imperialism: Spanish Rule and the Cult of Saints in Mexico City* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2019); Jessica Delgado, *Laywomen and the Making of Colonial Catholicism in New Spain, 1630-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Nancy Farriss, *Tongues of Fire: Language and Evangelization in Colonial Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); Nora E. Jaffary, *False Mystics: Deviancy and Orthodoxy in Colonial Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004); David Tavárez, *The Invisible War: Indigenous Devotions, Discipline and Dissent in Colonial Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); William Taylor, *Theatre of a Thousand Wonders: A History of Miraculous Images and Shrines in New Spain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), Pamela Voekel, *Alone Before God*.

has largely overlooked the ways in which elements of the Church and state found space for common projects in the twentieth century, primarily around the intersecting rhetorics of postrevolutionary social justice and Catholic social doctrine.

In one of the first revisionist volumes on the Cristero conflict, Jean Meyer argued that, on the verge of the Cristero Wars, Rome and a number of the Mexican bishops were prepared to bargain with the post-revolutionary regime. But it was the common people, expressing discontent over agrarianism, government incursion, and the anticlerical persecution of the post-revolutionary government who answered with arms.<sup>43</sup> Meyer's analysis mirrors the revisionist literature of the era, in that he portrayed the resolution of the Cristero Wars as a product of elite negotiations to mollify and crush popular rebellion. But his emphasis on popular mobilization and the ways in which the Church, as an institution, lacked control over the masses of Mexican Catholics, paved the way for subsequent histories that carefully probed the interstitial spaces between popular and institutional Catholicisms in the revolutionary and immediate post-revolutionary eras.<sup>44</sup>

The postrevisionist cultural turn did much to enhance our understanding of how everyday Catholics, inspired by their faith, approached, resisted, accommodated, and

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On the Porfirian period, see Paul Vanderwood, *The Power of God Against the Guns of Government: Religious Upheaval in Mexico at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Benjamin Smith, *The Roots of Conservatism in Mexico: Catholicism, Society, and Politics in the Mixteca Baja, 1750-1962* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012); Pablo Mijangos y González, *The Lawyer of the Church: Bishop Clemente de Jesús Munguía and the Clerical Response to La Reforma* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015).

<sup>43</sup> Jean Meyer, *The Cristero Rebellion: The Mexican People Between Church and State, 1926-1929* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). For a historiographical treatment of this era of religious history, and as it transitioned to the post-revisionist cultural history literature, see Adrian Bantjes, "Religion and the Mexican Revolution: Toward a New Historiography," ed. Martin Austin Nesvig *Religious Culture in Modern Mexico* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 231-233.

<sup>44</sup> Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire: Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán Peasants, and the Redemption of the Mexican Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) Purnell, *Popular Movements and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico: The Agraristas and Cristeros of Michoacán* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

shaped the post-Revolutionary regime. Much of the earliest postrevisionist work on the Cristero Wars focused on Michoacan and Jalisco, and for good reason, as that was where conflict was the heaviest.<sup>45</sup> Mirroring the broader trend in twentieth-century Mexican history scholarship, scholars of religious history began to question religious identity as a predictor for secular political action, and inserted questions of gender, race, ethnicity, and identity to show that grassroots negotiation between subalterns and the state was fundamental to crafting hegemony, sometimes in ways that transcended national borders.<sup>46</sup>

As scholars stepped into post-1940 religious history, the first cohort consisted of a significant block of liberationist clergy who began to explore the institutional history of the Catholic Church.<sup>47</sup> As Liberation Theology encouraged theologians to borrow social science methodology, the associated scholars and clergy came together at the behest of Enrique Dussel to found the the Commission for the Study of the History of the Church in Latin America (Comisión para el Estudio de la Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina, CEHILA). According to Dussel, the new approach to the history of Catholic Church was meant to be a move away from the tradition of papal histories and theological histories in an attempt to formulating an institutional history that "can be meaningfully described by discovering its interaction as a community in history with the

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<sup>45</sup> See Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire*; Purnell, *Popular Movements and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico*.

<sup>46</sup> Butler, *Popular Piety*; Kristina Boylan, "Gendering the Faith;" Schell, *Teaching the Children of the Revolution*; Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation*; Julia Young, *Mexican Exodus: Emigrants, Exiles, and Refugees of the Cristero War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Andes, *The Vatican and Catholic Activism in Mexico and Chile*; Jennifer Schepher-Hughes, *Biography of a Mexican Crucifix: Lived Religion and Local Faith from the Conquest to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> See Lisa M. Edwards, *Roman Virtues: The Education of Latin American Clergy in Rome, 1858-1962* (New York: Peter Lang, 2011), Chapter 5 in particular.



overall structure of society."<sup>48</sup> Methodologically speaking, this meant that the Church historians, like their peer revisionist historians, were using marxist social sciences to interrogate the relationship between the Church and secular society, often critiquing their own institution and highlighting the Church's role in perpetuating class inequalities.<sup>49</sup>

As early scholars began to insert the liberationist movement into the history of the Church in Latin America, interpretations ranged from Roberto Blancarte's moderate view of a Church "gradually giving way to a new generation of church leaders for whom temporal matters attained new significance," to histories that sought to celebrate the liberationists as throwing off the chains of conservative leadership to make peaceful revolution.<sup>50</sup> However, if these works, particularly those of the CEHILA cohort, questioned the legitimacy of the institutional hierarchy in favor of the liberationist movement, they also largely suffered from the methodological limitations of the broader revisionist histories. That is to say that they disregarded questions of popular religiosity in favor of highlighting the progressive currents within the institutional Church. In other words, they did not fully comprehend the variations in popular religiosity and how it interacted with a generation of activist clergy.

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<sup>48</sup> Enrique Dussel, "General Introduction," introduction to *The Church in Latin America, 1492-1992* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992), 1-2.

<sup>49</sup> See Luis del Valle, "Teología de la Liberación en México," in *El pensamiento social de los católicos mexicanos*, ed. Roberto Blancarte (México, CDMX: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1996); Enrique Dussel, *De Medellín a Puebla: Una década de sangre y esperanza (1968-1979)* (México, Edicol: Centro de Estudios Ecueménicos, 1979); Enrique Dussel, *Los últimos 50 años (1930-1985) en la historia de la Iglesia en América Latina* (Santa Fé de Bogotá: Indo-American Press, 1986); Enrique Dussel, *Teología de la liberación: Un panorama de su desarrollo* (México, CDMX: Potrerillos Editores, 1995); María Alicia Puente Lutteroth, ed., *Hacia una historia mínima de la Iglesia en México* (México, CDMX: Jus-CEHILA, 1993).

<sup>50</sup> Roberto Blancarte, "Intransigence, Anticommunism, and Reconciliation," in *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968*, eds. Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 83. See also Roberto Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia católica en México* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992); Miguel Concha Malo et al., *La participación de los cristianos en el proceso popular de liberación en México* (México, CDMX: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1986). Roderic A. Camp, *Crossing Swords: Politics and Religion in Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

With the post-revisionist cultural turn in the 1990s, much of the history of Liberation Theology and progressive Catholicism remained too recent for historical research. And so, it fell to anthropology and sociology to probe the contours of progressive religious movements.<sup>51</sup> As religious archives have gradually opened to cover the late-twentieth century, much of the recent work has focused on conservative religious movements, Catholic and Evangelical, reflecting a shift in Latin American History that takes seriously the multiple conservatisms in the Americas.<sup>52</sup> Today's Catholic Church in Mexico is indeed quite conservative, but, as I show in this project by tracing the ways in which ideological competitors in the Church hierarchy vied over how to engage with

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<sup>51</sup> Valerie Ann McNabb and Martha R. Ross, "Liberation or Theology? Ecclesial Base Communities in Oaxaca, Mexico," *Journal of Church and State* 35, no. 4 (Autumn 1993); Enrique Marroquín, *El conflicto religioso: Oaxaca, 1976-1992* (México, CDMX: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2007); Norget, *Days of Death, Days of Life*; Kristin Norget, "The Politics of 'Liberation': The Popular Church, Indigenous Theology and Grassroots Mobilization in Oaxaca, Mexico," *Latin American Perspectives* 24, no. 5 (1997): 96-127; Guillermo Trejo, *Popular Movements in Autocracies: Religion, Repression, and Indigenous Collective Action in Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Meyer, Gallardo, and Ríos, *Samuel Ruiz in San Cristóbal*; Victor Gabriel Muro, *Iglesia y movimientos sociales en México, 1972-1987: Los casos de Ciudad Juárez y el Istmo de Tehuantepec* (Puebla: Red Nacional de Investigación Urbana, El Colegio de Michoacán, 1994); Carolina Rivera Farfán, María del Carmen García Aguilar, Miguel Lisbona Guillén, Irene Sánchez Franco, eds., *Diversidad religiosa y conflicto en Chiapas: Intereses, utopías y realidades* (México, CDMX: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2011); Paja Faudree, *Singing for the Dead: The Politics of Indigenous Revival in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>52</sup> Erika Pani, ed., *Conservadurismo y derechas en la historia de México* (México, CDMX: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2009); Jaime Pensado, "El Movimiento Estudiantil Profesional (MEP): una mirada a la radicalización de la juventud católica mexicana durante la Guerra Fría," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 31, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 156-192; Jaime Pensado, "To Assault with the Truth': The Revitalization of Conservative Militancy in Mexico During the 1960s," in "Latin America in the Global Sixties," special issue, *The Americas* 70, no. 3 (January 2014): 489-521; Herrán Ávila, "The Other 'New Man,'" Kathleen McIntyre, *Protestantism and State Formation in Post-Revolutionary Oaxaca* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2019); Daniel Ramírez, *Migrating Faith: Pentecostalism in the United States and Mexico in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015). Julia Young has a forthcoming project on *sinarquismo*, Mexican ultraconservative Catholics in the midcentury, and Nathan Ellstrand's forthcoming dissertation at Loyola University Chicago looks at *sinarquista* projects in the United States. See also, Benjamin Cowan, *Moral Majorities Across the Americas*.

One of the factions of conservative Catholicism that merits greater scholarly investigation is that of the Legionaries of Christ (Legionarios de Cristo), their vast and growing network of educational institutions (Universidad Anáhuac), and their founder Marcial Maciel and the numerous allegations of sexual abuse leveled against him. *La Jornada* and *Proceso* have been two of the primary outlets in Mexico who have done in-depth reporting on Maciel and sexual abuse. In English, see Jason Berry and Gerald Renner, *Vows of Silence: The Abuse of Power in the Papacy of John Paul II* (New York: Free Press, 2014).

Mexico's indigenous peoples, that conservative hegemony was never preordained. The work on Catholic progressives remains incomplete. We have not yet explored the contingencies of Mexican religious history and the moments where progressives shaped the Church, regionally and nationally, in their image.

Histories of progressive Catholicism in the late twentieth century have a wonderful base to build upon, principally the above-cited revisionist histories and the anthropological and sociological examinations of Liberation Theology and progressive religious movements in Mexico. However, if the ethnographic methods have been effective in exploring the intricacies of local religious practice and their interactions with progressive Catholic clergy, these early publications had not yet tackled the contours of Liberation Theology on the ground in the greater context of socio-economic transformation in Mexico. Liberation Theology flourished in the margins, the informal settlements, the working class neighborhoods of Latin America. It was a movement, as Ivan Petrella noted, in the "areas of social abandonment," particularly connected to the expansion of the urban peripheries.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, scholars of Liberation Theology have predominantly focused on the urban manifestations, the ways in which activist clergy engaged with base communities, agitated for housing and public services, encouraged independent unionism, and demanded respect for human rights.<sup>54</sup>

In Mexico, the predominant understandings of Liberation Theology revolve around the "red bishops," Sergio Méndez Arceo and Samuel Ruiz García of Cuernavaca

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<sup>53</sup> Ivan Petrella, "Globalising Liberation Theology: The American Context, and Coda," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Christopher Rowland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>54</sup> Saúl Espino Armendáriz, "Historiography of Contemporary Catholicism in Mexico: Reflections from Mexico," paper presented at *The Social and Cultural History of Mexican Catholicism: A Symposium on the State of the Field*, Duke University, Durham, October 18, 2019.

and San Cristóbal de las Casas and their respective outspoken advocacy, respectively, on behalf of student activists and political prisoners, and the Chiapaneco indigenous and Guatemalan refugees.<sup>55</sup> As a result, we are only beginning to shift away from the prominent figures to examine the social and cultural histories of Catholicism on the margins.<sup>56</sup> Outside the centers of power and intellectual and theological production, we are just starting to see the patchwork of Catholic progressivism and liberationism that took multiple forms across Mexico's regional diversity.<sup>57</sup> And so, in the second displacement, I move the geographic focus of liberationism in Mexico away from Ruiz's Chiapas and into Tehuacán, Puebla. In Tehuacán, Samuel Ruiz worked in conjunction with his fellow bishops of his pastoral region, the Pacific South Region, to build a regional seminary (Seminario Regional del Sureste, SERESURE) where they sought to train future priests to work in their regional reality: poor, marginalized, indigenous, and historically underserved by the Church. I argue that, while not taking away from the work of Samuel Ruiz in his diocese, that southern Mexico became a laboratory for indigenous liberationism because of the regional networks of collaboration centered around SERESURE. While this work has built from the understood terrain of liberationist

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<sup>55</sup> Gutiérrez Quintanilla, *Los volcanes de Cuernavaca*; Todd Hartch, *The Prophet of Cuernavaca: Ivan Illich and the Crisis of the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Meyer, Gallardo, and Ríos, *Samuel Ruiz en San Cristóbal*; Shannon Mattiace, *To See with Two Eyes: Peasant Activism and Indian Autonomy in Chiapas, Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2003); Neil Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion: The Struggle for Land and Democracy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Gary MacEoin, *The People's Church: Bishop Samuel Ruiz of Mexico and Why He Matters* (New York: Crossroad, 1996); Silvia Marcos, "Teología India: la presencia de Dios en las culturas. Entrevista con Don Samuel Ruiz," in *Chiapas: El Factor Religioso: Un estudio multidisciplinario de las guerras santas de fin de milenio*, eds. Elio Masferrer et al. (México, CDMX: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas: Instituto Nacional Indigenista, 1998), 33–65; Ruth Chojnacki, *Indigenous Apostles: Maya Catholic Catechists Working the Word in Highland Chiapas* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

<sup>56</sup> Saúl Espino Armendáriz, "Historiography of Contemporary Catholicism in Mexico."

<sup>57</sup> Bradley Wright, "The Counternarratives of Doña Lucha;" Saúl Espino Armendáriz, "Feminismo católico en México"

activism (the CEBs, independent unionism, human rights), my project writes in elements of indigeneity and indigenous religiosity to the liberationist field to show the ways in which indigenous communities shaped the liberationist activism of the Church in the region.

But how does this particular history of progressive Catholicism build upon and add to our understanding of Mexico's twentieth century? In recent years, two emerging historiographical camps in modern Mexican history have been squaring off over how to interpret the strength of the post-Revolutionary state.<sup>58</sup> While these two camps have grown out of the strengths of the revisionist histories of the 1970s and 1980s and the post-revisionist cultural turn of the 1990s, neither body has fully incorporated the Catholic Church and Mexican Catholics, in all of their diversity, as critical elements of civil society in late twentieth-century Mexico.<sup>59</sup>

On one side is the camp that, building upon Alan Knight's 2002 essay assessing the "weight of the state," concludes that the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional), the single party that governed Mexico until democratization in 2000, was "weak and

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<sup>58</sup> Benjamin Smith, *The Mexican Press and Civil Society, 1940-1976: Stories from the Newsroom, Stories from the Street* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 279.

<sup>59</sup> Briefly, the classic revisionist works include Adolfo Gilly, *Interpretaciones de la revolución mexicana*, (México, CDMX: Universidad Autónoma de México, 1979); Roger Bartra, *Estructura agraria y clases sociales* (México, CDMX: Ediciones Era, 1976); Arturo Warman, *"We Come to Object": The Peasants of Morelos and the National State* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Nora Hamilton, *The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); Luís González y González, *San José de Gracia: Mexican Village in Transition*, trans. John Upton (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974).

And illustrative of the post-revisionist cultural turn are, for secular history, Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*; Gilbert Joseph and Daniel Nugents, eds., *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994); Dawson, *Indian and Nation*. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen Lewis, eds., *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

diffuse.”<sup>60</sup> In other words, the Mexican state, in this rendering, rarely had the power to directly enforce its dictates, relying instead on cooptation, patronage, economic pressure, local strongmen (and women!), and, in Smith’s case, a mostly loyal media that was still willing to test and shape the boundaries of the state.<sup>61</sup> Thus, even as the Mexican state was willing at times to employ violence, the inner workings of power, rife with competition, corruption, and sometimes incompetence, allowed for civil society to force the state to accede to citizen pressure.<sup>62</sup>

On the other side of the observed divide are those who study state violence and portray the Mexican state as a repressive, centralized apparatus. The contours are still taking shape, such as when, how, and who drove the PRI’s transformation into a “harder” regime. This literature sees a Mexico in the 1960s and “subversive 70s” that responded to social strife, economic inequality, and dissent not with the pliability of inclusion, but more often with political and military repression.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Alan Knight, “The Weight of the State in Modern Mexico,” in *Studies in the Formation of the Nation-State in Latin America*, ed. James Dunkerley (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2002), 212-53.

<sup>61</sup> Among this cohort, see, Jeffrey Rubin, *Decentering the Regime: Ethnicity, Radicalism, and Democracy in Juchitán, Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); Paul Gillingham and Benjamin Smith, eds., *Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico: 1938-1968* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Paul Gillingham, *Unrevolutionary Mexico: The Birth of a Strange Dictatorship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021); Vanessa Freije, *Citizens of Scandal: Journalism, Secrecy, and the Politics of Reckoning in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020).

<sup>62</sup> See also Thomas Rath, *The Myths of Demilitarization in Postrevolutionary Mexico, 1920-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013); Benjamin Smith, *Pistoleros and Popular Movements: The Politics of State Formation in Postrevolutionary Oaxaca* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009); Paul Gillingham, *Cuauhtemoc’s Bones: Forging National Identity in Modern Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011).

<sup>63</sup> Jaime Pensado and Enrique Ochoa, eds., *México Beyond 1968: Revolutionaries, Radicals, and Repression during the Global Sixties and Subversive Seventies* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018). In addition, see Gladys McCormick, *The Logic of Compromise in Mexico: How the Countryside was Key to the Emergence of Authoritarianism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016); Robert Alegre, *Railroad Radicals in Cold War Mexico: Gender, Class, and Memory* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014); Alexander Aviña, *Specters of Revolution: Peasant Guerrillas in the Cold War Mexican Countryside* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Sandra C. Mendiola García, *Street Democracy: Vendors, Violence, and Public Space in Late Twentieth-century Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017); Aaron Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico, 1938-1954* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010); Jaime Pensado, *Rebel Mexico: Student*

At the risk of stating the obvious, the Catholic Church complicates these readings of the Mexican state. On one hand, the *modus vivendi* negotiated between the Church and the Cárdenas administration, the recurring moments of collaboration between the two institutions, and sporadic instances of Church challenge to state authority, lend weight to the interpretation of the weak state, forced into negotiation by persistent armed Catholic resistance and the durable influence of the Church in society. On the other hand, the state's willingness to employ violence, carceral and physical, against liberationists, sometimes with the tacit support of conservative anti-communist Catholics, displayed distinct limits on the state's tolerance for dissent from progressive Catholics that paralleled violence visited upon unionists, campesinos, and others who challenged the PRI.<sup>64</sup> The breadth and influence of the Church, even with constitutional proscriptions on its involvement in public politics, rendered it unlike other civil constituencies that the state negotiated with, co-opted, and/or repressed. Yet, the only institution that even potentially rivaled the power of the state remains largely absent from the greater body of literature on Mexico's late twentieth century.

I do not think that this is primarily an issue of a scholarly blind-spot, although perceptions of the Church's persistent conservatism may be an influence. The post-revisionists have done excellent work incorporating religion and religious questions into

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*Unrest and Authoritarian Political Culture During the Long Sixties* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); Tanalis Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax-Priista, 1940–1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

There is a growing literature on Mexico as an integral actor in the global Cold War. See Renata Keller, *Mexico's Cold War: Cuba, the United States, and the Legacy of the Mexican Revolution* (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Zolov, *Last Good Neighbor: Mexico in the Global Sixties* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020); Christy Thornton, *Revolution in Development: Mexico and the Governance of the Global Economy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021).

<sup>64</sup> "Carta del Movimiento Revolucionario Social Cristiano de México, Cárcel de Lecumberri, D.F., Junio 29 de 1968," AHAM, Base DM, c. 27, exp. 56; Jaime Pensado, "The Silencing of Rebellious Priests in Cold War Mexico

the histories of the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>65</sup> However, the Catholic Church, as a private institution, has not legally been subject to the growing, if contested, transparency governing Mexico's public archives.<sup>66</sup> Further, the very real differences in resources between dioceses mean that some Catholic archives, such as the wonderfully comprehensive, staffed, and organized Archivo Histórico del Arzobispado de México, are far more open than other dioceses without the resources to staff an archivist.

Notwithstanding some excellent recent work, such as Vanessa Freije's incorporation of the Catholic Church's participation in anti-electoral fraud agitation in 1986 Chihuahua, or Shane Dillingham's repeated acknowledgment of Oaxacan liberationists as allies to indigenous activism in southern Mexico, there remain significant holes in the historiography where Catholics were active participants and agents in the

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<sup>65</sup> Marjorie Becker, *Setting the Virgin on Fire*; Jennie Purnell, *Popular Movements and State Formation in Revolutionary Mexico*; Matthew Butler, *Popular Piety and Political Identity in Mexico's Cristero Rebellion: Michoacan, 1927-1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Christopher Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos: Politics, Identity, and Agrarian Struggle in Postrevolutionary Michoacán, 1920-1935* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); Kristina Boylan, "Gendering the Faith and Altering the Nation: Mexican Catholic Women's Activism, 1917-1940," in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, eds. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Patience Schell, *Teaching the Children of the Revolution: Church and State Education in Mexico City, 1917-1926* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003). Benjamin Smith, *The Roots of Conservatism in Mexico*. See also David Espinosa, *Jesuit Student Groups, the Universidad Iberoamericana, and Political Resistance in Mexico, 1913-1979* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2014); Ben Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press 2013). Stephen Andes, *The Vatican and Catholic Activism in Mexico and Chile: The Politics of Transnational Catholicism, 1920-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Stephen Andes, *The Mysterious Sofia: A Catholic Woman's Story through a Century of Change* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2019).

<sup>66</sup> The twenty-first century has been a bit of a roller coaster for archival transparency in Mexico. After opening the security archives to researchers in 2002, the Peña Nieto administration (2012-2018) re-restricted access to the document collections. The López Obrador administration has ordered greater access to the collections of security documents, reportedly also to include the documents of the Mexico's security agency CISEN (Centro de Investigación y Seguridad Nacional), which emerged from the ashes of the DFS (Dirección Federal de Seguridad) in 1989. See Andrew Paxman, "Can Mexico's National Archive Restore its Reputation?," *LASA Forum* 51, no. 2 (April 2020): 89-93. See also the special issue edited by Tanalís Padilla and Louise Walker, eds., "Dossier: Spy Reports: Content, Methodology, and Historiography in Mexico's Secret Police Archive," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 19, no. 1 (July 2013): 1-103.



twentieth century's biggest questions.<sup>67</sup> As such, this dissertation writes religion, and religious activism, into the growing body of recent literature on *indigenismo*, Mexico's indigenous peoples, and developmentalism. I show that the Church and its agents were grappling with the same questions of rural development and assimilation as the *indigenista* intellectuals and policy makers that Karin Roseblatt examines, and occasionally collaborating with the state's rural development initiatives.<sup>68</sup> Catholics often had plenty to say, if not always constructive, in the developmental questions of the twentieth century that environmental historians have been fruitfully probing.<sup>69</sup> The creation of the National Indigenist Institute (*Instituto Nacional Indigenista*, INI) and its forays into Chiapas, sparked, I demonstrate, concerted (and relatively conservative) action by the Mexican Catholic Church that feared that they would lose indigenous bodies and souls to state initiatives.<sup>70</sup>

I show how, later in the twentieth century, the Church also became far more open to indigenous voices and perspectives that guided institutional priorities and programming, again paralleling many of the changes in state *indigenismo*, particularly during the Echeverría administration (1970-76).<sup>71</sup> In other words, my point here is that

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<sup>67</sup> Freije, *Citizens of Scandal*, Chapter 6; Alan Shane Dillingham, *Oaxaca Resurgent: Indigeneity, Development, and Inequality in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021).

<sup>68</sup> Karin Roseblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race in Mexico and the United States, 1910-1950* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Boyer, *Political Landscapes: Forests, Conservation, and Community in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015); Emily Wakild, *Revolutionary Parks: Conservation, Social Justice, and Mexico's National Parks, 1910-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011); Mikael Wolfe, *Watering the Revolution: An Environmental and Technological History of Agrarian Reform in Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

<sup>70</sup> See Stephen Lewis, *Rethinking Mexican Indigenismo: The INI's Coordinating Center Inhighland Chiapas and the Fate of a Utopian Project* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2018).

<sup>71</sup> See Dillingham, *Oaxaca Resurgent*; Maria Muñoz, *Stand up and Fight: Participatory Indigenismo, Populism, and Mobilization in Mexico, 1970-1984*. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016); Dawson, *Indian and Nation*; Alexander Dawson, *The Peyote Effect: From the Inquisition to the War on Drugs* (Oakland: University of California, 2018); Joshua Walker, "Faucets and Fertilizers: Interpreting

the Church and Catholic activists have been far more involved in the biggest questions of Mexico's twentieth century than constitutional proscriptions would suggest. By writing religion and religious activism into the questions of *indigenismo* and development, I show not only that the Church was not as marginalized from public life as some might believe, but also that indigenous peoples themselves drew heavily upon religious practice and cosmovision to inform everyday responses to state projects and neoliberal adjustment at the end of the Cold War.

### *Reassessing Liberation Theology in the Era of Neoliberal Multiculturalism*

The scholarship on Liberation Theology in the Americas has mirrored the ups and downs of the movement itself. In addition to the clergy-scholars of CEHILA, at the height of Liberation Theology's influence there were a bevy of popular books celebrating the movement's radical possibilities even while the conservative Vatican under Pope John Paul II was beginning to constrain liberationist action.<sup>72</sup> Into the 1990s, as liberationism had seemingly lost its sway with the end of the Cold War, marginalization by the Vatican, and the demise of the "revolutionary option," a series of scholars assessed it in ways that sought to explain its shortcomings and inabilities to overturn the conservatism of the Church or capitalism itself.<sup>73</sup> It is of little surprise that the literature's

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Technological Change in Rural Oaxaca, Mexico, 1946-1988," (PhD diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2015).

<sup>72</sup> For example, see Lernoux, *Cry of the People*; Bernice Kita, *What Prize Awaits Us: Letters from Guatemala* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988); Thomas Melville, *Through a Glass Darkly: The U.S. Holocaust in Central America* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2005); Gary MacEoin, *Unlikely Allies: The Christian-Socialist Convergence* (New York: Crossroad, 1990).

<sup>73</sup> Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*; Trejo, *Popular Movements in Autocracies*. On democratization, see Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*. Anthropological work includes John Burdick, *Looking for God in Brazil: The Progressive Catholic Church in Urban Brazil's Religious Arena* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); and Lancaster, *Thanks to God and the Revolution*.

strongest focus remained on the regions where Liberation Theology achieved the greatest public prominence, either for the widespread organization of CEBs in Brazil, for its prominent martyrs in the midst of Central America's civil wars, or for its outspoken public pronouncements against human rights abuses by military regimes.<sup>74</sup>

However, this was paired with attempts to grapple with the religious reality of spreading evangelicalism, and in the case of Brazil, why liberationism was losing ground to Pentacostal churches.<sup>75</sup> John Burdick linked the crisis in Liberation Theology in Brazil with the collapse of global socialism, implying that the developments in global politics rendered Liberation Theology's revolutionary promise unattainable. Burdick later reconsidered his pessimism that was a product of watching liberationists in Brazil turn back toward spirituality, and away from social activism, in their attempt to compete with Pentecostalism. Instead, he argued that even if Liberation Theology no longer had the public presence and power that it did in the 1970s and 80s, "the liberationist stance continues to exert significant, if not always obvious, influence over routines and ideas in three main arenas of social and political struggle."<sup>76</sup> The arenas he looked at in Brazil were the anti-racism movement, the women's movement, and MST, the landless workers movement. While other recent literature has shifted toward a focus on liberationist activism in the face of military dictatorships and in defense of human rights, Burdick's later work points toward an alternative way forward, assessing the lasting impacts that

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<sup>74</sup> Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*.

<sup>75</sup> Burdick, *Looking for God in Brazil*, 15. See also, Kevin Lewis O'Neill, *City of God: Christian Citizenship in Postwar Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

<sup>76</sup> John Burdick, *Legacies of Liberation: The Progressive Catholic Church in Brazil at the Start of a New Millennium* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 11.

Liberation Theology has had even if it never succeeded in revolutionizing socio-economic structures.<sup>77</sup>

That, I believe, is the central question today. Rather than asking how liberationism failed, the question now is how liberationism reverberated over time.<sup>78</sup> In my reassessment of liberationism in southern Mexico, as Burdick undertook in Brazil, and as Jorge Puma is working on in northern Mexico, I show how liberationist activism had long-lasting impacts not just in the region, but on the Catholic Church's embrace of indigenous religiosity in the years that followed. And in doing so, my work injects Liberation Theology and popular religion into the scholarly conversation on democratization, subaltern response, and the rise of multiculturalism in the face of neoliberal transformation.<sup>79</sup> Even as neoliberalism marked the end of revolutionary possibilities, it has been paired with a flourishing of rights, codified in national and international law, that have, in the case of this dissertation, been connected to the transformation of liberationist activism from class-based social struggle to indigenous

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<sup>77</sup> For liberationist opposition to military regimes, see Gustavo Morello, SJ, *The Catholic Church and Argentina's Dirty War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Steve Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973–1988* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Kenneth Serbin, *Secret Dialogues: Church-State Relations, Torture, and Social Justice in Authoritarian Brazil* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000). See also, on the role of lay catechists in the struggle against Guatemala's military regime, Betsy Konefal, *For Every Indio Who Falls: A History of Maya Activism in Guatemala, 1960-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2010).

<sup>78</sup> This parallels similar questions asked of secular civil society. See Pensado and Ochoa, eds., *México Beyond 1968*.

<sup>79</sup> For excellent recent literature in this vein, see Julia Paley, *Marketing Democracy: Power and Social Movements in Post-Dictatorship Chile* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Clara Han, *Life in Debt: Times of Care and Violence in Neoliberal Chile* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Edward Murphy, *For a Proper Home: Housing Rights in the Margins of Urban Chile, 1960-2010* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), J.T. Way, *The Mayan in the Mall: Globalization, Development and the Making of Modern Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), Peter Winn, ed., *Victims of the Chilean Miracle: Workers and Neoliberalism in the Pinochet Era, 1973-2002* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), Heidi Tinsman, *Buying into the Regime: Grapes and Consumption in Cold War Chile and the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014); Bryan McCann, *Hard Times in the Marvelous City: From Dictatorship to Democracy in the Favelas of Rio de Janeiro* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

rights.<sup>80</sup> In other words, I posit that one of the lasting reverberations of indigenous liberationism in Mexico has in fact been the official multiculturalism of our contemporary era.

Neoliberal multiculturalism is, however, Janus-faced. The 1980s saw significant advances in international law to protect the specific rights of native peoples, most notably elaborated in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 that recognized indigenous rights to self-determination. ILO 169 itself was a precursor to the United Nations' 2007 "Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," which further outlined the rights of indigenous peoples to "free, prior, and informed consent" on development, economic, and state projects that would have impact on native territories.<sup>81</sup> These developments in international law, still unevenly respected and enforced, were the product of vibrant indigenous rights movements that adopted and adapted the discourses and demands of human rights in the 1970s.<sup>82</sup>

Yet indigenous rights, multiculturalism, and ethnic pluralism (or the rhetorics thereof) have flourished alongside the insidious effects of neoliberal capitalism. Charles Hale identified the "racial ambivalence" of postwar Guatemala's framework for cultural rights that has failed to tackle the conditions that perpetuate vast inequalities along ethnic

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<sup>80</sup> See also, Kristin Norget, "A Cacophony of Autochthony: Representing Indigeneity in Oaxacan Popular Mobilization," *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (April 16, 2010): 116-43.

<sup>81</sup> Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous People's History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014).

<sup>82</sup> Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008); Samuel Moyn, *Human Rights and the Uses of History* (London: Verso, 2014). Samuel Moyn, one of the foremost scholars on the history of human rights, has also traced its origins to twentieth-century Catholic thought on the integrity of the human person. See, Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015).

lines.<sup>83</sup> In Mexico, Rebecca Overmyer-Velazquez examined how indigenous organizations in Guerrero adopted the language and visuals of “folkloric poverty,” acceding to official state multiculturalism and *indigenismo* to ameliorate basic poverty but isolated the indigenous organizations from broader political and socio-economic influence.<sup>84</sup> And Samuel Moyn’s most recent work probes the problematic coexistence of human rights and yawning inequalities.<sup>85</sup>

There is no question that neoliberalism as an organizing structure has been devastating for many, and particularly the indigenous peoples who have been dispossessed of land, starved of state economic support, and veritably forced into migration to seek better economic opportunity.<sup>86</sup> Yet it has also transformed societies in such a way that the outright racism and discrimination against indigenous peoples is no longer socially acceptable as it once was, even if “inclusion” is more often visual than real.<sup>87</sup> And poor and indigenous communities have, at the cost of perpetual debt, at times eagerly embraced the expanded access to consumer goods, educational opportunities, and household technologies to improve everyday life.<sup>88</sup> In other words, indigenous peoples have not merely been victims of neoliberal change, but active participants in shaping the discourses on rights, participating in the “opportunities” of the market, and continuing to demand the state respect said cultural rights and guarantee a baseline of subsistence.

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<sup>83</sup> Charles Hale, *Más que un indio: Racial Ambivalence and Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Guatemala* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2009).

<sup>84</sup> Rebecca Overmyer-Velázquez, *Folkloric Poverty: Neoliberal Multiculturalism in Mexico*. (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2010).

<sup>85</sup> Samuel Moyn, *Not Enough: Human Rights in an Unequal World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018).

<sup>86</sup> Shannon Speed, *Incarcerated Stories*; Angus Wright, *The Death of Ramón González: The Modern Agricultural Dilemma*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997); Jason De León, *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).

<sup>87</sup> J.T. Way, *The Mayan in the Mall*.

<sup>88</sup> Han, *Life in Debt*; Stephen, *Zapotec Women*.

Moving out of the predominantly secular spheres that these studies have encompassed, I demonstrate how the meeting of liberationist Church agents and indigenous communities transformed Catholic activism toward indigenous cultural resurgence and revitalization, ultimately gaining official recognition in the Vatican. In doing so, this project provides an alternative perspective on the origins of official multiculturalism. If Dillingham points to the intersection of developmentalism, New Left antiracism, and indigenous activism for education reform in Oaxaca as the origin of an official multiculturalism adopted by the Mexican state, I posit that liberationist Catholic activism in southern Mexico is a fourth locus.<sup>89</sup> In other words, reassessing the long-term reverberations of Liberation Theology and writing religion into Mexico's twentieth century, are simultaneously writing religion into the paradoxical multicultural pluralism now enshrined in national and international laws.

### Chapter Outline

The first two chapters set the stage for the remainder of the dissertation. I assess the ways in which ideological divisions within the Mexican Catholic Church constructed competing visions of how to work with the indigenous at the mid-century even as they always shared an anti-communist stance. After the dust had settled on the *crisiada* and the post-war era encouraged cautious optimism of development and prosperity, the Mexican Church turned again to the "indigenous problem."<sup>90</sup> In Chapter 1, I discuss a moderate, but modernizing faction, associated with Bishop Miguel Darío Miranda

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<sup>89</sup> Dillingham, *Oaxaca Resurgent*, 177-78.

<sup>90</sup> On the post-war years, prosperity, optimism, and developmentalism, see Stephen Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Washington, D.C.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); and Louise Walker, *Waking from the Dream: Mexico's Middle Classes after 1968* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

(Tulancingo), who embraced developmentalism and agricultural technologies as the tools to bring the indigenous into a moderate and Catholic modernity, often in collaboration with the State and state priorities. In Chapter 2, I show how a conservative and traditionalist strain within the Church, embodied by the likes of Bishop Lucio Torreblanca (Chiapas) and his ideological predecessor Bishop José de Jesús Manríquez y Zárate (Huejutla), argued vociferously that the spiritual conquest and indigenous conversion remained incomplete from the colonial era. To finish the task, Torreblanca lobbied for the creation and operation of “indigenous missions” so that the Church would fulfill its role as the natural and proper interlocutor between indigenous communities and the world.<sup>91</sup>

The third chapter moves from the national level to the regional where I demonstrate how the competing visions of work with the indigenous came together in southern Mexico. There, in the Pacific South Pastoral Region of the Church (la Región Pacífico-Sur), composed of the dioceses of Oaxaca and Chiapas, a group of bishops, inspired by previous work with the indigenous, post-Vatican II possibilities, and international Catholic developmentalism, founded a regional seminary, SERESURE, to train a generation of clergy to work with the indigenous. The region became notably more progressive with the appointment of new bishops in the 1970s. And so, placing Samuel Ruiz properly in a regional collaborative context, I show how the group of bishops constructed a liberationist indigenous ministry that increasingly invited the indigenous themselves to shape the work of the Church in the region.

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<sup>91</sup> “Letter from Archbishop Torreblanca (Durango) to the Episcopal Committee,” October 3, 1959, AHAM, Base DM, c. 75, exp. 6.



Chapter 4 chronologically parallels the prior chapter but focuses exclusively on SERESURE (1969-1990) and the ways in which the institution changed over time. In doing so, I argue that SERESURE, as an institution, space, and place that increasingly nurtured an official embrace of indigenous Catholicisms, was central to the meeting of Liberation Theology and indigenous Mexico that produced a distinct form of indigenous ministry that would reverberate in the decades after the seminary's closure.

In Chapter 5, I move to the community level case study in San Antonio Cañada, Puebla. In this historically Nahuatl municipality outside of Tehuacán and rising into the Sierra Negra, I follow Padre Tacho, a SERESURE graduate, in his first parish assignment. Drawing on oral histories from community members, I explore how, from 1980-1987, the young priest translated his liberationist education into action via the building of pastoral teams, the formation of cooperatives and bible study groups, and the increasing incorporation of Nahuatl into the liturgy. But I also show how this particular municipality, a collection of pueblos and rancherías, had its own desires to navigate a changing world of economic crisis, neoliberal structural adjustment, protestant conversion, and increased migration. And so, indigenous Mexico changed liberation theology. Rather than upending capitalism, Padre Tacho found himself in a community that yearned for greater connection to the world, better economic opportunities, an end to exploitation by middlemen that siphoned off the wealth of rural agricultural production and artisan crafts, a respect for and recognition of indigenous cultural and religious practices, an end to the discrimination and racism against the indigenous, and an end to *caciquismos* that circumscribed community political agency. Crucially, liberationist

activism adjusted accordingly, making capitalist dependencies a little more just and increasingly working toward cultural revitalization.

In 1990, the Vatican ordered the “reorientation” of SERESURE for its unacceptable heterodox approach to teaching both philosophy (Marxist social sciences) and Liberation Theology. This crackdown on, and ultimate closure of, SERESURE, the subject of Chapter 6, was part of a broader marginalization of liberationists that was orchestrated by the Vatican that included the closure of a similar seminary in Brazil, the silencing of Leonardo Boff, Cardinal Ratzinger’s notes on liberation theology, and a wave of violence against liberationists that dated back at least two decades prior. But, in Chapter 7, out of a serious golpe, I show how the networks of clergy and laity involved in indigenous Catholic ministry and activism were able to rebuild themselves in the absence of institutional support. They threw their energies into a new organization, the Network of Agents of Indigenous Ministry (EAPI), that built upon the *pastoral indigena* congresses that SERESURE had hosted annually. Further, Padre Tacho and his colleagues organized the 1992 quincentenary protest march, performing perhaps the first *misa Náhuatl* at its conclusions, giving brewing indigenous manifestations of discontent a distinctly Catholic tint. And in some cases, including that of Padre Tacho, I show that there were important connections to armed and clandestine organizations that caught Mexico by surprise with the Zapatista uprising in 1994.

### **Methodology and Sources**

This dissertation uses a combination of oral history and archival research to approach a particular story of the Mexican Church, liberationism, and indigenous Mexico. My archival sources came from both Church and state

archives. On the federal level, Mexico's National Archives (the Archivo General de la Nación) was critical for the archives of the Dirección Federal de Seguridad (DFS). Mexico's intelligence services spent considerable time spying on and reporting about the progressive Catholic Church. Many, if not most, of the documents in the DFS collection are quite straightforward: reporting on the activities of "subversive" clergy, and on the content of speeches, meetings and conferences. As such, they offer an excellent resource for recovering the contents and subjects of political and religious public discussions. However, they are also replete with assumptions, falsehoods, and what appears to be a near paranoia about the possibility of unrest fueled by religion.<sup>92</sup> But, beyond the sometime difficulty of parsing facts and fantasies, the intelligence reporting reveals the priorities and concerns of a secular state, officially anticlerical, even if rarely enforcing anticlerical provisions.

Other federal archives included the agrarian archives and the archives of the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), specifically to find interactions between the case study municipality of San Antonio Cañada and the Mexican state. The archives of the municipality and of the state of Puebla, particularly the archives of the governor's office, were fruitful for elaborating the relationship between municipality and state, often in a petitioner/benefactor relationship characteristic of the PRI's twentieth century rule.

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<sup>92</sup> See Sergio Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola: Una historia de los servicios de inteligencia en México* (México, CDMX: Raya en el Agua, 2001).

Church archives spanned all levels of the institution. The archival holdings of the Archdiocese of Mexico (Mexico City) were particularly useful for chapters 1 and 2 to show how the Mexican Church grappled with the “indigenous problem” over the decades of the mid-century. It gave the national view of how the highest representatives of the Church approached the changes within the Church and without, and only in that context then are the subsequent chapters understandable.<sup>93</sup> In Tehuacán, the diocesan archives, the SERESURE archives, and personal collections of clergy and laity allowed me to trace the pastoral developments of the Pacific-South Pastoral Region in particular and to assess how the training of clergy and catechists was fundamental to the institutionalization of liberationist *pastoral indígena*. Finally, missionary archives, including the Maryknoll Archives, the Mexican Jesuits, and the Claretian Missionaries, provided additional perspective on the intersection of men and women religious and indigenous Mexico.

Chapter 4, the case study of San Antonio Cañada, relies heavily on oral history interviews with Church agents, men and women religious, and community members.<sup>94</sup> Depending on the interviewee, this project relied on a mix of informal conversations about the past, often with community members in San Antonio Cañada, more structured interviews about particular experiences, mostly with the priests that studied at

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<sup>93</sup> "Boletín C.E.M.: ¿Cómo se ha aplicado el concilio?," AHAM, Base DM, c. 17, exp. 2, 1972.

<sup>94</sup> Here I draw upon a rich body of historical work that employs oral histories. See, in particular, Ron Grele, "Oral History as Evidence," in *History of Oral History: Foundations and Methodology*, ed. Thomas L. Charlton, Lois E. Myers, and Rebecca Sharpless, 43-99 (Lanham, MD: Altamira Press, 2007); Daniel James, *Doña María's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Florencia Mallon, *Courage Tastes of Blood: The Mapuche Community of Nicolás Ailio and the Chilean State, 1906-2001* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); and Steve Stern, *Remembering Pinochet's Chile: On the Eve of London 1998* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

SERESURE, and a series of open-ended, life history interviews with key interlocutors whose life experiences spanned the problems in question in this dissertation. In both the informal conversations and the life history interviews, I sought to allow interviewees space to explore the topics they felt were important or relevant and refrained from cutting them off.<sup>95</sup> This allowed not only for a better relationship with the interviewee, but a richer narrative that explored the everyday experiences of religious life and its inseparability from community structures.

There were moments where interviewees presented different, often minor, but sometimes conflicting, recollections of particular events or chronologies. When and where that occurred, I acknowledge it clearly in the text and in citations. However, I did not consider these discrepancies to be invalidating. The events in question occurred between thirty and forty years prior to the interview, and some of the interviewees were children or teenagers at the time. Some imprecision is, in fact, to be expected, particularly when I as the interviewer asked about things that may not have been central to the interviewee's self-conception of their life story and trajectory. However, when the oral histories are taken as a body of texts and conceived as a "memory community," the minor factual and chronological discrepancies between them often faded into irrelevance as the corpus of community-member oral testimonies revealed patterns regarding the larger issue at hand: change over time in the relationship between Church and community.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> See James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>96</sup> Erik Ching, *Stories of Civil War in El Salvador: A Battle over Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 10; 244-46. Ching's analysis of war narratives in El Salvador groups the narrators into four "memory communities" based on shared characteristics (class, profession, status) that render their narrations similar in spite of real ideological differences and sometimes conflict between members of the same memory community.

I follow Nathaniel Morris's lead in "respecting informants' explanations of particular behaviors and actions while also, in line with the exhortation of James C. Scott, supplementing - rather than trying to replace - these with information taken from sources unavailable to local people."<sup>97</sup> Morris's work in the Gran Nayar deftly adapted to the ways in which indigenous cosmologies of the region employ circular conceptions of time, potentially frustrating and clashing with a western attempt at chronological linear clarity. As such, he admitted that the chronology of oral narratives was one of the less important aspects, but rather the patterns and relationships that the oral narratives revealed were of critical importance to his rethinking of Náayari, Wixárika, O'dam, and Mexicanero participation in the Revolution and the *crisiada*. Similarly, the relative clarity or obscurity of different memories, the general tone of how narrators spoke of certain individuals, the warmth or coldness with which community members described the parish priests that rotated in and out of the community, reveal more than any discrepancy of date or year or, as we will see, where exactly they learned to drive the bus.

More importantly, historians have long moved away from conceptualizing oral histories as texts that potentially unlock some ignored, hidden, or secret history. Rather, oral histories offer other possibilities while bracketed by some distinct limitations. Early rethinking of oral history offered the possibility that historians could "treat the subjective, textual quality of oral testimony as unique opportunities."<sup>98</sup> However, as Daniel James interjected, oral narratives as such are not so clear as "windows" into the subjective

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<sup>97</sup> Nathaniel Morris, *Soldiers, Saints, and Shamans: Indigenous Communities and the Revolutionary State in Mexico's Gran Nayar, 1910-1940* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020), 153. Morris is referencing James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>98</sup> James, *Doña Maria's Story*, 123 in his discussion of Luisa Passerini, Ronald Grele, and Alessandro Portelli.

world, mindset, lived cultural, social, and ideological experiences of the narrator. Rather, he says, “the glass of the window is unclear.”<sup>99</sup> The oral testimonies are, in fact, filtered and refracted through class and gender (and racial and ethnic) conventions and structures. Beyond any question of epistemological content, historians must remain attuned to the logics and presuppositions, self-representations, cosmovisions, and values that inform and structure oral testimonies.

As James was astute to point out, the oral testimony is a co-construction of interviewee and interviewer. As was the case here, I readily admit that my role as an outsider bearing a stamp of approval or sponsorship from former pastoral agents in the case study communities surely influenced who talked to me and how they talked to me. Some lingering misconceptions meant that some believed that I myself was a priest, a rumor that I tried my best to dispel whenever it arose. And of course, there were warranted concerns over just what exactly I was proposing to do with the stories that people shared. Long histories of outsiders - representatives from Church, state, or something else - arriving and asking for assistance or promising things that never arrived, have taught folks to be wary. But fundamentally, the very real power differentials - my privilege to cross and recross borders, access resources, leverage education - hung over interactions and interviews. However, it is also undeniable that I was at the mercy of community member cooperation. It is only because people opted to share their stories, answer my (sometimes inane and ignorant) questions, and place a modicum of trust in my assertion that I would return to share the products of our conversations, that this project moved forward.

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, 124.

# Chapter 1: The Catholic Church and Indigenous Mexico in the Mid-Twentieth Century

## Introduction

As the Cárdenas presidency (1934-1940) moved into its final years, the conflicts between Church and state that had erupted in the 1920s seemed to finally reach a negotiated resolution.<sup>1</sup> The *modus vivendi* established between the regime and the Church by 1938 allowed the Catholic Church a freedom of movement not experienced since the Porfiriato when the dictatorship declined to enforce liberal anticlerical laws (*la Reforma*) in the name of social stability.<sup>2</sup> A younger generation of bishops, newly elevated to hierarchical positions within the Mexican Church, largely abandoned the hardline stance of some of their predecessors, were nationalist collaborators on the 1938 petroleum expropriation, and were now more prepared to tamp down on Catholics' dissent toward the Mexican state provided that the regime relaxed enforcement of anticlerical constitutional provisions.<sup>3</sup> In a parallel to the late nineteenth century, Catholic lay organizations like Catholic Action, the Knights of Columbus, and Club Serra began to flourish anew, extending the reach and power of a constitutionally and legislatively circumscribed Church.<sup>4</sup> But the social and political questions that Mexicans, Catholic or

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<sup>1</sup> Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia*, Chapter 1.

<sup>2</sup> Smith, *Roots of Conservatism*, Chapter 4; Silvia Arrom, *Volunteering for a Cause: Gender, Faith, and Charity in Mexico from the Reform to the Revolution* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia*, 58-62. On some of the hardliners, particularly those in exile, see Young, *Mexican Exodus*. On the oil expropriation, see Myrna Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor, and the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Adolfo Gilly, *El cardenismo, una utopía mexicana* (México, CDMX: Ediciones Era, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> On the late Porfiriato, in the wake of *Rerum Novarum* (1891), and the formation of myriad lay organizations, see Arrom, *Volunteering for a Cause*; Silvia Arrom, "Mexican Laywomen Spearhead a



not, faced moving in the 1940s were certainly distinct from those of the 1890s. Land reform, nationalist populism, and a postwar economic boom seemed to promise a bright future for Mexico's growing middle classes.<sup>5</sup> Socially minded Catholics, then, renewed their engagement with the poorer classes in the form of charity and "uplift," and further, in concert with a handful of prelates and clergy, asked how the rural poor and indigenous could be brought into a Catholic modernity.

Pope Pius XI's 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, had updated Catholic social doctrine to respond to changes in the world since *Rerum Novarum* in 1891.<sup>6</sup> In particular, while advocating a middle path between liberal capitalism (of the nineteenth century) and communism, Pius XI defended private property rights, but only on the grounds that they not harm the common good. He argued for the rights of workers to act in solidarity, to form unions, and to receive a wage that would meet family responsibilities and allow for personal dignity and freedom. In essence, while employing a hard line against totalitarian communism, the Pope argued that a moderate socialism that allowed for individual freedom might not be incompatible with Catholicism. But fundamentally, the Pope called for a distributive statism, a social order that cultivated solidarity rather than class conflict - a position that would be the hallmark of the spreading Christian Democratic parties

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Catholic Revival: The Ladies of Charity, 1863-1910," in *Religious Culture in Modern Mexico*, edited by Martin Austin Nesvig (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 50-77; Boylan, "Gendering the Faith;" Edward Wright-Rios, *Revolutions in Mexican Catholicism: Reform and Revelation in Oaxaca, 1887-1934* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009); Robert Weis, *For Christ and Country: Militant Catholic Youth in Post-Revolutionary Mexico*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), Chapter 1. On renewed lay organization activity after the *modus vivendi*, see Andes, *The Mysterious Sofia*; Andes, *The Vatican and Catholic Activism*; Espinosa, *Jesuit Student Groups*.

<sup>5</sup> Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s*; Walker, *Waking from the Dream*.

<sup>6</sup> See Weis, *For Christ and Country*, 12-13, for a brief overview of the reception of *Rerum Novarum* in Mexico.

across the continent even if there never was one in Mexico.<sup>7</sup> Although few from the Mexican hierarchy explicitly acknowledged so, the update in Catholic social doctrine provided crucial space for the intersection of Church and state.

This chapter and the next examine the ways in which hierarchs of the Mexican Catholic Church vied internally over divergent ideological visions of how the Church would and should work with Mexico's indigenous peoples. This was certainly not the only cleavage within the Church, nationally or internationally, but it is one particular to the Mexican experience that has yet to be explored in the literature on Mexico's religious history in the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> As I show, factions within the Church waged fierce battles in the decades prior to Vatican II and Medellín over the shape and form that indigenous ministry would take.<sup>9</sup> The divisions between the factions can best be defined by two elements: the extent to which social reform was seen as part of the mission of the Church, and the openness to scientific and technological advances as tools to transform the human condition.<sup>10</sup> Shared, however, were always an anti-communist stance and an approach to indigenous ministry from a patronizing perspective, even while emphasizing

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<sup>7</sup> In the catholic vocabulary, "solidarity" does not, like its labor or socialist usage, imply a working class solidarity in opposition to the capitalist class. Rather, catholic solidarity is a cross-class concept in which Catholics work together, in interdependence, toward a more just and peaceful society. See Fred Kammer, S.J., "Catholic Social Thought and Solidarity," *JustSouth Quarterly* (Summer 2013): 3.

<sup>8</sup> For the political and social ideological cleavages within the Church in the twentieth century, see Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia*; Camp, *Crossing Swords*.

<sup>9</sup> There is a bit of a periodization question here about the roots of the reforms of Vatican II. On questions of integral personhood and the ways in which that particular strain of Catholic social thought influenced the emergence of human rights discourses in the 1970s, see Samuel Moyn, *Christian Human Rights*. On Vatican II itself and the theological and pastoral antecedents, see O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*. Work on secular civil society has also started looking toward the 1950s and before to find the roots of the reformist and revolutionary movements that emerged in the 1960s. See, for instance, Mary Kay Vaughan, *Portrait of a Young Painter: Pepe Zúñiga and Mexico City's Rebel Generation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> I'm grateful to Sabrina González for helping conceive the Church's reforms and faultlines as less of an ideological progressive-conservative divide as much as they were marked by differences in "openness" or "closedness" to the technological and scientific advances that defined the twentieth century.

that the indigenous must be active on their own behalf in embracing progress, that would lessen only decades later.

To accomplish this analysis of the ideological factions in the Mexican Church, I focus on two bishops, Miguel Darío Miranda (Tulancingo) and Lucio Torreblanca (Chiapas), to demonstrate how, from the end of the Second World War to the opening of the second Vatican Council, each came to represent their respective ideological factions. In this chapter, Miguel Darío Miranda, long associated with Catholic Action in Mexico City prior to his elevation to the bishopric, embodied a group of moderate, but modernizing, prelates who opened their dioceses to a combination of clergy-led lay activism and modern agricultural technologies that, they hoped, would bring to the rural indigenous a proper Catholic education *and* rural economic development.<sup>11</sup> Acting on what Darío Miranda believed to be in the best interests of his indigenous flock in the Mezquital Valley, he showed a distinct willingness to collaborate with the Mexican state on a variety of agricultural development and educational projects, a coordination nearly unthinkable in the 1920s and 30s.

In the following chapter, I show how Lucio Torreblanca imagined the Church's role differently. He argued, employing a long strain of Mexican Catholic thinking, that the conversion project of the conquest remained incomplete.<sup>12</sup> And so, prior to questions of rural development were the necessities of christianization and proper Catholic education. As a result, Torreblanca viewed the state's welfare and development programs

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<sup>11</sup> On Darío Miranda's prior involvement in lay organizations in Mexico City, see Andes, *The Mysterious Sofía*.

<sup>12</sup> At times, the progressive sectors of the Church also employed this argument, most notably when Sergio Méndez Arceo stripped the Cathedral in Cuernavaca of popular images of the saints in order to discipline popular worship. See Scheper-Hughes, *Biography of a Mexican Crucifix*.

as competition for the charitable and educational programs of the Church rather than as a potential collaborator. He envisioned instead a new series of “internal missions,” staffed by religious orders, who would trek into the Chiapanecan highlands to minister to the Mayan peoples who had not seen a priest possibly since the Mexican Revolution. In effect, as Torreblanca trained scores of indigenous men as catechists, the predecessor to Bishop Samuel Ruiz’s widely celebrated catechist training programs, Torreblanca created parallel churches in Chiapas. There was a Catholic Church for the indigenous, run by religious orders, and a Catholic Church for the ladino (mestizo) population, staffed by secular diocesan clergy. As traditionalist as Torreblanca’s ideas were, the convergence of the two ideological positions in the 1960s became important building blocks for progressive and liberationist work with and among the indigenous in the late twentieth century.

While later chapters will examine the meeting points and concrete interactions between indigenous Catholics and Church agents in late twentieth-century Mexico, this pair of chapters examine the broader picture of international and national trends in a Catholic Church grappling with post-war modernity, technological change, and its role in both Mexico and the world. I show that elements of the Mexican Church were grappling over the “indigenous question” decades prior to the widely celebrated work of Samuel Ruiz and his colleagues in southern Mexico. Further, I argue that the indigenist work of the Church in the late twentieth century is only understandable as a product of the prior decades, during which a Church in the midst of change both cooperated and competed with the secular state in working with Mexico’s indigenous peoples. Local case studies

explored in later chapters will only be legible with the understanding of how the Church learned to tolerate, if not embrace, indigenous religiosity.

The *modus vivendi* (1938) between Church and state offered possibilities for Catholic lay activism not seen since the turn of the twentieth century. The Mexican Social Secretariat (Secretariado Social Mexicano, SSM), the umbrella organization of the Catholic Action organizations in Mexico, sponsored and coordinated a wide variety of publications and initiatives with the goal of cultivating an active laity that would spread the influence of the Church. Moving into the 1940s, the SSM began to expand its horizons beyond urban constituencies and look toward the rural and indigenous landscapes as populations who had yet to experience a revitalized social Catholicism. The first section of this chapter looks at how the SSM conceived of indigenous Mexico and began its first attempts at rural and indigenous outreach and education. Then, I explore how Bishop Miguel Darío Miranda of Tulancingo represented a Catholic Church open to modern agricultural technologies and collaboration with the state while also building a Catholic form of *indigenismo* that mirrored, in many ways, the priorities of the state. The following chapter then takes up the case of Bishop Lucio Torreblanca as emblematic of a Catholic traditionalism that conceived of the indigenous not as a population on the cusp of entering modernity but rather as objects of incomplete christianization and necessitating the paternalist protection of the Church in the form of “internal missions.”

There were broader processes under and behind both case studies. The increasing presence, since the early twentieth century, of Protestant missionaries throughout Mexico struck fear in the center of the Mexican Church that they would lose their religious near-

monopoly.<sup>13</sup> Both Tulancingo, particularly in the Mezquital Valley, and Chiapas were centers of Protestant proselytizing activity.<sup>14</sup> But it is critical to see how differently the respective factions of the Church responded to “threats” of Protestantism. Additionally, the post-war era was marked by organizational expansion within Mexican Catholicism. These two chapters show the ways in which both factions built the organizational infrastructure to help realize their respective visions of indigenous ministry. In doing so, I challenge the notion that the Mexican Catholic Church was the antimodern and elitist institution that its opponents so often portrayed it to be.<sup>15</sup> There were certainly internal tensions between those who continued to oppose the purported socialism of the Mexican government and those who saw the opportunity to embrace and leverage the expansion of modern science and knowledge to return the Church to a position of prominence in the public sphere. This chapter shows how opposing currents of the Mexican Catholic Church were critical actors in one of the most pressing questions of Mexican’s postrevolutionary arena: how and in what way were the indigenous and the rural poor to become part of the nation. And, in the eyes of the Church, that question was intrinsically tied to the concern over how might the nation remain Catholic in spite of anticlerical constitutional provisions and Protestant incursion.

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<sup>13</sup> Ramírez, *Migrating Faith*.

<sup>14</sup> Todd Hartch, *Missionaries of the State: The Summer Institute of Linguistics, State Formation, and Indigenous Mexico, 1935-1985* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006); Lewis, *Rethinking Mexican Indigenismo*.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, Vicente Lombardo Toledano, “Los indígenas y la Iglesia Católica,” *Siempre!* No. 415, June 7, 1961, reprinted in Vicente Lombardo Toledano, *El clero político en la historia de México*, vol. 2 (México, CDMX: Centro de Estudios Filosóficos, Políticos, y Sociales Vicente Lombardo Toledano, 1991), 14.

## **Indigenous Communities Between Church and State: Rural Development and Pastoral Indigenista**

As the mid-century Church faced recent détente and loosening of restrictions to action in the public sphere, the challenges of the modern world and growing populations encouraged the formation of particular offices and organizations to channel technical and anthropological expertise into the workings of Church projects and initiatives. Even before Vatican II, a modernizing current was coursing through the Church. A rising cohort of bishops and clergy, predominantly educated outside of Mexico, saw the new but tentative peace between Church and state as an opportunity to marry the historical mission of the Church with social reform driven by twentieth-century technological innovation.<sup>16</sup> Scholars of the U.S. Church have labeled the proliferation of Catholic organizations dedicated to social work and reform an “organizational revolution” that provided the knowledge and expertise for coordinated Church action.<sup>17</sup> This process unfolded later in Mexico than it did in the neighbor to the North, precisely because of the prolonged armed conflict. Yet, by the 1940s and 50s, research centers, information centers, communications outlets, and human rights centers were the cusp of the Church initiatives that marked twentieth century efforts to engage in the cultural and political problems of the moment. This section will show how the Church steadily (re)built capacity to work with indigenous peoples in the wake of the Cristero War and with particular expansion in the heady post-WWII years.

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<sup>16</sup> This was already an ongoing state project, particularly under Cardenista land reform and agricultural modernization campaigns. See, for example, Boyer, *Becoming Campesinos* on agrarianism in the state of Michoacán under Cárdenas first as state governor and then as president of the republic.

<sup>17</sup> On the U.S. Church undergoing “organizational revolution” as it related to social catholicism and unionism, see Ronald Schatz, “American Labor and the Catholic Church, 1919-1950,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 20 (Fall 1981): 46-53.

In the 1940s and 50s, growing interest on the part of Church agents, laity and clergy alike, coincided to push the Church toward a more structured and formalized engagement with indigenous peoples. The expansion of Catholic Action in Mexico in the late 1930s and into the 1940s ushered in an era of empowered and active lay participation in Catholic life. And although tens of thousands of Mexican Catholics found community and participation through an invigorated and active Catholic Action, they were overwhelmingly urban and middle and upper class.<sup>18</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the Cristero Wars, fearful of clashes with the secular state and enforcement of anticlerical laws, a reorganized Catholic Action tempered its prior commitment to social reform and Catholic workers' organizations to focus instead on spiritual renewal and moralization.<sup>19</sup> Yet after the Second World war, Mexican Catholic Action and the SSM increasingly found common cause, at least rhetorically, with a Mexican government trumpeting economic redistribution and moral, educational, and cultural uplift.<sup>20</sup> In the freedom accorded by the non-enforcement of anticlerical constitutional provisions, lay Catholic activists stepped into addressing agriculture, rural development, and the "indigenous problem."

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<sup>18</sup> Andes, *The Mysterious Sofia*.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Andes, "A Catholic Alternative to Revolution: The Survival of Social Catholicism in Postrevolutionary Mexico," *The Americas* 68, no. 4 (April 2012): 531. Mexico's unique history of religious conflict circumscribed and limited the scope of action for Mexican Catholic Action in ways not present in other countries. See Andes, *The Vatican and Catholic Activism in Mexico and Chile*.

<sup>20</sup> Mexican Catholic Action, like its European model, consisted of four branches, with groups for men (Unión Católica Mexicana, UCM), women (Unión Femenina Católica Mexicana, UFCM), young men (Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana, ACJM) and young women (Juventud Católica Femenina Mexicana, JCFM). The four branches all fell under the umbrella of the SSM for coordinating purposes but each designed and operated programming and planning according to their own priorities. Membership and activity levels varied widely across the country, often depending on institutional support of bishops and clergy. See Camp, *Crossing Swords*; Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia*.



In 1943, the SSM organized Catholic Action's first *Semana Rural* (rural week). Coordinated between various members of religious orders, agricultural engineers and specialists, lay activists, and international actors such as the director of international affairs at the National Catholic Rural Life Conference in the US and the Vatican's representative at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the "rural week" devoted to concerted action toward rural development in both the spiritual and technical realms.<sup>21</sup> Each year, lay and clerical agents worked side by side to share best practices and to promote the formation of Catholic *campesino* labor unions, worker and farmer cooperatives, local collective savings funds (*cajas de ahorro*), health and hygiene. And, as seen in the internal bulletin, *Santa Fe*, of Mexican Catholic Action, lay activists could read and learn about various indigenous groups and the "problems" of the countryside alongside calls to action.<sup>22</sup>

In 1947, in what appeared to be a series of issues with sections dedicated specifically to rural and indigenous concerns, Catholic Action readers learned first about the Totonacos of Puebla and Veracruz, presented with a series of statements and statistics that projected a scientific (anthropological and demographic) objectivity.<sup>23</sup> The likely urban, middle-class, parish-attending reader learned that the Totonacos lived in the mountains, in rainy places with poor roads and difficult access. According to the author, around 60,000 of the 91,000 Totonacos were monolingual in their native language, which

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<sup>21</sup> Miguel J. Hernandez Madrid, "Curas de pueblo y acción social católica en Michoacán, 1940-1960," *Tzintzun. Revista de Estudios Históricos*, no. 43 (Jan-Jun, 2006): 62.

<sup>22</sup> *Santa Fe* seems to have been only for internal distribution, sent to parishes with affiliated Catholic Action groups, and thus markedly different from subscriber magazines like *Juventud*, published by the JCFM, available to members and non-members alike. The articles examined here were all unsigned, likely to present them as encyclopedic entries merely for knowledge consumption rather than a written work of opinion by any individual.

<sup>23</sup> "Problema Indígena: Los Totonacos," *Santa Fe* Año IV: No. 2, Sept 1947, AHAM, Base DM, c. 308, exp. 20.

sounded like “mexicano” or Náhuatl. The Totonacos in the mountains had poorer hygiene than those at lower altitudes, with “disordered dwellings, without furniture, little light, and cramped.”<sup>24</sup> Their diets lacked meat and milk and they suffered from a variety of ailments. And in one series of somewhat disconnected statements: “They are very fond of alcohol. Their morality is flattering compared to other indigenous people. The number of bloody crimes is great.”<sup>25</sup> The author reported that they rely on agriculture, and their land produced abundant amounts of beans, chiles, corn, and fruit. However, a lack of communication and connection to markets meant that much was wasted. Religiously, the author reassured readers that the Totonacos were Catholic, if religiously ignorant and mistrustful of parish priests, even despite the efforts of Methodists to work in the region. Regardless of the difficulties of getting them religious services for questions of language and terrain, they were incorporated into Catholic life even with “irregularities due to their customs.”<sup>26</sup>

The underlying and unwritten message was clear: the Totonacos could prosper if only they cleaned up their homes, stopped drinking, saved more, and efficiently got their agricultural goods to market; and they should be more integrated into Roman Catholicism and leave their problematic customs behind. The parallels to official *indigenista* rhetoric was striking with the lamentations that indigenous poverty was the result of learned self-destructive habits fostered by the legacy of colonialism, exacerbated by isolation and harshness of their environment, that only needed to be broken in order to usher in a new prosperity.<sup>27</sup> However, the casual inclusion of the Protestant presence masked a deep fear

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> See Dawson, *Indian and Nation*; Rosemblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race*.

and insecurity over the rapidly increasing Protestant missionary activity throughout the country.<sup>28</sup> Although the Totonacos seemed to have rebuffed Protestant incursion on their own, the reader was certainly meant to be left with the fear that not all indigenous groups would be so loyal to the Church.

A few months later, Catholic Action readers learned about the Kickapoo.<sup>29</sup> Once again presented under the heading of “Indigenous Problem,” the article on the Kickapoo was far less structured and systematic than that on the Totonacos, written more as an informative essay and without the series of statistics. Yet many of the same themes were present: patriotism, or legitimate membership in the nation, combined with religious and moral shortcomings that could be remedied. The Kickapoo were presented as patriotic Mexicans even though they were of Algonquin heritage and were (forced) migrants to the southwest United States and northern Mexico.<sup>30</sup> The lands that they resided on in Coahuila dated to the 1840s “as a reward for their military cooperation against the Lipans and Comanches that ravaged the north of the republic.”<sup>31</sup> But while the Kickapoo’s fidelity to the nation was not in question, readers must have been dismayed to learn that the Kickapoo occasionally practiced polygamy, that men gathered to talk about tribal issues and smoked the “pipa de la paz” like the “North American indians,” and that “of religion they keep confused ideas about a supreme being and belief in the afterlife.”<sup>32</sup> The portrait presented was sympathetic if judgmental. Readers were encouraged to believe

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<sup>28</sup> See Hartch, *Missionaries of the State*; Ramírez, *Migrating Faith*.

<sup>29</sup> “Problema Indígena: Los Kikapoo,” *Santa Fe* Año IV: No. 7, Feb. 1948, AHAM, Base DM, c. 308, exp. 20.

<sup>30</sup> On the transnational settlement patterns of the Kickapoo, and the ways in which they have constructed transborder lives and relationships, see Jeffrey M. Schulze, *Are We Not Foreigners Here? Indigenous Nationalism in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

<sup>31</sup> “Problema Indígena: Los Kikapoo,” *Santa Fe* Año IV: No. 7, Feb. 1948, AHAM, Base DM, c. 308, exp. 20.”

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

that these indigenous groups, even if “semi-nomadic” and “without industry of their own,” were part of the fabric of Mexico and could still be brought into the fold with proper religious education.

In the subsequent issue, rather than focus on a particular indigenous group, readers were treated to an overview of the pressing religious problems that characterized many rural communities:

- 1) A vague and sterile sentimentality divorced from the precepts of the Church.
- 2) The exteriority that tends to reduce everything to ceremonies that do not spring from inner life.
- 3) The egoism by which prayer is reduced to pleading for worldly objects without worrying about the spiritual elements.<sup>33</sup>

Readers familiar with the language of the Church would have quickly recognized the implications of such charges. Rural Catholics, they were told, did not have enough religious education to fully appreciate the divine mystery of Church teachings and the inner spirituality that ought to accompany worship. And in lieu of spirituality, these rural Catholics reduced their religiosity to the rote recitation of ceremony and used their prayer to ask for a better present life (worldly objects) rather than eternal salvation. Unspoken here, but present later in similar diagnoses of rural Catholicism, were worries about materialism and, as a consequence, susceptibility to marxist ideologies.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the uneducated Catholics were captivated by “smells and bells,” and their belief that saints and other divine figures could and would intercede on their behalf in worldly matters such as health, wealth, and harvest yields. Catholic Action readers were treated to

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<sup>33</sup> “Movimiento Campesino: El problema de la Piedad en una PARROQUIA RURAL,” *Santa Fe* Año IV: No. 8, 1948, AHAM, Base DM, c. 308, exp. 20..

<sup>34</sup> “Letter from Bishop of Tehuantepec Jesús Alba Palacios to Archbishop Miranda,” January 9, 1962, AHAM, Base DM, c. 154, exp. 67.

a well-worn stereotype, dating back to the conquest, that rural and indigenous religiosity was a “cult of saints” that ignored the holy trinity.

The diagnosis of religious ignorance, particularly among the rural youth, called for renewed engagement from the Church as a remedy, and noted that the “acejotaemero” (ACJMer) would be particularly well suited for this “apostolic labor.”<sup>35</sup> The article placed equal culpability on the family and the school for the ignorant state of the rural Catholics, signaling the real consequences of a lack of clergy and of secular (socialist!) education.<sup>36</sup> But with the help of the young men from the ACJM going out into the countryside, committed Catholics could give the *campesinos* a “broad and solid religious instruction through knowledge of dogma, fulfillment of commandments and reception of the sacraments.”<sup>37</sup> Such instruction would do much to “remove prejudices and deviations, like believing that such things [religion] are women’s things or superstitiously worshipping the saints.”<sup>38</sup>

While the leadership of the SSM was trying to encourage young urban Catholics to engage with the rural poor, they were also trying to figure out how to extend Catholic Action into rural parishes. Although Catholic Action never really spread into rural and indigenous space, the SSM was certainly trying to devise ways to make inroads. In an undated working document, Catholic Action leaders recognized that Catholic Action would not look or function the same in rural space as it did in urban and more affluent

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<sup>35</sup> ACJM was the branch of Catholic Action for young men, see Espinosa, *Jesuit Student Groups*.

<sup>36</sup> On post-revolutionary rural education, see Vaughan, *Cultural Politics*.

<sup>37</sup> “Movimiento Campesino: El problema de la Piedad en una PARROQUIA RURAL,” *Santa Fe Año IV*: No. 8, 1948, AHAM, Base DM, c. 308, exp. 20.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

areas.<sup>39</sup> In a nod to rural poverty, they proposed that rural and indigenous parishes could reduce their annual contributions to the SSM, and perhaps only contribute to the Catholic Action programs that would be of use to the community.

The SSM also recommended that Catholic Action not limit itself to only religious outreach to rural communities but rather they should “study the social necessities of *los indios* and develop activities aimed at remedying them.”<sup>40</sup> Even while these educated and urban observers retained their prejudices, judging that indigenous life lacked culture, leadership and sometimes even the national language, they showed tentative steps toward a better understanding of rural communities and rural religious practices that marked a qualitative difference in what the relationship between Church and community could be.<sup>41</sup> Further, they showed an openness to leveraging the tools of modernity, scholarly knowledge and technical sciences, to build a better, and undoubtedly Catholic, future for indigenous Mexico.

In these initial forays into how to engage with indigenous and rural communities, urban and middle/upper class Catholics clearly had little idea of (or chose to disregard) the ways in which religiosity and cosmovision structured rural life. It would still be decades before the Church began to tolerate indigenous religiosity as a legitimate expression of Catholicism, and even then such a stance was not universal. Rather, they attributed rural problems, sins, deviations, alcoholism, sometime polygamy, and other perceived deficiencies as merely a question of incomplete religious education surely

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<sup>39</sup> “Como facilitar la organización de la ACM en pueblos pequeños, o de indios o de gente pobre?” AHAM, Base DM, c. 306, exp. 87, undated.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. The language they use is illuminating: “en muchos de estos pueblos la vida de sus habitantes es muy deficiente por razón de la escasísima cultura de sus habitantes, de las distancias enormes que los separan de poblados, de la falta de dirigentes y aún muchas veces hasta de la lengua nacional.”

exacerbated by the secular incursion and socialist education promulgated by the state. Yet this was still a significant change from the previous two decades during which most official Church service to rural communities was curtailed by anticlericalism and the oft-repeated lament of a scarcity of priests.<sup>42</sup> As the SSM sought to activate lay Catholics in the battle for rural souls, drawing on the youth to extend the reach of the Church (and maybe even channel these youth toward vocations), their efforts were complemented by a faction of Bishops who embraced agricultural sciences and modern anthropology to transform ministry to the indigenous.

### **Semana Rural: The Holy Spirit Meets the Green Revolution**

In this section, I focus on the diocese of Tulancingo, Bishop Miranda, and a diocesan priest, Héctor Samperio, to show how a younger generation of churchmen who had not yet been members of the hierarchy during the Cristero Wars sought to set aside the antagonisms of the past in order to better serve the indigenous and the rural poor of Mexico. The SSM and its representatives on the diocesan level provided the infrastructure, planning, and contacts in government and agricultural sciences to build collaborative projects built on partnership between the Church and secular institutions like agricultural schools, researchers, and government agencies. We begin with *Semana Rural*.

Mexico's first *Semana Rural* was organized in 1943 by the SSM. National campaigns were not entirely new for the Catholic Church. In the wake of the Cristero

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<sup>42</sup> John Considine, after a trip through the Americas, published *Call for Forty Thousand*, a book geared toward US Catholics to explain the state of the Church in Latin America and plea for volunteer missionaries to make up for the dearth of priests in Latin America. John Considine, *Call for Forty Thousand* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1946).

Wars, eager to prove its membership in the national fabric, the Church quickly organized a national collection to assist in compensating the expropriated oil companies. Josephus Daniels, the US ambassador to Mexico who was crucial in negotiating a peaceful resolution between Cárdenas and the US oil companies, recounted in his memoirs the Catholic enthusiasm for the expropriation. The Archbishop of Guadalajara, one of the most important and powerful prelates in the country, spoke from the pulpit that it was “a patriotic duty to contribute to the national fund.” By May 3rd (the expropriation had been announced March 18), the Mexican bishops had sent out a circular asking for Catholics to make contributions and encouraging parishes to pass the plate and collect donations during services.<sup>43</sup>

What the Mexican bishops were able to accomplish with remarkable speed, the rapid organization of a national fundraising drive, would set the stage for national-scale Church involvement in social issues for the remainder of the twentieth century. Each year, the Church appealed to the faithful for donations for any variety of issues: education, health, seminaries, the rural poor. And it was through these national appeals that the Church funded many of their initiatives. The National Center for Assistance to Indigenous Missions (el Centro Nacional de Ayuda a Misiones Indígenas, CENAMI), founded in 1961, would draw heavily on national collections as significant funding sources in the 1960s and beyond.<sup>44</sup> This dynamic, a nationalization and coordination of Church priorities, was a dramatic change from the nineteenth century of largely

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<sup>43</sup> Excerpt of Daniels’s memoir, including the Archbishop’s quotation, reprinted as Josephus Daniels, “The Oil Expropriation,” in *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*, Gilbert Joseph and Timothy Henderson eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 452-455

<sup>44</sup> See, for example, CENAMI, “2o Informe de los fondos recibidos hasta esta fecha correspondientes a la colecta CENAMI 1967,” January 31, 1968, AHAM, Base DM, c. 215, exp. 10.



autonomous dioceses reporting directly to Rome. Historians of the US Catholic Church date a similar dynamic in the United States to the First World War and the Church's efforts to coordinate contribution to the war effort as nationalist sentiment swept the nation.<sup>45</sup>

But before CENAMI was a permanent organization dedicated to fostering ministry among the indigenous, there was *Semana Rural*. Relying on fundraising through the SSM and Catholic Action, *Semana Rural* brought together the spiritual calls to action that went out to Catholic Action members with the cutting edge of modern agricultural science. From its first iteration in 1943, *Semana Rural* varied from diocese to diocese, but generally brought together a diversity of parties working in the rural realm to share best practices, technical knowledge, and discuss ways to improve the Church's presence and activities in the countryside. As such, this was not an evangelization project like during Easter Week when seminarians and lay activists organize(d) educational and missionary activities to spread the teachings of the Church and the meaning of resurrection.<sup>46</sup> Rather, "Semana Rural" was imagined more like a conference setting with planned presentations and space for discussion.

To illuminate the ways in which the Church began to embrace modern science and agricultural technologies as a means to address the "indigenous problem," let us look at the diocese of Tulancingo in the 1940s and 50s under the direction of Bishop Miguel Darío Miranda. Bishop Miranda, who would later ascend to become Archbishop of Mexico and then Cardinal, had been the director of the SSM in 1925-26 during the height

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Hurteau, *A Worldwide Heart: The Life of Maryknoll Father John J. Considine* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 24-25.

<sup>46</sup> See Chapters 3 and 4 on seminary training and Easter Week activities. Also, field notes from April 2017, La Lobera, San Antonio Cañada, Puebla.

of the first Cristero War and was arrested and sent into exile during President Calles's anticlerical enforcement. During his exile Miranda became a key interlocutor between Mexico and Rome, and made quite an impression on the Vatican as a potential mediator and diplomatic figure for negotiations between the Church and the Mexican government.<sup>47</sup> And perhaps importantly, although I do not have records that indicate any concrete meeting at that moment, Miranda was in Rome precisely as the Vatican was building institutions like the Missionary Ethnological Museum (1927) that celebrated the embrace of ethnology and anthropology as part of the Church's missionary outreach.<sup>48</sup> Appointed Bishop of Tulancingo in 1937, Miranda occupied that post until December 1955, when he was moved into the Archdiocese of Mexico.

The diocese of Tulancingo, Hidalgo included the parishes of the Mezquital Valley, an arid expanse populated primarily by some thirty-six thousand Otomí in the late 1930s.<sup>49</sup> Earlier the site of first Congreso Regional Indígena in 1936, one of the hallmark projects of President Cárdenas's *indigenista* policy, the Mezquital Valley shortly thereafter became a testing grounds for revolutionary *indigenismo*.<sup>50</sup> Although the massive projects of irrigation, infrastructure, education, and assimilation were largely considered failures of state *indigenismo* even by the coordinators themselves, the

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<sup>47</sup> Andes, *The Mysterious Sofia*, 66-67 and 131-132.

<sup>48</sup> Hurteau, *A Worldwide Heart*, 63-68. There is certainly evidence that Miranda and John Considine M.M., who was one of the driving forces behind the Missionary Ethnological Museum, knew each other well. Bishop Miranda and Considine seem to have been the respective parties who tried to found a foreign mission seminary in Mexico in partnership with Maryknoll, a project that got off the ground a few years later to teach potential Mexican missionary priests, and they did succeed in realizing their collaborative ideas with the founding of the Center for Intercultural Formation in Cuernavaca under the direction of Ivan Illich. See John J. Considine M.M., "Memo to Council (Maryknoll Council)," February 2, 1946, AHAM, Base DM, c. 243, exp. 55; and "Letter from Pontificia Commissione pro America Latina to Archbishop Miranda," March 31, 1961, AHAM, Base DM, c. 39, exp. 7.

<sup>49</sup> Dawson, *Indian and Nation*, 127.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 127-133.

penetration of the state into spaces long ignored meant that the Church faced new secular competition for indigenous souls. In the archives of Cardinal Miranda, concerted Church action along *indigenista* lines did not appear in his documents until the late 1940s. Given Dawson's recounting of state *indigenista* efforts to incorporate local stakeholders and powerbrokers in the Mezquital through public-private partnerships, it seems that the Church was not entirely welcome as a collaborator until after the series of *indigenista* failures at land reform and agricultural modernization.<sup>51</sup> The appearance of diocesan initiatives also coincided with increased Protestant activity in the region, particularly by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) and their published series of Otomí language primers.<sup>52</sup> In this interlude of state incursion and Protestant activity, flooding indigenous regions with resources, but before the cooperation and involvement of Church representatives, the question of how to respond to state initiatives and religious challenges illustrated the factions evident within the Mexican Church.

The hardliners, those who tended to be older and had lived in exile through the Cristero Wars, often saw any incursion of the state into local affairs as an attack on the Church, whether that was socialist education, agrarista organization, or Protestant support for *cardenismo*. Emblematic of such a stance were the broadsides launched against Protestantism by Archbishop of Mexico Luis María Martínez, who mounted the "Crusade for the Defense of the Catholic Faith" in 1944.<sup>53</sup> This wing railed against communism, socialism, Protestantism, and masonry as the dark forces rending society apart. As Kloppe-Santamaría showed, although the hardliners no longer openly called for violent

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 127-133.

<sup>52</sup> See the 140-page language primer, "Cartilla Otomí-Español," 1946, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Summer Institute of Linguistics Digital Archive (hereafter SIL), entry 11996.

<sup>53</sup> Kloppe-Santamaría, *In the Vortex of Violence*, 40-41.

resistance to the secular revolutionary state, their fiery warnings surely contributed to the persistence of lynching on the community level that aimed to defend communities from outsiders and outside change (socialist teachers, Protestant missionaries, foreign scientists).<sup>54</sup> However, some of these hardliners also considered themselves *indigenistas*, trumpeting the traditional role of the Catholic Church as missionaries, educators, and defenders of the indigenous.

In the north of Hidalgo, in the Huasteca, Bishop José de Jesús Manríquez y Zárata of Huejutla endured the longest exile of any of the Mexican bishops (1926-44) precisely because of his “intemperate condemnations of the Revolution.”<sup>55</sup> Bishop Manríquez, in the early 1920s (prior to his exile), embarked on a remarkable program to give an indigenous twist to official Catholicism in his diocese. He learned Náhuatl, he trained Náhuatl speakers as catechists (although most were women who defined themselves as mestizo), and from the center of the diocese celebrated “Indian Christmas,” “Indian Easter,” and set up a cooperative store to serve the “*inditos* (little indians).”<sup>56</sup> This cultural turn, however, did not upend the socioeconomic hierarchy of the region nor did it fundamentally change the operation of the Church for mestizo and white believers. Instead, Bishop Manríquez created two churches, with a “parallel and generally subordinate set of indigenous lay institutions.”<sup>57</sup> And although Bishop Manríquez saw some success in recruiting and training indigenous young men to become priests, the diocesan seminary did not create the same intellectual and pastoral atmosphere as the other indigenous diocese of Huajuapán (Oaxaca) where even mestizo seminarians were

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 41-42.

<sup>55</sup> Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation*, 64.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 68.

trained in indigenous religiosity as part of broader campaign to recapture the religious loyalties of the Mixteco.<sup>58</sup> While Manríquez was pioneering in its legitimation of indigenous cultural and religious practices, it did little to change the socioeconomic position of the Nahua in the diocese.

In contrast to Bishop Manríquez to the north, Bishop Miranda stepped into a Tulancingo diocese that Fallaw described as politically and economically irrelevant to the Church but that had been relatively spared the violent conflicts of the anticlerical era and the fights over socialist education. As already mentioned, the diocese was the site of significant state intervention in the Mezquital Valley starting during the Cárdenas years and continuing through the 1940s and 50s. Miranda took an entirely different tack than Manríquez and, by the late 1940s, approached the efforts of the state as an opportunity for Church-state collaboration, even while maintaining suspicion of the secularism of the state. In his notes dating to sometime in the late 1940s/early 1950s, Miranda reflected on the “*problematica indigenista campesino*” and noted that solutions must take on a “local character” to solve the pressing issues of “land transformation, agrarian reform, agriculture, and rural social education.”<sup>59</sup>

These notes, while the personal reflections of a bishop grappling with the realities that his diocese faced, demonstrated a slow but definite change in the way the Mexican Church was thinking about service to rural and indigenous communities. In a letter to the auxiliary Bishop of Zamora, Salvador Martínez Silva, Bishop Miranda meditated on the disputes within the Mexican Church as competing visions and priorities were muddling a

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<sup>58</sup> Smith, *Roots of Conservatism*, 206.

<sup>59</sup> “Notes on *Problematica indigenista campesino*,” no date, estimated late 40s/early 50s, AHAM, Base DM, c. 84, exp. 12. See also Roseblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race*, Chapter 4 for the ways that local particularities began to infiltrate indigenista programming.

unified direction to take with regards to the indigenous. Two bishops, Archbishop Ruiz of Yucatan and Archbishop Márquez of Puebla, had authored separate documents in 1948 responding to an “exhortation of the Episcopate to alleviate the conditions of the campesinos.”<sup>60</sup> Both responses, in the eyes of Miranda, came up short in addressing the central questions “relative to the *indios*.” Miranda proposed that the two of them work together because Archbishop Márquez did not address the specific context of the indigenous and Archbishop Ruiz omitted the doctrinal issues in favor of warning of the dangers of communism in the countryside. In diplomatic fashion, Miranda pulled positives out of the shortcomings of the two drafts: “although they do not cover the entire problem of the *campesinos*, they nevertheless contain very important points that they are enough to properly guide priests and the faithful on current issues, about which the Church can neither be alien, nor should it remain silent.”<sup>61</sup> Rather, in revising the position of the Church toward rural and indigenous issues, Miranda proposed that the next draft “be scrupulously prepared, ensuring that its writing reflects the perfect knowledge of our environment, of the problems to which we refer, the doctrine that we must apply to its solution, the one that concerns us in restoring social order and peace in our national environment.”<sup>62</sup>

To Miranda, the Church could no longer rely on the diatribes against communism, but rather needed to embrace modern social sciences to better know and understand the environment in which they were to work. Miranda did not see science and faith as antithetical, but saw that the Church could train its agents in agricultural and social

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<sup>60</sup> “Letter from Bishop Miguel Darío Miranda to Bishop Salvador Martínez Silva,” March 17, 1948, AHAM, Base DM, c. 153, exp. 58. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

sciences while also and always continuing the evangelical mission. In his diocese, Miranda took the two missions of spiritual and material progress as interconnected. To chart this path, Bishop Miranda not only endeavored to expand pastoral ministry to the Otomí of the Mezquital Valley, but also sent some of his priests for training in agricultural sciences in order to fully participate in the modernization process that the Green Revolution seemed to promise for the rural poor. In his role as President of the SSM, Bishop Miranda had already been intimately involved in the national organization of *Semana Rural*.

In 1951, the Second National Rural Week was held in Tepotzlán, Morelos (Diocese of Cuernavaca) and the programming previewed what Bishop Miranda would encourage locally in his own diocese in the following years. The five days of the national meeting were planned to the minute, starting with mass at 7 AM each morning, followed by discussion of agricultural themes, demonstrations of agricultural practices, and talks on rural life and industry. Each day was marked by a distinct theme: Tuesday was “Agricultural credit and its solutions, especially for ejidatarios and small property-owners,” Wednesday “Connection to the land,” Thursday “Improving nutrition/Alcoholism,” and Friday was “Prevention of illnesses.”<sup>63</sup> Crucially, these congresses were not just meetings of committed clergy and lay Catholics. The sessions themselves in fact seemed to have little to do with Catholicism at all. While some agricultural science and engineering presentations were entrusted to lay people involved in Catholic Action and even a Benedictine father trained in beekeeping (*apicultura*),

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<sup>63</sup> “Program of the Second National *Semana Rural*, Cuernavaca,” January 15-20, 1951, AHAM, Base Cancillería (hereafter Base Can), c. 117, exp. 2.

others were led by government representatives from the National Corn Commission (Comisión del Maíz) and the Directorate of Soil and Water Conservation (Dirección de Conservación del Suelo y Agua).<sup>64</sup>

Héctor Samperio, a diocesan priest who later left the priesthood and became a historian and founding member of the Centro Hidalguense de Investigaciones Históricas, was the beneficiary of Miranda's vision.<sup>65</sup> In 1952, Samperio was a seminary student at the Interdiocesan Seminary of Montezuma in Montezuma, New Mexico.<sup>66</sup> Samperio wrote to Bishop Miranda about his studies and a long-term project he and his fellow students from Tulancingo had been working on since they arrived at Montezuma in 1946. Tasked with putting together a modest, but comprehensive, study of the diocese, Samperio reported that the work was almost complete and had been done to the best of their abilities given the scarcity of research materials to work with. They had written sections on the geography of the diocese, the economy and industries of the region, histories of the diocese and various parishes, and even included "summaries of some

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<sup>64</sup> "Program of the Second National Semana Rural, Cuernavaca," January 15-20, 1951, AHAM, Base Can, c. 117, exp. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Raul Guerrero Guerrero, "El Centro Hidalguense de Investigaciones Históricas," *Teotlalpan* no. 1, (Jan-Apr 1973): 11-14.

<sup>66</sup> A remnant of the Cristero Wars, the seminary opened in 1937 with significant aid from the US Catholic Church to train future Mexican priests in an era when Catholic institutions had been shuttered and closed under orders from the state. Run by Jesuits, historically one of the religious orders known for their scholarly and educational endeavors, the seminary took priests from across Mexico until it was moved to Tula in 1972 and closed a few years after that. Camp argues that Montezuma was notable for a variety of reasons, but perhaps most for fostering a cohort of young priests and future bishops who had rigorous intellectual training and imagined themselves as part of a Mexican Church rather than merely diocesan. Butler has two recently published articles exploring the foundation and workings of the seminary, posing some intriguing questions about the seminary's long-term reverberations. Camp, *Crossing Swords*; Matthew Butler, "¿Bienvenidos al Hotel Montezuma? Negociaciones transaccionales y la formación de un clero 'mexicano' en el exilio, 1937-1947," and "El sacerdocio de Montezuma: el jocosismo franco-canadiense y la identidad clerical mexicana, 1943-1962," in *Cruce de fronteras: la influencia de los Estados Unidos y América Latina en los proyectos de nación católicos en México, siglo XX*, eds. Yves Solís, Matthew Butler, and Camille Foulard (México, CDMX: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Azcapotzalco, 2020), 197-223 and 421-451.



chapters of an *indigenista* book.”<sup>67</sup> The Jesuit professors and Bishop Miranda were ensuring that their students left the seminary with a solid understanding of the political economy of the region and at least a basic knowledge of the peoples that the new priests were to work with and among.

By 1954, Héctor Samperio had been ordained as a priest and was serving in a parish while also working as part of the SSM and coordinating *Semana Rural* for the diocese. In an update for the bishop, Samperio detailed his work with a newly formed parish committee made up, presumably, of *campesinos*. They were preparing experimental fields to try new crops: the *frijol* “guandul” (pigeon pea, originally from South Asia) for the canyon slopes, soybean for the plains, and two hybrid varieties (H-123 and H-1) of corn for rain-fed and irrigated fields respectively.<sup>68</sup> Promotion of the soybean for nutritional purposes had powerful backers that included the Rockefeller Foundation, UNESCO and the Interamerican Indigenist Institute (III). The SIL was also distributing bilingual Otomí and Spanish materials on the uses of soy.<sup>69</sup> Samperio reported that an engineer from the Mexican Institute of Natural Resource Conservation (Instituto Mexicano de Conservación de Recursos Naturales) expressed interest in joining forces and working together. Lastly, and importantly, Samperio commented that the local committee of faithful working with him on the agricultural experiments “will serve on whatever moral and religious campaign.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> “Letter from Héctor Samperio G. to Bishop Miguel Darío Miranda,” April 30, 1952, AHAM, Base DM, c. 267, exp. 73.

<sup>68</sup> “Letter from Pbro. Héctor Samperio to Bishop Miranda, Tulancingo,” March 17, 1954, AHAM, Base DM, c. 329, exp. 97.

<sup>69</sup> SIL/III, “Recetas para derivados alimenticios del frijol soya,” 1951, SIL, entry 56165.

<sup>70</sup> “Letter from Pbro. Héctor Samperio to Bishop Miranda, Tulancingo,” March 17, 1954, AHAM, Base DM, c. 329, exp. 97.

This comment, tacked onto the end of the report on experimental crops, was a reminder of the core mission of the SSM: to build an active laity and reinforce fidelity to the Church in a secularizing world. An improvement in the material lives of the faithful while not engaging in socialist redistribution was certainly a central goal, but the twin projects of social reform/improvement and evangelization could not be separated. In fact, Hernández Madrid argues that cohorts of priests who trained together in Montezuma (like Samperio), brought back to Mexico a dedication to social Catholicism, the use of modern science, and a determination to work with poor that all predated the Second Vatican Council and the political implications of Liberation Theology.<sup>71</sup> While Roderic Camp focused on Montezuma as a space in which a generation of future bishops trained together, Hernández Madrid focused instead on the majority of students and graduates who did not become bishops. He notes that their (mostly) Jesuit professors tended to be trained in secular sciences and philosophies, aware of the social Catholicism percolating in Europe, and many had been involved in earlier iterations of Catholic Action and lay movements in Mexico before their Cristero-era exile.<sup>72</sup> As a result, seminarians were primed to use, expand, and facilitate the Catholic Action movement which, under the leadership of Jesuit Pedro Velázquez, took advantage of the peace between Church and state to orient Catholic Action toward meeting the spiritual *and* material needs of Mexico's faithful, particularly the poor.<sup>73</sup> It is only in this conjunction of events and institutions that we can understand the apparently quick embrace of "modern" science among a certain percentage of the Mexican clergy and Church hierarchy in the 1940s and

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<sup>71</sup> Hernández Madrid, "Curas de pueblo," 52-61.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

<sup>73</sup> Velázquez, Pedro, *Miseria de México... ¡Tierra desconocida!* (México, CDMX; Secretariado Social Mexicano, 1946), 223.

50s. And it is in this way that a passing comment like Samperio's could unintentionally reveal the motivations and interests underlying the agricultural projects of Rural Week.

A year later, Samperio wrote another update to Bishop Miranda. In 1955, still in his role as parish priest and diocesan coordinator of SSM, Samperio was working with the National Olive Commission (Comisión Nacional del Olivo) and planting 300 pilot project olive trees in four communities in southeast Hidalgo. He was also awaiting a visit from agricultural engineers with the National Corn Commission (Comisión Nacional del Maíz) who were to demonstrate two hybrid corn varieties, a hybrid wheat (Mexe-53), and "improved varieties of beans."<sup>74</sup> Almost exactly a year later, Samperio was abroad and taking courses at the Institut Agricole D'Oka, a technical agricultural college affiliated with the University of Montreal.<sup>75</sup> In his update letter to Bishop Miranda, who had already moved to Mexico City in December 1955, Samperio asked for more money in order to take more courses which could include "Aviculture, Rural Economy, Fruit Cultivation, Bovines, Botany, Fertilizers, Soils, Rural Construction, and Animal Illnesses."<sup>76</sup> Further, while in Montreal, presumably spending considerable time with the French-Canadian clergy, Samperio also made contacts within the Canadian Agricultural Ministry and was collecting as much published information as possible to send back to Mexico.

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<sup>74</sup> "Letter from Pbro. Héctor Samperio to Bishop Miranda," February 11, 1955, AHAM, Base DM, c. 63, exp. 79.

<sup>75</sup> For relationships between Quebecois Catholics and the Mexican Church, see Maurice Demers, *Connected Struggles: Catholics, Nationalist, and Transnational Relations between Mexico and Québec, 1917-1945* (Montréal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2014).

<sup>76</sup> "Letter from Pbro. Héctor Samperio in La Trappe, Quebec to Bishop Miranda," February 27, 1956, AHAM, Base DM, c. 63, exp. 79. All of these fields were, of course, priorities of the Mexican state's rural development programs.

Later in 1956, Samperio sent a telegraph to Archbishop Miranda (he had been named Archbishop upon the death of the Archbishop of Mexico a month prior) to thank him for entrusting Rural Week in Tulancingo to Samperio.<sup>77</sup> The continued communication between Samperio and Archbishop Miranda, even as Miranda was no longer Samperio's direct superior, indicated a mentor and benefactor relationship between the two. While Samperio's continued updates could be seen as a courtesy to his superior who consistently had devoted resources and funding to technical agricultural modernization projects in the diocese and agricultural science education for Samperio, I believe instead that it also shows abiding interest on the part of Archbishop Miranda in the tools available to concretely improve the lives of rural and indigenous Mexicans.

Even beyond Mexico, Archbishop Miranda's work in Tulancingo caught the attention of interested observers. A student at the University of Madrid wrote Miranda to ask for materials on indigenous languages from the Tulancingo diocese because he had seen a profile of Miranda and his work with the indigenous published in *America Indígena*, the magazine/periodical of the III.<sup>78</sup>

In his ascent through the Mexican Church hierarchy, Miranda's attention could no longer dwell upon the intricacies of small-scale and local initiatives that were possible in Tulancingo. Regardless, Archbishop Miranda continued to receive updates from Samperio and others involved in rural development and indigenous ministry. In the early 1960s, someone prepared a summary of the Church's work with the indigenous in the

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<sup>77</sup> "Telegraph from Pbro. Héctor Samperio to Archbishop Miranda," August 23, 1956, AHAM, Base DM, c. 158, exp. 9.

<sup>78</sup> "Letter from Alberto Rubio Fuentes, University of Madrid, to Bishop Miranda," March 22, 1955, AHAM, Base DM, c. 256, exp. 19.

Mezquital.<sup>79</sup> Perhaps reflecting an intended audience of Church hierarchy, this summary included both the intensely local interactions between Church and community, such as a meeting with mothers and children in the village of Los Remedios, alongside the ways in which the work in the Mezquital reverberated nationally and internationally. The work with the Otomí had been presented to officials at the Vatican and the programs counted the “enthusiastic intervention and attention” from Monsignor Piani, the Apostolic Delegate in Mexico.<sup>80</sup>

But perhaps the most notable point in the summary was the short section detailing “Collaboration with civil authorities in general works: the foundation of an *Internado Indígena Cardenista*.”<sup>81</sup> One of the hallmarks of revolutionary, Cárdenas-era *indigenismo* was the *internado*, a boarding school environment for indigenous students in which they would have learned Spanish, “proper” customs and habits, and technical and agricultural techniques.<sup>82</sup> The *internado* in the Mezquital was constructed in 1938, and although it is unclear from the available documents when exactly the diocese and the state began collaborating in the *internado* operations, the summary notes that Bishop Miranda visited and both the government and the bishop expressed “mutual satisfaction regarding the united works.”<sup>83</sup> That, by the 1950s and 1960s, the Church and state were collaborating in one of the foundational laboratories of revolutionary *indigenismo*, indicates that both

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<sup>79</sup> There is no date, but it references Samuel Ruiz as Bishop of San Cristóbal Las Casas and Archbishop Miranda’s work in CELAM where he was President from 1958 to 1963. Therefore, this is from sometime in the 1960-63 time frame. “Pastoral Indigenista Misional en el Mezquital,” no date, AHAM, Base DM, c. 274, exp. 28.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> See Dawson, *Indian and Nation*, chapter 2.

<sup>83</sup> On the founding of the *internado* and how it actually became a chapel dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe in 2002, see María Félix Quezada Ramírez, *Ixmiquilpan*, vol. 2, *Las comunidades indígenas de Hidalgo* (Pachuca, Hidalgo: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de Hidalgo, 2015), 12. For the quotation, “Pastoral Indigenista Misional en el Mezquital,” no date, AHAM, Base DM, c. 274, exp. 28.

parties were comfortable enough with each other to put aside the anti-state and anticlerical bluster of hardliners in the respective institutions. For instance, Manuel Gamio, director of the III, wrote to Archbishop Miranda to commend him on the diocesan work with the Otomí in the Mezquital.<sup>84</sup> Further, if the *internados* were part of the modernizing and assimilationist mission of *indigenismo*, then the participation of the Church itself (or segments of it) indicated that the state's wariness toward the Church as a bulwark of rural "fanaticism" may have been waning. Although revolutionary *indigenismo* may not have taken on the campaign of "defanatization" like the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) did, it was only a few years prior that state policymakers could have hardly imagined the Church as a partner in rural and indigenous education.<sup>85</sup>

This is not to say that there was not still mutual suspicion between Church and state, just that there were key sectors in which the two could collaborate. Under the logic of Cold War anti-communism, it is perhaps not much of a surprise that both Church and state were deeply invested in preventing communism (or the threat thereof) from spreading through the countryside.<sup>86</sup> There were certainly still elements within the Church who frequently invoked the bogeymen of "protestants, masons, and communists"

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<sup>84</sup> Letter from Manuel Gamio to Archbishop Miranda, Dec. 3, 1956, AHAM, Base DM, c. 101, exp. 8. Gamio also expresses some concern that his 11-year-old grandson, attending a Catholic school run the Misioneros del Espíritu Santo, is being pressured to join the priesthood, which he considers inappropriate at that age.

<sup>85</sup> Dawson, *Indian and Nation*; Kloppe-Santamaria, *In the Vortex of Violence*; Roseblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race*; Vaughan, *Cultural Politics*.

<sup>86</sup> See, for example, the programming of the 3rd Catholic Congress on Rural Life held in Panama in 1955. Over six days, the congress devoted two days specifically to communism with the following panels: Day 4 - "1) Tactics and works of Communism; 2) Tactics and works of secularism; 3) The internal life of Communism (by Douglas Hyde); Day 5 - 1) Teachings of the Church about atheist Communism; 2) The Church's proposal to counteract Communism; 3) Cooperation with the state and the citizenry in this plan." "3er Congreso Católico de la Vida Rural," Panama, April 17-24, 1955, AHAM, Base Can, c. 117, exp. 2.

threatening their rural and indigenous parishes.<sup>87</sup> But the moderate, and modernizing, faction, rapidly rising in power in the Church, brushed aside the most outlandish paranoia of the conservative hardliners. Given what we have already seen during Miranda's bishopry of Tulancingo, it is entirely consistent that, through his position not just as Archbishop of Mexico but also as the president of CELAM, he expanded the Church's participation in the technological and scientific projects aimed at improving rural life writ large and indigenous life in particular through targeted projects like those in the Mezquital.

### Conclusion

Archbishop Miranda maintained contact with Héctor Samperio long after his move from Tulancingo to Mexico City. In 1963, Samperio was in the United States and working at the Office of the Lay Apostolate alongside Louis Colonnese, a priest who was working under John Considine M.M. at the Latin American Bureau of the National Catholic Welfare Conference (NCWC, the US Episcopate). Samperio, Colonnese, and Considine were, at the end of 1963, frantically finishing organizing for the first Catholic Inter-American Cooperation Program (CICOP) meeting.<sup>88</sup> Samperio wrote to update Archbishop Miranda on his recent move to Iowa, his work with Father Colonnese, and

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<sup>87</sup> "Letter from Bishop of Tehuantepec Jesús Alba Palacios to Archbishop Miranda," January 9, 1962, AHAM, Base DM, c. 154, exp. 67.

<sup>88</sup> CICOP had ten annual meetings running from 1964 to 1973. For a table of the ten CICOP conferences, see Hurteau, *A Worldwide Heart*, 287. They brought together episcopal representatives from Latin America and the United States along with policymakers, academics, and theologians to work on addressing urgent issues in the Americas. For an example of non-Church participants, Louis Colonnese invited Ralph Dungan, the former US Ambassador to Chile and then-Chancellor of Higher Education of New Jersey, to serve on the coordinating committee for the 1969 conference, "Human Rights and the Liberation of Man in the Americas." See "Letter of invitation from Rev. Louis Colonnese to Chancellor Ralph Dungan," February 20, 1968, Ralph A. Dungan Personal Papers, JFK Presidential Library, Digital Identifier RADPP-026-001-p0002.

his success sending a lay volunteer to Huayacocotla, Veracruz (in the Huasteca) through the Papal Volunteers for Latin America (PAVLA) program. But most importantly, Samperio was engaging in the personal outreach to ensure that Archbishop Miranda had received his invitation and, in a very diplomatic manner, let him know that the conference would be “unilaterally influenced by the Chile-Brazil group” if the other Mexican invitees continued to ignore their invitations and entreaties to participate.<sup>89</sup> In particular, Samperio was very concerned that neither Pedro Velazquez (Director of the SSM) and Mons. Rafael Vázquez Corona (National Assistant of Catholic Action for the CEM) had replied. Thus, he asked Archbishop Miranda to reach out to them and to invite anyone else that he thought CICOP had accidentally omitted from the attached list.<sup>90</sup>

In essence, Cardinal Miranda represented a Catholic version of Cold War politics that, even before the reforms of the Second Vatican Council, was making peace with secular liberalism and embracing the possibilities of social reform and uplift through the embrace of modern science. And recognition for this faction reverberated in both religious and secular circles. Miranda’s indigenista pastoral programs in Tulancingo, combining indigenous language training for priests, road construction, and agricultural technical assistance, were celebrated as a model program by their secular partners in the Mezquital, Gamio and the III, in the pages of *America Indígena*.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Presumably, Samperio was concerned over the potential domination of the emerging progressive bishops, like Manuel Larraín (Chile) who had been agitating for agrarian reform, or Hélder Câmara (Brazil), who was openly socialist.

<sup>90</sup> “Letter from Héctor Samperio to Archbishop Miranda,” December 18, 1963, AHAM, Base DM, c. 332, exp. 29.

<sup>91</sup> Ángel María Garibay, “Algunos aspectos de la obra indigenista de la Iglesia Católica en la actualidad,” *América Indígena* 15, no. 1 (January 1955): 11-28.



Yet this faction also had to walk a fine line. Internally, they were jockeying with hardline anti-communists within and associated with the Church, like the Sinarquistas. For example, in 1952 the Anti-Communist Popular Front of Mexico (el Frente Popular Anti-Comunista de México) was circulating a pamphlet titled “All the Popes Against Communism.” Miranda, at that point still titular President of the SSM, had the SSM respond point by point to the pamphlet, clarifying how it mistranslated papal documents and misrepresented Catholic social doctrine. The SSM’s response tacked on their official position regarding communism. Communism as a doctrine was wrong, they argued, because it failed to account for the dignity of the human person, encouraged violence, undermined the family unit, contained mistaken ideas on morality and truth, and allowed no place for religion in human life. However, the SSM was clear that communism itself sought a more just world that was not entirely inconsistent with Catholic social teachings. The SSM cautioned that “Catholics need to be careful that their anti-communist position never appears like an opposition to the elevation of the working class.”<sup>92</sup>

Camp argued that the Church and the state never fully understood the motivations and the ideological underpinnings of the other.<sup>93</sup> In sectors such as organized labor, Church and state were fierce competitors at times for the loyalty of workers’ organizations. Bishop of Cuernavaca Sergio Méndez Arceo and Fidel Velázquez, longtime leader of the Confederation of Mexican Workers (Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos, CTM) and fervent PRIista, famously clashed over Méndez

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<sup>92</sup> Pbro. Manuel Velazquez, “Asunto: Se da la opinión sobre el folleto titulado ‘Todos los Papas contra el Comunismo,’” July 18, 1952, AHAM, Base Can, c. 177, exp. 2.

<sup>93</sup> Camp, *Crossing Swords*, Chapter 1.

Arceo's support for independent labor unions.<sup>94</sup> Even in these sectors where Catholic social doctrine coincided with the rhetorical legacy of the Mexican Revolution, perceptions of mutual antagonism at times foreswore the possibility of collaboration. However, more diplomatic representatives of the Church like Bishop Miranda were indeed sometimes able to allay the state's preoccupations about a "political" Church and collaborate in initiatives such as rural development. As we have seen, in the case of indigenous peoples, this collaboration was predicated on similar understandings of indigenous communities as lamentably held back due to a lack of education and the harshness of their rural environment. As both moderate Catholics and the Mexican state embraced modern agricultural and social sciences, allegedly neutral and universal, free of ideology, rural development became a meeting ground upon which collaboration on something like the Internado Indígena Cardenista of the Mezquital was made possible.<sup>95</sup> In Chiapas however, Bishop Lucio Torreblanca had other ideas of how the Church should engage with indigenous peoples. He proposed that the Church fulfill its historical role, based in the colonial past, of protector of the indigenous. In this vision, he imagined the Church and new missionary activity as the interlocutors between indigenous communities and the world. There would be no space for Church-state collaboration.

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<sup>94</sup> See the IPS report on a 1971 CTM protest that demanded the deportation of Ivan Illich for violating Article 33 of the Constitution (foreigners intruding on Mexican politics) and the punishment of Bishop Méndez Arceo for violation of Article 130 (religious involvement in public politics), "Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales: Estado de Morelos, Información de Cuernavaca, A/2719," October 24, 1971, AGN, Ivan Illich, Versión Pública, Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales (hereafter IPS), Legajo Único.

<sup>95</sup> On science's alleged neutrality as a mid-century modernizing tool, see Karin Roseblatt, "Modernization, Dependency, and the Global in Mexican Critiques of Anthropology," *Journal of Global History* 9, no. 1 (March 2014): 94-121.

## Chapter 2: The Unfinished Business of the Conquest: Bishop Lucio Torreblanca and “Internal Missions”

### Introduction

If the case of Bishop Miranda demonstrated an invigorated Catholic engagement with rural development, driven by scientific and technological advancements, the case of Bishop Torreblanca in Chiapas presented an alternative vision of how and why the Church engaged with Mexico’s rural indigenous peoples. Bishop Miranda imagined that modern science would improve rural life materially and spiritually, a central goal of social Catholicism. But Bishop Torreblanca gave the Church a goal to “reconquer” the space lost to secular liberalism, anticlericalism, and Protestant missionaries. His vision saw indigenous communities as a frontier for “internal missions.” In an ironic twist, Torreblanca’s ultimate success in establishing missions and the infrastructure to support them would provide the basis for later liberationist work.

By the midcentury mark, depictions of rural religious practices had reached wide audiences beyond Mexico through Graham Greene’s novel, *The Power and the Glory* (1941), his published notes from his journey through Mexico, *The Lawless Roads* (1939), and a film adapted from the novel, *The Fugitive* (1947), directed by John Ford and starring Henry Fonda. In the books, Greene portrayed the governors of Tabasco and Chiapas as particularly capricious in their exercise of anticlericalism.<sup>1</sup> But even as fierce

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Greene, *The Lawless Roads* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990). It is also worth noting that Cardinal Miranda (at that point not yet appointed Bishop) met with and facilitated Greene’s Mexico travel, Andes, *The Mysterious Sofia*, 323.

as Greene's critique of the Mexican authorities was, his language also dripped with disdain when describing indigenous religiosity and the "whiskey" priest who economically exploited the faithful for every religious service conducted in semi-clandestinity.<sup>2</sup> As he told a story of Catholicism's lasting power, Greene and other "urban" observers, foreign and domestic, saw the "Indian religion - a dark, tormented, magic cult" as a barely recognizable Catholicism.<sup>3</sup> Domestically, the pious voices of Catholic Action dressed up their lamentations of indigenous religious practices as the fault of incomplete education. Yet, even cloaked in respectability, domestic church-people clearly saw indigenous religiosity and religious practices as needing remedy in order to bring the indigenous into an ordered and disciplined Catholic moral and spiritual practice.

Concurrent with Cardinal Miranda's work in Tulancingo, the new Bishop of Chiapas, Lucio Torreblanca y Tapia, arrived in Chiapas right as the Mexican Church was grappling with how to reassert its power and influence in the country now that the friendly Ávila Camacho (1940-46) administration had dropped any enforcement of anticlerical provisions. Just as Stephen Andes documented the ideological struggles over the mission of Catholic Action in Mexico, various bishops too were jostling within the hierarchy of the Church over the priorities of the Church in a post-war era.<sup>4</sup> Lucio Torreblanca y Tapia, named Bishop of Chiapas in 1944, became one of the strongest, consistent, and conservative voices in the Church demanding a renewed vigor in Church attention to Mexico's indigenous populations.

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<sup>2</sup> Greene, *The Lawless Roads*, 154.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 166-67.

<sup>4</sup> Andes, *The Mysterious Sofia*, 200-203.

In this chapter, I first look at the diocese of Chiapas and Bishop Lucio Torreblanca as emblematic of a Catholic traditionalism that conceived of the indigenous not as a population on the cusp of entering modernity but rather as objects of incomplete christianization and necessitating the paternalist protection of the Church in the form of “internal missions.” I close the chapter with a discussion of how a combination of these two divergent strains, Miranda’s and Torreblanca’s, of Catholic thought were institutionalized in the growing Church bureaucracy with the founding of CENAMI, and how they laid the groundwork for future endeavors in indigenous ministry as the process of Vatican II began to unfold in the early 1960s

### **Mission in the Twentieth Century: From Rome to Chiapas**

Bishop Torreblanca was originally from Huajuapán de León, Oaxaca, a notoriously religiously conservative diocese that was carved out of the Archdiocese of Antequera (Oaxaca) by Pope Pius X in 1903.<sup>5</sup> Huajuapán was not just notoriously conservative, but was also Mexico’s first “indigenous” diocese, specifically associated with the predominant Mixtec population of the region and incorporating Mixtec language and culture into seminary training.<sup>6</sup> Like Cardinal Miranda, Torreblanca spent much of the Cristero war years outside of Mexico. But unlike Miranda, who spent his brief exile traveling, fundraising, and building the foundations for a post-conflict Church, Torreblanca spent these years mostly in post-seminary graduate education in Rome.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> On the Diocese of Huajuapán de León, see Smith, *Roots of Conservatism*, Chapter 4 in particular. Although it is unclear if there is family relation, or how close that relation might be, one of the Huajuapán laymen responsible for petitioning for elevation to diocesan status was Fiacro Torreblanca.

<sup>6</sup> Fallaw, *Religion and State Formation*, 66.

<sup>7</sup> On Cardinal Miranda’s exile activities, see Andes, *The Mysterious Sofia*, 109-163.

While the goings-on of 1920s Mexico was certainly of serious concern to the Vatican, much of the attention of the European Church was devoted to the question of how to move beyond the horrors of the Great War. In large part, the Vatican's answer was missionary work. The Vatican was still decades away from the reforms of the Second Vatican Council that institutionally legitimated the cultural and spiritual diversity of the Catholic world. However, much of the 1920s was devoted to a celebration and expansion of missionary work and the increasing use of ethnology and anthropology as sciences to understand and build knowledge of non-European cultures.<sup>8</sup> But even setting aside the question of use of anthropological sciences, such events as the 1925 Vatican Mission Exposition exposed the workings of the Church around the globe to thousands upon thousands of visitors.

Pope Pius XI had declared that 1925 would be a Holy Year with focus on mission. The Vatican invited missionary orders to send objects and articles that would show the societies, cultures, and beliefs of the places where missionaries were working.<sup>9</sup> The first of twelve pavilions devoted to different regions of the world highlighted indigenous groups of North and Central America, with a number of objects coming from US missionaries and anthropologists who worked among Native Americans and in the Caribbean.<sup>10</sup> Gloria Bell argued that in spite of ongoing concerns and anxieties about indigenous religiosity, the presence of “pagan” indigenous artifacts and objects in the

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<sup>8</sup> As already mentioned above, the use of ethnology was institutionalized through such projects as the 1927 founding of the Missionary Ethnological Museum. Hurteau, *A Worldwide Heart*, 63-68.

<sup>9</sup> See Angelyn Dries, “The 1925 Vatican Mission Exposition and the Interface Between Catholic Mission Theory and World Religions,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 40, no. 2, (April 2016): 119-132.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 123; 126-128.

Exposition functioned as “silent markers of conversion.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, the objects on view were reminders that missionary work had succeeded in replacing pagan beliefs with Catholicism in countless indigenous cultures. We do not know about Bishop Torreblanca’s attendance or thoughts on the exposition, but we do know that he spent his formative years in Rome during these events and that he arrived in Chiapas with an evangelical zeal and a determination that spiritual outreach would transform the region. As one Chiapaneco intellectual noted, “Bishop Torreblanca privileged spirituality as the dynamo for the reconquest of the world, and accompanied it with an unusual missionary action.”<sup>12</sup>

Torreblanca served as the Bishop of Chiapas from 1944 to 1959. He was named Archbishop of Durango in 1959, but only held that post for two years before he passed away in 1961. Jean Meyer described the diocese of Chiapas as having been functionally abandoned by clergy for nearly a century (1857-1940), and subject to particularly stringent anticlerical measures in the 1930s.<sup>13</sup> However, the absence of the Catholic Church and the permission given by President Cárdenas to allow the SIL to work freely meant that Protestant missionaries and educators were spreading through the region of southeast Mexico right at the moment that the Catholic Church was scrambling to reassert its hegemony. Todd Hartch dispelled the notion that the SIL “tricked” Cárdenas into inviting them into Mexico. Rather, he saw the entry of the SIL as a logical step following the federal government’s abandonment of restricting religious practice and as

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<sup>11</sup> Gloria Bell, “Competing Sovereignities: Indigeneity and the Visual Culture of Catholic Colonization at the 1925 Pontifical Missionary Exhibition,” *Journal of Global Catholicism* 3, no. 2, (Summer 2019): 23.

<sup>12</sup> Jesús Morales Bermúdez, *Entre ásperos caminos llanos: la diócesis de San Cristóbal de las Casas, 1950-1995* (México, CDMX: Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Chiapas, 2005), 87.

<sup>13</sup> Meyer, Gallardo, and Ríos, *Samuel Ruiz en San Cristóbal*, 25.

part of the idea of “religious replacement” in lieu of “religious suppression” put forth by President Cárdenas and Moises Saenz.<sup>14</sup> Further, the SIL’s willingness to be a partner to the state and the state’s priorities in the realm of indigenous education and rural development shaped the ways in which the SIL was granted a freedom of movement only tentatively unavailable to the Catholic Church.<sup>15</sup> As Camp shows, Church-state relations continued to be marked by mutual suspicion even in an era of increasingly shared goals of modernization and anti-communism.<sup>16</sup>

This was the milieu that the recently anointed bishop stepped into: a diocese abandoned and exiled, a scarcity of priests (the common Church lament), and Protestant missionaries encroaching on a territory mythical in the history of the Mexican Catholic Church for the legacy of Bartolomé de las Casas as the “defender of the indians.” Given Torreblanca’s likely conservative upbringing and training out of Huajuapán de León, it is quite possible that his appointment to Chiapas was precisely because of the combination of his Roman education and his experiences working with indigenous peoples in his home diocese. But concurrent to the Church’s return to Chiapas was a state constructing and expanding the apparatus of official outreach to, and work for, the indigenous with the INI and the Coordinating Center. Torreblanca too responded with means to start working for the indigenous.

According to Morales Bermúdez, Bishop Torreblanca drew upon a pair of parallel and separate fonts of manpower in his spiritual “reconquest” of Chiapas. The first, his

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<sup>14</sup> Hartch, *Missionaries of the State*, 30-33.

<sup>15</sup> See Lewis, *Rethinking Mexican Indigenismo* for SIL/state collaboration in Chiapas.

<sup>16</sup> Camp argues that Church-state relations over the 20th century was more a product of misunderstanding and miscomprehension than anything else - a “mutual ignorance” of how the other functioned and the logic underlying decisions. Camp, *Crossing Swords*, 202.



local clergy, priests who had been raised and educated in Chiapas and were familiar with the religious and socio-politico-cultural terrain of the region, will be set aside for a moment. The second, religious orders, streamed into Chiapas at the bishop's invitation. At first, Bishop Torreblanca quickly put together missionary teams to embark across the state on "intensive campaigns of preaching and liturgical celebrations."<sup>17</sup> Town after town likely saw their first openly celebrated mass in decades as the bishop tried to send Church agents to all corners of the diocese. Further, these roving missionary campaigns, surely responding to increased Protestant missionary activity in the region, foreshadowed the establishment of permanent missionary territories entrusted to different religious orders. Missionaries of the Holy Spirit took charge of a parish (Parroquia de la Virgen de Guadalupe) in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the Jesuits established a mission in Bachajón (part of the municipality of Chilón), the Dominicans went to Ocosingo, the Franciscans to Tumbalá and Palenque, and the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (founded by Chiapaneco priest Teodosio Martínez Ramos) took missions in Tenejapa, Oxchuc, and Huixtán.<sup>18</sup>

By inviting missionary orders, Bishop Torreblanca aimed to address interconnected pressing issues in the diocese. The first, again, was the scarcity of priests. The long absence of Church agents in the region had decimated the ranks of the diocesan clergy largely because recruitment and training was severely limited during the anticlerical decades. While the ranks of diocesan clergy would grow in subsequent years, many of them trained at Montezuma, inviting missionary orders filled an immediate need

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<sup>17</sup> Morales Bermúdez, *Entre ásperos caminos llanos*, 91.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 91-92. On the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (Misioneros de la sagrada corazón y la Santa María de Guadalupe), who were founded in 1938, the first members of the order were trained at Montezuma Seminary, and went back to Chiapas on the invitation of Bishop Torreblanca in 1951, see "Historia." Misioneros del Sagrado Corazón y de Santa María de Guadalupe, <http://www.msycmgpe.org/historia.html>, accessed Dec. 4, 2020.

in the diocese.<sup>19</sup> And second, Protestant missionaries operating throughout the state were encroaching on “traditionally” Catholic territory and threatening the hegemony of the Church. Protestant evangelization and conversion campaigns saw significant success in Chiapas, which both frustrated the Catholic Church and took violent turns in a handful of places where Catholic community-members exiled converts for disrupting intra-community dynamics.<sup>20</sup> While each missionary order took their own particular approach to animating the faithful, the Missionaries of the Holy Spirit were critical partners to Bishop Torreblanca in driving a biblical education campaign (el Movimiento Bíblico) that formed laypersons into catechists to advance religious education in the region.<sup>21</sup> This was, of course, the predecessor to Bishop Samuel Ruiz’s widely celebrated catechist training program that empowered indigenous community leaders to be agents of their own religious education and of their own liberation/salvation, which would have lasting consequences in the 1994 Zapatista uprising.<sup>22</sup> However, unlike the liberatory and social-minded biblical training that would become the hallmark of the Ruiz bishopric, the early iterations of biblical training were designed precisely to respond to and combat Protestant

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<sup>19</sup> Butler, “Montezuma’s Children,” cites figures that a quarter of diocesan clergy in Mexico were Montezuma alumni by the early 1970s.

<sup>20</sup> On the well-known case of San Juan Chamula and Protestant exiles creating new community bonds in the outskirts of San Cristóbal de las Casas, see Gabriela Patricia Robledo Hernández, *Identidades femeninas en transformación: Religión y género entre la población indígena urbana en el altiplano Chiapaneco* (México, CDMX: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2009). On intra-community religious conflicts and violence in the neighboring state of Oaxaca, see Marroquín, *El conflicto religioso*. See also Kloppe-Santamaría, *In the Vortex of Violence*, Chapter 2 on the intersection of religion and lynching.

<sup>21</sup> Morales Bermúdez, *Entre ásperos caminos llanos*, 113-4.

<sup>22</sup> Morales Bermúdez, *Entre ásperos caminos llanos*, 13; Meyer, Gallardo, and Ríos, *Samuel Ruiz en San Cristóbal*, 117-8. A number of the indigenous catechists ended up in the ranks of the EZLN and were crucial community-members for the legitimation of the Zapatista movement in the highlands of Chiapas - see Mattiace, *To See with Two Eyes*.

evangelization by appropriating the individualistic contemplative spirituality of Protestantism via bible study.<sup>23</sup>

The Movimiento Biblico in Mexico arose out of tentative early twentieth century attempts within the Church to expand the purview of biblical knowledge beyond the particular persons (priests, theologians) and institutions (the Vatican) that had long been considered guardians of biblical interpretation and Church doctrine. It was only 1930 when the Catholic Church sanctioned translations of the bible into Italian, French, Spanish, and English for pastoral use, and the 1943 encyclical, *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, by Pope Pius XII that encouraged lay biblical study and exhorted translations of the bible into additional vernaculars.<sup>24</sup> These types of biblical movements, generally conservative in nature but effective in mobilizing and activating laypersons, were the predecessors of both the evangelical-like movements within Catholicism such as Charismatic Catholicism *and* the Christian base communities that would become emblematic of liberationist Catholicism beginning in the 1960s even as these two outgrowths had divergent political and social implications.<sup>25</sup>

Despite changing norms regarding use of vernacular languages and biblical translations within the Church prior to the reforms of Vatican II, the use of indigenous languages was hotly debated within the Mexican Church. This debate had been running since the conquest, and there was a long history of clergy learning indigenous languages

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<sup>23</sup> Morales Bermúdez, *Entre ásperos caminos llanos*, 114.

<sup>24</sup> Daniel Scoth Marquéz Páz, “La pastoral bíblica en la Arquidiócesis de Guatemala a la luz del Concilio Vaticano II (1955-1975): Una aproximación histórica comparativa,” (Licenciatura en Teología, Universidad Mesoamericana, Guatemala, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> On their co-existence in Brazil, see Burdick, *Looking for God in Brazil*.

to facilitate evangelization.<sup>26</sup> However, the practice had long faded by the time Mexico was entering the twentieth century. Thus, Huajuapán, along with Huejutla in the Huasteca, had reinvigorated the question by teaching seminarians Mixtec and Náhuatl, respectively, and encouraging priests in the diocese to communicate with the indigenous faithful in their own language.<sup>27</sup> It is likely that Bishop Torreblanca himself had been trained in the seminary in Mixtec and arrived in Chiapas with similar ideas regarding the use of indigenous languages. Yet Catholics in Mexico lagged far behind the enterprising biblical translators of the SIL who had embedded linguists in Chiapas in the late 1930s and were already publishing language primers in Zoque, Tzeltal, and Tzotzil as early as 1944.<sup>28</sup> There were a few pioneering examples of Catholic catechetical primers, including one published in Totonaco for use in the Diocese of Papantla.<sup>29</sup> While Bishop Torreblanca was beginning to encourage the training of indigenous catechists so that they could spread religious education in their own languages, it was not a shared conviction that agents of the Church should be trained to communicate in indigenous languages.

The disagreement over the appropriateness of indigenous language use was powerfully reflected in a white paper written by Ángel Garibay for the Permanent Commission of Seminary Superiors. Garibay, priest and academic, refuted point by point

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<sup>26</sup> See Scheper-Hughes, *Biography of a Mexican Crucifix*; William Taylor, *Magistrates of the Sacred: Priests and Parishioners in Eighteenth-Century Mexico* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1996).

<sup>27</sup> Smith, *Roots of Conservatism*, 219-20.

<sup>28</sup> See the SIL digital archive: “Lecciones de lectura en el idioma Zoque de Copainalá, Chiapas,” 1944, entry 61278; Marianna Slocum, “Translated Tzeltal Texts,” 1944, entry 58494; and Tzotzil texts from later in the 1940s/early 1950s published in coordination with the INI, “Tzotzil 3, Zinacantan” INI, CCI, no date, entry 86646.

<sup>29</sup> Father Carlos Ramírez, “A’ctzu Catecismo Totonaco Tachuhuin: Breve catecismo en Idioma Totonaco para los fieles en algunas Parroquias de la Diócesis de Papantla,” 1953, Tezuitlan, Puebla, AHAM, Base DM, c 236, exp 58.

the justifications that indigenous languages should not be studied in the seminaries.<sup>30</sup> In response to the argument that it is pointless to learn indigenous languages because they are bound to disappear, Garibay noted that this same argument has been repeated since the sixteenth century and the indigenous languages had not yet disappeared. To the argument that “it is preferable to teach *castellano* to the indians than it is to learn their language,” he responded that it should be easier for one already-educated individual (priest) to learn another language than to teach a second language to many people, a task that would also distract from the primary mission of religious education and guidance.<sup>31</sup> With a few more refutations of arguments against the teaching of indigenous languages, Garibay makes his point clearly: it is not necessary that every seminarian learn an indigenous language, but it is necessary that every seminarian internalize the importance of studying indigenous languages of the region where they are to work. After all, he argued, it would be counterproductive to create a uniform seminary curriculum for dioceses with multiple indigenous languages. Rather, seminaries should prepare future priests to go out and learn the language of those they are working among.<sup>32</sup>

Missionary activity and empowerment of laypersons as catechists and biblical educators were critical elements in Bishop Torreblanca’s larger vision of “reconquest” of rural and indigenous space. Fundamentally, his vision came down to a question over who, Church or state, was the proper intermediary with indigenous communities. In a 1951 diocesan circular sent to the clergy of the diocese of Chiapas, Bishop Torreblanca exhorted his clergy to work with the *campesinos* on reforestation and tree planting

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<sup>30</sup> Ángel María Garibay K., “Del estudio de las lenguas indígenas en los seminarios,” October 10, 1950, AHAM, Base DM, c. 159, exp. 51.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

projects.<sup>33</sup> He started by noting that this project was national and was conducted with the assistance of the civil authorities. While the terms of the project and cooperation between Church and state are not entirely visible here, the allusions of the document allow for some conclusions. First, Bishop Torreblanca merited that clerical participation in reforestation was a patriotic exercise given that it is “for the conservation and fertility of the soil and for the health and wellbeing of man.”<sup>34</sup> He posited that clergy are particularly well situated to undertake this project because “our condition as pastors of souls puts us in intimate contact with all social classes, principally the campesinos, who are the great majority in our diocese, and who know to listen to the voice of their pastor, not just when we guide them along the road toward eternal salvation, but also when we guide them on the paths of wellbeing and progress.”<sup>35</sup>

In fact, contact with the dispersed *campesinos* (by which he meant indigenous) of the diocese was part and parcel of the “reconquest” mission. Responding to the roving Protestant missionaries, Bishop Torreblanca’s vision of mission rested on two pillars: a teaching of the “word” that responded to Protestant questioning of Catholicism, and that Catholic teachings would go to the communities rather than the communities coming to the parish. It relied heavily on the invited missionaries, but also on the indigenous themselves who missionaries empowered as catechists to teach the “word” to their fellow community members. In a celebratory piece about the evolution of the diocese, Jesuit priest Mardonio Morales commented that Torreblanca’s project “broke the parish centralism and pushed the missionaries to get out to the dispersed communities in the

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<sup>33</sup> Gobierno eclesiastico de la Diócesis de Chiapas, “Circular num. 55,” AHAM, Base DM, c. 202, exp. 88, July 21, 1951.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

mountains.”<sup>36</sup> This process would reach further heights under Bishop Samuel Ruíz in the 1960s, but was certainly well under way when a forestry proposal came across the desk of Bishop Torreblanca in 1951.

We know little of this particular project, an apparent collaboration between Church and state in reforestation and in planting fruit trees in particular along roads and paths for the purposes of both conservation and beautification.<sup>37</sup> However, we can extrapolate from the work of Christopher Boyer that this project arose from a transition of state priorities. No longer would the campesino collective be the driver of national agricultural production as had been the focus of the Cárdenas era (1934-40). Rather, Boyer observed, “Mexican leaders of the 1940s and 1950s chose a middle ground that embraced the Cárdenas model of state-managed economic development but gave up on the idea that the working poor could bring it to fruition.”<sup>38</sup> In this middle ground, the state entrusted private concerns to carry out forestry under the watchful eye of new and expanded bureaucratic bodies while also mounting national projects to educate and discipline the rural poor for their perceived unscientific mismanagement of woodlands.<sup>39</sup>

What is notable though was not that Bishop Torreblanca envisioned his clergy, and by extension the Church itself, as a willing collaborator with state priorities and programs, but that he saw his clergy as the ideal vehicles to carry out these programs *in place of* agents of the state. Although he did not mention the recent construction and opening of the INI Coordinating Center in Chiapas (1951), this could not have been far

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<sup>36</sup> Mardonio Morales, S.J., “Pastoral indígena en la diócesis de San Cristóbal de las Casas,” February 2000, Archivo Histórico de la Provincia de México de la Compañía de Jesús (hereafter AHPM), Sección IV, 602, Misión de Bachajón.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Boyer, *Political Landscapes*, 129.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, Chapter 4 in particular.

from the Bishop's mind. Torreblanca carried on about the benefits of reforestation, that it prevented forest fires, made up for the "immoderate felling of trees," and helped prevent erosion when planted in ravines and along river banks.<sup>40</sup> But most importantly, he recognized that the Church potentially had a reach that the state did not and he was determined to protect that advantage. He directed his clergy: "you will try to instill these ideas in all your parishioners, even from the most remote settlements (*rancherías*) of your jurisdiction."<sup>41</sup> It was not that the Church would work side by side with the state as in Tulancingo, but that the Church could and should appropriate some of the state's priorities and work among the *campesinos* in place of the state.

### **Internal Missions, the CEM, and CENAMI**

Bishop Torreblanca, with his ideological prejudices and limitations, was pushing a renewed effort of the Catholic Church, particularly in Chiapas, to inherit and embody its historical role as the Church of Bartolome de las Casas, "protector of *los indios*." And in fact, further embracing the legacy of colonial evangelization, Torreblanca envisioned renewed outreach to the indigenous as an "internal mission," a new evangelization process to remedy decades (if not centuries) of (benign?) neglect.<sup>42</sup> As the Mexican Church began to strengthen and reorganize the national episcopate (the CEM), Bishop Torreblanca moved his advocacy out from the borders of his diocese to prod the Mexican Church toward his idea of indigenous communities as the new mission frontier. In 1955, Bishop Miranda remarked, in a letter to Ángel Garibay about the push throughout the

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<sup>40</sup> Gobierno eclesiástico de la Diócesis de Chiapas, "Circular num. 55," AHAM, Base DM, c. 202, exp. 88, July 21, 1951.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Eleazar López Hernández, Oct. 5, 2016.



Church to engage in better and more profound work with the indigenous, that “our work is now only in its initial period; but it is certainly inspired by the tremendous love of the Church for our little indian brothers (*los inditos*) who today, like yesterday, should be the object of our pastoral care, like they were during the golden age of our missions.”<sup>43</sup> Left unsaid was the association between mission and colonization precisely at the moment that decolonization was well underway across the world.

The work referenced above that was in its “initial stages” was strengthened by the reorganization of the Mexican Episcopate in 1953, providing Bishop Torreblanca with a platform from which to encourage centralized action on improving and expanding “internal missions.”<sup>44</sup> The CEM first emerged in 1935 in the wake of the Cristero Wars.<sup>45</sup> The idea of episcopal conferences themselves was still a developing concept within Catholicism in the early twentieth century, and would only be concretized in the second Vatican Council. The first Catholic episcopal conferences arose in Western Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century during the crises of Pius IX’s papacy and the incomplete nature of the first Vatican Council, and then in the United States during the First World War.<sup>46</sup> Responding to papal encouragement and the nascent formation of CELAM (the Latin American episcopate), the Mexican prelates reorganized their own episcopal body to encourage national coordination of priorities. While the CEM held and holds no authority to dictate the actions and priorities of any given diocese, a strengthened national

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<sup>43</sup> “Letter from Bishop Miranda to Ángel María Garibay,” February 14, 1955, AHAM, Base DM, c. 329, exp. 53.

<sup>44</sup> “Conclusiones, sugerencias y votos relativos a los temas de la comisión 6a (misiones, indios y gentes de color),” 1955, AHAM, Base DM, c. 33, exp. 57.

<sup>45</sup> Camp, *Crossing Swords*, 236.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph A. Komonchak, “Introduction: Episcopal Conferences Under Criticism,” in *Episcopal Conferences: Historical, Canonical, and Theological Studies*, ed. Thomas J. Reese (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1989), 1-3.

body built upon the idea of a Mexican Church, national in nature, that had been fostered over years of exile and training together at the Montezuma Seminary. And it was in this newly empowered body, now meeting annually, that Bishop Torreblanca advocated for increased attention to the indigenous peoples of Mexico.

At the end of the 1957 CEM Plenary Assembly, the secretaries of the Assembly, Bishops Ernesto Corripio (Tamaulipas) and Bishop Adalberto Almeida (Tulancingo), presented the collected bishops a series of final declarations and papers that represented the discussions and decisions made over the days of the assembly. In their statement on the “indigenous problem,” they lamented that the indigenous did not enjoy the same benefits of Christian civilization as the majority of Mexicans. In particular, “the deplorable conditions of their lives are characterized by extreme and undeserved poverty; by very imperfect religiosity and morality; by the lack of culture and education both social and economic; a lack of hygiene; and by an accumulation of illnesses, some endemic, that make their lives painfully unhappy.”<sup>47</sup>

The concluding document from the Episcopate’s assembly represented and included the competing views and priorities of the different Bishops who worked with and among the indigenous. In their enumeration of the “indigenous problem,” it is telling that the CEM placed the situation of indigenous poverty at the top of their list, inching toward a critique of economic relations and exploitations by deeming the poverty “undeserved.” Reflecting the positions of an ascendent conservative moderate current, counting Miranda among their ranks, the CEM document went on to argue that the

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<sup>47</sup> “Declaraciones y exhortación del Episcopado Mexicano al terminar su asamblea plenaria de Octubre de 1957,” Oct. 17, 1957, AHAM, Base DM, c. 74, exp. 47.

material and the spiritual needs must be combined in order to address “the whole well being of man.”<sup>48</sup> Without saying as much, such a position was critiquing both Marxism for ignoring spiritual needs and conservative traditionalism for ignoring material needs. While the document recognized the voices of Bishop Torreblanca and his allies in that it placed the Church as the inheritor of the great missionary legacy of the past, it also called for action to transcend the missionary framework and encouraged all Catholics, “as members of the Church and as citizens of Mexico,” to take “prompt and adequate action.”<sup>49</sup> In other words, working with the indigenous was not just about continuing the “glorious” work of an incomplete conquest. The challenges of the modern era called for Catholics, if they were to be members of the nation, to draw upon their faith and ensure that all Mexicans received the benefits and promises that only the combination of modernity and faith could provide.

Bishop Torreblanca apparently thought this focus on material needs a step too far, a realm into which the Church ought not to venture. Upon being commissioned to present to the Episcopate on the “indigenous problem,” he first apologized for not putting together a more complete presentation for them and then launched into his understanding of the issue.

The religious life of [the indigenous] ranges from the paganism of the Lacandón to a Christian life that is measured by the reception of Baptism and shows religious practices that appear as a mix of Christianity, of idolatry and of superstition and it is all wrapped up in a profound religious and cultural ignorance. Their moral life is deeply marked by the sins deriving from alcoholism; the material conditions of their lives are falling, sometimes, to absolute misery, but in general, they do not reach satisfaction of the necessities for dignity in the human person. It is important to keep in mind that they live

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

under the incessant siege of Protestant propaganda that wants to drag them toward heresy with promises of material benefits.<sup>50</sup>

The Episcopate was in the process of creating the Episcopal Commission in Favor of the Indigenous (Comisión Episcopal a Favor de los Indígenas). Given Archbishop Torreblanca's experience in Chiapas and rather remarkable progress in rebuilding the Church and attracting missionary programs to work with and among the indigenous, it was perfectly logical that the Episcopate would solicit his opinion. It is doubtful, however, that they expected such a broadside that bordered on accusing his fellow bishops of not fully comprehending the urgency of the "indigenous problem" and "rechristianization."<sup>51</sup> Thus, rather than form a commission "in favor of the indigenous," the Episcopate's efforts should instead, he argued, focus on the idea of "internal missions."

As Archbishop Torreblanca conceived it, the "internal mission" was not so different from a parish structure and could simply fall under the Church's existing Canon Law regarding the governance of parishes. However, beyond the day-to-day activities expected of a parish, Torreblanca argued that the "internal mission should have, at a minimum: a) two priests aided by a great many catechists and b) a community of religious sisters in sufficient numbers to attend to: the domestic services, free schooling and the *internado*, catechism, the [medical] dispensary and the visits with the missionary [priest] to the settlements within the mission."<sup>52</sup> Even more explicit than his 1951 circular in which he reasoned that priests are particularly well-placed to engage in agricultural

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<sup>50</sup> "Letter from Archbishop Torreblanca (Durango) to the Episcopal Committee," October 3, 1959, AHAM, Base DM, c. 75, exp. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

development, his 1959 proposal for the “internal mission” left absolutely no space for the state. The social services that were integral to postrevolutionary state expansion, the school and basic medical provision, were to be taken over by religious sisters.<sup>53</sup>

Torreblanca was not alone in this line of thinking. In a document circulating for the 1955 meeting in Rio de Janeiro that would give shape to the newly formed CELAM, Bernardino Echeverria Ruiz, the Bishop of Ambato, Ecuador, argued that the Church was the only institution that could confront the indigenous problem. Prior to the conquest, he argued, the great indigenous civilizations “were states of the communist type in which the right to property hardly existed.”<sup>54</sup> In his view, as a result of incomplete conquest and incomplete christianization of the indigenous, the indigenous remained highly susceptible to communist propaganda and influence. And finally, he argued, countries like Mexico, Guatemala (1952), Bolivia, and possibly Ecuador, that were announcing agrarian reform, collectivizing and expropriating private property, were the primary drivers of socialism and communism under the auspices of “helping” the indigenous.<sup>55</sup> To counteract the state, communists, and Protestant incursion, the Bishop argued that the Church must reclaim its role, as it had in the conquest, as “the true friend of the indian, his protector.”<sup>56</sup> In this imagining, only the Church could promote the “religious, moral, social, and cultural bettering of our indigenous.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> On state expansion of education in particular, see Vaughan, *Cultural Politics*.

<sup>54</sup> Bishop Bernardino Echeverria Ruiz, “La Iglesia católica y el problema del indio, Documento 26,” July/August 1955, AHAM, Base DM, c. 34, exp. 18.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> “Letter from Archbishop Torreblanca (Durango) to the Episcopal Committee,” October 3, 1959, AHAM, Base DM, c. 75, exp. 6.

Archbishop Torreblanca thus tried to reorient the Episcopate away from a commission “in favor of” the indigenous, which could skew toward works like those undertaken by Bishop Miranda in Tulancingo in collaboration with the state. Instead, he proposed a more focused “Commission for Internal Missions” which would have the sole purpose of aiding bishops who wanted to establish indigenous missions in their dioceses. It would collect and publish “propaganda,” organize national collections, and recruit religious orders to staff and/or establish new missions.<sup>58</sup> The CEM did not entirely follow his suggestions. Rather, the CEM went through with forming the Episcopal Commission in Favor of the Indigenous and, two years later in 1961, created a subordinate institute dedicated specifically to Torreblanca’s interests: CENAMI.

To chair the new Episcopal Commission, the Mexican bishops tapped Luis Cabrera Cruz, Bishop of San Luis Potosi. Rounding out the commission members were Bishop Manuel Yerena (Huejutla) and Jesus Alba Palacios, recently appointed as the Bishop of Tehuantepec.<sup>59</sup> The commission, in its report to the CEM plenary assembly of 1961, showed a broad range of activities that went beyond the narrow vision of Bishop Torreblanca. Bishop Cabrera Cruz reported on the opening of new missionary centers in the Huasteca, the preparation for opening an *internado*, the printing and distribution of basic catechism in indigenous languages, a partnership with Catholic Relief Services to distribute basic goods and cereals to communities in need, a national conference on indigenous apostolates, and the provisional founding of CENAMI and its first intensive

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> “Letter from Bishop Luis Cabrera Cruz to Archbishop Miranda,” June 18, 1960, AHAM, Base DM, c. 74, exp. 36.

course for lay people “to form and orient future lay leaders of ten dioceses for future social and educational work among indigenous groups.”<sup>60</sup>

CENAMI, almost directly following the proposal that Torreblanca had submitted to the CEM a few years prior, took as its mission the following responsibilities to help indigenous missions with “schooling material and technique for literacy centers and schools, medicines and other medical supplies for dispensaries and hygiene promotion, cereals and other foods that will be obtained from Catholic Relief Services, economic aid in cash for specific cases, information services to recruit personnel teams for short-term missions or men and women religious to found mission centers.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, CENAMI was founded as an institutional tool to aid mission initiatives that would ultimately, the Church hoped, would replace the role of the state as the primary interlocutor between indigenous communities and the world.

CENAMI served as a connecting node between the “regular” diocesan Church and religious orders that operated with the permission of diocesan authorities but also according to the characteristics and logics of each particular order. According to its founding statutes, CENAMI operationally had a foot in both sides: it reported to the Episcopal Commission AND served as an auxiliary organization of the Conference of Religious Institutions of Mexico, (la Conferencia de Institutos Religiosos de México, CIRM).<sup>62</sup> Filling the ranks of indigenous missions with members of religious orders made staffing and financial sense for dioceses. The influx of missionaries certainly aided

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<sup>60</sup> Bishop Luis Cabrera Cruz, “Informe que rinde la comisión episcopal en favor de los indígenas, a la asamblea plenaria del Episcopado,” October 5-7, 1961, AHAM, Base DM, c. 72, exp. 47.

<sup>61</sup> Letter from Bishop Luis Cabrera Cruz to Archbishop Miranda,” May 31, 1961, AHAM, Base DM, c. 302, exp. 23.

<sup>62</sup> The CIRM has renamed itself as the Conference of Superiors of Religious Orders of Mexico (Conferencia de Superiores Mayores de Religiosos de México) while retaining its original initials.

with the persistent “scarcity” of personnel, but more concretely, dioceses did not have to financially support members of religious orders who took vows of poverty and received subsidies from their religious order to aid in missionary work.<sup>63</sup> In the 1961 CEM-convoked Congress on the Indigenous Apostolate, among the proposals floated was one to urge every religious order of both men and women to study the possibility of establishing and sustaining an indigenous mission.<sup>64</sup>

Archbishop Lucio Torreblanca passed away in August 1961, long before CENAMI transformed its mission in the post-conciliar years toward building an “autochthonous church.”<sup>65</sup> In a certain sense, then, he was victorious in seeing his ideas come to fruition, even as CENAMI was subordinate to the moderate-dominated Episcopal Commission in Favor of the Indigenous. However, CENAMI’s initial foundation represented an exciting moment for a resurgent Church that felt, for the first time since the Cristiada, emboldened to wage a viable campaign to retake its pre-independence place as the paternalistic protector of indigenous communities against the supposed depredations of the state, communists, modernizers, and Protestants. As ideologically conservative as this project was, it coincided with a global flourishing of missionary activity that had roots in the 1925 Vatican Mission Exposition.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The financial operation of the Church remains fairly obscure, but generally diocesan priests are expected to support themselves through collection at mass and charging fees for basic religious services. A percentage of that collection is supposed to go to the diocese, to the Episcopate, and to the Vatican. This dynamic is explored at greater length in Chapter 4.

<sup>64</sup> “Conclusiones del Congreso de Apostolado entre indígenas,” 1961, AHAM, Base DM, c. 210, exp. 37.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, “Opinión de CENAPI sobre la integración y solución que propone a la CEI,” May 1974, AHAM, Base DM, c. 25, exp. 8.

<sup>66</sup> In addition to the work cited above on the Mission Exposition, see the following for the missionary turn toward Latin America, Fitzpatrick-Behrens, *The Maryknoll Catholic Mission in Peru*; Eileen Markey, *A Radical Faith: The Assassination of Sister Maura* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2016); Melville, *Through a Glass Darkly*.



The reorientation of mission after Vatican II, from conversion of “pagans” to service for the poor and needy, was not necessarily a smooth transition.<sup>67</sup> Numerous religious order members left the priesthood in protest against the Vatican II changes and commitments to social Catholicism that were unrecognizable to them.<sup>68</sup> But the ideological conflicts within the Church should not distract from the very real organizational revolution that occurred in the Latin American Catholic Church. On both the continental and national levels, the Church built institutions in the form of Episcopal Conferences, research institutions, expansions of Catholic Action, and offices like CENAMI. Cooperation between national Churches birthed social-Catholicism-oriented experiments like Ivan Illich’s school for new foreign missionaries based in Cuernavaca.<sup>69</sup> Efforts in Mexico saw attempts to form the National School for the Indigenous (Escuela Nacional para los Indígenas) that was to educate both indigenous pupils (in *internado* fashion) and the missionaries who aspired to work among the indigenous.<sup>70</sup> The proposed school prompted outcries from leftists and PRI-allies that such a school would undoubtedly violate the Mexican Constitution. Vicente Lombardo Toledano wrote, sarcastically, that these efforts harkened back to the sixteenth century, “which had such excellent results for the native populations of Mexico.”<sup>71</sup> However, then as now, the

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<sup>67</sup> For an overview of the broader trends in mission in Latin America, see Gerald Costello, *Mission to Latin America: The Successes and Failures of a Twentieth Century Crusade* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979).

<sup>68</sup> See Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 132-34 for the Jesuit experience in the late 1960s in Mexico.

<sup>69</sup> Hartch, *The Prophet of Cuernavaca*.

<sup>70</sup> “Conclusiones del Congreso de Apostolado entre indígenas,” 1961, AHAM, Base DM, c. 210, exp. 37.

<sup>71</sup> Lombardo Toledano, “Los indígenas y la Iglesia Católica.” On Lombardo Toledano’s relationship with the PRI, see Daniela Spenser, *In Combat: The Life of Lombardo Toledano* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2020).

ideological battles coursing through the Catholic Church were not always visible or legible to outside observers.

### **Conclusion**

These two chapters have presented competing, yet ultimately not incompatible, visions of how the Church proposed to work with and among the indigenous of Mexico. In fact, their greatest disagreement was not whether, but *how* to work with the indigenous and what issues were prioritized: religious education or material aid and development. On one side, and ultimately the hegemonic position after the Second Vatican Council, was a faction that saw promise in the marriage of spiritual and temporal issues, religious education and outreach combined with social services and development devised with the cutting edge of modern science and technological expertise. While remaining wary of the secular state, Church leaders like Cardinal Miranda showed willingness, even eagerness at times, to collaborate with the state on rural development projects like those in the Mezquital. They approached the post-war era with an optimism and openness to new forms of knowledge that would shape rural development. It would be a mistake to label them progressives, however, as they drew on a *Rerum Novarum* Catholic social doctrine that would only blunt the sharp edges of unequal socio-economic relations rather than overturning class structures.<sup>72</sup> Further, as has been amply documented in studies of the Green Revolution and modernization theory, little evidence exists that development advocates took into account the existing agricultural expertise and experience of the

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<sup>72</sup> Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum: Encyclical of Pope Leo XIII on Capital and Labor* (Rome: The Vatican, 1891), [https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_l-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_l-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum.html).

indigenous and *campesino* populations that such efforts were purportedly aiding.<sup>73</sup> But try they did, collaborating locally on such emblematic indigenista projects as the *internado* and nationally, organizing meetings that brought together Church agents, government representatives, and agricultural scientists to explore and share best practices and cutting edge knowledge of modern agriculture.

On the other side were the traditionalists, of whom Archbishop Torreblanca was illustrative. From his post in Chiapas, Torreblanca oversaw massive expansion of ministry to the indigenous of the region, reversing decades of Church retreat and retrenchment due to secular liberalism and revolutionary anticlericalism. The programs launched by Torreblanca were pioneering in certain respects. He trained scores of indigenous people to serve as catechists and religious leaders in their own community, delegating some limited responsibility of religious education to those who had not been considered capable of such positions previously. The catechism programs of Torreblanca were the foundation that Bishop Samuel Ruiz built upon in his later expansion and extension of indigenous catechism that combined religious education with questions of social justice.<sup>74</sup> But, for Torreblanca, social justice was often secondary to proper religious education and full christianization of the indigenous. Rather, similar to Bishop Manríquez of Huejutla in the 1920s, Bishop Torreblanca constructed parallel Churches. By inviting cohorts of religious orders to take responsibility for indigenous parishes, Torreblanca freed diocesan clergy to concentrate their ministry on the ladino population of the state.<sup>75</sup> Underlying his commitment to the indigenous peoples of Chiapas was a

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<sup>73</sup> Walker, "Faucets and Fertilizers;" Wright, *The Death of Ramón González*.

<sup>74</sup> See Chojnacki, *Indigenous Apostles*.

<sup>75</sup> That the Church in Chiapas, like the state government, only really served ladinos was a common complaint that Bishop Ruiz faced and attempted to reverse upon his appointment to the bishopric.

deep belief that the spiritual conquest of the Americas was still incomplete and that only a return to the heritage of forefathers like Fray Bartolomé de las Casas could complete the urgent task. As such, rather than cooperate with an expanding state apparatus that was in the midst of building its own outreach to indigenous Mexico via the INI and Coordinating Centers, Torreblanca argued that any rural development was better left to the Church since they were already in contact with the people even in the most remote settlements. In doing so however, and perhaps unintentionally given his focus on christianization, Torreblanca managed to launch a movement within the Mexican Church that was reverberating throughout the Americas: a reconceptualized sense of mission that was no longer entirely about conversion but instead was a devotion of Church resources and personnel to service among the poor and marginalized.

Both bishops, Miranda and Torreblanca, shared circumstances that unquestionably informed their turn toward indigenous ministry. In both dioceses, Protestant missionaries were active in proselytizing and working in collaboration with state indigenismo. In particular, the SIL was active in both the Mezquital and the highlands of Chiapas, where they put together bilingual language primers, worked on literacy programs, published bilingual nutritional guides sponsored by the III and UNESCO, translated the Bible into indigenous languages, and, as Lewis shows in the case of Chiapas, worked extensively with the INI's San Cristóbal Coordinating Center.<sup>76</sup> However, their responses to Protestant incursion, while sharing concern over Catholicism's continued religious hegemony, were strikingly different. Miranda opted for a Catholic Church immersed in the problems and challenges of modernity through

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<sup>76</sup> Lewis, *Rethinking Mexican Indigenismo*.

embrace of the sciences and collaboration with the state on rural development. Real ecumenical collaboration on social issues of development, poverty, migration, and so forth would not entirely appear until after the reforms of Vatican II, but the growing openness toward working with putative rivals (the state) certainly laid the groundwork for future shared initiatives. In Chiapas however, Torreblanca viewed Protestantism as the heretical enemy and the state as a propagator of godless socialism and communism. In such a stance, even when in agreement with the goals of individual state programs like the reforestation initiative discussed above, the only acceptable interlocutor between indigenous communities and the outside world could be the Catholic Church.

Both Bishops also drew upon and contributed to two related phenomena that were changing the shape of Mexican Catholicism. First, Catholicism's turn toward an active and empowered laity through such initiatives as Catholic Action provided a ready population of urban and educated Catholic Mexicans ready to assist in charitable and educational initiatives targeting the rural and indigenous poor. The SSM, the associated Catholic Action organizations, and other lay organizations such as the Knights of Columbus (Caballeros de Colón) collectively contributed to Catholic lay activism oriented toward national issues and charitable initiatives ranging from monetary collections to support the 1938 oil expropriation to supporting "internal mission." Second, the organizational revolution within Catholicism saw the appearance of scores of new bodies and organizations that built bureaucratic structures into the operations of the national Church to better direct and employ specialized knowledge and expertise. CENAMI may have been the most dramatic result of the organizational revolution meeting a Catholic indigenismo. It was joined by the Episcopal Commission in Favor of

the Indigenous, the National Center for Indigenista Ministry (El Centro Nacional de Pastoral Indigenista, CENAPI) that supported diocesan (rather than missionary) indigenous ministry, and others, a flourishing in Church attention to the indigenous in the 1960s and 70s. By 1971, CENAMI was counting the collaboration of secular academics, anthropologists in particular, in publishing its own scholarly journal, *Estudios Indigenas*. Taken together, these two phenomena also indicate a shift in perspective within the Church from the diocesan (or parochial) to the national. At the core was the question of how Catholics would and could assert their membership in an overwhelmingly Catholic yet officially secular nation. Education and incorporation (often, but not always, imagined as cultural assimilation) of their indigenous countrymen was undoubtedly part of a nationalization of perspective.

And lastly, the threat of communism was shared among the hierarchy across the ideological spectrum. A hardline faction saw the threat anywhere and everywhere, and, for instance, feared that indigenous communitarian practices, the *usos y costumbres* by which village life was often structured, rendered the indigenous dangerously susceptible to communist infiltration.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Bishop Emilio Abascal, Secretary General of the CEM, warned his fellow bishops of communist incursions from multiple fronts.<sup>78</sup> He reported in 1959 that a group was coming from “Red China” under “apparently innocuous purposes,” but that they were planning to “spread communist doctrine among

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<sup>77</sup> Bishop Bernardino Echeverria Ruiz, “La Iglesia católica y el problema del indio, Documento 26,” July/August 1955, AHAM, Base DM, c 34, exp 18. Greg Grandin discusses a similar dynamic in the Guatemalan case, a persistent Cold War fear that the indigenous were particularly susceptible to communist ideologies. In Guatemala, of course, this had genocidal consequences. Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>78</sup> There is no familial relation that I know of between Bishop Abascal and Salvador Abascal, leader of the National Synarchist Union (UNS).

us.”<sup>79</sup> Further, he added that there was an upcoming Youth Festival in Vienna, Austria that was organized directly by Moscow. He warned that Moscow, in the previous two years, had extended its influence over Latin America and Africa. Without offering any indication that Mexican youth groups were planning to attend, the greater lesson that he conveyed to his fellow bishops was that communism disguised itself and they should be mindful of presentation versus the true ends of such events. Thus, he argued, they should be cognizant that “these festivals promote peace, friendship, and international benevolence, but their true objective, persecuted with great skill, is to advance the cause of international communism.”<sup>80</sup>

While Abascal was certainly correct that the international communist movements and organizations had adopted the call for peace and the “peace dove” as a rallying symbol, it is unclear precisely what purpose his warning about the Youth Festival held beyond raising awareness among the bishops of the insidiousness of communism.<sup>81</sup> The next internal CEM circular, one week later and authored by Octaviano Márquez, the Archbishop of Puebla and President of the CEM, said little about communism and instead encouraged bishops to study the documents on the “indigenous problem” and on the mission teams from JCFM (Juventud Católica Femenina Mexicana, the female youth branch of Mexican Catholic Action). Archbishop Márquez reported that the apostolic delegate, Luigi Raimondi, was keen to see greater action and initiative regarding indigenous peoples as two years had already passed

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<sup>79</sup> Obispo Emilio Abascal, Secretario General de la CEM, “CEM Circular Num. 16, 1957-59,” June 15, 1959, AHAM, Base DM, c. 58, exp. 71.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> On the peace dove, international communism, and Mexican actors, see Zolov, *The Last Good Neighbor*, chapter 4.

since the “indigenous problem” was the subject of the CEM Plenary Assembly.<sup>82</sup> Without saying so explicitly in the two internal bulletins, the issues of communism, indigenous peoples, Catholic Action, and youth groups were intimately linked for the bishops and the CEM. Although there were moments where the Church could and would collaborate with the state on, for example, development, education, and literacy, even the collaborative factions exemplified by Miranda remained wary. For instance, the López Mateos administration’s noninterventionist response to the Cuban Revolution considerably alarmed the Catholic Church.<sup>83</sup>

Of course, the Mexican state itself, even as its foreign relations were far more ambiguous regarding communism and communist states, was highly concerned about the internal threats of communist movements.<sup>84</sup> The reams of intelligence material on left-wing movements, and, of course, the Mexican government’s own “Dirty War” against leftists indicated the lengths the state would go to forcefully suppress the supposed threat of internal communism.<sup>85</sup> And there were elements of the Catholic Church, and certainly among the laity, that wholeheartedly cheered such overbearing tactics.<sup>86</sup> But the state was also being pulled to the right, by formal opposition parties and conservative movements alike.<sup>87</sup> The formation of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) in 1939 as a conservative, christian democratic, opposition party certainly raised hopes within the Episcopate although the

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<sup>82</sup> Archbishop Octaviano Márquez, “CEM Circular Num. 17, 1957-59,” June 21, 1959, AHAM, Base DM, c. 58, exp. 71.

<sup>83</sup> On López Mateos, see Zolov, *The Last Good Neighbor* and Keller, *Mexico’s Cold War*. On the Church’s alarm over Cuba, see Blancarte, *Historia de la iglesia*, 178.

<sup>84</sup> Zolov, *The Last Good Neighbor*; Keller, *Mexico’s Cold War*.

<sup>85</sup> See McCormick, *The Logic of Compromise*; Aviña, *Specters of Revolution* on Mexico’s Dirty War.

<sup>86</sup> For Catholic support for dictatorships and dirty wars elsewhere, see Ben Cowan, *Moral Majorities*; Morello, *The Catholic Church and Argentina’s Dirty War*. On right-wing citizen support for dictatorships’ tactics against the left, see Stern, *Remembering Pinochet’s Chile*; and Ching, *Stories of Civil War in El Salvador*.

<sup>87</sup> Young, “Creating Catholic Utopias;” Herrán Ávila, “The Other ‘New Man.’”



Church was often abundantly careful to distance itself from open and formal political endorsement.<sup>88</sup>

In the next chapter, I examine how indigenous ministry developed on a regional level as the new diocese of Tehuacán (1962) worked with the dioceses of Oaxaca and Chiapas to build regional institutions dedicated to serving the indigenous majority of southeast Mexico. I demonstrate that both Miranda and Torreblanca were critical predecessors, divergent as they were, to the liberationist *pastoral indígena* that began to emerge in southern Mexico. The politics of Cold War anticommunism would remain integral to both Church and state, but as a liberationist faction began to coalesce, they too were increasingly painted as part of the communist menace.

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<sup>88</sup> See Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia* on the relations between the Church and PAN. On the PAN, see Soledad Loaeza, “The National Action Party (PAN): From the Fringes of the Political System to the Heart of Change,” in *Christian Democracy in Latin America: Electoral Competition and Regime Conflicts*, Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003):196-246; and Beatriz Magaloni and Alejandro Moreno, “Catching All Souls: The Partido Acción Nacional and the Politics of Religion in Mexico,” in *Christian Democracy in Latin America: Electoral Competition and Regime Conflicts*, Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003): 247- 274; and Soledad Loaeza, *El Partido Acción Nacional: la larga marcha, 1939–1994. Oposición leal y partido de protesta* (México, CDMX: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999).

## Chapter 3: The Bishops of the Pacific South Region and the Development of *Pastoral Indígena*, 1968-1985

### Introduction

The Bishops of the Pacific South Region, comprised of the dioceses of Oaxaca and Chiapas, between 1977 and 1985 published a series of jointly authored pastoral letters in which they articulated a bold and progressive, yet always faithful to their institution, vision for the role of the Church in the public sphere. They embraced the possibilities offered by Liberation Theology and enumerated what it meant to adopt a Christian commitment to working with and among the poor and the indigenous.<sup>1</sup> They cautiously advocated for democratization and political alternatives to the PRI.<sup>2</sup> They tackled the growing issue of narcotrafficking and the economic incentives driving marijuana and poppy cultivation.<sup>3</sup> And they insisted that Guatemalan refugees receive sanctuary in Mexico from the Guatemalan civil war and from Guatemalan military incursions that violated the national sovereignty of Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Their outspokenness was, in some ways, a reflection of a Mexican Church once again comfortable with open criticism of the State.<sup>5</sup> However, what was notable in southern Mexico was that the criticism was

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<sup>1</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, "Nuestro compromiso cristiano con los indígenas y campesinos de la Región Pacífico-Sur," 1977, reprinted in *Tehuantepec 1891-1991: Un siglo de fe* (México, CDMX: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, 1991), 55-94.

<sup>2</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, "Vivir Cristianamente el Compromiso Político," March 19, 1982, reprinted in *Tehuantepec 1891-1991: Un siglo de fe* (México, CDMX: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, 1991), 195-254.

<sup>3</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, "Narcotráfico, preocupación pastoral," March 1984, reprinted in *Tehuantepec 1891-1991: Un siglo de fe* (México, CDMX: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, 1991), 257-289.

<sup>4</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, "Sobre la situación de los refugiados" May 23, 1984, reprinted in *Tehuantepec 1891-1991: Un siglo de fe* (México, CDMX: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, 1991), 341-364.

<sup>5</sup> Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia*.

leveled from a progressive stance, lamenting a lack of social justice, rather than a conservative or traditionalist stance lambasting the state's secularism and/or near-communism.<sup>6</sup>

The Bishops adopted the post-revolutionary social mission as their own, argued that the State had failed the promises it had made to the indigenous, and they did so with a combination of Catholic social doctrine and the very same technocratic and academic language that the State deployed in its anti-poverty initiatives. This chapter shows how the Church in southern Mexico embraced and transformed Bishop Lucio Torreblanca's vision of "internal missions" into a liberationist endeavor. I track how one ideological current of the Church began to reject the rhetoric of steady post-revolutionary progress and embraced a stance that criticized the State, not for socialism, secularism or populism as was the language of the Catholic right, but for failing to include wide swaths of the Mexican populace, indigenous Mexico in particular, in the social and economic gains of the "Mexican miracle."<sup>7</sup>

This chapter asks how such an ideological constellation of progressive bishops came to be and explores the practical consequences and possibilities that emerged from a changed ideological landscape. To do so, this chapter moves from the national sphere of the previous chapter to a regional level in order to better examine the ways in which the Mexican Catholic Church adjusted its relationship with indigenous Mexico from the moments immediately preceding the Second Vatican Council through the mid-1980s.

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<sup>6</sup> DFS, "Memorandum," January 22, 1963, AGN, Movimiento Familiar Cristiano, Versión Pública. DFS. Legajo Único, c. 286; Herrán Ávila, "Las Guerrillas Blancas."

<sup>7</sup> Julia Young, "Creating Catholic Utopias: Mexican Religious Activism and the Unión Nacional Sinarquista During the 1940s," *Catholic Southwest* 29 (December 2018): 3-20. See also the forthcoming dissertation from Nathan Ellstrand.

Although the focus is emphatically on the relationship between the Church and indigenous Mexico, the trajectory of that relationship did not occur in a vacuum. All levels of the Church, from the pinnacle of the hierarchy to lay activists on the ground, were both responding to circumstances beyond their control and were agents in their own right trying to shape the world according to their religious beliefs and immediate aims.<sup>8</sup> And the ground below them shifted tremendously in the twenty-five years of this chapter.

Mexico entered the 1960s tentatively, riding the highs of post-war economic growth and a burgeoning urban middle class that was, however, limited by the Cold War cultural constraints of anti-communism and coerced conformity.<sup>9</sup> Growing discontent with the PRI manifested in citizen protest wielding demands as varied as independence for labor unions and better conditions for rural workers to conservative protests against the PRI's perceived support for communist Cuba.<sup>10</sup> Discontent and protests did, of course, meet brutal responses at times, most notably in the 1968 Tlatelolco Massacre that silenced a wave of student protests.<sup>11</sup> Moving into the 1970s, Mexico was a paradox in which clandestine revolutionary organizations battled against an Echeverría administration that funded a resurgent populist bonanza with easy international credit backed by high oil prices.<sup>12</sup> When the oil bubble popped, Presidents López Portillo and de la Madrid ushered in painful structural reforms that abandoned the social promises of

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<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> Pensado, *Rebel Mexico*; Mary Kay Vaughan, *Portrait of a Young Painter*; Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California, 1999); and Zolov, *Last Good Neighbor*.

<sup>10</sup> Alegre, *Railroad Radicals*; McCormick, *The Logic of Compromise*; Padilla, *Rural Resistance*; Keller, *Mexico's Cold War*.

<sup>11</sup> Pensado and Ochoa, eds., *México Beyond 1968*.

<sup>12</sup> Thornton, *Revolution in Development*; Pensado and Ochoa, eds., *México Beyond 1968*.

the revolution.<sup>13</sup> However, protest and crisis combined to initiate the slow process of democratization, first manifesting on the municipal level.<sup>14</sup> As I show in this chapter, the Church was not always uniform in responding to shifts in Mexico's socio-political fabric. Yet a series of factors aligned that, I argue, allowed for the emergence of a progressive bloc of bishops, embracing a "prophetic voice," in southern Mexico who sought cooperation with the State when feasible, but was willing to criticize when necessary.

The chapter begins with a brief overview of the structural changes in the Church in the late 1950s that saw the creation of numerous new dioceses and mission territories. The territorial subdivisions and bureaucratic expansion were crucial elements that facilitated the growth of ideological diversity within the Mexican Church. As the Church emerged from the Second Vatican Council, the Mexican Episcopate began tentative steps to adopt the reforms of the council. Among the initial steps was the designation of pastoral regions comprising one Archdiocese and its dependent dioceses that were grouped according to shared demographic and socio-religious dynamics. I concentrate on the evolution of the Pacific South Region (*Región Pacífico-Sur*) from its early initiatives in the late 1960s that sought to bring the Church closer to the indigenous of southern Mexico to an open embrace of Liberation Theologies by the late 1970s. To show how the Church evolved in the region, I discuss three interconnected elements: the foundation of a regional seminary in 1969; the development of a liberationist indigenous ministry through regional conferences and meetings (1972-1986) that brought together intellectuals, church representatives, clergy, and laity to discuss and argue over the role of

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<sup>13</sup> Thornton, *Revolution in Development*.

<sup>14</sup> Rubin, *Decentering the Regime*.

the Church in indigenous Mexico; and the jointly authored pastoral letters (1979-1987) in which the bishops of the region saw, judged, and acted on possible solutions to the unique problems facing the region.<sup>15</sup> The regional seminary, SERESURE, I argue, was a cornerstone in the institutionalization of regional collegiality and cooperation, and was the institution around which the bishops' collective endeavors took shape.

Although a handful of scholars have identified this group of bishops as a bastion of Catholic progressivism in Mexico, no work has yet examined the ways in which such a group coalesced, developed, and changed over time.<sup>16</sup> The progressive turn in the Church in southern Mexico in the 1970s was never inevitable. In fact, an observer of the Mexican Catholic Church at the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s would likely have dismissed the likelihood of such a progressive turn within the ranks of the Church. This top-down analysis of the bishops, their ideological turn, the ways that they built upon previous Church endeavors to work with the indigenous and how embraced the priorities of Liberation Theology to use their "prophetic voice," is paired with subsequent chapters that move to ground level and the interactions between agents of the Church and indigenous peoples and communities, to offer one possible answer to the central questions of this dissertation. Further, in showing how this group of bishops built upon the indigenist programs of their ideologically diverse predecessors, incorporating new theologies that embraced marxist social sciences and insisted on a commitment to the

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<sup>15</sup> The "see-judge-act" method, popularized by Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, was critical for liberationist praxis and formed the basis for work among the CEBs. See Cardenal, *The Gospel in Solentiname*.

<sup>16</sup> See Faudree, *Singing for the Dead*; McIntyre, *Protestantism and State Formation*; Trejo, *Popular Movements in Autocracies*; Kristin Norget, "'Knowing Where We Enter: Indigenous Theology and the Popular Church in Oaxaca, Mexico,'" in *Resurgent Voices in Latin America: Indigenous Peoples, Political Mobilization, and Religious Change*, eds. Edward Cleary and Timothy Steigenga (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 154-186.

poor, I reorient our scholarly gaze away from the most notable bishop among the group, Samuel Ruiz, and toward the regional collective as they built a regional vision of liberationist Church-indigenous relations.<sup>17</sup> I suggest that an examination of the Pacific-South Region bishops, their collaborative initiatives such as a the regional seminary, and the ways in which everyday agents of the Church interacted with indigenous Mexico is a means to shift from narratives of exceptional and heroic individuals like Bishop Samuel Ruiz and toward a broader understanding of how the Church began to incorporate the meeting of Liberation Theology and indigenous religiosity into the programming and initiatives of the Church.

### **A Reorganized Episcopate**

Change is slow in the Catholic Church. Edicts, encyclicals, and new elaborations and clarifications of doctrine may bring headlines and attention, but the primary means through which a Pope alters the character of the Church on the ground is through the bishops appointed. No shortage of material has been written about Pope Pius XII (1939-58) as the Vatican stoked controversy for its silence in the face of Naziism and the Holocaust.<sup>18</sup> Less examined, however, is the way in which Pius XII and his successors, John XXIII (1958-1963) and Paul VI (1963-1978), generally moved the Church toward a “comprehensive vision of the world” that paired spiritual and material development, not only through the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) but also via appointments of

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<sup>17</sup> On Ruiz, the Catholic Church, and progressive movements in Chiapas see Mattiace, *To See With Two Eyes*; and Chojnacki, *Indigenous Apostles*. On Ruiz as an individual, see Meyer, Gallardo, and Ríos, *Samuel Ruiz en San Cristóbal*; MacEoin, *The People's Church*; Marcos, “Teología India.”

<sup>18</sup> See, among many others, John Cornwell, *Hitler's Pope: The Secret History of Pius XII* (New York: Viking, 1999); José Sánchez, *Pius XII and the Holocaust: Understanding the Controversy* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2002).

moderate bishops who elevated social concerns alongside doctrinal orthodoxy.<sup>19</sup> At times, the Catholic integralism of the Pius XII era informed and motivated ideological diverse currents within the church - some that bordered on fascism and stubborn anti-semitism and others that sought common cause with Marxism and the Soviets.<sup>20</sup> In the Mexican case, a cohort of clergy and bishops, many trained abroad at Montezuma and/or in Rome, were ready to push, not necessarily for collaboration with the state, but for social reform in Mexico that had yet to be completed.<sup>21</sup> However, even as the Church showed its capacity to accommodate competing ideologies as the 1950s drew to a close, increasing ideological diversity within the ranks of the Episcopate in the aftermath of Vatican II prompted new internal battles of the position and direction of the Church.<sup>22</sup>

As the Episcopate restructured itself in 1954, it also reorganized ecclesial jurisdictions and embarked on a dramatic expansion within the ranks of the hierarchy in order to increase its organizational strength and influence in the country. The CEM began scheduling annual meetings, forming commissions on various ministerial priorities (family, social, indigenous, education, doctrine, and so forth) that were headed by Bishops appropriate for or well-versed in the issues at hand. Bishop Lucio Torreblanca's

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<sup>19</sup> Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia*, 151.

<sup>20</sup> Piotr Kosicki, *Catholics on the Barricades: Poland, France, and "Revolution," 1891-1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018). Samuel Moyn also locates the origins of human rights discourses in Catholic integralism, Moyn, *Christian Human Rights*.

<sup>21</sup> For the disproportionate representation of bishops in the Mexican Episcopate who trained at Montezuma, see Camp, *Crossing Swords*, 166-69. Butler, "Montezuma's Children" poses the question of the lasting impacts of the Montezuma education on the ranks of the clergy and hierarchy alike.

<sup>22</sup> On Cardinal Ernesto Corripio Ahumada publicly castigating "activist" clergy for engaging in activities beyond their mission of evangelization and spiritual service, much to the delight of the Mexican intelligence services, see "Clero," August, 3, 1981, AGN, DFS, Conferencia Episcopal Mexicana, DFS 1/1 Versión Pública, c. 299, 2016.



lobbying had succeeded, in 1959, in adding a commission to the Episcopate that he was tapped to lead, the Episcopal Commission in Favor of the Indigenous.<sup>23</sup>

And it was not just in Mexico. In 1955, the Latin American bishops met in Rio de Janeiro and formed a Latin American Episcopate, CELAM (el Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano), to better coordinate Church activities and positions on a continental scale.<sup>24</sup> Adjacent and often connected to the episcopal councils (national and continental) were new offices and organizations dedicated to social reform, human rights, documentation and communication centers, agricultural science, using anthropological knowledge to improve everyday ministry, lay training centers, and missionary training centers. The previously discussed CENAMI, formed in 1961, was emblematic of this wave of Church-backed civil associations.<sup>25</sup> The “organizational revolution” was rather remarkable in that the Latin American Church did not necessarily occupy spaces that they had not already been in (charity, education, social concern), but that the marriage of faith and modern sciences, including Marxist social sciences, indicated a slow but discernible shift in the Church’s relationship to the secular world, even prior to Vatican II.<sup>26</sup>

The newly arrived apostolic delegate, Luigi Raimondi (1956-67), sought to shape the Mexican Church in the image of the Italian Church, dividing and subdividing

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<sup>23</sup> “Letter from Archbishop Torreblanca (Durango) to the Episcopal Committee,” October 3, 1959, AHAM, Base DM, c. 75, exp. 6.

<sup>24</sup> Costello, *Mission to Latin America*, discusses the formation of CELAM as building (at least the appearances of) a united and cohesive Church.

<sup>25</sup> See “Conclusiones del Congreso de Apostolado entre indígenas,” 1961, AHAM, Base DM, c. 210, exp. 37. “Asociación civil” is a legal designation for non-profit organizations according to Mexican law.

<sup>26</sup> In addition to Schatz, “American Labor and the Catholic Church,” David Endres also uses “organizational revolution” to describe the Catholic Church and the raft of Catholic organizations founded during the early 20th-century in the United States. David Endres, *American Crusade: Catholic Youth in the World Mission Movement from World War I through Vatican II* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010).

dioceses into smaller and more numerous administrative units.<sup>27</sup> This (in theory) brought the Church closer to the people, particularly in the secondary and tertiary towns and cities that now had a bishop of their own. In that sense, the Church was attempting to challenge the reach of the Mexican State. It reflected Torreblanca's question as to who would be the interlocutor between even the most remote communities and the world. On the other hand, this called for many new bishops and led to the dramatic expansion, a bloating even, of Church administration and bureaucracy. When Raimondi arrived in 1957, Mexico had thirty-four dioceses and five missionary territories, and the CEM counted some thirty-five member bishops. By the time Raimondi was transferred to the United States a decade later, Mexico had twenty-four new dioceses, four new missionary prelatures, and now counted eighty bishops as part of the CEM (because more auxiliary bishops were appointed as well). One observer called this the "balkanization" of the Mexican Church.<sup>28</sup>

The process was accompanied by the designation or carving up of the country into pastoral regions. Prior to the introduction of pastoral regions in 1964, the Mexican Church had been divided by Ecclesial Provinces consisting of one Archdiocese and its dependent dioceses.<sup>29</sup> While some of the provinces were socially and demographically similar, others possessed a vast socio-demographic and territorial diversity that impeded smooth coordination of ministerial priorities. For example, the province of the

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<sup>27</sup> Mexico had apostolic delegates rather than papal nuncios because Mexico and the Vatican had severed diplomatic relations as a result of the Revolution. This changed with Constitutional Reform that recognized religious institutions as legal entities in 1992.

<sup>28</sup> Jesus Garcia, "La Iglesia mexicana desde 1962," in ed. Enrique Dussel, *Historia General de la Iglesia en América Latina, Tomo V: México* (México, DF: Comisión para el Estudio de la Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina y el Caribe, 1984), 367. I do not think "balkanization" is an entirely appropriate term because of the implications of hostility between the divided territories, but it certainly meant increased ideological diversity among the ecclesial territories.

<sup>29</sup> "CEM Boletín N 3," December 1977, AHAM, Base Can, c. 87, exp. 9.

Archdiocese of Mexico contained suffragan dioceses spanning from Hidalgo Huasteca to the Guerrero coast and the Antequera Province stretched from the Oaxaca-Guerrero border through Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche and Yucatán.<sup>30</sup> The expansive ecclesiastical territories, by the early 1960s, were no longer appropriate to meet the dynamics of the mid-century.

The Second Vatican Council prompted a rethinking of the body of the Church, a move toward collegiality that increased lay involvement, encouraged episcopal collaboration, and mandated the formation of national Episcopal Conferences to better meet the challenges of the contemporary world.<sup>31</sup> The Mexican bishops, even before the doctrinal decrees, took the percolating ideas of collegiality back to Mexico and launched two interrelated initiatives: the Union of Episcopal Mutual Aid (*Union de Mutua Ayuda Episcopal*, UMAE) and pastoral regions.<sup>32</sup> First, adjacent to the CEM, a group of poorer dioceses formed the UMAE to create a space for discussion of pastoral collaboration and resource sharing.<sup>33</sup> UMAE was the brainchild of Bishops Samuel Ruiz (San Cristóbal de las Casas) and Alfonso Sánchez Tinoco (Papantla, Veracruz). While participating in Vatican II, the pair of Mexican bishops were also working with French priest and sociologist Fernand Boulard to devise a structure for collaboration among “modest”

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<sup>30</sup> On the Province of Mexico, *ibid.* On the Province of Antequera, “Orígenes del magisterio colegiado de la Región Pacífico-Sur,” in *Tehuantepec 1891-1991: Un siglo de fe*, 39-40.

<sup>31</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Christus Dominus: Decree Concerning the Pastoral Office of Bishops in the Church* (Rome: Second Vatican Council, October 28, 1965), [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_christus-dominus\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_christus-dominus_en.html). The first episcopal conferences arose in western Europe, informally in the mid-nineteenth century, and first officially in Switzerland in 1863. See Komonchak, “Introduction: Episcopal Conferences Under Criticism.” On collegiality, see O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*.

<sup>32</sup> For how Vatican II unfolded and what was meant by collegiality, a softening of hierarchies and incorporation of the laity into decision-making bodies of the Church, see O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*.

<sup>33</sup> “CEM Boletín N 3,” December 1977, AHAM, Base Can, c. 87, exp. 9.

dioceses.<sup>34</sup> In 1964, the two bishops organized meetings among a handful of interested bishops and the staffs of the SSM and the Movement for a Better World (*Movimiento por un Mundo Mejor*), and began to hammer out the details of the alternative interdiocesan organization and how it would undertake proposed socio-religious and socio-economic studies to better tailor and implement pastoral plans.<sup>35</sup>

Within a year, the UMAE had expanded from seven interested bishops to fourteen, and then to twenty-five dioceses by 1967.<sup>36</sup> It established an office in Mexico City and recruited priests (secular and religious) to direct the new programs aimed at pastoral development. Of the initial team of six priests, two came from the Archdiocese of Jalapa (Ver), and one each from the dioceses of San Cristóbal, Papantla, Huejutla, and Zacatecas.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, three of the priests selected for the new project studied, quite likely together, at the Montezuma Seminary.<sup>38</sup> The Jesuit training at Montezuma, some of which we have already seen through the correspondence between Bishop Miranda and Hector Samperio, had clearly prepared this generation of graduates to employ the social sciences to further the ministerial projects of the Mexican Church.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Jesus Garcia, "La Iglesia mexicana desde 1962," 373.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid; Gabriel Adriányi, *The Church in the Modern Age*, vol 10 (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 745. The *Movimiento por un Mundo Mejor* was a lay organization launched in Italy in the early twentieth century that proposed a socially-aware proselytizing project with the mission of converting the world to a social Catholic morality.

<sup>36</sup> Garcia, "La Iglesia Mexicana desde 1962," 373; Adriányi, *The Church in the Modern Age*, 745. The twenty-five were the dioceses of (North Gulf Region) Matamoros, Ciudad Victoria, Tampico, Ciudad Valles, Tuxpan, and Huejutla; (Central Gulf Region) Papantla, Xalapa, Veracruz, and San Andrés Tuxtla; and in not yet defined pastoral regions were Zacatecas, Tula, Autlán, Zamora, Apatzingán, Tacámbaro, Ciudad Altamirano, Chilapa, Acapulco, Oaxaca, Tehuantepec, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, San Cristóbal, Tapachula, and Campeche.

<sup>37</sup> "Letter from Samuel Ruiz and Auxiliary Bishop of Mexico Francisco Orozco y Lomeli," December 30, 1965, AHAM, Base Can, c. 105, exp. 24.

<sup>38</sup> Curia del Arzobispado de México, Oficialía de Registro y Control, "Datos Personales: Nicolás Lafarga Corona (Papantla), Adolfo Antonio Suárez Rivera (San Cristóbal), and Jesús Torres Jara (Jalapa)," January 26, 1966, AHAM, Base Can, c. 105, exp. 24.

<sup>39</sup> Butler, "Montezuma's Children."

The six priests, in Mexico City on loan from their dioceses, made up the first “animation and promotion team” whose primary responsibility was to work with dioceses on undertaking socioreligious analyses of the region and then elaborating comprehensive pastoral plans.<sup>40</sup> This was the edge of an emerging *pastoral de conjunto* or comprehensive ministry that combined the evangelizing zeal of conversion ministry with objective analyses of local reality so that pastoral programs could address the material, social, cultural, and political issues of all sectors of the faithful. In other words, the idea was that future pastoral work, to be carried out in teams, would be more responsive to the input of the entire community of the Church, actively including the laity in developing pastoral programs. To engage with dioceses across the country, promotion teams both invited participants to Mexico City for summer courses (six weeks) and intensive week-long seminars and traveled around the member dioceses to meet and train diocesan pastoral teams.

In 1967, in collaboration with the Latin American Pastoral Institute of CELAM (*Instituto Pastoral Latinoamericano*, IPLA), UMAE hosted a six-week summer course on developing pastoral programs.<sup>41</sup> They invited two or three priests from each member diocese and opened the course to a handful of priests from non-member dioceses. This summer course, far from the conservative image of the Mexican Church, brought in three invited theologians and professors to run the course: Pierre-André Liégé, Luis Maldonado Arenas, and Segundo Galilea. Liégé was a theology professor at the Catholic Institute of Paris, advisor to both Popes John XXIII and Paul VI, and theological advisor at the

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<sup>40</sup> Garcia, “La Iglesia Mexicana desde 1962,” 373.

<sup>41</sup> “Letter from Pbro. Jesús Torres, UMAE Coordinator, to Francisco Orosco Lomelín, Auxiliary Bishop of Mexico,” June 8, 1967, AHAM, Base Can, c. 105, exp. 24.

Second Vatican Council.<sup>42</sup> Maldonado Arenas, a Spanish theologian, was the founder of the Pastoral Institute at the University of Salamanca in 1955.<sup>43</sup> Finally, Segundo Galilea, the Chilean priest and theologian, was the director of the IPLA but would gain more renown in the 1970s as part of the intellectual cohort publishing the new corpus of Liberation Theology. Galilea's contribution to the theological movement was an analysis of popular religiosity and liberatory christology.<sup>44</sup> The UMAE was sponsoring courses that featured the cutting edge of pastoral thought, bringing the nascent beginnings of Liberation Theology to Mexico and working to build out the ideas of what a socially-minded, comprehensive pastoral program could look like.

A 1968 week-long seminar on "Evangelization" invited priests, women religious, and lay activists from member dioceses to meet for twice-daily conferences analyzing the Mexican reality, specifically addressing the processes of pluralism, urbanization, and secularization, and then sharing evangelization and catechism best practices.<sup>45</sup> To better facilitate and streamline discussion, the coordinator, Jesús Torres, proposed that participants at the study week divide according to the pastoral ambience where they worked: "urban, rural, indígenous."<sup>46</sup> Notable here was the practice not of dividing participating members by traditional geography, but rather by recognizing that, for example, pastoral workers in the Prelature of the Tarahumara (Chihuahua) likely had

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<sup>42</sup> See Nicholas Bradbury, *Practical Theology and Pierre-André Liégé: Radical Dominican and Vatican II Pioneer* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

<sup>43</sup> José Luis Corzo, "Luis Maldonado hizo un servicio impagable a la Iglesia" *Periodista Digital*, Nov 10, 2017.

<sup>44</sup> Galilea was, like many of the Liberation Theologians, a prolific writer. For one of his books that distills his theological contributions for an English-language audience, see Segundo Galilea, *The Way of Living Faith: A Spirituality of Liberation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989).

<sup>45</sup> UMAE, "Programa: Semana de Estudios (sic): La Evangelización," September 1968, AHAM, Base Can, c. 105, exp 24.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

more in common with pastoral workers from Tehuantepec, Oaxaca than they did with colleagues working in neighboring, but urban and rural mestizo, Chihuahua. UMAE's experimentation here reflected a preoccupation with how to best divide Mexico into pastoral regions that shared demographic and socio-economic characteristics. As we shall see, regional groupings would take multiple forms over time as lines were drawn and redrawn. Even then, as in the case of the Pacific South Region and SERESURE, some collaborative projects extended beyond the boundaries of the pastoral region to include other demographically similar dioceses.

Finally, the UMAE promotion team spent significant time on the road, making the rounds of member dioceses to address fora as varied as clerical retreats, religious order retreats, pastoral commission meetings, CEB regional *encuentros*, *Cursillos de Cristiandad*, and basic pastoral training for lay activists.<sup>47</sup> In two weeks during September 1970 promotion team members were in the states of Veracruz, Tamaulipas, Tabasco, Zacatecas, Chiapas, Michoacán, Nuevo León, Durango, Coahuila, San Luis Potosí, Puebla, Hidalgo, and Mexico City.<sup>48</sup> Operating in this manner, UMAE provided a model of what shared resources, both human and material, could provide for interested elements of the Church. Following this lead, CENAMI too began to operate similarly, both holding seminars in Mexico City and traveling the country to engage pastoral agents on emerging ideas of indigenous pastoral work.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> UMAE, "Agenda del equipo," August 1970, AHAM, Base Can, c. 105, exp. 24. The *Cursillos de Cristiandad* is a lay movement founded in Spain in the 1940s that developed a three-day training program around spirituality and evangelizing. The idea was that it would form new lay leaders to engage in conversion efforts for the Catholic Church.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> "Actividades de CENAMI en 1975," *Estudios Indígenas*, 5, no. 2, (December 1975), 259-269.

The UMAE disappeared in 1971 when the CEM ordered that it merge into the new Episcopal Commission on Comprehensive Pastoral Ministry (*pastoral de conjunto*).<sup>50</sup> For a brief experiment (1964-71), the UMAE had long-lasting effects on segments of the Mexican Church. Its incorporation into the structures of the Episcopate certainly forestalled growing critiques and conflicts within the Church itself over the balance of power between rich and poor dioceses and between “traditional” and “experimental” or “modernizing” bishops.<sup>51</sup> As the bishops involved recognized, the UMAE undertook “activities and sacrifices that permitted numerous dioceses to begin the path of pastoral renovation in light of the Second Vatican council,” and they hoped that this work would extend under the new structure.<sup>52</sup> There was some reason for this hope as Archbishop Ernesto Corripio (Antequera/Oaxaca), conservative as he may have been, was now the President of the CEM (since 1968) and had served briefly as president of the UMAE while he was still Bishop of Tampico (1956-1967).

One of the lasting influences that the UMAE had as it merged into the structure of the CEM was not only the official CEM adoption of the emerging *pastoral de conjunto*, but also that the CEM adopted the UMAE’s blueprint for dividing the Mexican church into pastoral regions. For dioceses that had not been part of the UMAE, CEM officials attempted to extend the logic of regional divisions across the entire Church: placing dioceses together that shared demographic and socio-economic characteristics that would allow for regional interdiocesan cooperation on pastoral/ministerial programs and

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<sup>50</sup> “Los Obispos de la UMAE, reunidos con la Comisión de Pastoral Conjunto,” June 22, 1971, AHAM Base Can, c. 105, exp. 24.

<sup>51</sup> Garcia, “La Iglesia mexicana desde 1962,” 373.

<sup>52</sup> “Los Obispos de la UMAE, reunidos con la Comisión de Pastoral Conjunto,” June 22, 1971, AHAM Base Can, c. 105, exp 24.



priorities. The adoption of the UMAE's regional divisions was almost immediate and altered the structure of other Episcopal Committees and their associated activities and organizations. A 1972 conference organized by the Episcopal Commission of Evangelization featured a panel made up of representatives of the participating pastoral regions where they reported on regional initiatives and obstacles.<sup>53</sup> Of course, placement in regional groupings did not guarantee smooth functioning or cooperation. In recognition of "uncomfortable functioning" within a handful of regions, the CEM shuffled regional placements slightly in 1977, particularly those in-between dioceses such as Tehuacán that had been created by carving off pieces of two or more other (arch)dioceses that operated in different pastoral regions.<sup>54</sup> UMAE had formulated, by the end of Vatican II, the blueprint for cooperative and collaborative interdiocesan pastoral work. And so, at the moment of UMAE's height of action, in 1967-70, it had placed together in the Región Pacífico-Sur the heavily indigenous Archdiocese of Oaxaca, and the Dioceses of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, Tapachula, Chiapas, Tehuacán, Puebla, the Prelature of the Mixe, Oaxaca, and they would soon be joined by the Prelature of Huautla de Jiménez in the Oaxacan Mazateca in 1974.<sup>55</sup> The UMAE's pastoral programming would indelibly mark the new pastoral

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<sup>53</sup> Present were Regiones Noroeste, Centro, Oriente, and Metropolitana. DFS report, "Clero," August 11, 1972, AGN, DFS, Conferencia Episcopal Mexicana, DFS 1/1 Versión Pública, c. 299, 2016.

<sup>54</sup> "CEM Boletín N 3," December 1977, AHAM, Base Can, c. 87, exp. 9.

<sup>55</sup> Huajuapán de León (Oax) was also briefly part of this group, but the historically conservative/traditionalist diocese ended up with Puebla instead as a more appropriate ideological partnership. Tehuacán also cycled in and out of official placement in the pastoral region. Ultimately, as shown in the 1972 map of Archdioceses and suffragan dioceses below, Tehuacán was also placed with the Archdiocese of Puebla although it continued to collaborate extensively with the Oaxacan and Chiapaneco dioceses. The involved bishops were Archbishop Ernesto Corripio (Oaxaca), Bishops Jesús Clemente Alba (Tehuantepec), José Sepúlveda (Tuxtla Gutiérrez), Adolfo Hernández (Tapachula), Samuel Ruiz García (San Cristóbal de Las Casas), and Rafael Ayala (Tehuacán).

region that grappled with additional methods and modes of engagement with the indigenous peoples of southern Mexico.

### THE 1972 BOUNDARIES OF THE ARCHDIOCESES AND DIOCESES

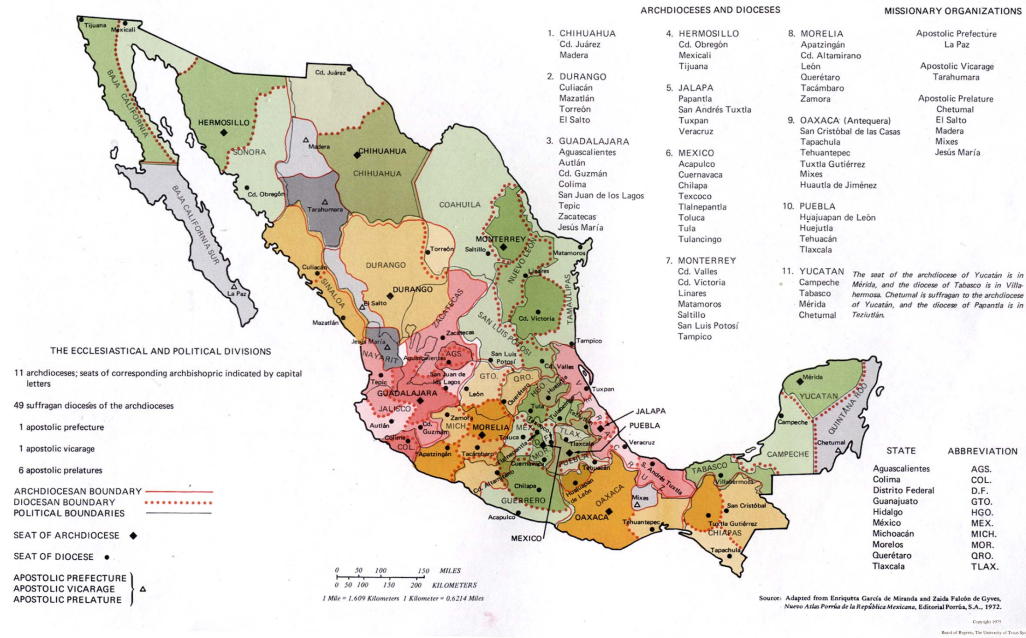


Image 1: The 1972 Boundaries of the Archdioceses and Dioceses  
 Source: Adapted from Enriqueta García and Zaida Falcon de Gyves, *Nuevo Atlas Porrúa de la República Mexicana*, Editorial Porrúa S.A., 1972. Digital copy accessed from the Map Collection at the Perry-Castaneda Library, UT Austin.

### The Pacific South Region and SERESURE

In the initial grouping of bishops in the Pacific South Region, it would be a distortion to depict them as progressives, radicals, or liberationists. However, as we shall see, they were undoubtedly influenced by the urgent questions that emerged from the growing corpus of Liberation Theology. Among other collaborative projects, their most influential was likely a regional seminary with the explicit mission to train clergy to work in the regional reality: poor, indigenous, marginalized, historically underserved by the Church. Regional seminaries had certainly existed before, and we don't have to look far

to find a Mexican predecessor, the Seminario Montezuma, which was training future Mexican priests (a disproportionate number of whom would become bishops) in Montezuma, New Mexico.<sup>56</sup>

But SERESURE was different. First of all, Montezuma was a project born of persecution and exile. SERESURE, however, arose in the wake of Vatican II which left, in *Optatam Totius*, the structure and design of priestly training programs to the national episcopal councils. The encouragement of regional cooperation emanating from the UMAE's regional structures was crucial for how Vatican II and its overtures to a multicultural Church would take shape in Mexico. For the Bishops of the Pacific South Region, Vatican II broadly offered possibilities for molding the Church to better serve the regional realities of disparate indigenous groups and widespread rural poverty. But it would be in the realm of seminary education and priestly training where this group of bishops grasped real possibilities of changing how the institution of the Church engaged with Mexico's indigenous peoples.

The Vatican II document on seminaries and education, *Optatam Totius*, opened with a paragraph that acknowledged the diversity of the Catholic world and left the structure and design of priestly training programs to the national episcopal councils.<sup>57</sup> The overture to local circumstances and national episcopal control followed the spirit of Vatican II and its shift to a more collegial and diversified global Church.<sup>58</sup> The CEM's Episcopal Commission on Vocations and Seminaries followed up on the Vatican II

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<sup>56</sup> See Camp, *Crossing Swords*; Butler, "Montezuma's Children."

<sup>57</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (Rome: Second Vatican Council, December 7, 1965), [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_19651028\\_optatam-totius\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19651028_optatam-totius_en.html).

<sup>58</sup> O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*, 239-40.

documents, and released its guidelines for priestly training in 1967 in the episcopal document *Ratio Institutionis Sacerdotalis*.<sup>59</sup>

While *Ratio Institutionis Sacerdotalis* kept the largely spiritual focus of *Optatam Totius*, urging that priestly training be based firmly in scripture and classical Thomist theology, it is also notable where the commission chose to expand on the guidelines set during Vatican II.<sup>60</sup> In particular, the authors included a section on “common” seminaries, by which they meant regional seminaries for dioceses that either did not have a diocesan seminary or where the current diocesan seminary was not meeting the standards of priestly training. While *Optatam Totius* provided an opening for regional seminaries, the Mexican Episcopate thoroughly embraced the possibility in *Ratio Institutionis Sacerdotalis*. The creation of regional seminaries should, the CEM said, be based on geographic, socio-religious, economic, and academic criteria. The formation of a regional seminary should draw from dioceses that shared social and religious characteristics and should serve the purposes of shared costs among the involved dioceses for the adequate intellectual and academic training of their future priests. Should a group of bishops desire to form a regional seminary, the episcopal document mandated that they elaborate a contract in which they spelled out the objectives of the seminary, its methodology, and how it would abide by Church statutes.<sup>61</sup> Said contracts “should cover and clearly resolve the following aspects: episcopal governance and seminary leadership,

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<sup>59</sup> Comisión Episcopal de Vocaciones y Seminarios, “Ratio Institutionis Sacerdotalis,” 1967, DT. This is not to be confused with *Ratio Fundamental Institutionis Sacerdotalis*, promulgated in 1970 by the Vatican’s Congregation for Catholic Education. Rather, the Mexican document was part of a global Church process within which national episcopates built upon Church doctrine to craft their national educational priorities and then the national documents were used to help compile the 1970 promulgation.

<sup>60</sup> On philosophical and theological training fundamentally based in scripture, see Comisión Episcopal de Vocaciones y Seminarios, “Ratio Institutionis Sacerdotalis,” 62-68.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, 21-3.

budget and administration, standards for student admission, courses and curricular plans, and the indispensable control of performance.”<sup>62</sup> Additionally, the guidelines encouraged regional seminaries to build a teaching corp of diocesan priests assigned by their bishops alongside contracted and invited religious clergy and lay professors.<sup>63</sup>

In March of 1968, in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, at an annual meeting of the Bishops of the Pacific South Region, the gathered Bishops released a statement that they intended to create a regional seminary that would be based in Tehuacán. Present at the meeting were Archbishop Ernesto Corripio (Oaxaca), and Bishops Jesús Clemente Alba (Tehuantepec), José Sepúlveda (Tuxtla Gutiérrez), Adolfo Hernández (Tapachula), Samuel Ruiz García (San Cristóbal de Las Casas), and Rafael Ayala (Tehuacán).<sup>64</sup> Of the collected territories that made up the Región Pacífico-Sur, there were three new dioceses (Tapachula, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Tehuacán) and one new Prelature (Mixe, soon to be joined by Huautla in 1974), and the promise of shared resources and personnel proved critical for the new dioceses to begin to train potential new clergy. The collection of Bishops, Samuel Ruiz aside, were emphatically not, in 1968, known for their ideological progressivism.<sup>65</sup> The Archbishop of Oaxaca was Ernesto Corripio Ahumada, also serving as the president of the CEM at that moment, and who would later become the Archbishop of Mexico (and then made cardinal in 1979). He was theologically conservative, but had been quite active in the Second Vatican Council. He was generally open to experimentation within limits, and had, as the president of UMAE, embraced the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>64</sup> Gonzalo Hallo del Salto O.E.S.A., *Rafael Ayala Ayala: Primer Obispo de Tehuacán* (México, DF: Editorial Progreso, 1989), 146.

<sup>65</sup> This changed in the 1970s as the following were appointed: Bishop Arturo Lona in Tehuantepec, Hermenegildo Ramírez M.J. in Huautla de Jimenez, and Archbishop Bartolomé Carrasco in Oaxaca.

possibilities offered by mutual aid and collaboration.<sup>66</sup> Overall, he charted a centrist path and played the role of mediator and conciliator, very much following the pattern of his predecessor in Mexico City, Cardinal Darío Miranda.

Despite the reputation that SERESURE later acquired, its founding was not liberationist, but was a product of the possibilities of experimentation opened by Vatican II, a grappling with the how to reach indigenous communities now being targeted by Protestant missionaries, and the financial realities of new dioceses unable to create and fund educational institutions from scratch. In their founding contract, the bishops proposed a "special training for priests that is based in our pastoral reality which covers rural and indigenous zones that have incomplete evangelization as a result of historical circumstances as well as situations of social, economic, and cultural underdevelopment."<sup>67</sup> SERESURE thus began as a regional project, situated in and shaped to the particularities of indigenous southeast Mexico, but whose mission reverberated with the priorities of both the Vatican AND the modernizing and developmentalist institutions founded by the US and Western European Catholic Churches in the post-war era. Mexico may not have been any significant destination for the streams of US and European missionaries flowing into the Americas (even as scores were flowing through Mexico to learn Spanish in Cuernavaca under Ivan Illich), but the missionary objective of SERESURE tapped into the same ideologies and funding streams

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<sup>66</sup> Norget, "Knowing Where We Enter," 159.

<sup>67</sup> "Contrato para fundación de un seminario mayor interdiocesano," October, 1969, Archivo de la Diócesis de Tehuacán (hereafter DT).

that were supporting the Maryknollers and other missionary orders that flocked into Guatemala, Peru, and Bolivia to serve the poor and indigenous “down south.”<sup>68</sup>

Along with his five colleagues listed above, and accompanied by the apostolic delegate, Monsignor Guido del Mestri, Rafael Ayala laid the first stone of the seminary on January 25, 1969.<sup>69</sup> The apostolic delegate delivered the first stone, having received it from Rome where it was blessed by Pope Paul VI prior to its trans-Atlantic journey. Additionally, in a physical manifestation of the collaborative regional project, angular stones brought from each diocese were incorporated into the building materials and cement.<sup>70</sup> Further details and ornamentation would be added in the following years to evoke the regional characteristics of Mexico’s southeast, “from the wild beauty that made the [chapel’s] organ from Zapotitlán, to the tropical exuberance of Chiapas.”<sup>71</sup>

Construction proceeded apace through the year but had not yet finished by the fall of 1969. The first student cohort, for lack of a dedicated space, shared the neighboring minor seminary, itself only completed two years prior thanks to the generosity of one of Tehuacán’s richest families, the Romeros.<sup>72</sup> While the construction costs were technically to be shared by the dioceses, the bishops had to reach beyond their traditionally modest source of funds in order to finance the construction and operation of the seminary. Within Tehuacán, Bishop Rafael Ayala appealed to the metropolitan residents, petitioning them to

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<sup>68</sup> See Hartch, *The Prophet of Cuernavaca*; Fitzpatrick-Behrens, *The Maryknoll Catholic Mission in Peru*; and Costello, *Mission to Latin America*.

<sup>69</sup> “Se colocará la primera piedra para el SERESURE,” *La Escoba*, January 19, 1969, Tehuacán, Puebla.

<sup>70</sup> “S.S. Paulo VI envió la primera piedra para el SERESURE,” *La Escoba*, January 29, 1969, Tehuacán, Puebla.

<sup>71</sup> Hallo del Salto, *Rafael Ayala Ayala*, 147.

<sup>72</sup> Hallo del Salto, *Rafael Ayala Ayala*, 140-41; interview with Uriel Gomez, February 28, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

open their pocketbooks in the name of local pride to help fund the future of their relatively newly created diocese (1962).<sup>73</sup>

Archbishop Corripio leveraged his ascent up the Mexican Church hierarchy to plead for funds at home and abroad. In early 1969, Archbishop Corripio received a personal letter from Cardinal Carlo Confalonieri, a member of the Vatican Curia and head of the Pontifical Commission on Latin America. Cardinal Confalonieri referenced Corripio's request for funds and replied with the good news that the Pontifical Commission would be pulling together funds "from some benefactor" and would further assist in a public campaign in favor of the regional seminary.<sup>74</sup> As Corripio was in Rome for a Bishops' Synod, he received a letter from Bishop Rafael Ayala: "I sent to Germany the things that ADVENIAT asked for, and I'm sending you a copy, to see if you there is anything you can do for this project, hopefully a trip to Germany."<sup>75</sup>

While ultimately it does not appear that the seminary received funding from Adveniat (which was a foundation run by the German Episcopal Conference), Corripio was indeed successful in asking for funds from the US Catholic Bishops. By February of 1970, Corripio thanked Louis Colonnese, the head of the Latin American Bureau (LAB) of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB, later the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCCB) for the \$40,000 USD sent down for the seminary. Corripio noted that the money sent would be used to pay debt taken on for the cost of construction, but he also asked for additional financial help, attaching a formal request to the U.S.

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<sup>73</sup> "Está muy cercano el día del Camino de Plata pro-construcción del Seminario Mayor," *La Escoba*, July 7, 1969, Tehuacán, Puebla.

<sup>74</sup> Letter from Cardinal Carlo Confalonieri to Archbishop Ernesto Corripio, February 2, 1969, DT.

<sup>75</sup> Archbishop Corripio was in Rome for the I Extraordinary General Assembly, 11-28 October, 1969, "Cooperation between the Holy See and the Episcopal Conferences; "Letter from Rafael Ayala y Ayala to Ernesto Corripio," October 20, 1969, DT.



Catholic National Annual Collection for Latin America, estimating that the final cost of the project will exceed \$150,000 USD.<sup>76</sup> By 1971, it seems that international, or at least Vatican, generosity had run its course. Rafael Ayala received a letter from Carlo Confalonieri instructing him not to ask for any more funding because what SERESURE had received was already exceptional. Confalonieri left open the possibility, however, of additional financial assistance when he noted that they might be able to send "private funding from pious souls."<sup>77</sup>

Funding would remain a concern throughout SERESURE's existence largely because the member dioceses were among the poorest in Mexico. Since *la Reforma* and the Revolution had divested the Church of most of its property, the finances of the Mexican Church relied heavily on the day to day ability of the faithful to donate, rendering the Church resource-starved in the poorer regions of the country. Daily operational costs were shared among the dioceses according to the number of students they sent, and each diocese was charged with sending a professor to form part of the faculty.<sup>78</sup> Yet with the assistance of international and local benefactors, the bishops had managed to pull together enough funds over the course of a year and a half to begin construction on the regional seminary and house nearly 50 new students to begin the institutionalization of regional collegiality and cooperation. Classes began with much ceremony on October 15, 1969 and the official inauguration occurred nearly three weeks later on November 6, 1969.<sup>79</sup> The day of the inauguration was set to coincide with the saint day of Archbishop Corripio, the man

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<sup>76</sup> Letter from Ernesto Corripio to Louis Colonnese, March 2, 1970, DT.

<sup>77</sup> Letter from Carlo Confalonieri to Rafael Ayala y Ayala, February 2, 1971, DT.

<sup>78</sup> "Contrato para la fundación del seminario regional del Sureste," undated, likely 1970/71, DT.

<sup>79</sup> Hallo del Salto, *Rafael Ayala Ayala*, 147.

responsible for gathering much of the funds necessary to begin realizing the vision of a regional seminary.<sup>80</sup>

While questions of the internal workings of the seminary and how it changed over time will be examined in the following chapter, from the very beginning the training in SERESURE marked itself as unique and experimental along the lines of the comprehensive pastoral ministry advocated by the UMAE. Alongside the traditional academic pillars of philosophical and theological training, SERESURE placed particular emphasis on pastoral formation.<sup>81</sup> Beginning in their second of eight years at the seminary, seminarians spent nearly all of their vacation time on pastoral projects in indigenous communities in their home dioceses. Pastoral projects ranged from more traditional spiritual accompaniment such as biblical talks to undertaking social, economic, and political analyses of the respective communities and helping mount economic projects such as producer cooperatives.<sup>82</sup> The changes to pastoral training that came in subsequent years were designed to deepen seminarian engagement with indigenous communities and to move beyond mere spiritual service and toward addressing the economic and political marginalizations faced by the indigenous. The changes in pastoral training were largely informed by work that was hosted by the seminary but not necessarily a part of seminarian training. As elements of the Church strove to horizontalize the relationship between clergy and laypeople in developing pastoral programs and priorities, SERESURE played host to annual conferences on

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<sup>80</sup> Letter from Rafael Ayala y Ayala to Ernesto Corripio Ahumada, October 20, 1969, DT.

<sup>81</sup> "Ideario del Seminario Regional del Sureste," Undated, 1970/71, DT.

<sup>82</sup> Jose Ambrosio Lezama Cariño and Enrique Domingo Camargo Melendez, "Estudio Socio-Pastoral de San Antonio Cañada," July 1986, personal collection of Padre Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón (hereafter AH).

indigenous pastoral work. These conferences brought together academics, clergy, and indigenous laity and they began to address the cultural, linguistic, and indigenous identity questions that would mark the emergence of Indigenous Theology.

### **The *Encuentros Indigenistas***

We focused on studying philosophy but always with the social tendency focused toward a *pastoral indígena*, toward a *pastoral hacia los pobres*... We had *encuentros indigenistas* with representatives from Chiapas, Oaxaca, the indigenous groups sent pairs of catechists, and we would have meetings and sessions with them... We organized it, asked for financial help from the dioceses in order to send people, and it was a week of reflection focused on *pastoral de conjunto*, *pastoral integral*, how they are working in the parishes, what are the most pressing needs of the people and how can we refocus our own formation... At the end of the year, we went out to work in indigenous communities, to the farthest corners of our diocese.<sup>83</sup>

Uriel Gómez, a student from Tapachula, was among the first cohorts at SERESURE. He left the seminary before finishing. However, his experiences there marked what would become years of lay involvement in the diocese of Tehuacán, where he remained after leaving the seminary. In the quotation above, Gómez was referring to the summer *encuentros* that SERESURE began co-hosting with the Centro Nacional de Ayuda a Misiones Indígenas (CENAMI), the Episcopate organization formed in 1961 with the mission of assisting in the development and implementation of *pastoral indigenista* in the mission setting as an integrationist and assimilationist project to bring the indigenous into “modernity.”<sup>84</sup> In November 1970, just a year after commencing operations, SERESURE played host to its first large *encuentro de pastoral indígena*. Participating in the conference were seventy-five priests, forty sisters, ninety-one

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Uriel Gómez, February 28, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

<sup>84</sup> Chojnacki, *Indigenous Apostles*, 63.

seminarians (which is more than were studying at SERESURE), four brothers, seven bishops, and twenty lay people who streamed into Tehuacán from Puebla, Oaxaca, Veracruz, Chiapas, Sonora, Mexico City, and even New Mexico. While some of the conference objectives were internal to SERESURE, such as discussions as to how to best integrate *pastoral indigenista* into seminary studies, other objectives were clearly responding to work in January 1970 in the first Encuentro de Pastoral Indígena, held in Xicotepec, Puebla (Sierra Norte de Puebla).<sup>85</sup>

The Xicotepec meeting was novel in that indigenous people were invited to be active participants in a meeting about the direction of Church programs in indigenous space. However, it was unclear the full extent of incorporation of indigenous participants in the decision-making at Xicotepec. Rather than having indigenous laity and Church agents working together, CENAMI organized two parallel meetings taking place in the same space. In one working group were bishops, priests, religious, and secular missionaries that worked in indigenous areas. In the other, “indigenous leaders,” presumably lay community leaders, from six different cultural regions, worked together on the same themes and questions as the Church agents. Following their sessions, the two working groups came together to share results although no indication was given as to where the groups disagreed or how they reconciled differences.<sup>86</sup> Enrique Dussel identified the Xicotepec meeting as the moment when a colonialist model of Church assistance and charity work for the indigenous transformed into a liberationist scheme for pastoral work with and among the indigenous, aiming to address the particular economic,

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<sup>85</sup> Luís González R., “El señorío de los dioses: una experiencia,” *Estudios Indígenas* 1, no. 1 (September 1971): 43-49.

<sup>86</sup> P. Héctor Samperio, CENAMI newsletter, June 1, 1970, AHAM, Base DM, c. 75, exp. 31.

social, political, and cultural challenges that faced Mexico's indigenous populations.<sup>87</sup> However, although the concrete input of indigenous attendees may not have been entirely clear in Xicotepec, the trend toward greater inclusion became clearer over the course of the 1970s in the multiple meetings held at SERESURE and throughout southern Mexico.

In the first *pastoral indigenista* meeting in SERESURE, the final document identified concrete ways that the preliminary conclusions of Xicotepec would be applied to pastoral work in southeast Mexico. If the organs of the Mexican Episcopate were beginning to promote a "ministry of Incarnation and Liberation in indigenous cultures to promote the growth of autochthonous Churches," the SERESURE meeting asked how to do that beginning at the seminary level.<sup>88</sup> First and foremost, the participants in Tehuacán agreed that to work with and amongst the indigenous, it was first necessary to "know" the indigenous, their languages and cultures. In this manner, the on-the-ground agents of the Church were beginning to systematize the intellectual advances of liberation theology, the critical use of Marxist social science and scientific knowledge to address the concrete realities of poverty and marginalization of Mexico's indigenous people. In what was quickly becoming a twin project of cultural valorization and economic empowerment, the conclusions called for a cultural pluralism, autochthonous churches incarnated in their own communities while at the same time asking the Catholic Church how best to address inequality and oppression of indigenous peoples.<sup>89</sup> While the social and economic development questions had been part of the Church's thinking on indigenous issues in prior decades, particularly among the Cardinal Miranda current of thought, the

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<sup>87</sup> Dussel, *De Medellín a Puebla*, 168. Also see Concha Malo et al., *La participación*, 75.

<sup>88</sup> "Informe de actividades del CENAPI, Secretaria ejecutiva de la Comisión Episcopal para Indígenas: 1970-73," October 1973, AHAM, Base DM, c. 73, exp. 68, page 4.

<sup>89</sup> González R., "El señorío de los dioses," 48-49.

valorization of indigeneity and indigenous religious practice, without the corresponding paternalistic lamentations of the need for education, was indeed novel.

The flurry of meetings over the next few years indicates the perceived urgency of the moment. Xicotepec and Tehuacán were followed by annual larger conferences at SERESURE as well as smaller, more focused meetings through southeast Mexico, tailored to individual dioceses' particularities. Almost immediately following, there was an Encuentro de Pastoral Indigenista en Tehuantepec in February 1971 with workshops, clearly geared toward pastoral workers, on theory of culture, inculturation, social change, intercultural situations, methods and techniques of social research/investigation, inculturation ministry in indigenous communities, and liberation.<sup>90</sup>

The Primer Encuentro de Pastoral Indigenista en Oaxaca took place in January 1972 on the "proclamation of the gospel as a ferment of freedom and progress for the Oaxacan indigenous groups." This meeting also counted the participation of Bishop Samuel Ruiz and his diocese's representative/professor at SERESURE, Felipe Blanco.<sup>91</sup> Tehuacán hosted the Segundo Encuentro de Pastoral Indigenista en el Sureste, 23-26 May, 1972 with 156 participants, half from Tehuacán, and the rest coming from Oaxaca, Veracruz, Chiapas, Mexico City, and Yucatán. Here, the overarching themes were indigenous empowerment within the Church itself, the recruitment of indigenous seminarians and priests, and how to maintain dual identities as indigenous *and* clergy for those already ordained.<sup>92</sup> One panel, chaired by Zapotecan priest Eleazar López

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<sup>90</sup> "Encuentro de pastoral indigenista en Tehuantepec," *Estudios Indígenas* 1, no. 1 (September 1971): 53-54.

<sup>91</sup> "Primer encuentro de pastoral indigenista en Oaxaca," *Estudios Indígenas* 1, no. 2 (December 1971): 85-86.

<sup>92</sup> "Segundo encuentro de pastoral indigenista en el sureste," *Estudios Indígenas* 1, no. 4 (June 1972): 125-129.

Hernández, who later became the director of CENAMI, argued for aggressive recruitment of indigenous priests as they were inherently suited to the new direction of said ministry. Bridging the gap between clerical and indigenous identity was a crucial stepping stone in building a new relationship between Church and community. One indigenous priest remarked that SERESURE was notable in that it did not force indigenous seminarians to discard the indigenous language and vestments that they had been raised with.<sup>93</sup>

The official follow-up to Xicotepec occurred in Oaxaca, Sept 25-28, 1972, as the Encuentro de Obispos de Áreas Indígenas. Convoled by Bishop Samuel Ruiz in his position as the head of the Episcopal Commission for the Indigenous (la Comisión Episcopal para Indígenas, CEPI), Ruiz sought a collegial conversation to ask if there was another path, “viable rather than utopic,” toward indigenous cultural survival and liberation from injustice and socioeconomic marginalization.<sup>94</sup>

The connecting thread of these meetings was clear. First, SERESURE, as both a physical location and as a collective of bishops, clergy, religious, and seminarians, was intimately involved in the development of a liberationist *pastoral indígenista* in Mexico. Beyond those actually studying and working at SERESURE, attendees at the annual conferences came from across Mexico and even internationally to participate in the conversations addressing the “indigenous question.” Second, while trumpeting a goal of autochthonous churches, an inculturated Catholicism particular to the various indigenous communities, much more time initially seems to have been spent on the liberationist model of employing the social sciences to address the socioeconomic inequalities of

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<sup>93</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, Tehuacán, Puebla, May 9, 2017.

<sup>94</sup> Samuel Ruiz, “I encuentro de obispos de áreas indígenas,” *Estudios Indígenas* 2, no. 1 (September 72): 137-138.

developmentalist capitalism. This focus too was reflected in the curriculum of SERESURE. Seminarians, during their periods of pastoral mission in communities, were instructed to undertake socio-economic and religious analyses of the communities prior to embarking on any pastoral programs.<sup>95</sup> In this manner, the first attempts to articulate a radical *pastoral indigenista* maintained some of the assimilationist assumptions of the past: that concerted action with indigenous communities could bring them out of economic and cultural “backwardness” as judged relative to urban, mestizo society.

Yet this orientation began to change quickly within a matter of only a few years as indigenous participants were increasingly included in the development of indigenous ministry. The intellectuals within the Church, those publishing *Estudios Indígenas* out of CENAMI, those teaching at seminaries and universities, were closely observing if not collaborating in the changes occurring in Mexican anthropology and how experts and academics engaged with communities.<sup>96</sup> *Estudios Indígenas*, while a religious publication, also invited secular anthropologists to write articles and published the final documents from secular meetings, including the massively important First National Congress of Indigenous Peoples, around which Muñoz centers her analysis of participatory *indigenismo*.<sup>97</sup>

The process of ideological and methodological change was also filtering into Church organized meetings. Concurrent with the First National Congress of Indigenous

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<sup>95</sup> As an example, see Seminarians Jose Ambrosio Lezama Cariño and Enrique Domingo Camargo Melendez, "Estudio Socio-Pastoral de San Antonio Cañada," July 1986, AH.

<sup>96</sup> Lewis, *Rethinking Mexican Indigenismo*, 227-44. See also Alan Shane Dillingham, "Indigenismo and its Discontents: Bilingual Teachers and the Democratic Opening in the Mixteca Alta of Oaxaca, Mexico, 1954-1982," (PhD Diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2012).

<sup>97</sup> "Declaración al I Congreso de Pueblos Indígenas," *Estudios Indígenas* 5, no. 2, December 1975, 235-41; Muñoz, *Stand Up and Fight*, chapters 4 and 5.



Peoples, the *encuentros* at SERESURE and organized by SERESURE community members continued apace. In July 1975, the Second Assembly of Pastoral Agents in Indigenous Zones was held in Tehuantepec, Oaxaca under the direction of Bishop Arturo Lona, member of the coordinating body of SERESURE and also the new president of the CEPI. Gathered attendees from across the country, but heavily representing the dioceses that made up SERESURE, were tasked with sharing local experiences of “*pastoral indígena o pastoral indigenista*” and accompanying the presentations with critical reflections from community representatives who had been the recipients of these ministerial experiences. Presentations and workshops included arts, education, indigenous religious practices and rites, and a report from the San Cristobal delegation on their participation in the First Indigenous Congress.

Two important elements emerged from this programming. First, this documented a moment of transition from *pastoral indigenista* to *pastoral indígena*, indicating that the debate over naming convention and the methodological implications of naming was well under way.<sup>98</sup> Second, the ways in which indigenous participants were being invited to comment on and critique Church outreach and ministry programs shows a broadening of the terms of inclusion implied by *pastoral indígena* and horizontalizing the relationship between Church and community. The inclusion of a workshop on indigenous rites led by the delegation from the Nahuatl region of the Sierra Zongolica, Veracruz, pointed toward attempts to build an inculturated Catholicism, an adaptation of Catholicism to indigenous culture and cosmovision, that went beyond just increased Church presence in indigenous

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<sup>98</sup> Previous to this meeting, *Estudios Indígenas* had already started to debate the terms *indigenista* and *indígena* and the implications of shifting social and power relations. Jorge Santiago, “¿Acción indigenista o acción indígena?,” *Estudios Indígenas* 2, no. 3 (March 1973), 281-82.

regions to actual participation in, and official tolerance of, indigenous religiosity.<sup>99</sup> The simple act of inviting clergy to join communities in what had previously been (and often remained) unsanctioned religious practice such as building shrines and leaving offerings in sacred natural spaces spoke volumes about a greater degree of trust vested in certain clergy.<sup>100</sup>

If we jump forward to 1986, we can see some of the notable intellectual and conceptual changes that occurred over the previous decade. In the VIII Encuentro de Pastoral Indígena, held in April of 1986, a presentation by the seminary rector most clearly shows how *pastoral indígena* had influenced changes in the seminary itself. He emphasized how the internal organization of the seminary had changed to mirror that of an indigenous pueblo. The bishops filled the role of the *consejo de ancianos*, the rector was the *presidente municipal*, decisions were made in *asamblea* with participation of all involved, and the seminary itself ran on *trabajos y servicios comunitarios*.<sup>101</sup>

Whether this was more rhetorical than reality is a valid question, but it nonetheless demonstrates a reversal of sorts in which some Church representatives looked to indigenous structures and cosmovisions as potentially viable models to mediate the destructive tendencies of capitalism. While socio-economic concerns remained central in the presentations by diocesan representatives, the sessions on cultural aspects - linguistic, religious, communitarian, and traditions often imagined as at risk of being lost

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<sup>99</sup> "II asamblea de agentes de pastoral en zonas indígenas," *Estudios Indígenas* 4, no. 4 (June 1975), 551-52.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Estefena Damian, San Antonio Cañada, Puebla, May 9, 2017.

<sup>101</sup> "Reporte: VIII Encuentro de Pastoral Indígena, Seminario Regional del Sureste, Tehuacán, Puebla, 3-5 de abril de 1986," DT, 5.

- marked a progression of greater inclusion of not just indigenous people but also indigeneity itself (or what the Church imagined that to be).<sup>102</sup>

However, such a reversal obscures the real conflicts within the Church as, by the late 1980s, a conservative tendency under Pope John Paul II had increasingly moved to silence and marginalize those associated with Liberation Theology for their alleged heterodoxy.<sup>103</sup> Additionally, there remained a central contradiction within the trend toward cultural, in place of socio-economic, aspects of *pastoral indígena*: how could catholicism be both culturally diverse and universal? Norget argued that the progressive attempts to valorize and incorporate indigenous cultural and religious practices always clashed against the historical relationships between the Church and indigenous communities and the purported universalism of “Catholicism as a supposedly generic, non-culturally specific religiosity.”<sup>104</sup> And thus, if the local or regional formulations of liberationist thinking are premised on a universal Catholicism that can be found in every culture and the Church as the font of “official knowledge,” even the most progressive iterations of Liberation Theology (or emerging Indigenous Theology) leave themselves open to a conservative appropriation denuded of the political content and commitment.<sup>105</sup> Yet, for nearly a decade, as local and regional meetings between Church agents and indigenous peoples shepherded in a transition from *pastoral indígenista* to a liberationist

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<sup>102</sup> “Reflexión crítica de la situación de nuestra región: VIII Encuentro de Pastoral Indígena, Seminario Regional del Sureste, Tehuacán, Puebla, 3-5 de abril de 1986,” DT. For a parallel argument regarding state policy earlier in the century, see Chapter 4 of Roseblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race*.

<sup>103</sup> See Chapter 5 on the closure of SERESURE and how Vatican politics reverberated at the local and regional level. See also, Harvey Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff: The Vatican and the Future of World Christianity* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone Books, 1988).

<sup>104</sup> Kristin Norget, “Decolonization and the Politics of Syncretism: The Catholic Church, Indigenous Theology and Cultural Autonomy in Oaxaca, Mexico,” *The Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 15, no. 1 (April 16, 2010): 93-94.

<sup>105</sup> This dynamic is explored in Chapter 6 and in the Conclusion, and I do not think it was as bleak as Norget presented it to be.

*pastoral indígena*, the bishops of the region grappled with how to mediate the meeting of local specificity and doctrinal universality as they articulated a vision of the role of the Church in the world, or at least in southern Mexico.

### **Pastoral Letters**

SERESURE, as a collaborative project, reoriented regional Church priorities away from their long-held roles of ministering to the urban mestizo and landed elite classes and towards the needs and demands of their predominantly indigenous flock. Its transformation over time, intensifying pastoral training and reflecting the theological and ministerial developments articulated in regional meetings on *pastoral indígena* and published in the pages of CENAMI's *Estudios Indígenas*, was also a reflection of personnel changes within the collective of bishops. Archbishop Corripio Ahumada, the mediator, moderate, and fundraiser, was transferred to the Archdiocese of Puebla in 1976 and then to the Archdiocese of Mexico in 1977. In his place, Pope Paul VI named Bartólome Carrasco, previously Bishop of Huejutla (1963-67), Auxiliary Bishop of Antequera (1967-71), and Bishop of Tapachula (1971-76), as Archbishop of Antequera (Oaxaca). Carrasco, who openly advocated for social justice and a Church that accompanied the poor in their struggles for liberation, was joined by his ideological companions Arturo Lona (Tehuantepec), Samuel Ruiz (San Cristóbal de las Casas) and, in 1974, Hermenegildo Ramírez Sánchez M.J., the Bishop of the Prelature of Huautla de Jiménez.<sup>106</sup> Tehuacán, although part of the SERESURE collective, was technically part of the Región Oriente pastoral region alongside Puebla, Huajuapán, and Tlaxcala. And thus,

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<sup>106</sup> On Bishop Ramírez and his missionary endeavors to be close to the Mazatecan population of the Prelature, see Faudree, *Singing for the Dead*, 97.

as of 1976, four of the seven bishops of the Pacific South Region were open advocates for the social justice orientation proposed by Liberation Theology, and they immediately began, via a series of jointly issued pastoral letters alongside new research, documentation, and human rights centers, to build a vision of what it would mean for the Church to accompany and not just evangelize the indigenous.<sup>107</sup>

In 1977, the bishops released their first joint pastoral letter, “Our Christian Commitment to the Indigenous and Campesinos of the Pacific South Region.”<sup>108</sup> As a reflection of the shifted ideological constellation of power in the region, the letter itself was both an articulation of what the bishops intended to build in their region and a broadside against what they viewed as tepid commitments by the Mexican Church to engage in the social and political questions that situations of poverty so urgently demanded. The ideas contained within - that indigenous peoples of the region suffered from systemic and structural forces that dispossessed them of land, exploited them for cheap labor, denied them just payment for agricultural products, and the persistence of *cacicazgos* that disenfranchised them from exercising political and economic power - reflected years of advocacy by progressive Church elements.

As early as 1969, for example, Samuel Ruiz had ghostwritten a proposal for a massive Church fund for development and agrarian reform for indigenous Mexico. Sent to Cardinal Darío Miranda via Bishop José Esaú Robles of Tulancingo (1962-74) as a middleman, the memorandum called for the Cardinal to redirect one million pesos from

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<sup>107</sup> Pastoral letters, issued by Church hierarchs, are like Papal encyclicals in that they are publicly released and expound on a particular topic in light of Church and the gospel. While they are not doctrine-setting, as a Papal encyclical would be, they are meant to set the tone and priorities of diocesan positions and initiatives.

<sup>108</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, “Nuestro compromiso cristiano con los indígenas y campesinos de la Región Pacífico-Sur.”

the National Basilica of Guadalupe to create a “‘Guadalupan Fund for the Indigenous Development’ (although the people will probably quickly start to call it ‘The Cardinal’s Fund’).”<sup>109</sup> Bishop Robles, at three different moments, made it clear to the Cardinal that Bishop Ruiz was the real author of the proposal, as though trying to wash his hands of the bold (and flattering) call for a redistribution of Church wealth.<sup>110</sup> In arguing for the fund, Robles/Ruiz continued with more flattery, and commented that the Cardinal’s recent elevation to the Cardinate made the timing propitious for bold action that would indicate the seriousness of the task and encourage further donations to augment the million-peso seed money. The fund would not require additional personnel to manage it, they said, because the Episcopal Commission for the Indigenous already had the infrastructure to ensure that it would be invested wisely in “comprehensive development and evangelization of the indigenous.”<sup>111</sup> The money should come from the Basilica of Guadalupe, they argued, precisely because “Our Lady of Guadalupe is the object of special devotion by the indigenous.”<sup>112</sup>

Significantly, Robles/Ruiz did not solely rely on flattery and reassurance that the fund would be well-managed. Rather, they argued that such a fund would finally address “the most tragic conditions of human and Christian underdevelopment” that persist among the nearly four million Mexicans who “are still waiting for frontal and profound action from the Church that has always mediated its most generous efforts due to the lack

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<sup>109</sup> “Memorandum, Bishop José Esaú Robles to Cardinal Darío Miranda,” July 17, 1969, AHAM, Base DM, c. 75, exp. 28.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. In an introductory note, Robles wrote that this “suggestion” was really from Bishop Ruiz. The first paragraph asks for strict confidentiality on the suggestion of Bishop Ruiz. And a handwritten note at the end repeats that the memorandum was written by Ruiz.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

of material resources.”<sup>113</sup> Further, this would be the type of action that conformed to post-conciliar ideals of “a Church of the poor that shares its bread with the most poor. A Church incarnated that shows that it shares the anxieties and hopes of its most helpless children. Of a serving Church, where the highest hierarchies, like Christ, have the most noble function of serving and not being served.”<sup>114</sup> They pointed to Peru and Ecuador as national churches that, after Medellín, were giving away some of their extensive properties in order to spur agrarian reform, and thus the fund would be Mexico’s action consistent with the CELAM meeting. Lastly, they argued, this fund would be precisely the type of action that Pope Paul VI imagined in the recent papal encyclical *Populorum Progressio*.

To wrap up the argument, they return to flattery and appeal to Cardinal Miranda that the creation of the fund would not just be a show of gesture, but that across the Republic, the indigenous “would continue to see Your Eminence as the Pastor and Father who is still present in the midst of their problems that are treated by other agents with demagoguery and without the authenticity of the Church where they were baptized.”<sup>115</sup> The allusion to “other agents” was likely the requisite nod to the anti-communism and anti-secularism that prevailed in the Church, even among the moderate and more open-minded currents. There is no attached record of Cardinal Miranda’s response, but it was assuredly a negative as nothing I found indicated that such a fund ever arose from the Mexican Church with such a broad-ranging and ambitious mission. However, Bishop Ruiz’s boldness, expressed through a mix of flattery, prodding, and even shaming that the

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

Mexican Church had yet to fulfill post-conciliar ideals, demonstrated that an empowered minority of progressives within the Church felt free to push against the highest levels of power within their institution. Further, although the Mexican State went unmentioned in the memorandum, the context of the moment allowed the reader to infer that the “demagoguery” emanated from State agents who had, in spite of their revolutionary rhetoric, abandoned any pretense toward aid and development for the indigenous. Although the Church hierarchy had responded tepidly to the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre and state violence, Ruiz clearly saw an opportunity for the Church to assert its historic role as protector of the indigenous as the state had forfeited its credibility.<sup>116</sup>

Bishop Ruiz’s proposal, along with Bishop Méndez Arceo of Cuernavaca lambasting the repressive hand of the state and advocating for the liberation of political prisoners, were the progressive interpretations of emerging changes in Catholic social doctrine that were reflected in *Populorum Progressio*, the final documents from the CELAM Medellín meeting (Sept. 1968), and the Mexican Episcopate’s own pastoral document, la *Carta pastoral sobre el desarrollo e integración del país* (Pastoral letter on development and integration of the country).<sup>117</sup> The CEM’s pastoral letter, issued on the one year anniversary of *Populorum Progressio*, lamented inequality and injustice in Mexico, as well as the continued Constitutional provisions limiting the action of the Church, while calling on all Mexicans to dialogue and work in concert against violence

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<sup>116</sup> On the nonresponse to Tlatelolco by the CEM, see Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia*, 240-250. On Tlatelolco, see Elena Poniatowska, *Massacre in Mexico* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1991).

<sup>117</sup> On Bishop Méndez Arceo as nearly the sole Church representative to forcefully respond to State violence, see Enrique Maza S.J., “El movimiento estudiantil y sus repercusiones para la Iglesia,” *Christus* 34, no. 397 (December 1968): 1260-63.



and for a more just country.<sup>118</sup> It was, to that point, the strongest critique that the post-Cristero hierarchy had leveled against the Mexican government, the PRI, and the “lack of authentic, functional, and healthy organizations” that could transform the State and political society into a vehicle for equitable development.<sup>119</sup> Yet, while a progressive wing used the arguments of the document to call for a wholesale reordering of societal priorities, the moderate majority of the Episcopate drew on the same pastoral letter in the aftermath of Tlatelolco to sidestep completely the question of state violence and instead call for dialogue and peace to “construct a homeland where equality, liberty, responsibility, truth and law are values that permit all construct in solidarity the development of the country.”<sup>120</sup> In other words, there were apparent limits to the criticism leveled by the moderate majority while a minority progressive current was increasingly willing to level blame on the State and denounce repressive violence.<sup>121</sup>

The repression of the student movement and the apparent bankruptcy of the PRI’s revolutionary rhetoric drove, as historians have well documented, parallel and sometimes contradictory changes in Mexican politics and society. On one hand, a portion of the

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<sup>118</sup> CEM, *Carta pastoral sobre el desarrollo e integración del país* (México, CDMX: Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, 1968).

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> CEM, “Mensaje pastoral del Comité Episcopal sobre los sucesos de Tlatelolco,” October 9, 1968, reprinted in *Historia General de la Iglesia en América Latina, Tomo V: México*, ed. Enrique Dussel (México, CDMX: Comisión para el Estudio de la Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina y el Caribe, 1984), 474-5.

Blancarte calls the majority wing of the Episcopate the “neointransigent moderate current” to signify their centrist ideology combined with a hardening refusal to work with the Mexican State; Blancarte, *Historia de la Iglesia*, 238.

<sup>121</sup> In contrast to the CEM’s pastoral letter after Tlatelolco, a group of progressive clergy (including nearly the entire staff of both the SSM and the UMAE) had released their own letter a month prior to the massacre arguing that the student movement revealed the profound necessity of a social change that was impeded by state violence and the those who oppose change in order to maintain their privileged status; “Al pueblo mexicano: Declaración de 37 sacerdotes sobre el conflicto estudiantil de 1968,” reprinted in *Historia General de la Iglesia en América Latina, Tomo V: México*, ed. Enrique Dussel (México, CDMX: Comisión para el Estudio de la Historia de la Iglesia en América Latina y el Caribe, 1984), 472-3.

radical left concluded that social change was impossible via peaceful protest under the one-party state. The explosion of revolutionary guerrilla organizations, continuing a process that had begun in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution a decade prior, saw scores of disillusioned social movement participants take up arms and retreat to the urban underground or the mountainous countryside to wage war against the State.<sup>122</sup> On the other hand, the backlash to state violence forced a recalibration of PRI politics. Luis Echeverría, the Secretary of Interior (Gobernación) under President Díaz Ordaz and orchestrator of the repression leveled against the student movement, campaigned for president in 1970 on a platform that promised a return to the redistributive policies of the Cárdenas era.<sup>123</sup> And within the Church, the apparent shift to the populist left by the Echeverría administration both emboldened progressive Catholic agents to push for further change *and* hardened right-wing opposition to such an extent that reactionary elements, ultraconservative Catholic organizations like El Yunque and local paramilitaries (white guards) under the control of PRI-affiliated *caciques*, attempted to assassinate progressive bishops Sergio Méndez Arceo and Arturo Lona respectively.<sup>124</sup>

The progressive Church critiques did not only circulate within Mexico. Another crucial precursor to the pastoral letters of the Bishops of the Pacific South Region was the

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<sup>122</sup> Among the many excellent works on Mexican revolutionary and guerrilla movements, see Fernando Herrera Calderón and Adela Cedillo, eds., *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico: Revolutionary Struggles and the Dirty war, 1964-1982* (New York: Routledge, 2012); Pensado and Ochoa, eds., *México Beyond 1968*.

<sup>123</sup> There is also quite a bit of historical work on Echeverría. See recently published work, Thornton, *Revolution in Development*, Chapter 8; Alan Shane Dillingham, "Mexico's Turn Toward the Third World: Rural Development Under President Luis Echeverría," in *México Beyond 1968: Revolutionaries, Radicals, and Repression during the Global Sixties and Subversive Seventies*, eds. Jaime Pensado and Enrique Ochoa (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2018), 113-33.

<sup>124</sup> On two assassination attempts against Méndez Arceo by El Yunque, see Bernardo Barranco, "México, líder en asesinatos de sacerdotes," *La Jornada*, Dec. 31, 2014. On Lona Reyes, see Pedro Matias, "Muere por covid-19 el sacerdote Arturo Lona Reyes, el 'Obispo de los pobres,'" *Proceso*, Oct. 31, 2020.

document “Justice in Mexico” prepared in advance of the 1971 Vatican Synod that brought together bishops from around the Catholic world to discuss and elaborate the Church’s position on “Justice in the World.”<sup>125</sup> “Justice in Mexico,” alongside other similar documents produced by national episcopates, evolved over two months of synodal assemblies into one of the most progressive documents to emerge from the Vatican. “Justice in the World” maintained the middle-road stance between capitalism and socialism that was constitutive of twentieth-century Catholic social doctrine, but spared no hesitation in identifying the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few as the obstacle to people exercising their basic human rights.<sup>126</sup> But, worried about the rise of Liberation Theology and the political commitment of the new theologies, “Justice in the World” was largely sidelined by the Vatican and omitted from the Vatican-published *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.<sup>127</sup> In striking contrast to the strident call for social justice by the 1971 Synod, Pope Paul VI, on the tenth anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, affirmed the centrality of evangelization for the Church in *Evangelii nuntiandi*. In doing so, the Pope underlined the role of every Catholic to deepen their own faith, believe in the Gospel, and spread the word of the Truth of God and the

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<sup>125</sup> In preparation for the synod, the CEM produced a working document from which “Justice in Mexico” emerged, containing initial thoughts on the shortcomings of Church action in the socio-political sphere and a series of questions aimed at articulating new possible directions for the Church. See CEM, “Documento Sinodal: Justicia,” Mexico, CDMX April 30, 1971, AHAM, Base Can, c. 119, exp. 1. For English-language reporting on the CEM’s self-criticism, see “Mexican Church Criticizes Itself,” *The New York Times*, September 26, 1971.

<sup>126</sup> The final document, “Justice in the World,” can be found on the Vatican website. Synod of Bishops, “A Justiça no mundo” (Rome: The Vatican, November 30, 1971), [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_19711130\\_giustizia\\_po.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_19711130_giustizia_po.html).

<sup>127</sup> Peter Henriot, “Remembering ‘Justice’: Retrieving a Forgotten Proclamation,” *America*, November 14, 2011.

divine mystery of the Church. The temporal concerns of “Justice in the World” were shelved for the eternal and transcendent concerns of the Gospel and salvation.<sup>128</sup>

This is to say that by 1977, when the Bishops of the Pacific South Region issued their first jointly signed pastoral letter, the ground had shifted significantly in the preceding years, first toward and then away from the temporal issues of social justice and inequality. Additionally, in the years since the opening of SERESURE in 1969, there were two processes not entirely unique to indigenous southern Mexico, but that were exacerbating factors that informed how the Bishops articulated their message. First, President Echeverría’s return to a variation of *cardenista* populism reversed the policies of the previous administrations which had overseen the “Mexican miracle” in part by ending agrarian reform and subsidizing industrial agriculture (primarily in northern Mexico) in order to keep foodstuffs affordable for the burgeoning urban populations. Echeverría massively expanded rural development and antipoverty programs in the form of an expanded INI, increased rural credit for agricultural investment, and the expansion of CONASUPO (Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares) stores into rural areas rather than solely urban environments. Under Echeverría, rural CONASUPO locations expanded from 43 in 1970 to 899 by 1975.<sup>129</sup> Rural development and antipoverty initiatives had not seen such concerted state action since the end of the Cárdenas presidency in 1940. However, the administration was more than willing to use repressive

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<sup>128</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi: Apostolic Exhortation of His Holiness Pope Paul VI to the Episcopate, to the Clergy and to all the Faithful of the Entire World* (Rome: The Vatican, December 8, 1975), [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_exh\\_19751208\\_evangelii-nuntiandi.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_p-vi_exh_19751208_evangelii-nuntiandi.html)

<sup>129</sup> Dillingham, “Mexico’s Turn,” 121-22.

violence against peasants and campesinos who did not channel their grievances through the official organizations and coalitions of the State.<sup>130</sup>

Second, Protestant and evangelical proselytization and conversion was increasing rapidly in southern Mexico. In the indigenous villages throughout Chiapas and Oaxaca, Catholics accused evangelicals of disrupting *usos y costumbres*, the collective practices that defined village life, governance, and community membership. Refusal of evangelical converts to contribute money and time to, for example, “voluntary” labor to repair or improve a village chapel could and did spark violent reprisals and displacement as Catholics ran the “non-cooperating” converts out of town.<sup>131</sup> In McIntyre’s account of the turn toward liberationism among the bishops of the Pacific South Region, she argued that “stemming the tide of Protestantism became synonymous with fighting for indigenous rights.”<sup>132</sup> While the Church itself was overtly distressed by the inroads made by “sects,” and it launched various programs and initiatives across the nation to specifically counter said inroads, the liberationist line of southern Mexico tended to lament the presence of evangelicals but generally shunned the combative language of doctrinal conservatives who viewed the “sects” as existential threats.<sup>133</sup> The bishops did, as McIntyre cites, warn that Protestant sects, like the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses, were spreading “propaganda” of US superiority, which the bishops claimed had led to a number of deaths and the desecration of Catholic images and chapels.<sup>134</sup> However, in the next paragraph,

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<sup>130</sup> Aviña, *Specters of Revolution*.

<sup>131</sup> See Marroquín, *El conflicto religioso*; and McIntyre, *Protestantism and State Formation*.

<sup>132</sup> McIntyre, 132.

<sup>133</sup> See the 1984 program launched in Chihuahua under Archbishop Adalberto Almeida y Merino that sought to enlist the faithful in combating Protestant proselytization in the Archdiocese, “Católico: Defiende tu fe,” AHAM, Base DM, c. 153, exp. 57.

<sup>134</sup> McIntyre, 147; Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, “Vivir Cristianamente el Compromiso Político,” 222-3.

the bishops affirmed that “not all Protestants act in the same manner.”<sup>135</sup> In fact, they acknowledged that many of the Protestant denominations, particularly those which were members of the World Council of Churches, “lend themselves to dialogue and sincere collaboration.”<sup>136</sup>

While there was indeed a deep concern over the individualism and the retreat from community participation that evangelical and Pentecostal conversion entailed, the ecumenical tendencies of liberationist currents within the Church mediated the ways in which they responded to religious competition. The Bishops of the Pacific South Region faced a landscape - the populism of the Echeverría administration, the spread of Protestantism, and the growing contributions of Liberation Theology - that was markedly different from even a decade earlier. And, in 1977, with a consolidated progressive majority, they released their first pastoral letter that was a salvo against the unjust social, ethnic, and political structures of the region as well as against the moderate majority of their own Catholic Church.

The title of the pastoral letter, “Our Christian Commitment with the Indigenous and *campesinos* of the Pacific South Region,” was a clear reference to the 1973 CEM pastoral letter, “The Christian Commitment to Social Options and Politics.”<sup>137</sup> The 1973 CEM letter had marked a step back certainly from “Justice in Mexico” (1971) and even from the 1968 letter on development. In response to such liberationist groups like “Priests for the People” (Sacerdotes para el Pueblo), ultra-conservative currents (including lay Cristero leader René Capistran Garza) within the Catholic Church founded a Mexican

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<sup>135</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, “Vivir Cristianamente el Compromiso Político,” 223.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 223.

<sup>137</sup> CEM, *El compromiso cristiano ante las opciones sociales y la política*, October 18, 1973.

chapter of the Saint Pius X Society.<sup>138</sup> The Saint Pius X Society was founded as a community of ultraconservative clergy by French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre, who was most notable for rejecting the reforms of Vatican II and trying to ordain his own bishops in opposition to the Vatican.<sup>139</sup> The pressure exerted from a resurgent ultraconservative wing was reflected in the 1973 letter inasmuch as it rejected analysis of the structures that perpetuated inequality and instead attributed economic, political, and social ills to a lack of Christian morality in Mexican society and among the political class. As a result, the letter denounced the “radical solutions” of “class war” as divisive and inconsistent with Catholicism.<sup>140</sup> If the Mexican Church had taken steps forward toward adopting the reforms of Vatican II and Medellín in the late 1960s, this 1973 document was a definitive step backwards and away from the accomplishments of the immediately preceding years.

But a reading of the Church as a conservative monolith, which might be justified if one only read the pronouncements and pastoral letters coming from the CEM in the mid-1970s, ignores the considerable division and ideological jostling that occurred under the surface. For the Bishops of the Pacific South Region, their 1977 letter hardly referenced the CEM letters (a type of response itself without vocalizing their disagreement), and instead drew amply from Vatican II (*Gaudium et Spes*) and Medellín to elaborate an alternative vision of a Church tasked not just with spiritual salvation but also with addressing the temporal concerns of inequality and exploitation. The Bishops opened with a blunt assessment of their region: majority indigenous, half of whom lived by subsistence agriculture, and the majority of the region was suffering an agricultural

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<sup>138</sup> García, 429.

<sup>139</sup> See Yves Congar, *Challenge to the Church: the case of Archbishop Lefebvre*, (London: Collins, 1977). See also Cowan, *Moral Majorities Across the Americas*.

<sup>140</sup> CEM, *El compromiso cristiano ante las opciones sociales y la política*, October 18, 1973, 10-14.

crisis of land theft, concentration of ownership in fewer and fewer hands, foreign capital invading domestic agricultural sectors, exploitative middlemen siphoning off just profits, poor wages, and pressures to cultivate drugs (marijuana and mushrooms) and fermentable crops instead of those that would provide the basis of health and life.<sup>141</sup> In identifying the perpetrators of injustice in the region, the Bishops were equally pointed: commercial and political *cacicazgos*, corruption in multiple levels of the government, unequal application of law, manipulation of public programs, and “some technicians and bureaucrats who are creating a modern type of *cacicazgo*; they decide everything from their desks and often bring progress to communities only for their own benefit.”<sup>142</sup>

Without ever naming particular state or federal administrations, politicians, or individual bureaucrats, the letter did in fact point a finger directly at the recently inaugurated López Portillo administration (1976-82) and its populist development program when the Bishops declared that the “*Alianza para la Producción* is acquiring characteristics of an alliance against the poor.”<sup>143</sup> The criticism leveled was not against the goals of development per se, but rather the ways in which said programs, initiatives, and offices had been corrupted and betrayed by unscrupulous actors who profited from the exploitation of the indigenous. In this manner, the Bishops stuck to a long tradition of media outlets publishing exposés that portrayed corruption as the perversion of the revolutionary heritage of the State rather than a systemic feature of Mexican governmentality and never actually naming the President as one of the corrupt.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, “Nuestro compromiso cristiano con los indígenas y campesinos de la Región Pacífico-Sur,” 65-67.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 67-8.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 69.

<sup>144</sup> Freije, *Citizens of Scandal*.



If the Bishops employed a political and social analysis to the problems plaguing the region, they prescribed solutions both spiritual and temporal. As such, even as they critiqued certain elements of the Church for silent complicity with the exploitation of the indigenous of the region, the Bishops never strayed from their positions as representatives and hierarchs of the institution itself. The vision of a future that they proposed was indelibly Catholic, but a Catholicism imbued with a mission of immediate as well as transcendent salvation. And, reflecting the developments and advances undertaken in the series of conferences and meetings on *pastoral indigenista/indigena*, they pointed to two specific Catholicisms that would address the contemporary problems: the historical Catholic humanism toward the indigenous of Bartolomé de las Casas and the indigenous Catholicism(s) that shaped community collective identities and engagement with the world.<sup>145</sup> In essence, this pastoral document envisioned a Church that used the tools of social science to diagnose the societal ills, was willing to leverage Church resources (material and personnel) to address societal and spiritual damage, but fundamentally, following the lines of Liberation Theology, this Church would accompany the indigenous who were “the principal agents of the own liberation.”<sup>146</sup>

Until the late 1980s, when the Vatican’s apostolic delegate began appointing more conservatives to disrupt the progressive balance of the Pacific South Region, the Bishops of the region continued to release joint letters nearly annually (and sometimes more often) to address more specific issues that faced their region. Many of them were jointly

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<sup>145</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, “Nuestro compromiso cristiano con los indígenas y campesinos de la Región Pacífico-Sur,” 70-71.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 62.

authored messages for Easter or Christmas, which largely served as reminders of the teachings of the gospel and how those translated to a commitment to the poor.<sup>147</sup>

No other subsequent letter reached the breadth of analysis and pointed condemnation of the 1977 document, although they approached it in their 1982 document, “To Live Political Commitment in a Christian Way.”<sup>148</sup> Once again, the bishops walked a fine line by pointedly critiquing the López Portillo administration without ever citing anyone by name. Additionally, the document spoke extensively of struggles in the region of the Oaxacan isthmus without ever explicitly endorsing the Coalition of Workers, Peasants, and Students of the Isthmus (COCEI), the local organization that had mounted a successful municipal electoral challenge to the PRI in Juchitán, Oaxaca.<sup>149</sup> By constitutional prohibition, the Bishops could not (and dared not) endorse any particular candidate or party, but were clearly becoming more emboldened to buck the PRI and urge parishioners to adopt “comprehensive conscious awareness” (*conocimiento conciente integral*) of politics. By this, the bishops advocated that people not only inform themselves of political issues, study the reality and what alternatives may exist, but that they should also “search for or create cooperative, labor union, and political organizations in order to achieve legal and just claims. And they should organize

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<sup>147</sup> See, for example, Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, “Mensaje Pascual, 1979”; “Mensaje de Navidad, 1979;” “Mensaje Navideño, 1980;” “Mensaje Cuaresmal, 1987,” all reprinted in *Tehuantepec 1891-1991: Un siglo de fe* (México, CDMX: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, 1991).

<sup>148</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, “Vivir Cristianamente el Compromiso Político.”

<sup>149</sup> Jeffery Rubin makes the point that the Church never endorsed COCEI, but endorsed and promoted the conditions that allowed for COCEI and democratization. Further, he writes, priests in Juchitán would read, from the pulpit, letters from the Bishops and messages from the Bishop Arturo Lona so that everyone knew where the sympathy of the Church lay. Rubin, *Decentering the Regime*, 195-6.

in popular movements or parties.”<sup>150</sup> In other words, the Bishops were telling southern Mexico that there were other options beyond the PRI and its allied organizations.<sup>151</sup>

Notwithstanding the limits of Mexico’s security archives, I believe that we can still use the volume of documentation as a proxy for estimating the degree of concern expressed by the state regarding the activities of some of the bishops.<sup>152</sup> For Arturo Lona Reyes, although he had been in Tehuantepec, Oaxaca since his appointment in 1971, and nearly immediately became known as one of the progressive bishops, the DFS frankly ignored him until October 1980 when they apparently noticed that he might be supporting COCEI.<sup>153</sup> And once the DFS identified him as potentially subversive, the documentation on him increased measurably, from four publicly available pages of reports on Lona Reyes in the 1970s to 52 pages covering 1980-1985.<sup>154</sup> In linking Bishop Lona Reyes to COCEI, the state acknowledged that the Church itself, or at least this collective of Bishops, was pushing democratization as a result of its documented and suspected links to COCEI. In a 1982 report, just days before the Bishops published their letter on political life, the DFS ordered the surveillance of all members of the Pacific South Region as well as a handful of priests and lay activists who were working alongside the

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<sup>150</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, “Vivir Cristianamente el Compromiso Político,” 221.

<sup>151</sup> The commonly accepted moment of intrusion by the Catholic Church into the realm of democratization is the 1986 standoff between the Archbishop of Chihuahua and the PRI when the Archbishop threatened to withhold mass until and unless state elections were free from fraud and manipulation. See Freije, *Citizens of Scandal*, chapter 6; or Blancarte, *El poder, salinismo e Iglesia católica*. But, others have noted that the ideas about democratization and informed exercise of political rights were circulating within the Church by the late 1970s and early 1980s. See Camp, *Crossing Swords*, 60-67.

<sup>152</sup> See Aguayo Quezada, *La Charola*, and Padilla and Walker, eds., “Dossier: Spy Reports: Content, Methodology, and Historiography in Mexico’s Secret Police Archive,”

<sup>153</sup> “Estado de Oaxaca,” Oct 14, 1980, AGN, Lona Reyes, Arturo, DFS 1/1 Versión Pública, c. 297, 2016.

<sup>154</sup> I acknowledge that 52 pages over six years does not entail extensive surveillance when compared to the hundreds of pages generated on other social movements, including COCEI. Regardless, even as Bishop Lona remained low on the priority list for the DFS, he was nonetheless on their radar and the increase in reporting and surveillance reflects those changes in the way the State suspiciously eyed the progressive currents of the Church.

bishops on the grounds that the government needed to know “the true scope of those who, under the protection of Catholic doctrine, are causing an infinity of problems among the deprived classes and the different ethnic groups that inhabit that region of the territory.”<sup>155</sup> The DFS had even tried, a few days prior, to learn what the Bishops were talking about in their meeting at Pinotepa Nacional, Oax where their pastoral letter was written. However, their intelligence gathering capabilities were frustrated by what they termed a “strong hermetism” among the Bishops because “their activities are discrete, they sleep and eat in that place.”<sup>156</sup> In lieu of actual intelligence, the DFS was not beyond fabricating information, as in one 1981 report that claimed that Samuel Ruiz had a cadre of nuns trafficking arms on his orders.<sup>157</sup>

During a particularly prolific period in 1984, when the Bishops released three joint letters from March to May, the DFS renewed their efforts to figure out exactly what was going on among the Bishops.<sup>158</sup> The March 1984 letter, “Drug Trafficking, a Pastoral Concern,” identified the growing incidence of cultivation, marketing, and consumption of drugs, primarily marijuana, as embedded in broader processes of state abandonment of aid and support for rural and indigenous development in the wake of financial crisis and neoliberal reforms of the de la Madrid administration (1982-1988).<sup>159</sup> This letter, even though it, once again, avoided naming the State or any particular government official as

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<sup>155</sup> Order to surveil the Pacific South Region bishops, March 9, 1982, AGN, Lona Reyes, Arturo, DFS 1/1 Versión Pública, c. 297, 2016. Punctuation added in English translation for clarity.

<sup>156</sup> “Clero en Oaxaca,” March 3, 1982, AGN, Lona Reyes, Arturo, DFS 1/1 Versión Pública, c. 297, 2016.

<sup>157</sup> “Obispo de San Cristóbal subersivo (sic),” June 8, 1981, Ruiz García, Samuel, Versión Testada .DFS, 2a Parte. This accusation, as Julia Young pointed out, mirrored fears in the 1920s that nuns and other respectable women were clandestinely supporting the *cristeros*. See also, Weis, *For Christ and Country*.

<sup>158</sup> See “Se integran los comités que participan en la reunión ‘Comunidad Eclesiástica Básica,’” October 10, 1984, AGN, Lona Reyes, Arturo, DFS 1/1 Versión Pública, c. 297, 2016.

<sup>159</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, “Narcotráfico, preocupación pastoral.”

direct participants in the drug trade, kicked off a frenzied production of reports.<sup>160</sup> The increase in intelligence reporting, given the tempered criticism in the letter, is far more legible after all we have learned about the DFS's direct involvement in drug trafficking and assassination of prominent journalists who threatened to expose them.<sup>161</sup>

A month later, the Bishops released a letter for Easter, "The Poor, the Sign of Resurrection," in which they reiterated many of the observations of economic exploitations and the economic crisis that were devastating the communities of the region.<sup>162</sup> Hewing to the message and lesson of Easter itself however, in their condemnation of social, economic, and political ills afflicting the poor as "signs of death," the Bishops argued that a Catholicism and an evangelization infused with liberation and resurrection was a hopeful and emancipatory approach to the world. They drew not just on the story of Easter, but also, in a reflection of the growing incorporation of indigenous cultural and religious practices, the story of the Virgin of Guadalupe as recounted in the *Nican Mopohua*. In doing so, they argued that the seeds of resurrection, liberation, or a "new hope for life," were found precisely among the poor themselves and the values that indigenous cosmovision and religiosity promoted for a revitalized community life. But more precisely, they called all to act like the Virgin did: "to show and give love, compassion, aid and defense; to listen to and remedy the laments, miseries, hardships, and pains of the people."<sup>163</sup> The Bishops reminded readers that they were

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<sup>160</sup> In addition to reports in the files of Samuel Ruiz and Arturo Lona, see "Estado de Oaxaca," April 27, 1984, AGN, DFS, Bartolomé Carrasco Briseño, DFS 1/1 Versión Pública, c. 296, 2016.

<sup>161</sup> See Russell Bartley and Sylvia Erickson Bartley, *Eclipse of the Assassins: The CIA, Imperial Politics, and the Slaying of Mexican Journalist Manuel Buendía* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015).

<sup>162</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, "Los pobres, signo de resurrección: Mensaje Pascual," April 1984, reprinted in *Tehuantepec 1891-1991: Un siglo de fe* (México, CDMX: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, 1991), 293-338.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 337.

firmly wedded to the institution and teaching of the Church, and in doing so, tried to show that liberationism and indigenous ministry were compatible with, rather than opposed to, Church doctrine.

And one more month later, the Bishop released “On the situation of the refugees.”<sup>164</sup> They affirmed a Christian responsibility to help those in need. They based their call to action on Pope John XXIII’s 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, which had declared the Church’s concerns for human rights, among which was the right to emigration, and on Pope John Paul II’s speech to the United Nations declaring the individual’s right to life, liberty, and personal safety.<sup>165</sup> They recounted the situation the Guatemalan refugees faced, which had already been denounced by religious and secular authorities alike on the international stage and was now exacerbated by the military dictatorship’s organization of the so-called “civil defense patrols.”<sup>166</sup> Further, they spared critiques of the Mexican government, even as the two institutions were arguing over who would take responsibility for the refugees and where the refugees would reside. Rather, the Bishops praised the Mexican government’s actions in creating and operating the Mexican Commission for Aid to Refugees and for its continued resistance to the Guatemalan government’s entreaties to repatriate the refugees.<sup>167</sup>

However, the fact that the Guatemalan military was engaging in cross-border raids was, the Bishops exclaimed, a violation of both human rights and the integrity of

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<sup>164</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, “Sobre la situación de los refugiados.”

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 345-6; Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris: Encyclical of Pope John XXIII on Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity, and Liberty* (Rome: The Vatican, April 11, 1963), [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_11041963\\_pacem.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem.html); Pope John Paul II, “Speech given at the XXXIV General Assembly of the United Nations,” October 2, 1979.

<sup>166</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, “Sobre la situación de los refugiados,” 348. On the civil patrols, see Konefal, *For Every Indian Who Falls*.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, 351; 356. La Comisión Mexicana de Ayuda a Refugiados (COMAR).

the national territory. Thus, even as they praised the Mexican government and reiterated their continued cooperation in service to the refugee population, the Bishops asked that the State give more precise instructions to its border agents so that not a single refugee would be turned away, that the rights and physical security of refugees were always guaranteed, that refugee relocation within Mexican borders only occur with the consent of the refugees, and that the Mexican government live up to its international reputation and “assume diplomatic and political positions in the face of the arbitrariness with which the Guatemalan Armed Forces damage our sovereignty, thus safeguarding the security of our people and that of the refugees.”<sup>168</sup>

While the Bishops were more than willing to critique the government and corrupt agents of the State for perpetuating systems of exploitation and injustice in the region, they showed an openness to praising the State when opportunities for collaboration presented themselves. Yet, embedded in that willingness to collaborate was an insistence that the Church “knew” the people better than the State, and that their pastoral experience provided a “direct knowledge of their deep worries” that the State was not privileged to.<sup>169</sup> Thus, collaboration was paired with the long strain of Catholic thought within Mexico that questioned the legitimacy of the State’s interaction with the poor, or viewed the Church as uniquely positioned to be the interlocutor between the “poor” and the world. Contrary to the highly conservative and traditional iterations of this argument that predominated in the Chiapas of Bishop Torreblanca, the Bishops of the Pacific South

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid, 362.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 363.

Region appropriated the substance of that argument to advance it from a progressive, social justice, yet still nationalistic stance.

### **Conclusion**

Preceding and during the Second Vatican Council, the Mexican Church was in the process of reorganizing itself in order to better meet the challenges of the contemporary moment. Swift population growth, rural to urban migration, Protestant evangelizing, the Green Revolution, and developmentalism rendered the landscape quite different from that of the decades before. And the Church sought to keep up, and it imagined it could do so by emulating the bureaucratic growth of the state. With the creation of new dioceses and the concomitant expansion of the hierarchy, new organizations dedicated to particular social issues, the adoption of new methods of comprehensive pastoral action, and the reorganization of the Church into pastoral regions, the CEM imagined that it could viably contest the state for the souls of the country.

Although there were a handful of progressive voices within the hierarchy prodding and influencing the direction of the institution, such changes were not themselves emblematic of Catholic progressivism. Rather, in a series of historical contingencies, the changes in the CEM, new resources available to resource-poor dioceses, and a spirit and practice of collegiality and collaboration embodied by SERESURE, came together to as Pacific South region found itself to be the emerging locus of Catholic progressivism in the 1970s.

From 1977 until the late 1980s, the bishops presented themselves as prophetic voices championing the cause of the indigenous, the poor, and the marginalized in their southern Mexican setting. They increasingly used their resources, material and physical,



to host conferences and *encuentros* that fostered the transformation of *pastoral indigenista* into a liberationist *pastoral indígena*. The formation of SERESURE and the seminary's evolution over time reflected efforts on the part of the Bishops to mold a generation of priests spiritually and intellectually prepared to challenge the unjust structures that the Bishops denounced in their joint letters. But the clergy, the missionaries, and the lay activists were the agents who encountered the indigenous on the ground. The next chapter returns to SERESURE to examine the ways in which the seminary changed over time, especially as it concerned an intensification of pastoral training in the region.

## Chapter 4: The Regional Seminary of the Southeast (SERESURE): 1969-1990

### Introduction

The unofficial SERESURE alumni network now exists as a Whatsapp group. Former seminarians, some ordained, some not, leveraged advances in communication technology in recent years to rebuild their group of *ex-seresurianos*. After SERESURE's forced closure in 1990, this cohort of former students formed a loose organization that met annually throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, although they have not been nearly as active in the last decade.<sup>1</sup> In 2017, they were reconstituting their group as much to share with each other their successes and failures in indigenous pastoral work as to catch up with old friends from across southern Mexico.

Now in their 60s and 70s, they no longer are the young and dynamic priests that eagerly embraced the hardships that came along with accompanying indigenous communities in their spiritual, political, and socio-economic liberation. Yet many still embraced the mission of the seminary that they had left thirty years prior: transforming the priesthood to be more responsive to the local and regional realities and indigenous cultures. Nearly across the board, they imagined themselves as a radical generation, bookended by conservatisms.<sup>2</sup> Before them, they saw a (perhaps exaggerated) pre-Vatican II traditionalism, and they lived through the reactionary swing of the global Catholic Church orchestrated by Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger (later

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<sup>1</sup> Field notes, April 2017.

<sup>2</sup> New biography has recently helped rethink generational narratives, and Mary Kay Vaughan in particular focuses on an "in-between" generation who came of age in the 1950s and early 1960s to assess cultural changes in mid-to-late twentieth century Mexico. Vaughan, *Portrait of a Young Painter*.

Pope Benedict XVI). One priest in Oaxaca commented, "we are the sons of Vatican II and Medellín."<sup>3</sup> Each walked their own path after leaving the seminary, these were the "red priests" that the conservative media railed against.<sup>4</sup> Some worked quietly in the shadows, calmly accompanying indigenous communities in their everyday struggles for security and sustenance. Others suffered the private and public violence too often enacted upon the left. There have been assassination attempts, kidnappings, threats of cacique, corporate, and state violence.<sup>5</sup>

What was it about SERESURE that, even though it is nothing more than a memory, still inspires such polarizing opinions? The group of former students remain fierce partisans of the project that was the seminary. They see their continued organization, informal as it may be, as a means of keeping alive the memory and mission of SERESURE. Others, such as the rector of the current diocesan seminary in Tehuacán, have few kind words to share. Rather, they recount the "errors" and "mistakes," the "heterodoxy" that required correction.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter explores the ways in which SERESURE developed and changed over time to reflect the changed dynamics within the Bishops of the Pacific South Region, the development of a liberationist *pastoral indígena*, the demands of a heavily indigenous faithful, and the social and political dynamics within the host diocese of Tehuacán. The conferences, meetings, and pastoral letters of the previous chapter

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Father José Rentería, San Bartolo Coyotepec, Oaxaca, June 26, 2015.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, José A. Perez Stuart, "Portafolios," *Excelsior* January 24, 1994. Perez Stuart, in his regular column in *Excelsior*, repeatedly accused the Church and "priests allied with the marxist liberation theology" (*curas aliados a la teología de la liberación marxista*) of supporting the guerrillas in Chiapas and beyond.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Father Martín Octavio García Ortiz, July 3, 2015, Oaxaca, Oaxaca; Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, March 14, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla; Interview with Father Enrique Domingo Camargo Melendez, March 15, 2017, Ajalpan, Puebla.

<sup>6</sup> Conversation with Father Alejandro Palafox Beristain, October 14, 2016, San Lorenzo Teotipilco, Puebla.

demonstrated the ways in which Church leaders in southern Mexico were gradually incorporating both Liberation Theology and indigenous perspectives into regional Church initiatives. I argue that SERESURE, the regional seminary, was a crucial component to understanding liberationism in Mexico. Although it did not begin as a liberationist institution, the way it transformed over time, driven by ideological shifts among the bishops, student demands for a more socially engaged education, and increased input from indigenous peoples that seminarians were trained to serve, charted the ways in which liberationist ideas were incorporated into Church elements as well as the distinct limits and boundaries later imposed by a resurgent conservative wing. The following chapter will focus on case study communities where graduates of SERESURE served after their ordination and the final chapters will deal with the closing of the seminary and the aftermath in Mexico of the Vatican's marginalization of the liberationist currents within the Church.

This chapter contributes to a literature on clerical education that is still sparse. Regarding Latin America, the best study is unquestionably Kenneth Serbin's social and cultural analysis of seminaries and clerical education in Brazil from the late nineteenth century through the late twentieth century.<sup>7</sup> In the case of Mexico, no similar comprehensive study of clerical education exists yet, perhaps in large part because of how seminaries faded from importance in Mexican public and civic life over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, even prior to the Cristero Wars. The secularization of education usurped what had been a central role for seminaries: general

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<sup>7</sup> Kenneth Serbin, *Needs of the Heart: A Social and Cultural History of Brazil's Clergy and Seminaries* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

education as *colegios* in which Mexico's elite learned alongside candidates for future priesthood. In 1857, for instance, the Guadalajara seminary/*colegio* had nearly 1000 enrolled students, with divisions erected between those likely destined for the priesthood, the *internos*, and those, the *externos*, who were there for education and inclusion in the networks of Guadalajaran political and social power.<sup>8</sup> But by the turn of the century, and more so after the Revolution, secular education had largely replaced the multifaceted religious *colegios* as the institutions for the education of Mexico's elite.

In the post-Revolutionary era, the scholarship on clerical education is concentrated on the rather exceptional case of Montezuma Seminary, its high graduation and ordination rate, and its disproportionate production of future bishops.<sup>9</sup> In imagining their new educational institution, the Bishops of the Pacific South Region drew heavily upon Montezuma Seminary, which a few of them also attended as seminarians.<sup>10</sup> Montezuma, as Matthew Butler has shown in recent work, employed a more comprehensive vision of seminary education that extended beyond theology and spiritual training to incorporate social science analysis and "modern" methods of pastoral practice into the curriculum.<sup>11</sup> Further, Montezuma contributed to the construction of a shared Catholic Mexican nationalism among seminarians (and the future bishops among them), in contrast to the more insular regionalist identities that emerged in strictly diocesan seminaries.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> James Lee, "Clerical Education in Nineteenth-Century Mexico: The Conciliar Seminaries of Mexico City and Guadalajara, 1821-1910" *The Americas*, Apr., 1980, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Apr., 1980), pp. 465-477, 468.

<sup>9</sup> Camp, *Crossing Swords*; Butler, "Montezuma's Children;" "¿Bienvenidos al Hotel Montezuma?" and "El sacerdocio de Montezuma."

<sup>10</sup> Montezuma graduates who were bishops in the SERESURE community included Bishop Rafael Ayala (Tehuacán, 1962-1985), Arturo Lona (Tehuantepec, 1971-2000), and Juvenal Porcayo Uribe (Tapachula 1976-1983). For a list of Montezuma graduates who became bishops, see Camp, *Crossing Swords*, 169.

<sup>11</sup> Butler, "¿Bienvenidos al Hotel Montezuma?," and "El sacerdocio de Montezuma."

<sup>12</sup> Butler, "Montezuma's Children."

However, Montezuma emerged from a particular set of circumstances: the Cristero conflict and closure of Church institutions that forced an improvisation in exile. In contrast, even as the SERESURE bishops drew from Montezuma as an example to build upon, they were bolstered by an increasingly confident Mexican Church willing to wade into secular realms, Vatican II regulations on seminary education that granted increased leeway to local and national circumstances atop centralized standards, and the subsequent rewriting of seminary guidelines within Mexico.<sup>13</sup> But in a broader historical perspective, both Montezuma and then the Vatican II updated guidelines on Catholic education were part of a Vatican-pushed modernizing drive in seminary education that dated to the late nineteenth century.

As Lisa Edwards has shown, Pope Leo XIII (1878-1903) not only launched a renewed social Catholicism via *Rerum Novarum* that sought engagement with, rather than wholesale rejection of, moderate liberalism, but his papal administration also endeavored to rationalize and professionalize clerical education to meet the challenges of secular liberalism, the threat of socialism, and the industrial age.<sup>14</sup> The Vatican identified a negative feedback mechanism in Latin America that needed to be broken in order to realize reform: there were not enough priests, many of the existing priesthood lacked the necessary discipline and preparation to command public respect, and thus parents did not necessarily see the priesthood as an enticing option for their male children.<sup>15</sup> Such reform required seminary education to be modernized, regimented, and elevated to the same

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<sup>13</sup> *Optatam Totius* and Comisión Episcopal de Vocaciones y Seminarios, “Ratio Institutionis Sacerdotalis,” 1967

<sup>14</sup> Edwards, *Roman Virtues*; Lisa M. Edwards, “Latin American Seminary Reform: Modernization and the Preservation of the Catholic Church,” *Catholic Historical Review* April 2009, 95:2, 261-282.

<sup>15</sup> Lisa M. Edwards, “Latin American Seminary Reform” 264.

standards as expected in Rome at the Pontifical Gregorian University, which itself was already training the most promising Latin American students and housing them at the Latin American residential school, Colegio Pío Latino Americano, that was founded in 1858.<sup>16</sup> The stakes were high. Latin American bishops repeatedly expressed frustration in their inability to reform the moral habits of the general populace, in no small part because they did not see their priests modeling the moral behavior that they wished imparted upon society.<sup>17</sup>

However, goals of improved seminary education modeled on the Gregorian University, incorporating foreign languages, social sciences like sociology and psychology, and later, Catholic Action and other pastoral methods to better prepare clergy for the contemporary landscape, did not always translate into a reformed priesthood. Rather, the “whiskey priest” stereotype that Graham Greene wrote about in the 1930s persisted long after the Vatican’s first concerted efforts at wholesale clerical education reform in Latin America.<sup>18</sup> Despite limited success, there certainly were advances, particularly where regional seminaries employed stricter admission criteria and personnel control.<sup>19</sup> As a whole, and encompassing some regional distinctions (such as Quechua education in some Peruvian seminaries), Latin America approached the Second World War with vastly improved clerical education that conformed to a Roman model.<sup>20</sup> And importantly, in locales and seminaries where robust secular and spiritual educations co-existed, Serbin argues that they “furnish an important case study of how cultural

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 272.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 273-4.

<sup>18</sup> Greene, *The Power and the Glory*.

<sup>19</sup> Edwards highlights, in addition to Montezuma, the seminary in San José, Costa Rica that took seminarians from across Costa Rica and Panama, “Latin American Seminary Reform” 280.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 282.

modernization proceeded in the Third World with the help of religion.”<sup>21</sup> In other words, clergy were critical interlocutors that, when possessing “modern” technical and scientific training, competed with the growing secular state as the bearer of “modernity.”

Seminario Montezuma produced cohorts of clergy trained in social science and in the “modern” pastoral practices of Catholic Action and other techniques for building and encouraging an active lay population. Yet, like the organizations and initiatives their graduates engaged in, the general body of graduates could best be described as modernizing, but moderate. Their rigorous academic and theological preparation surely contributed to the disproportionate percentage of graduates who later became hierarchs of the Church. Similarly, a disproportionate segment of SERESURE graduates ended up as proponents of Liberation Theology and the progressive currents within the Church. It stands to reason then that the orientation of the seminary itself and the ways in which it trained the future clergy ought to be the focus of examination to understand why and how so many SERESURE graduates ended up as liberationists. Further, if Montezuma was critical to understanding the spread of movements such as Catholic Action, then SERESURE is critical, I argue, to understanding the spread and implementation of Liberation Theology in (southern) Mexico, sometimes in spite of hierarchs’ efforts to temper seminarian political radicalism.

The intersection of Vatican II reforms and the nascent institutionalization of Liberation Theology in the Latin American Church via CELAM’s Medellín meeting spurred changes in pedagogical practices in Church seminaries. Two Mexican seminaries in particular began to emphasize social activism, solidarity, and accompaniment

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<sup>21</sup> Serbin, *Needs of the Heart*, 10.



alongside traditional theological training.<sup>22</sup> The curriculum of the Jesuit seminary that moved from Montezuma to Tula, Hidalgo—Seminario Interregional Mexicano de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe—and SERESURE both combined community pastoral work and traditional classroom study.<sup>23</sup> The required community pastoral work of SERESURE in particular exposed seminarians, to an unprecedented degree, to the realities of the indigenous villages of southern Mexico, deliberately preparing them to be receptive to indigenous Catholicism and the everyday demands of accompaniment beyond sacramental service.

This chapter asks two central questions: how did Liberation Theology shape the seminary training (theological, intellectual, and pastoral) at SERESURE? And how did the student body, in their interactions with indigenous laypeople, shape their own seminary training? I recognize that SERESURE was an exceptional case, one in which the bishops involved encouraged experimentations in clerical education. Yet their experimentations had limits that were at once self-imposed, financial, and external to the region. To begin with, we have already seen how the idea of a regional seminary to serve the needs of southern Mexico coalesced in the immediate aftermath of Vatican II.

Once formed, SERESURE quickly took on the business of training a new generation of clergy to work with and among the indigenous of southern Mexico. This chapter opens with an exploration of the first cohorts sent for education at SERESURE. Drawing primarily on oral history interviews with alumni, I show that not only was SERESURE aimed at educating priests to work with the indigenous, but that revamped

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<sup>22</sup> Marroquín, 2007; interviews with Father José Rentería, June 26, 2015 and Father Martín Octavio García Ortíz, July 3, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Pedagogical material and annual reports are housed in AHPM, Sección IV, exp. 677, Tula, 1973-1980. No one has yet written about the regional seminary in Tula.

Church priorities in the region meant that more indigenous students were being recruited for the priesthood. While the Vatican was promoting an “indigenization” of the clergy, in the Asian and African contexts, this was generally understood to mean the recruitment of Asian-born or African-born priests educated in the model of Roman Catholicism to replace foreign missionaries.<sup>24</sup> In Mexico, however, indigenization of the clergy was a fraught question not because Mexico had a problem producing native-born clergy. Mexico actually “overproduced” priests when compared to its Latin American counterparts. That was one of the reasons that Mexico was never the missionary destination like Guatemala, Peru, and Bolivia.<sup>25</sup> Rather, ideological tensions within the Catholic Church split over the extent to which hierarchs believed that indigeneity could coexist with a priestly identity. And, a movement of indigenous priests (*el movimiento de sacerdotes indigenas*) was steadily demanding that the Mexican Church embrace and support indigeneity among the clergy.<sup>26</sup>

Second, I examine the curricular model of the seminary and the ways in which intellectual and theological training adhered to traditional seminary experiences *and* experimented with broader courses of study, such as indigenous language acquisition, that were specifically attuned to the needs of the region. I show how, particularly from the late 1970s until the late 1980s, SERESURE was intimately connected to the intellectual networks of Liberation Theology in Mexico and beyond.

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<sup>24</sup> See Charles Keith, *Catholic Vietnam: A Church from Empire to Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Costello, *Mission to Latin America*. On missionaries in other countries, see Fitzpatrick-Behrens, *The Maryknoll Catholic Mission in Peru*.

<sup>26</sup> “Segundo encuentro de pastoral indigenista en el sureste.”

Finally, and most importantly, I examine the change over time in the pastoral training program at SERESURE. The structure of pastoral training underwent at least four iterations during the seminary's existence. Drawing primarily upon conference reports, annual plans, and oral histories, I show how changes that intensified pastoral training both coincided with the ideological shifts in the Pacific South Region and responded to student demands that pastoral practice become more central to the student experience and that it better engage with the social questions facing the region.

I argue that these elements—changing student demographics, intellectual training that included Marxist social science and Liberation Theology, and pastoral training that involved prolonged periods of pastoral practice in indigenous space—place SERESURE at the center of any interrogation of the development and shape of Liberation Theology in indigenous Mexico. Further, this chapter and the following show how concrete interactions between indigenous peoples and representatives of the Church forced changes in the way that the Church ministered to and responded to the demands of indigenous Mexico. As yet, scholarly examinations of Liberation Theology in Latin America have neglected to consider the ways in which cohorts of clergy, the representatives of the Church on the ground, were trained to be liberationists. This chapter is one step toward remedying that shortcoming.

### **Entering the Seminary**

Uriel Gómez was a young man from Tapachula, Chiapas when he was sent to Tehuacán, Puebla in 1969 to continue his seminary studies. He had begun the first phase of his studies at the diocesan seminary in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas. As plans solidified

to open a regional seminary in Tehuacán, the respective bishops of the involved dioceses made the rounds to individual students and priests in order to select the first cohort of students to attend the new seminary. Uriel was one of the initial students, a total of forty-nine, who made their way to Tehuacán in the late summer of 1969 to start or continue their seminary training.<sup>27</sup> Although Uriel left the seminary after three years, his classmates began to graduate in 1976 and became the first ordained priests from SERESURE.

By the 1990-1991 school year, when the regional seminary finally shut its doors on Vatican orders, a total of 737 students had spent at least some time studying there. Although SERESURE was launched by the six dioceses of Oaxaca, Tehuantepec, Tapachula, Tuxtla Gutierrez, San Cristóbal de las Casas, and Tehuacán, it had welcomed others in who wanted to partake in the unique experiment in pastoral training for indigenous and rural areas. Over its 20-year existence, students had come from a total of eighteen dioceses in Mexico, one diocese in Guatemala, and two religious congregations. Upon graduation, 158 had been ordained as priests, although there were a handful of former students who were ordained later or after finishing their studies elsewhere.<sup>28</sup> While a graduation and ordination rate of just over twenty percent may seem low, it must be noted that seminaries in Latin America long had high dropout rates, with Brazil's seminary completion rate only hovering around ten percent in the early 1960s.<sup>29</sup> On one hand, seminaries offered excellent educational opportunities, particularly to students from poor and/or rural families. On the other, the disciplinary demands of seminary life and

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Uriel Gómez Juárez, February 28, 2017 and March 3, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

<sup>28</sup> "Introducción al cuaderno," *Christus* 74, no. 780 (Sept-Oct 2010): 15.

<sup>29</sup> Serbin, *Needs of the Heart*, 97.

ultimately the priesthood served to severely whittle down the numbers of graduating students.

Thus, Uriel's experience was representative of the majority of students. He was among the vast majority that did not finish their seminary studies. Uriel left to study business and management at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and returned to Tehuacán and married. He fondly remembered his days at the seminary, harboring no regret for having attended. But as he was about to enter his theological studies, he "asked God to enlighten me to make a decision. I decided to leave the seminary, because I was not going to be a good priest, I did not have the vocation for the priesthood." Uriel remained heavily involved in the Church in the subsequent years, chairing the Tehuacán branch of the Christian Family Movement (Movimiento Familiar Cristiano, MFC) as well as the diocesan advisory Council of the Laity (el Consejo de Laicos).<sup>30</sup> Just because one left the seminary did not mean that one left the Church. More often than not, seminarians withdrew solely from their priestly vocation, not from the Church itself. In fact, the Tehuacán region is still home to a number of non-governmental organizations and lay Catholic initiatives founded by former seminarians.<sup>31</sup>

If Uriel was representative of the majority, who were those that finished and proceeded to their ordination? While this project cannot speak to the recruiting practices of other dioceses, Tehuacán very deliberately began to seek potential seminary candidates beyond the traditionally urban, middle-class, educated, and pious young men such as Uriel. Citing the scarcity of priests as one of the primary problems facing the dioceses of

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<sup>30</sup> Interview with Uriel Gómez, March 3, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Raúl Hernández Garcíadiego, May 20, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

southeast Mexico, a common refrain echoed across Latin America, the diocese sent representatives to the rural parishes to recruit young boys for the minor seminary.<sup>32</sup> Minor seminaries, no longer as prominent as they once were, were essentially private religious secondary schools, grades 7-12, that sought to groom their male students to continue through to the major seminary (university level studies) and eventually into the priesthood. The founding of the minor seminary (1963) was among the first projects undertaken by Bishop Rafael Ayala in the new diocese (1962), and it was touted as the first step toward building a future cadre of priests from the region to serve the region.<sup>33</sup>

The diocesan representatives, in addition to advertising on the radio, consulted with parish priests and other pastoral agents as to who the most active and intelligent young men and boys were.<sup>34</sup> The diocese extended invitations to the lucky few based on the local recommendations. By going to the minor seminary, these young men from the indigenous villages received the opportunity to study at the secondary level, an opportunity otherwise almost unavailable if secondary schools did not exist yet in their villages, or if sending children to school in the city was beyond family financial means.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Regarding SERESURE, see “Presentación del SERESURE para el VIII Encuentro de la pastoral indígena,” April 3-5, 1986, DT. The issue of a scarcity of priests appears and reappears across Church documents. See, for example, “El problema de los indios - Comunicación de CELAM,” July-August, 1955, AHAM, Base DM, c. 34, exp. 26; Letter from Arturo Lona Reyes to Miguel Darió Miranda, February 2, 1974, AHAM, Base DM, c. 153, exp. 64.

<sup>33</sup> Hallo del Salto, *Rafael Ayala Ayala*, 140-45. As public secondary schooling has expanded throughout Mexico, minor seminaries are no longer nearly as prominent as they once were, and they have contracted to reflect said changes in the education landscape. The course of study in the minor seminaries today only encompasses grades 10-12. See CEM, *Normas básicas y ordenamiento básico de los estudios para la formación sacerdotal en México* (México, CDMX: Conferencia del Episcopado Mexicano, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Radio was (and is) an important medium for reaching remote communities. See Joy Elizabeth Hayes, *Radio Nation: Communication, Popular Culture, and Nationalism in Mexico, 1920-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020); Erica Cusi Wortham, *Indigenous Media in Mexico: Culture, Community, and the State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 9, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla; Interview with Ricardo Rivera Barragán, April 21, Chapulco, Puebla. Of course, as the Mexican state continued to build and expand public education throughout the 1970s and forward, the minor seminary became less enticing once students could remain in their village for schooling.

In the case of Padre Tacho, who grew up in the village of San Gabriel Chilac, south-southeast of Tehuacán, the nuns in the parish social center were the ones who extended the opportunity for him to consider the seminary.<sup>36</sup> Padre Tacho grew up in a family closely tied to the twin pillars of indigenous communities, the church and the municipal government. His mother spoke Náhuatl her entire life and never learned Spanish fluently, but was always in the church with her twelve children. His father spoke Spanish because he was often in and out of the village selling agricultural produce and was also heavily involved in municipal governance. The life experiences of Tacho's father emphasized the importance of education for their children, offering them the possibilities of moving between indigenous villages and urban mestizo cultures.

Padre Tacho's involvement with the Church was a constant during his youth, even as he was in and out of primary school to attend to the demands of family agricultural production. In particular, he remembers the two parish priests that served in Chilac during the 1960s. The first, Padre Alvino Gómez Castellanos, made a significant impression on Tacho by upending notions of what a priest could and should be. Padre Alvino had come from Oaxaca, drove a Jeep, flew a small airplane, and was a fanatic for baseball. The villagers said that "the Padre did not act like a priest because he would go to the baseball game right after mass," often bringing village kids along with him.<sup>37</sup> Padre Alvino was not just a baseball-loving adventurer. He also invited religious sisters of Maria Inmaculada to join him in founding a social center and teaching literacy classes. They named the center the John XXIII Social Center (El Centro Social Juan XXIII), very

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<sup>36</sup> The following relies on a series of interviews with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, April-May, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 9, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

clearly identifying themselves with the new path of *aggiornamento* that Pope John XXIII was opening for the Church when he convened the Second Vatican Council.<sup>38</sup> Beyond the liturgy and the sacraments, Padre Alvino and the religious sisters were employing a socially active Catholicism in the indigenous villages located just south of the city in the Tehuacán valley. They brought in modern literacy pedagogies like the Laubach method. The Laubach method, promoted by President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, his Education Minister Agustín Yáñez, and UNESCO, taught literacy based on pictorial association with phonetic sounds and the teaching method was easily transmutable between languages.<sup>39</sup> They employed their most active youth members to teach both literacy classes to adults and catechism classes to younger children. In other words, the religious sisters were empowering Tacho and his compatriots to be agents in both spiritual and educational realms of their village.

One day, while Tacho was out working in the fields after primary school, a man bicycled up with the message that the religious sisters wanted to talk to him. When he arrived at the John XIII social center, they sat him down to ask him if he would like to continue studying in the minor seminary. Although he had some idea of what the seminary might be because he had visited the grounds while it was under construction, he asked the sisters what the seminary would be like. They told him that it was the place that trained people like Padre Alvino and Padre Pedro (the more traditional priest who came to the parish after Padre Alvino), and that it was a place where the students studied and played baseball. Tacho saw the seminary as an opportunity to not just study, although that

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<sup>38</sup> On the geopolitics of naming, see Michael Bhatia, ed., *Terrorism and the Politics of Naming* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>39</sup> Irma Contreras García, *Las etnias del Estado de Chiapas: Castellанизación y bibliografías* (México : Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México: 2001), 60.



was very important, but to follow in the footsteps of the priests who he looked up to and worked with. When Tacho started in the minor seminary in 1967, he was one of six or seven from his parish that began classes that year.<sup>40</sup> The religious sisters took vocational promotion as one of their mission activities in addition to their community educational and charitable actions. Across the diocese, pastoral agents, particularly religious missionaries, were responding enthusiastically to the modernizing exhortations of Vatican II and Pope Paul VI. They were beginning to bridge the chasm that had long existed between indigenous Catholic religiosity and Roman Catholicism. Among the first steps, promoting vocations of indigenous youth.

Padre Tacho's story illuminates a number of issues. First, he vividly described the very real poverty as well as the persistence of customs of his rural, indigenous village. Even though the village itself is not far from Tehuacán, situated in the valley with fertile agricultural soil, his father's involvement in regional trade and local politics was insufficient to consistently provide educational opportunities for his twelve children beyond the public primary school that existed in San Gabriel Chilac. Tacho's family was certainly a story of self-improvement as he and some of his siblings left Chilac for educational and employment opportunities. Other siblings remained, worked the family's land plot, built new homes, and helped sustain the family through agriculture and local commerce. In Tacho's description of the family dynamic, the family roles are clearly gendered: his mother was the keeper of indigenous identity, linguistic and religious,

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<sup>40</sup> This, and above paragraphs: interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 9, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

while his father, also indigenous in his customs and lineage, fulfilled the economic and governing role of the family and village.

Second, Tacho illustrated the changing nature of the Church itself in the 1960s. He described Padre Alvino, the women religious, and the Pope John XXIII social center that they founded. The name of the social center, the *pastoral de conjunto*, and the pastoral work in teams indicated that Padre Alvino and the women religious saw themselves as part of the Church's new way of being in the world. They were missionaries in an indigenous village, providing both religious and secular education to youth and adults alike. This is the Church and its agents that Tacho identified with. His sparing words about Padre Pedro Cruz, only indicating that the priest was pious, devout, and traditional, sharply contrasted with his extended discussion of literacy methodology and the baseball-loving Padre Alvino. In this manner, Tacho foreshadowed his own future pastoral work of accompaniment, and erased the binary distinctions between Church agent and the common people; between spiritual and earthly fulfilment; service to God and service to humans, devotion to the Church and the pleasures and pastimes of the modern world. Padre Alvino and the women religious showed a Church fully engaged in the everyday lives of their parishioners, in both their difficulties and their triumphs.

Finally, the women religious played a crucial role in social outreach and vocational recruitment. Tacho was only one of many who were offered the opportunity to attend the minor seminary. Responding to the frequent lamentations of the scarcity of priests, missionary sisters took on the role of promoting vocations in addition to their educational and charitable responsibilities. Today, when almost every village has at least a secondary school, the minor seminary is no longer the desirable or necessary option for

those who want to continue their studies.<sup>41</sup> But when the minor seminary was the best option for young men from rural villages, the vocational promotion undertaken by missionary sisters was a logical extension of their day-to-day educational activities. Another priest from the mountains of the Mixteca Poblana reported a similar recruitment story, that the Misionarios de los Sagrados Corazones de Jesús y María came to do pastoral work in his indigenous village up in the mountains. In addition to literacy and other educational work, the missionaries funneled a total of 36 students to the minor seminary, three of whom went on to continue their studies at SERESURE.<sup>42</sup>

Once the students arrived at the minor seminary, the difference between the religious educational institution and their villages could be difficult. Padre Tacho mentioned that, at least in Tehuacán, the formation in the minor seminary was still in the style of “pre-Vatican II.” By that, he referred to a persistent belief within urban mestizo Catholicism that an indigenous identity could not and should not co-exist with a priestly identity. For a student like Ricardo Rivera, who in his words was “a good kid who never went out, one could have called me passive,” the minor seminary was an ideal setting to follow the instructions and discipline of the priests even if it meant reshaping his identity.<sup>43</sup> However, for students like Tacho, and his friend and colleague Padre Mario Ordiano, the minor seminary forced them, in more ways than one, to painfully suppress their indigenous roots.

In terms of appearance, Tacho spoke of the dress in the seminary and how it differed from everyday village life. Students had to wear shoes rather than *huaraches*, the

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<sup>41</sup> Field notes, conversation with seminarians on pastoral assignment, April 2017, San Isidro Lobera, Puebla.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Mario Ordiano, April 24, 2017, Tepanco de López, Puebla.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Ricardo Rivera Barragán, April 21, 2017, Chapulco, Puebla.

leather sandals still commonly worn by indigenous campesinos. Students had to use undergarments whereas in the village they just wore pants and shirts with nothing underneath. Additionally, Tacho said, “we had to use towels, pajamas, a bathrobe, and make our beds with the sheets, the blanket, and the bedspread. I had to learn all of this and I did not always like it.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, not only was the minor seminary a step along the path of becoming a priest, but it was also a means, like the *internados*, of assimilating indigenous students with the trappings of westernized normativity.<sup>45</sup>

Padre Tacho told another story of his time in the minor seminary that spoke to the persistence of discriminatory attitudes toward indigenous language and culture, even among clergy who were supposed to be ministering to indigenous peoples of the region:

I was with Eligio and Miguel Ángel, who also know Náhuatl and we are now all indigenous priests. We were playing around during Latin class and we made a note that we were passing amongst ourselves and laughing during the class. The priest who was teaching the class wasn't actually a priest yet, he was a seminarian who was doing his service to finish his theological studies. He was from Ajalpan. In Ajalpan, and in Coxcatlán, you can still see a lot of racism. In Ajalpan, for example, they have categories of people: those of reason (*gente de razón*) and those of the pueblo (*gente de pueblo*). The people of reason live in the center and those of the pueblo live on the outskirts. The seminarian was from the people of reason, and he found our note. He opened it up and asked, ‘Who wrote this?’ It was written in Náhuatl and we sat there silently. He said that if nobody says who it was, then he would cancel the class and everyone would be punished. So we raised our hands. He asked us why we had written it. We replied that we speak and understand Náhuatl and that was all there was to it. He said that we were punished, and then demanded for us to tell him what the note said. I translated it: ‘Pass me your sister.’ He got very angry and castigated us in front of the chapel all night. I’m telling you this story because of what happened to me. In primary school the teacher had also laughed at us because we spoke Náhuatl. Well, so I go to the seminary, and they punish me all night for having written a note. I said, “screw this language,” and I stopped speaking it from secondary

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<sup>44</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 9, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

<sup>45</sup> Dawson, *Indian and Nation*.

school almost until I was in my philosophical studies. Because of SERESURE I started speaking my language again.<sup>46</sup>

The conflict over indigenous identity in the minor seminary was not isolated to the Tehuacán region. Rather, Tacho's painful experience was the concrete meeting between two apparently opposing forces within the Church: a movement to increase the recruitment of indigenous young men into the priesthood, and a century-long process of Romanization that sought to discipline seminarians into a clerical model which had no space for indigeneity.<sup>47</sup>

However, among a vanguard of seminarians and priests, indigenous lay activists, and a handful of Bishops, the erasure of indigenous identity in the seminary was denounced as a painful travesty. At the annual CELAM meeting in 1971, held in San José, Costa Rica, the Mexican contingent reported to their Latin American colleagues on the first regional meeting on *pastoral indigenista* that had taken place in November 1970 in Tehuacán.<sup>48</sup> As reported to CELAM, Eleazar López Hernández, the future director of CENAMI but then a seminarian in his second year of theological studies, spoke of the alienation of the seminary: "We, with the formation we receive in the seminaries, are no longer indigenous, we are foreigners. My formation into a foreigner is a painful fact."<sup>49</sup> López Hernández went on to lament that his training had made him a foreigner in his own territory, the Zapotec communities of the Oaxacan isthmus. But, he argued, seminary training did not necessarily have to be this way. Rather, "profound reflection," and not

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 9, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

<sup>47</sup> Serbin, *Needs of the Heart*.

<sup>48</sup> "Indígenas y Sacerdocio, Documento No 49," XIII Reunión Ordinaria del Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, San José de Costa Rica, May 9-15, 1971, AHAM, Base DM, c. 48, exp. 26. See also, González R., "El Señorío de los dioses."

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

just “simple adaptations,” would permit the formation and inclusion of indigenous priests and an indigenous priesthood into the Church. In his imagining, “this indigenous priesthood would base itself in the exigencies of the Gospel... [and] also in the exigencies and necessities of our indigenous [peoples].”<sup>50</sup>

The 1970 meeting in Tehuacán, and the subsequent reports to the CEM and to CELAM, presaged years of trying to figure out exactly what it would mean to cultivate coexisting Roman Catholic and indigenous identities within future priests. The celebrated “Bishop of the indigenous,” Samuel Ruiz, along with his colleague in Chiapas, Bishop Alba Palacios, had no easy answers, and reported as much when they commented on the difficulties they had faced with the seminaries in Chiapas. But, he offered, such a step forward might be possible if it was carefully studied, maintained the standards of training without sacrificing academic rigor, and conformed to two guiding questions: “What will the indigenous priest need to serve their communities? What will he need to overcome the crises that he will go through?”<sup>51</sup>

A Yaqui priest replied pointedly to the concerns from the Chiapaneco bishops that indigenous priesthood would not be something adopted without rigorous study, and it certainly would not abandon academic study. Rather, echoing López Hernández, Felipe Rojo argued that the seminary was not precluded from having both rigorous academic study and “people that understand the indigenous, their psychology, that have love for them, that provide them a good example, that know how to adapt the texts to their mentality.”<sup>52</sup> In other words, Rojo was arguing that, at a minimum, seminaries should no

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, citing P. Felipe Rojo, Yaqui priest from Ciudad Obregon, Sonora.

longer employ professors who, like the one who castigated Tacho for his use of Náhuatl, disparaged indigenous languages and cultures.

Although no decisions were made in the 1970 meeting at Tehuacán, nor at the 1971 CELAM meeting, the substantive inclusion of indigenous voices, lay and clerical (ordained and in formation), marked the increasing incorporation of indigenous perspectives in Church prerogatives that the Xicotepec meeting had ushered in. Mazateco priest, Padre Quiroga, proposed that, in the meantime, parish priests could rediscover and adapt to indigenous cultural and communitarian practices through prolonged and humble (in the mode of Jesus Christ, he commented) contact. By doing so as “*indigenista* parish priests,” they could rely on indigenous “psychology and modes for electing leaders, which will help in finding candidates for the priesthood.”<sup>53</sup> Padre Quiroga was, in his contribution, most concerned with the recruitment of future priests rather than the existing priests, many of whom were indigenous by heritage and upbringing but had their indigenous culture trained out of them at the seminary. In his stopgap proposal, he proposed a fairly radical concept, that indigenous communities could exercise self-determination in who would minister to them by drawing upon indigenous governance practices to select future religious leaders.

A Chiapaneco speaker, Alejandro Buenrostro, chimed in after Padre Quiroga to give the example of the catechist program in San Cristobal de las Casas that had, at that moment, some 1,200 indigenous catechists ministering and providing religious education and guidance to their own communities. “Many of them,” Buenrostro argued, “could be

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, citing P. Quiroga.

ordained perfectly as ministers of charity, of the Gospel, and in time, of the Eucharist.”<sup>54</sup> In what the report portrayed as a flurry of proposals and thoughts, one after the other, speakers underlined the urgency of the indigenous priesthood. Efraín López, a seminarian at Montezuma, offered that the Episcopate should “seriously consider” a seminary, regional or national, that would be “authentically indigenous,” or “at least it should be less occidentalizing than the traditional formation.”<sup>55</sup> López’s comment made at SERESURE may seem surprising given what SERESURE later became and the ways in which Tacho and his colleagues spoke of the institution as a space that valorized their indigenous identities. But that aspect of SERESURE was still under construction in 1970, the institution was founded to train priests to work in the indigenous reality of the region, not to necessarily entirely reimagine the priesthood.

Finally, Hector Samperio, the former protégé of Cardinal Miranda, stood up and proposed that, as the Executive Secretary of the National Center for Indigenous Ministry (el Centro Nacional de la Pastoral Indígena, CENAPI), they could undertake a wide ranging study of priests, indigenous seminarians, and indigenous lay catechists. Bishop Samuel Ruiz, in his role as president of the Episcopal Commission for the Indigenous (to which CENAPI reported), “enthusiastically” accepted Samperio’s proposal.

It does not appear that CENAPI followed through on Samperio’s proposed study specifically about indigenous priesthood.<sup>56</sup> Yet, the widespread publication of this

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, quoting Alejandro Buenrostro, layperson of Chiapas.

The reforms and experiments that emerged from the Second Vatican Council had certainly expanded the role of laypersons and of women religious in the everyday religious activities of the faithful. However, consecration of the Eucharist, the liturgical rite during which the bread and wine are transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ, remained the sole purview of ordained priests.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, quoting Efraín López, seminarian at Montezuma.

<sup>56</sup> CENAPI and CENAMI merged in 1974, marking an end to CENAPI’s brief existence. For the most comprehensive record of their activities, see “Informe de actividades del Centro Nacional de Pastoral



particular conference report in both Catholic progressive vanguard circles and in CELAM itself indicates the seriousness with which the Latin American Churches were grappling with the idea of multicultural pluralism not just among the faithful but within the ranks of the clergy. Following the Mexican delegation's presentation in the 1971 CELAM meeting, the Ecuadorian delegation presented on a series of community meetings. The dialogues between Church agents and indigenous community members in Tungurahua, Canelos, y Chimborazo, held in the Quichua language, revealed an enthusiastic desire to have a priest who came from the communities themselves who could minister in indigenous languages, administer rites and rituals, provide a sense of community pride and dignity, and "unlike the current priest, but one like a husband/married man, he would be dedicated to us and speak the same language as us."<sup>57</sup>

Within the Church as a whole, and in Tehuacán, at SERESURE, in particular, inclusive contact with indigenous laypeople was generating provocative proposals for multiculturalism within the ranks of the Church. Concurrently, in the minor seminary of Tehuacán, just next door to SERESURE, a young Tacho was being disciplined for his persistent use of the Náhuatl language that he grew up speaking. If the minor seminary served as a feeding institution to the regional seminary, it was striking how different they were in orientation and ideology. Far from the repression of indigenous customs and identities in the minor seminary, SERESURE was beginning to experiment with the idea that indigenous students might be capable of holding more than one identity at a time.<sup>58</sup>

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Indigenista (CENAPI), Secretaria Ejecutiva de la Comisión Episcopal para Indígenas, 1970-73," Oct. 1973, AHAM, Base DM, c. 73, exp. 68.

<sup>57</sup> "Indígenas y Sacerdocio, Documento No 49," XIII Reunión Ordinaria del Consejo Episcopal Latinoamericano, San José de Costa Rica, May 9-15, 1971, AHAM, Base DM, c. 48, exp. 26.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, October 21, 2016, Tehuacán, Puebla.

The difference between the two institutions can largely be attributed to their differences in mission and scope of organization. While both followed the Vatican and Mexican Episcopate guidelines for a combination of intellectual and spiritual formation, the minor seminary served only the Tehuacán region, and was the initial location where academics met the imposition of clerical discipline. SERESURE, however, had been founded with the mission to train priests to be pastors for the regional reality of southeast Mexico.<sup>59</sup> As the next sections show, SERESURE increasingly, over the course of the 1970s and early 1980s, experimented with academic and pastoral training to respond to the exigencies of the founding mission and the realities of the indigenous communities who were in contact with a Church exploring what it meant to be otherwise.

### **Life in the Seminary**

In the founding contract, the Bishops agreed that they would aim to “achieve that special type of priest that our pastoral reality demands, made of up of rural and indigenous zones, with an incomplete evangelization or that came to less because of historical circumstances, and which find themselves in a situation of social, economic, and cultural underdevelopment.”<sup>60</sup> The mission itself bridged the ideological poles within the Mexican Church regarding the proper orientation and effort that ought to be exerted on behalf of Mexico’s indigenous peoples. For the students, this meant a middle ground, so to speak, of traditional Roman philosophical and theological study in the Thomist

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<sup>59</sup> Vatican guidelines, see *Optatam Totius*: "Decree of Priestly Training, Proclaimed by Pope Paul VI, October 28, 1965." On Mexican Episcopate guidelines for seminary training, see Comisión Episcopal de Vocaciones y Seminarios, "Ratio Institutionis Sacerdotalis," 1967, accessed in the archive of SERESURE. Finally, on the mission of SERESURE, see "Ideario del Seminario Regional del Sureste," undated, likely 1970/71, DT.

<sup>60</sup> "Contrato para la fundación del seminario regional del Sureste," undated, likely 1970/71, DT.

tradition but with some critical adjustments to better fulfill the institution's mission. Two elements marked their seminary studies different from the pre-Vatican II norms: the consistent and enhanced focus on pastoral work to meet the needs of their indigenous reality, and the inclusion of marxist social sciences as part of the methodological toolbox that allowed students to formulate pastoral action. While the forms of pastoral training used in the seminary would change over time, the overarching goal was to create pastor priests, "in contact with the reality of their diocese and the entire region," and "all the classes of the seminary should contribute to fomenting a pastoral mentality: anthropology, sociology, economics, pedagogy, etc."<sup>61</sup>

With overarching concern for pastoral formation, yet fully abiding by Vatican guidelines for seminary norms, the Bishops outlined a structure of study that would take students eight to nine years to finish, similar to seminary training elsewhere.<sup>62</sup> Although they had already been training students for some six years, the Vatican ultimately approved the contract and statutes of SERESURE in 1975. In the final version the Bishop's Council adopted a distinctly post-Vatican II orientation, embracing cultural and ministerial pluralism, for the seminary in the mission to form pastors "attentive to the diverse circumstance of the region of the Southeast, which demands specific elements for a ministry adequate for the diverse zones."<sup>63</sup>

To begin their journey through the seminary, students, most of whom had completed secondary school at the minor seminary in their respective dioceses, spent

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<sup>61</sup> "Ideario del Seminario Regional del Sureste," undated, likely 1970/71, DT.

<sup>62</sup> The 8-year course of study remains standard for seminary study. See CEM, *Normas básicas y ordenamiento básico de los estudios para la formación sacerdotal en México* (México, CDMX, Editorial CEM, 2012), 126.

<sup>63</sup> "Reglamento del Seminario Regional del Sureste (Ad Experimentum)," 1977, DT/SM, 6.

their first year in the preparatory course (el propeduético) in Etna, Oaxaca. The propaedeutic year was designed as a bridge between the minor seminary and the path to priesthood. In other words, it was the first introduction to the disciplinary norms of the seminary and the integration of spiritual and academic coursework so that prospective seminarians “could perceive the feeling, the order and the apostolic purpose of ecclesiastic studies - to deepen their own faith and understand at greater depth the nature of priestly vocation so that they can embrace it with increased awareness.”<sup>64</sup> While I do not have data that shows the percentage of students who continued or not from the propaedeutic year into the seminary, the introductory course was fundamentally about ensuring that prospective seminarians were certain of their choice and prepared for the intellectual, theological, and disciplinary life of the seminary. Thus, the propaedeutic course provided an early exit ramp of sorts for those who, during or upon completion of their first year either decided for themselves or were judged to be ill-suited for the priesthood.

While the propaedeutic was nominally under the control of the Bishops’ Council, it was mostly staffed by personnel from the Archdiocese of Oaxaca given its location in Etna, just outside of the city of Oaxaca. One former teacher, who throughout the 1980s taught “Mexican Reality,” described his goal as to prepare first-year students for the complexity that they would face as future pastors, and that a firm grounding in a interdisciplinary understanding of Mexico in the twentieth century would assist them in their “future analyses of reality.”<sup>65</sup> Additionally, courses such as Human Relations, Linguistics, Historiography, Techniques of Investigation, Beginning French, Literary

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<sup>64</sup> "Reglamento del Seminario Regional del Sureste (Ad Experimentum)," 1977, DT/SM, 23.

<sup>65</sup> Enrique Marroquín, *Historia y profecía* (México, CDMX: Ediciones Navarra, 2014), 271.

Arts, Musical Culture, and Social Courtesy were part of a formation that sought to provide students with an introduction to adulthood, professionalism, and academic rigor that the major seminary demanded.<sup>66</sup> The preparatory course for SERESURE was intended to emphasize the various subjects that the students would undertake in the coming years, but more specifically to develop a “vocational orientation in the students... complemented by a humanistic and literary formation with a Christian vision of human values.”<sup>67</sup> The propaedeutic was, in 1989, the site of the opening ideological clash among the Bishops that would, within a year, end with the dissolution of SERESURE.<sup>68</sup>

Following the introductory year, students moved from Etna, Oaxaca to Tehuacán, Puebla. There, on the grounds of SERESURE, they faced at least seven more years of study, punctuated by pastoral projects that took them to indigenous communities throughout the region. Life at the seminary was rigidly scheduled. From the moment that seminarians arrived at the grounds on the outskirts of Tehuacán, their life was structured from the moment of waking through lights out. Rigid discipline and structure was, in theory, to be internalized by the seminarian so that they began to engage in “self-formation,” (*autoformación*) or “personal initiative, always balanced with the spirit of obedience.”<sup>69</sup> “Self-formation,” distinct from “independent spirit,” was about forming personal character, integrity, sacrifice, and punctuality that would be “in service of the people of God.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> “SERESURE, Curso 75-76,” 1975, DT/SM.

<sup>67</sup> “Reglamento del Seminario Regional del Sureste (Ad Experimentum),” 1977, DT.

<sup>68</sup> This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

<sup>69</sup> Reglamento del Seminario Regional del Sureste (Ad Experimentum),” 1977, DT/SM, 16-17.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

Daily Schedule Monday-Friday:<sup>71</sup>

6:00 AM	Wake up	1:45	Lunch and free time
6:20	Prayer and meditation	3:00	Cultural Activities or Pastoral Evaluation
7:00	Class or study time	3:45	Studying
8:00	Breakfast and chores	6:45	(Particularly Monday and Friday) Spirituality, Meditation of the Word
9:00	Class	7:15	Eucharist by unit (equipos de vida) or as a community (Monday and Thursday)
10:00	Class	8:00	Dinner and recreation
11:00	Class	9:00	Studying
12:00 PM	Sports or Workshops	9:50	Finish the day, prayers of thanks (acción de gracias) and rest

Saturdays, Sundays, and Holidays:

7:00 AM	Wake up	11:30	Sports
7:20	Prayer and meditation	2:00 PM	Lunch/Comida
8:00	Breakfast and chores	8:30	Dinner
9:30	Studying	10:00	End of day, rest

Note	For greater responsibility, during these days each seminarian will search for a moment for personal or community spirituality.
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Within the rigidity of the seminary life, SERESURE granted some leeway in that the institution empowered students to engage in the programming of activities beyond the classroom. Padre Tacho, for example, was the coordinator of sports and recreation in the 1975-76 school year, with a committee of fellow students assisting him.<sup>72</sup> Rather than clashing with the hierarchical imposition of authority, such organization was consistent with the principles of *pastoral de conjunto* and the emphasis placed on working in units

<sup>71</sup> Schedules printed in "SERESURE, Curso 75-76," 1975, DT/SM, 18.

<sup>72</sup> SERESURE, Curso 75-76," 1975, DT/SM, 26.

and teams. The idea of training in teamwork, reflected in committees and pastoral groups, was to emphasize that, while the cleric ought to assume a saintly disposition grounded in the example of Christ himself, the cleric fundamentally relied on the community around him to effect action and change. Whether that be in the form of Tacho organizing baseball games on the seminary grounds or accompanying communities in land conflicts, the involvement of students in the governing of everyday life in the seminary was designed to provide a sense of ownership and agency in the community of the institution.

Greater responsibility came with age and experience. The committees that students served on, for example, drew students from across cohorts/years, but the general coordinator was always an advanced student, someone who, at minimum, had started their theological studies. The course of study following the propaedeutic consisted of three years of “philosophy” (general academics and social sciences) and four years of theology, followed by a final year of pastoral work after which they returned to the seminary to write a thesis on theology illuminated by their completed pastoral work.<sup>73</sup>

However, as is so often the case, reality clashed with regulations and the ideal. Seminarians may not have engaged in the same degree of *relajo* that Jaime Pensado wrote about among college students in Mexico City, but lack of proper discipline frequently concerned the Bishops.<sup>74</sup> In one particularly revealing instance at a meeting of the Council of Bishops, one of them (unknown which, although the language indicates that it was likely one of the two conservatives) prepared a report for his fellow bishops in which directly quoted from the Medellín documents when he lamented the ways in which

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<sup>73</sup> "Reglamento del Seminario Regional del Sureste (Ad Experimentum)," 1977, DT.

<sup>74</sup> Pensado, *Rebel Mexico*.

the problems that plagued the youth in society also were reflected among seminarians: “tensions between authority and obedience, cravings for total independence, lack of balance in discerning the positives and negatives of the novelties that arise within the life of the Church and the world, rejection of certain traditional religious values, exaggerated activism that leads to neglecting a life in relation to God.”<sup>75</sup>

Beyond his general critique of youth, including the seminarians, not fully embracing the proper deference to authority and religious tradition, the author spoke more specifically about the seminarians at SERESURE: “The state of adolescence is very prolonged among some of the students, above all, those who came from minor seminaries... They show an affective disintegration that manifests in inappropriate relationships, especially towards women...[and] in jocular infantilism when referring to issues or problems of a sexual nature.”<sup>76</sup> In other words, the Bishop lamented the shortcomings of the seminarians themselves and their failure to act like the mature adults, much less the priests and leaders that the Bishops wanted them to become. There may also have been an element of coded language here, although it is difficult to discern if there was worry about sexual activity or just frustration with teenage immaturity. Regardless, discipline and maturity remained overarching concerns throughout seminary life and even manifested in the Vatican-ordered reorientation of the seminary in 1990 when the apostolic visitors claimed that there was a widespread “lack of discipline” in the seminary.<sup>77</sup> In addition to “*autoformación*,” a large part of the mission to form mature priests and leaders was rigorous and up-to-date academic study.

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<sup>75</sup> SERESURE, “Reunión del Consejo Episcopal, Cuaderno de trabajo” 24-26 Febrero, 1988, DT/SM.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> See Chapter 6; Sacra Congregatio pro Institutione Catholica, Prot. N. 1056/90/7, August 9, 1990.



## Academic Studies and Liberation Theology

Upon arriving in Tehuacán, seminarians began a minimum of five semesters of philosophy. The first wave of students, Uriel's cohort, entered directly into the years of philosophical study, likely having already undertaken preparatory work in their home dioceses. The years of philosophy were a course load of the humanities, social sciences, and languages, providing almost a liberal arts type education upon which later years of theological studies would build.<sup>78</sup> Throughout their philosophy studies, students would additionally take courses in arts, music, public speaking, orthography, theater, and the classic languages such as Latin and Greek.<sup>79</sup> In essence, the first years in the seminary, like seminaries elsewhere, provided a university-type education, designed to ensure that future clerics were worldly and knowledgeable, and that they would be well-prepared for the years of theological study that followed. However, as discussed below, SERESURE also began to introduce indigenous language training in the late 1970s. Although there had been pioneering indigenous language training earlier in the twentieth century in Huejutla and Huajuapán, SERESURE was unique among its peer seminaries in employing indigenous language training for purposes extending far beyond missionary evangelizing work.

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<sup>78</sup> "SERESURE 77, Planes de Unidades, II Semestre," 1977, DT; "SERESURE, Curso 75-76," 1975, DT/SM.

In the first year, courses included: History of Philosophy, French, History of Religions, Sociology, Anthropology, Communication, and Introduction to Philosophical Methodology.

The second year: History of Philosophy 2, French 2, English, Mexican Philosophy, Psychology, The Old Testament, Ethics, and History of the Church.

The third year: English 2, Pedagogy, Atheism, Introduction to Theology, Special Philosophy, and a rotating series of seminars that included Marxism, Human Rights, Agrarianism, The Right to Life, Philosophy of Religion, Philosophy of Liberation, Philosophy of Law, and Economic and Social Problems in Mexico.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

The theological studies, similarly, were grounded in classic and orthodox theology, primarily Saint Thomas Aquinas, as emphasized in *Optatam Totius*. However, reflecting changes in pastoral training, the theological curriculum began, in the late 1970s, to include pastoral theology, spiritual theology, apostolic movements, ecclesial base communities, *pastoral de conjunto*, and group dynamics and pastoralism.<sup>80</sup> By 1986-7, theological courses included “Indigenous Theologies, Indigenous Ministry and Popular Religiosity” (taught by Padre Tacho), and “Ecumenism and Religious Sects.”<sup>81</sup> SERESURE still retained the orthodox fundamentals of theological training, but it was also clearly training seminarians in the new theological contributions. Any innovations in theological training, courses on Indigenous Theology and Liberation Theology, supplemented rather than replaced classic Thomist theological training. These supplements, notwithstanding conservative claims otherwise, were also fully within the spirit of Vatican II and *Gaudium et Spes* that proposed theology appropriate to and arising from local circumstances. In other words, proponents of SERESURE argued that any theological innovations undertaken to meet the pastoral challenges and needs of indigenous southern Mexico were indeed part of the new orthodoxy sanctioned by Vatican II. The theology of SERESURE, then, was generated by contact with and work among the indigenous. It was, one writer argued, “a theology from the reality of the poor; from indigenous cultures.”<sup>82</sup> Thus theology went beyond the focus on Saint Thomas

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<sup>80</sup> “SERESURE 77, Planes de Unidades, II Semestre,” 1977, DT.

<sup>81</sup> “SERESURE: Directorio de formación: Efemérides 1986-1987,” DT/SM. “Ecumenism and Religious Sects,” despite the continued use of “sect” to describe protestant congregations, was about how to work across congregation divides. The course was taught by Maria Van Doren, a Belgian missionary sister who joined Padre Tacho in his parish of San Antonio Cañada. See Chapter 5.

<sup>82</sup> See Ranulfo Pacheco López, “La enseñanza de la Teología en el seminario Regional del Sureste (SERESURE),” *Christus* 74, no. 780 (Sept-Oct 2010) 28-29.

Aquinas that had been emphasized in *Optatam Totius* to focus primarily on the intersection of theology and on-the-ground pastoral work. In other words, the theological focus was less classical and more pragmatic.

Ultimately, the goal of SERESURE was no different than that of any other seminary. The Bishops aimed to provide seminarians with a well-rounded education that prepared them to intelligently and critically engage with the vagaries and challenges of the world around them. The curriculum, with the exception of some of the theological courses that tracked changes in Liberation Theology and the emerging Indigenous Theology, did not fundamentally change over the course of SERESURE's existence.<sup>83</sup> Certainly, particular professors and teachers likely took different approaches to their assigned courses. And various courses appeared or disappeared over the course of a decade. But the goal remained the same, that of an academically rigorous and rounded education in history, philosophy, language, methodologies, and a diversity of theologies both grounded in orthodoxy and specific to regional realities.<sup>84</sup>

However, there were two elements of academic training that did indeed mark SERESURE as unique within the ambit of Mexican seminaries: the formal relationships with prominent liberation theologians in Mexico and the introduction of indigenous language training. First, from the very beginning, SERESURE maintained frequent and consistent relationships with prominent liberationists, Liberation Theologians, and progressive elements of the Church in Mexico. Uriel Gómez spoke of a class trip to visit

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<sup>83</sup> The difference in course listings between "SERESURE 77, Planes de Unidades, II Semestre," "SERESURE, Curso 75-76," and "SERESURE: Directorio de formación: Enfermedades 1986-1987," are largely insignificant. What significant additions or subtractions in the curriculum that do exist, such as Padro Tacho's courses on indigenous religious practice, are discussed above.

<sup>84</sup> There was likely a greater focus on Marxist social sciences and methodologies than in other seminaries, although that would require additional research to confirm.

Bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo in Cuernavaca, likely in 1970/71, to learn about the progressive methods and initiatives in his diocese.<sup>85</sup> CENAMI, particularly after its progressive turn in the early 1970s, was a frequent organizer of conferences and summer programs (the *encuentros de pastoral indígena*) at SERESURE, attendance at which was often required of seminarians.<sup>86</sup> Multiple interviewees pointed to the *encuentros* as foundational elements in the construction of their own pastoral practices, and as the initial location where they interacted with priests, theologians, and indigenous lay people to actively discuss what indigenous communities could want and expect from agents of the Church.<sup>87</sup>

But the biggest connection to the intellectual movement of Liberation Theology was that Enrique Dussel and Miguel Concha were, through most of the 1980s, curricular advisors for SERESURE. Dussel, the Argentine philosopher and lay theologian in exile in Mexico, and Concha, Dominican friar and human rights activist, were (and are) two of the preeminent liberationists in Mexico. The full extent of their involvement in the curricular structure at SERESURE remains obscured but for fleeting mentions in extant and available archival documents. For instance, in a 1987 meeting of the Bishops, Bishop Rivera Carrera questioned if Enrique Dussel and Miguel Concha should be replaced as advisors by others who are “more adequate for the environment of seminaries, because Mexico is undertaking a revision of [seminary] training.”<sup>88</sup> Bishop Ruiz of San Cristóbal responded diplomatically that Dussel and Concha helped with guidance, not control, but

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with Uriel Gómez.

<sup>86</sup> See Jesus Garcia chapter in the Dussel volume on CENAMI’s progressive turn, all the priest interviews mention the importance of CENAMI in organizing the conferences, and cite just about any conference report published in *Estudios Indígenas*. See Chapters 2 and 3 for more on CENAMI.

<sup>87</sup> Interviews with Enrique Camargo, March 15, 2017 and Ricardo Rivera, April 21, 2017.

<sup>88</sup> SERESURE, “Reunión del Consejo Episcopal, Cuaderno de trabajo,” February 26-27, 1987, DT/SM.

that the seminary would be open to bringing on additional advisors in the specific areas that require it.<sup>89</sup> The meeting minutes quickly moved on to other topics, indicating that no decision was made that day.

The fact remains that Liberation Theology was indeed a curricular pillar that helped define SERESURE. Padre Martín García Ortiz in Oaxaca (graduated in 86/87), recalled that he was impacted most by studying the Liberation Theologians, particularly the Brazilian brothers Boff, and Clodovis Boff's short book, *Cómo trabajar con el pueblo*.<sup>90</sup> And the student bulletin (BIS, Boletín Informativo SERESURE) published in the late 1970s and early 1980s frequently reviewed the newest publications in Liberation Theology, as the one extant example showed with student reviews of Ernesto Cardenal's *El evangelio en Solentinamo* and *La santidad de la revolución* as well as Giulio Girardi's *Amor cristiano y lucha de clases*.<sup>91</sup>

The second element that rendered SERESURE unique was the teaching of indigenous languages. In the late 1970s, at least for the seminarians from Tehuacán, SERESURE introduced Náhuatl classes so that the *tehuacanos* would be better equipped to work with the communities in the region.<sup>92</sup> The students from Tehuacán not only began learning Náhuatl (if they did not already speak it) but they also put together a primer for Náhuatl use among clergy in the region.<sup>93</sup> To further support the more

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Padre Martín Octavio García Ortiz, July 3, 2015, Oaxaca, Oaxaca. Clodovis Boff, *Cómo trabajar con el pueblo* (Bogotá: Indoamerican Press Service: 1986).

<sup>91</sup> "Boletín informativo SERESURE, Año II, Núm 7, Mayo-Junio 1978," DT. Cardenal, *The Gospel at Solentiname* remains a classic treatise on base communities in Nicaragua and the organic intellectualism of the poor themselves. The book is a series of published conversations between Cardenal and the base communities he was working with in Nicaragua prior to the revolution. See also Ernesto Cardenal, *La santidad de la revolución* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1976); Giulio Girardi, *Amor cristiano y lucha de clases* (Salamanca: Ediciones Sígueme, 1975).

<sup>92</sup> "Boletín informativo SERESURE, Año II, Núm 7, Mayo-Junio 1978," DT.

<sup>93</sup> "Boletín informativo SERESURE, Año II, Núm 7, Mayo-Junio 1978," DT.

intensive pastoral work, additional elements of indigenous studies were added to the first year curriculum, only described in the bulletin as “an indigenist line.”<sup>94</sup> If other indigenous languages were taught to students from different dioceses, and oral histories suggest that they were, this did not appear in the available annual plans from the seminary.<sup>95</sup> I surmise that indigenous language study was often combined with the extended periods of pastoral work, discussed below, in home dioceses.

Padre Tacho, in addition to his parish assignment, spent a number of years (estimated 1981-87) as the professor of Náhuatl and teaching the previously mentioned social science methodologies, rural popular religiosity, and indigenous popular religiosity.<sup>96</sup> Another graduate, Padre Mario Ordiano, also served as a teacher of Church history and oversaw pastoral formation in the latter half of the 1980s.<sup>97</sup> The appointment of priests like Tacho and Mario as professors would later fuel critiques that SERESURE employed a teaching corp untrained and ill-suited for their positions.<sup>98</sup> And the Bishops, at times, acknowledged that their teaching corp made up primarily of priests who had no further education than the seminary itself was likely inadequate for the academic standards that they hoped to maintain.<sup>99</sup> However, employing the diocesan priests, who were often also parish priests, served very real economic purposes. As the Bishops’ Council meetings show, they were always concerned about finances, particularly during the crisis years of the mid-1980s when inflation frequently undermined seminary

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Interviews with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

<sup>96</sup> Interviews with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla; “SERESURE: Directorio de formación: Efermeridades 1986-1987,” DT/SM.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Padre Mario Ordiano, April 24, 2017, Tepanco de López, Puebla

<sup>98</sup> Sacra Congregatio pro Institutione Catholica, Prot. N. 1056/90/7, August 9, 1990.

<sup>99</sup> SERESURE, “Reunión del Consejo Episcopal, Cuaderno de trabajo” 26-27 Febrero 1987, DT/SM.

finances. Hiring priests to teach part time was markedly cheaper than contracting professors and specialists to work full-time at the seminary.<sup>100</sup> Further, employment at the seminary as part-time teachers alleviated the burden on poor communities to financially maintain their parish priest.<sup>101</sup> One of the frequently expressed reasons that community members in San Antonio Cañada remembered Padre Tacho fondly was that he charged on a sliding scale for mass and religious rites so important to village ritual cycles.<sup>102</sup>

Hiring parish priests also helped combine the pillars of academic, linguistic, and pastoral formation, and reinforced the ways in which academic/theological training and pastoral experience worked dialectically to shape seminarians into pastors ready and able to work in the most remote corners of indigenous southern Mexico. Bringing in parish priests like Padre Tacho, who were indigenous themselves, and who quickly gained reputations as indigenous activists, was very concretely meant to serve as a model for younger seminarians, both an educational and mentoring experience.

### **Pastoral Training**

The pastoral training program at SERESURE was the element through which the collective of Bishops believed that they could form a generation of future priests well-prepared to work in the furthest reaches of indigenous southern Mexico.<sup>103</sup> Interestingly, there was little about intensive pastoral training itself that could, or would, raise the hackles of conservative prelates. As the global Church moved into the 1980s, Pope John Paul II in fact differentiated himself from previous papacies precisely through his

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, see also SERESURE, “Reunión del Consejo Episcopal, Cuaderno de trabajo” 24-26 Febrero, 1988.

<sup>101</sup> Interviews with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Apolinaria Ramos Jinéz, May 17, 2017, San Antonio Cañada, Puebla.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Padre Mario Ordiano, April 24, 2017, Tepanco de López, Puebla. Padre Mario communicated how central pastoral training was to his seminary experience.

encouragement of groundbreaking pastoral programs that drew upon the radical innovations of French and Belgian pastoralism of the early twentieth century (albeit denuded of their political ramifications).<sup>104</sup> In the conflicts that would arise between liberationists and the Vatican later in the 1980s, Pope John Paul II and Cardinal Ratzinger remained steadfastly supportive of the Church's work with and among the poor. Rather, their concerns revolved around the content of the evangelizing programs that, they feared, elevated political and socio-economic concerns above matters of faith. Taken to their extreme conclusion, they feared, such focus could end up justifying violence.<sup>105</sup>

Similar to the Mexican tradition of conservative prelates such as Torreblanca (Chiapas) and Henriquez (Huejutla), aggressive pastoralism in the service of evangelization was never at risk of upsetting the Vatican. And, in the conflict that would conclude with the closing of SERESURE, the ambitious pastoral training program was nearly the only element of the seminary that was not critiqued in the Vatican document that ordered the seminary's "reorientation."<sup>106</sup> Thus, almost as though the Church was replaying the conflicts of previous decades, the issue in Mexico was less the presence of pastoral training and more the content and emphasis of liberationist *pastoral indígena* as increasingly articulated in regional *encuentros* and congresses and translated into seminary pastoral training.

As evidenced by annual reports and curricular development documents from the seminary, it appears that the structure of pastoral training underwent four broad iterations

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<sup>104</sup> Kosicki, 311-313.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid; See also, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation,' Sacred Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith, August 6, 1984," in *The Ratzinger Report: An Exclusive Interview on the State of the Church*, by Vittorio Messori and Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1985), 174-186.

<sup>106</sup> Sacra Congregatio pro Institutione Catholica, Prot. N. 1056/90/7, August 9, 1990.



during the existence of SERESURE.<sup>107</sup> In the first stage (1969-1974), pastoral formation took two forms. First, seminarians spent weekends at parishes in the city or in nearby communities, all within the diocese of Tehuacán, returning the same day. And second, seminarians spent part of summer break, the months of June and July, in parishes in their home dioceses. Former students involved in this type of pastoral training reported that it adhered to traditional notions of priestly service - in that the students would assist with mass, with biblical talks, and the catechism and preparation programs for first communion and marriage.<sup>108</sup> The summer programs were longer, and students were assigned to a parish in their home dioceses to serve as assistants for the parish priest. As one might suspect, experiences varied during the summers depending on the parish assignment and the ideological orientation of the hosting parish priest.

In the second iteration of pastoral training (1974-75 and 1975-76) the students in their third year of theology did a project in the parish of Teotitlán del Camino, Oaxaca (now known as Teotitlan de Flores Magón) while the other seminarians continued similar weekend ministry in nearby parishes. The third-year students went on Fridays after class and returned at midday on Mondays. They assisted communities in small teams and “with a determined plan.”<sup>109</sup> While the content of their pastoral work did not change significantly, the idea was for the students to spend more time in the communities and be more systematic in developing pastoral projects. Ricardo Rivera, echoing this pastoral methodology, commented that since graduation and ordination, he has approached every

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<sup>107</sup> While these iterations appear and reappear in documents spanning the years, I primarily draw upon a conference report that brings them all together: “Presentación del SERESURE para el VIII Encuentro de la pastoral indígena,” April 3-5, 1986, DT.

<sup>108</sup> Interviews with Uriel Gómez Juárez, March 3, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.; and Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 10, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

<sup>109</sup> “Presentación del SERESURE para el VIII Encuentro de la pastoral indígena,” April 3-5, 1986, DT.

parish assignment with the same structure and methodology for elaborating the “determined plan” that he learned in the seminary. He outlined, “we have to arrive and learn the reality first, what are the hardest problems and where do we need to go, what groups already exist. In order to begin, we need to know what the parish already has, build a sort of continuity, and then we can start with the consciousness raising work.”<sup>110</sup>

During the 1976-77 and 1977-78 school years, in the third iteration of pastoral training, the fifth-year Theology did projects in the region of Tehuantepec, Oax and Pinotepa Nacional, Oax. In the 1978 student bulletin, the student authors wholeheartedly celebrated the more intensive pastoral work that they were engaging in. Agustín Pacheco and Anastasio Hidalgo (the future Padre Tacho) wrote that it was “formation in action” with the objective “to discover a new way of priestly ministry which brings us to the liberation of the poor.”<sup>111</sup> Rather than solely teaching bible study or preparation for religious rites, they engaged in community participation, “adapting our programming to the pastoral work already going on in the place, always so that our work responds to the real needs of the community.”<sup>112</sup> The seminarians articulated an increasingly important concept within *pastoral indígena*, that the indigenous themselves should be the ones who find the relevance of the Gospel in their everyday lives and, conversely, that they find their everyday lives reflected in the Gospel. They wrote, “we help the people find for themselves the word of God by raising consciousness on the importance and gravity of the problems they face. We ask for their assistance in addressing these problems. We do not take away from the people their values, but raise consciousness about their life, their

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<sup>110</sup> Interview with Ricardo Rivera, April 21, 2017, Chapulco, Puebla.

<sup>111</sup> “Boletín informativo SERESURE, Año II, Núm 7, Mayo-Junio 1978,” DT.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

own values, and in this way they can discover their true values. Whatever personal or community action should be illuminated by the gospel."<sup>113</sup> The seminarians were clearly reflecting the words of their Bishops, who had only a year prior written their blistering pastoral letter on the Christian commitment that the Church owed the indigenous. In the letter, the Bishops were clear that the indigenous should be “agents of their own liberation.”<sup>114</sup> Thus, the changes in the pastoral training program were intimately connected to the ideological shifts within the makeup of the Bishops of the region and the identification with, by at least a segment of the student body, of liberationist pastoralism.

The student writers in 1978 also suggested two changes to improve their pastoral training: first, that the work should be done by diocesis, and that each "colonia" in SERESURE should come up with their own plan of activities, in agreement with their bishop. And second, that the priests who were part of the Formation Team should accompany the students in the pastoral training so that they are more fully “collaborators in the formation of the students.”<sup>115</sup> In other words, even though the member dioceses of SERESURE shared many of the same challenges, the students seemed to be searching for ways in which they could further narrow their training to confront the socio-political and cultural specificities of their home dioceses.

In 1980, the seminary entered the fourth iteration of pastoral training, a format that largely remained in place until the seminary's closing in 1990. The changes in training reflected some of the suggestions that students had previously offered, and small adjustments continued throughout the decade in response to student and community

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<sup>113</sup> “Presentación del SERESURE para el VIII Encuentro de la pastoral indígena,” April 3-5, 1986, DT.

<sup>114</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, “Nuestro compromiso cristiano con los indígenas y campesinos de la Región Pacífico-Sur,” 62.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

feedback.<sup>116</sup> Pastoral training, rather than just weekends and summer, now included two prolonged periods of pastoral work, December 15 to February 15 and June 15 to July 30, at parishes in students' home dioceses rather than having all of the students in one cohort working in the same location. However, there were still occasional group pastoral projects that included all the students of the same year across the member dioceses.

Overall, the idea was that each small team of students would work over a longer period of time with the same communities. To integrate the academic and pastoral work, the students would also complete an intensive socio-religious analysis of the communities in which they were working. Said analyses pushed seminarians to move beyond a mere acknowledgement of the local realities and lamenting the depth of problems and poverty while offering spiritual supplience. In one example that will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter, the two seminarians working under Padre Tacho in San Antonio Cañada, Puebla not only worked in the parish during breaks and on some weekends, but they also engaged in archival research in Puebla City and Mexico City to ground their parish analysis in the history of the region and the municipality. In a cycle of positive reinforcement, these school projects then assisted parish priests in further developing pastoral work to the needs and demands of the communities.<sup>117</sup> The idea was "to form priests capable of accompanying communities in all of their problems. This helps give a more solid formation, it strengthens and complements the other areas of formation, the

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<sup>116</sup> That the seminary took the student input seriously is not a minor issue. In fact, more often than not, student demands and suggestions were viewed as affronts to the authority of the bishop or seminary rector. Here, it seems that student input was a manifestation of "collegiality" in action, the Vatican II buzzword that promised a horizontalization of relations within the Church and raised fears among conservatives that hierarchy would disappear. See, on seminaries and seminarians, Serbin, *Needs of the Heart*. On Vatican II and collegiality, see O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*.

<sup>117</sup> Jose Ambrosio Lezama Cariño and Enrique Domingo Camargo Melendez, "Estudio Socio-Pastoral de San Antonio Cañada," July 1986, AH.

seminarians learn the reality, and it continues to form a new and attractive image of the priest as service and commitment."<sup>118</sup>

The combination of social sciences and the possibilities for faith-based action encouraged seminarians to approach their pastoral work through questioning the systems of capitalism, exploitation, and marginalization, Mexico's place in the world, and the position of the indigenous within Mexico. At times, the seminarians' discernment read similar to analyses of "*realidad nacional*" carried out by Marxist armed revolutionary organizations.<sup>119</sup> For instance, in an unsigned 1984 proposal for the following year of pastoral training, the authors listed a litany of injustices facing indigenous southern Mexico:

There are social problems in the region, that it is rich in resources and thus has been a battleground of capitalist interests between those who want to have complete control over the economy of the country. The oppression and exploitation of the indigenous and campesinos is worse every time: kicking them off of their lands, which are being concentrated in few hands, profits obtained in the countryside don't remain there, widespread unemployment, they are the reserve army of cheap labor in the process of industrialization in the region, great exploitation of their artisan work, and a wave of migration to the urban centers. On a political level - the people want liberation, but there is also increased political manipulation and domination. There are massacres, repression, tricks, caciquismo, division, conflicts over land boundaries. It affects human dignity. On an ideological level, there is alienating and consumerist propaganda, illiteracy, alcoholism, and prostitution, protestant sects and transculturation. At a national level, we suffer a strong external dependence, as part of what is called the Third World. We carry a debt around 100 million USD, which means an annual bleeding of the poorest because of the selfish interests of the centers of power.<sup>120</sup>

There is nothing that marked this analysis as particularly Catholic beyond the reference to "protestant sects." The seminarian authors were openly using Marxist theory

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<sup>118</sup> "Presentación del SERESURE para el VIII Encuentro de la pastoral indígena," April 3-5, 1986, DT.

<sup>119</sup> On competing revolutionary analyses in the Salvadoran context and how said analyses of "*realidad nacional*" determined revolutionary activity, see Ching, *Stories of Civil War in El Salvador*, 152-53.

<sup>120</sup> "Plan de Formación Pastoral: Preproyecto," December, 1984, DT.

when they noted the existence of a “reserve army,” and dependency theory in their references to national and international relationships between center and periphery. SERESURE’s professor of Marxist philosophy may have claimed that the teaching of Marxist social sciences provided a foundation upon which seminarians could then critique Marxism, but it appears that the seminarians did not necessarily agree.<sup>121</sup> They read, as one might suspect from this, the CEPAL economists, Andre Gunder Frank, Fernando Henrique Cardoso, and Enzo Faletto. In their Marxism class, they were reading Marx, of course, but also Chilean Marxist theorist Marta Harnecker. And, to inform their work on the ground, they were all reading Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals-Borda.<sup>122</sup>

The ways in which the students deployed Marxist theory and methodology to analyze their regional reality indicated that they, or at least a cohort of the most politically engaged, readily absorbed the materials not for the purposes of critique but to elaborate a vision of socially and politically active future priests ready to “denounce the situation of sin that contradicts the Plan of God, whose essence is to proclaim Good News to the poor, the freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4,18).”<sup>123</sup> Fully embracing Gustavo Gutierrez’s theological discussion of collective, or social, sins, the seminarians drew upon oft-cited biblical text (Luke 4,18-19) and their Marxist analysis to argue that the reality of the region demanded an activist pastoralism.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Interview with Javier Galvez, Tehuacán, Puebla, May 2, 2017.

<sup>122</sup> Interviews with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla; Enrique Domingo Camargo Melendez, March 15, 2017, Ajalpan, Puebla; Padre Mario Ordiano, April 24, 2017, Tepanco de López, Puebla.

<sup>123</sup> “Plan de Formación Pastoral: Preproyecto,” December, 1984, DT.

<sup>124</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, translated by John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973).

Even as the seminary was intensifying the pastoral training, the extant archival documents indicate that both seminarians and the communities they served were eager for seminarians to spend even more time in the field. During the first meeting of the Bishops' Council for the 1986-87 school year, the bishops heard from the students in their fourth year of theological studies about their month-long summer project (July 1986) in Salinas Cruz, Oaxaca.<sup>125</sup> The special project, intensive exposure to the on-the-ground workings of ecclesial base communities, reflected the particular regional nature of SERESURE. The twelve seminarians (eleven from SERESURE and one from Tehuantepec) spanned the member dioceses, worked under the local parish priest, Padre Miguel Cruz, Coordinator of the Interparochial Team of Salinas Cruz (Equipo interparroquial de Salinas Cruz), and were assessed by Padre Jesús Mendoza Zaragoza, the pastoral formation coordinator at SERESURE and long-time coordinator of social ministry in the Diocese of Acapulco.

In what amounted to a qualitative survey about their experiences, seminarians lauded the ways in which their pastoral training exposed them to “the indigenous environment” and “cooperatives and collective work,” and how this work promoted “a new type of priest: a humble pastor, committed and serving.”<sup>126</sup> They asked, however, for more sustained leadership, organization, and accompaniment. They suspected that Padre Mendoza Zaragoza had too many other commitments to provide them the “more efficient accompaniment” that they desired.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> The following is based on documents comprising the meeting packet put together as the “Agenda para la reunión con el consejo episcopal, 1986-87,” September 10-11, 1986, DT/SM. Salinas Cruz, Oaxaca is an oil processing and port town, an industrial hub in the Isthmus.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

Yet overall, they reported to the bishops that their pastoral experience in Salinas Cruz served them well. Numerous comments indicated that the seminarians felt as though pastoral practice in the field, working with the faithful in base communities and in their everyday life, pushed them beyond their academic work to more fully develop themselves as future pastors. The language used, statements beginning with “I realized,” “it pushed me/us,” “we appreciated,” “we felt,” and “we reflected,” indicated that the pastoral project was indeed an eye-opening venture for the students. While some of the language was perhaps chosen with the audience of their superiors, the Bishops, in mind, the quotations were anonymized in the working report and show a good deal of consistency in their tenor of praising the work as bridging an intellectual understanding with on-the-ground realities. One student commented, “I realized that we have to immerse ourselves fully in the life of the people in order to fulfill our pastoral mission of accompaniment.”<sup>128</sup>

Similarly, indigenous lay agents in the isthmus communicated their pleasure with the seminarians’ summer project. One speaker said that the seminarians “helped us work toward uncovering and solving the problems in our home communities.” Another said, “we found a means to valorize our cultures and interchange ideas that we can then put into practice in each of our communities.” And still a third said that working with the seminarians helped him to “value our culture.”<sup>129</sup>

The bishops were undoubtedly pleased with the feedback that they received from seminarians and indigenous community members alike. For the following year, 1987,

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.



they organized a similar summer project for advanced (4th year Theology) seminarians, this time working with Guatemalan refugees in Chiapas. The bishops, and Samuel Ruiz in particular, had already long been concerned about the safety and security of the Guatemalan refugees, mostly Mayan indigenous, streaming into Chiapas to escape the brutal violence of the Guatemalan army.<sup>130</sup> By the late 1980s, the Guatemalan civil war had calmed somewhat from the genocidal heights of the General Efraín Ríos Montt years (1982-83) during which the Guatemalan armed forces and paramilitaries killed an estimated 200,000 mostly Mayan Guatemalans.<sup>131</sup> In the aftermath of the genocidal campaign, the Guatemalan armed forces had implemented a system of forced recruitment into “civil defense patrols,” sparking new, if different, waves of violence under the same logic of counterinsurgency and anti-communism.<sup>132</sup> Even though the worst of the state violence had subsided, refugees and displaced peoples continued to flow to urban centers or across the border into Chiapas. However, by this point, the Guatemalan Army had stopped the illegal cross-border raids that had so incensed the Bishops in 1984 when they demanded that the Mexican government provide sanctuary to the refugees and forcefully stop the violations of national sovereignty.

More certain at this later date that the work would be safe for the seminarians, the Bishops felt comfortable sending the group to Motozintla, Chiapas, a municipality near Tapachula, in the mountains of the southern corner of the state bordering Guatemala. Enrique Camargo, a priest in the diocese of Tehuacán, went to Motozintla with his fellow seminarians from across Oaxaca and Chiapas (and probably some from Guerrero

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<sup>130</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, “Sobre la situación de los refugiados.”

<sup>131</sup> See, among others, Kirsten Weld, *Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014) and Konefal, *For Every Indio Who Falls*.

<sup>132</sup> See Grandin, *Last Colonial Massacre*; Konefal, *For Every Indio Who Falls*.

although he did not mention them). There, Padre Enrique reported that the seminarians went to “learn the work of the catechists.”<sup>133</sup> He almost certainly meant the pioneering work in Chiapas, mostly in the Diocese of San Cristóbal, of training indigenous (mostly men) folks as community religious leaders and organizers.<sup>134</sup> In Motozintla, however, the seminarians found themselves working with both indigenous communities and in the refugee camps near the border. In addition to catechism and other spiritual ministry, Padre Enrique said that they worked on agriculture projects, helping communities and refugees with traditional crops such as corn as well as a pilot project planting soy. Padre Enrique, in his recollections, evoked an isolated space that indigenous communities shared across borders: “Where we went to work was called Motozintla. From there we could see the nearby Guatemalan cantons of Toquian, Pavencul, places that were far away and secluded, just like the *sierra* that we have here bordering Oaxaca, Huautla and abutting Veracruz.”

In this description, Padre Enrique simultaneously evoked distance and familiarity, rendering experiences commonly shared in dispersed indigenous communities throughout the *sierras* of southern Mexico. Although most communities did not share the particular Guatemalan experience of exile and displacement as the result of state violence and civil war, the required work in indigenous communities and refugee camps was the same: agricultural improvement to tackle the issues of malnutrition, population growth, and exhaustion of the soil. Padre Enrique’s recollections drew little distinction between spiritual work, cultural revitalization, agricultural improvement, and the struggles against

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<sup>133</sup> Interview with Enrique Camargo, March 15, 2017.

<sup>134</sup> See Mattiace, *To See with Two Eyes*; Chojnacki, *Indigenous Apostles*; and Meyer, Gallardo, and Ríos, *Samuel Ruiz en San Cristóbal*, for more on the indigenous catechists.

*caciquismo*. In other words, there was no neat separation between issues and struggles that conservatives and traditionalists preferred to keep apart.<sup>135</sup> And Padre Enrique, like many of his fellow graduates, credited SERESURE with the training that sent a young man raised in urban Tehuacán to the remote corners of indigenous southeast Mexico and opened his eyes not just to injustice but to the real possibilities of work to counter that injustice. Padre Enrique was among the last of the SERESURE graduates to so explicitly take on the political compromises that he understood “the preferential option for the poor” to entail. By 1988, when Padre Enrique graduated and was ordained into the priesthood, the ideological balance of power in the region had already begun its shift to a conservative traditionalism that may have still celebrated pastoral and evangelical work but that divorced itself from the political commitment that the previous cohorts of seminarians had clamored for.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the 20-year experiment that was SERESURE. To begin with, oral histories demonstrated how, at least in the diocese of Tehuacán, the priorities of the post-conciliar Church translated into increased recruitment of indigenous young men and boys for the priesthood. Responding to long-running laments within the hierarchy of a “scarcity” of priests, Bishop Rafael Ayala, with generous donations from wealthy local families, founded the minor seminary in 1963 to draw in indigenous boys from across the diocese in the hopes of them continuing onward in their studies and toward clerical vocations. However, as the interviewees report, the minor seminary never

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<sup>135</sup> Elio Masferrer, *¿Es del César o es de Dios?: Un modelo antropológico del campo religioso* (México, CDMX: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2004).

adopted the liberationist orientation of the subsequently founded SERESURE and, consequently, remained steadfast in its goal of assimilation of indigenous boys into a westernized mestizaje rather than nurturing a coexistence of priestly and indigenous identities.

Once the young men advanced in their studies and entered SERESURE, interviewees reported that they had entered something else entirely, a space in which they no longer had to choose between their indigenous culture and Roman Catholicism. SERESURE, however, was not a static institution. While it began as an institution that reflected moderate developmentalist priorities of international Catholic funding institutions, it changed over time parallel to changes in Church doctrine, Liberation Theology, the concrete historical context of Mexico in the 1970s and 80s, and, importantly, the increasing incorporation of indigenous voices into Church fora such as meetings about indigenous ministry and surveys on pastoral training for the seminarians. As Liberation Theology responded to critiques that it was too focused on Marxist socio-economic class dynamics to the detriment of other social hierarchies and inequalities along the lines of gender, race, and ethnicity, SERESURE too endeavored to imagine how to train seminarians to address the twin projects of economic inequality *and* indigenous cultural survival.<sup>136</sup>

This chapter has shown that, although the academic training changed moderately over time, the primary response of SERESURE was to increase the depth and breadth of

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<sup>136</sup> As early as the early 1970s, liberation theologians from Latin America and African-American theologians from the United States were probing the possible intersections of Liberation Theology and Black Theology and what each could add to the growing literature of the other. See Sergio Torres and John Eagleson, eds., *Theology in the Americas*; and Torres and Eagleson, eds., *The Challenge of Basic Christian Communities*.

pastoral training for seminarians, to place them in the field and working among and within indigenous communities for longer and longer periods of time during the school year. From the first iteration of weekends in nearby parishes to the fourth and final iteration of pastoral training that placed advanced seminarians in communities for two extended periods during the year, it was precisely the intensive pastoral experiences, along with links to liberationists and indigenous language training, that marked SERESURE unique among Mexican seminaries. Further, the formation teams and the Council of Bishops strove to combine pastoral training with the methodologies of Marxist social sciences in order that seminarians possessed the “toolkit” to analyze the structural realities of the world and the region, elaborate appropriate pastoral plans, and enact said plans. In other words, seminarians were being trained to combine the “see, judge, act” method with the methodological tools of Marxist social sciences, particularly Mexican anthropology and the increasing collaboration between secular academics and Church pastoral and intellectual centers such as CENAMI and its quarterly journal, *Estudios Indígenas*.<sup>137</sup>

SERESURE, even as it embraced methodological and theological innovations and deepened its commitment to liberationist *pastoral indígena*, may never have been the radical institution that both its proponents and critics claimed that it was.<sup>138</sup> The Bishops of the Pacific South Region, even as they advanced liberationist diagnoses and solutions

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<sup>137</sup> “See, judge, act,” was a method of determining pastoral action as elaborated by Belgian Cardinal Joseph Cardijn in the early twentieth century. He is well known for founding the Young Christian Workers, and his methods for social Catholicism were widely adopted in the iterations of Catholic Action around the world. See, Joseph Cardijn, *Laymen into Action* (London, G. Chapman, 1964).

<sup>138</sup> Padre Ricardo Rivera, even as an ally and friend to the “progressive” wing of the Tehuacán diocesan clergy, was careful to note that the moderates were always the majority in the seminary and in the priesthood. Interview with Ricardo Rivera, April 21, 2017.

to the problems that faced indigenous southern Mexico, always remained within the theological and doctrinal boundaries of the Church. Similarly, SERESURE was always, first and foremost, a seminary meant for training candidates to the priesthood. Like seminaries throughout Mexico and beyond, SERESURE and the Council of Bishops were always concerned with discipline and celibacy. Although there were percolating movements of priests and seminarians who advocated for an end to celibacy (yet rarely for female ordination), the Bishops remained steadfast in their stance that the celibacy question was settled and closed to debate. The guiding principles of SERESURE sought to inculcate self-discipline into the future priests, entrusting them to act with autonomy and liberty, but to refrain from “debauchery” or “licentiousness,” and to not act “capriciously.”<sup>139</sup> In the coded language of the Church, a Church beginning to deal secretly with what would become a deluge of sexual assault allegations, the Bishops were talking about sex without mentioning sex.<sup>140</sup> And the Vatican letter that will be discussed in relation to the seminary’s closure further spoke of a failure of “discipline” among the seminarians.

The ideological conflicts that resounded within the global Catholic Church were also reflected within SERESURE. In the late 1980s, as the Vatican moved to suppress the more radical iterations of Liberation Theology, SERESURE became a proxy battleground. The Vatican appointment of renowned conservative Bishops to Tehuacán (1985) and Oaxaca (1987, as Archbishop co-adjutor) were warning signs to progressives in the region that their projects were potentially in the crosshairs.

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<sup>139</sup> “SERESURE: Directorio de formación: Efemérides 1986-1987,” DT/SM.

<sup>140</sup> Richard Sipe, *A Secret World: Sexuality and the Search for Celibacy* (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Sipe, *Sex, Priests, and Power: Anatomy of a Crisis* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

Ultimately, their worries came to fruition. In the fall of 1990, the Vatican ordered the “reorientation” of the seminary. But before that happened, scores of graduates had already been ordained into the priesthood and had taken their seminary training into their parish communities. The next chapter follows one priest, Padre Tacho, and his seven years in the historically Nahua municipality of San Antonio Cañada, Puebla where he grappled with how to translate his seminary experience into parish initiatives grounded in the twin pillars of socio-religious activism and indigenous cultural revival.

## Chapter 5: San Antonio Cañada and Padre Tacho, 1980-1987

### Introduction

The Second Vatican Council, in an *aggiornamento*, an opening of the Church to the world, posited in *Gaudium et Spes* that every culture contained the “seeds of the word.”<sup>1</sup> However, the argument over the shape of a catholic multicultural pluralism was only just beginning. The bishops in southern Mexico founded SERESURE to specifically address the relationship between the Church and Mexico’s indigenous peoples. Both part of and parallel to the seminary was increased contact between indigenous peoples and agents of the Church. In *encuentros* and congresses, the Church, like the state, was increasingly inviting indigenous peoples themselves to participate in the mass meetings and decision-making processes over policy towards and with indigenous communities.<sup>2</sup> However, the seminary and the myriad pastoral *encuentros* remained spaces organized, dominated, and governed by the Church and church prerogatives. They were undoubtedly becoming more responsive to lay indigenous input, but could not and should not be mistaken for a horizontalization of the multiple hierarchical relationships that governed the Church’s interactions with the world: the hierarchy of the clerical body, from bishop down to seminarian, and the distinction between the clergy and the laity.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (Rome: Second Vatican Council, October 28, 1965), [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html).

<sup>2</sup> On the secular process of indigenous, see Maria Muñoz, *Stand up and Fight*.



I move from spaces governed by the Church into the domain of indigenous Mexico, the communities that Church agents (parish priests, men and women religious, seminarians, lay volunteers) streamed into with their ideas of salvation, liberation, development, and education. However, what they met was rarely exactly what they expected. Rather, the concrete interactions between indigenous community members and agents of the Church, more often than not, forced adjustments in Church prerogatives to meet the needs and desires of the communities themselves as they lived through the 1980s economic crisis and neoliberal structural adjustment.

I follow one parish priest who had recently graduated from SERESURE, Padre Tacho, to examine the ground-level interactions between representatives of the Catholic Church and the people that they aimed to serve. The story of San Antonio Cañada and the pastoral team that served the region is but one possible story among many. Yet, I argue, this story illuminates the sincere efforts of committed cohorts within the Church to open themselves to other ways of being Catholic as they drew on their training and inspiration in Liberation Theology and its concomitant “preferential option for the poor” when they went out into the world. At the same time, this story highlights the embedded contradictions and chasms between the aspirational imaginaries cultivated in institutions like SERESURE and the reality of life on the ground in an indigenous municipality grappling with socio-economic crisis and long term structural and cultural changes.

I will begin with the historical background and context of the municipality and parish of San Antonio Cañada. Situated not far from Tehuacán, in the foothills of and rising into the Sierra Negra, the municipality is statistically quite impoverished and demographically majority indigenous. I explore the place of San Antonio Cañada in the

Tehuacán region, the existing and historical links of capitalist dependencies, the evolution of state involvement in the municipality, and the historical processes that shaped the uneven land-holding patterns, a mix of individual and communally titled lands, that today mark the municipality.<sup>3</sup> The long running archival trail regarding land grants shows how San Antonio Cañada was both marginalized from, yet intertwined with, the defining moments and processes of Mexico's early twentieth century.

I then explore Padre Tacho's entry into the community and the ways in which, drawing upon oral histories, community members remember and recall the differences between the young Tacho and their previous (and subsequent) interactions with Church agents. I detail the existing religious infrastructure of lay and apostolic movements, and how Padre Tacho and community members leveraged religious educational opportunities in Tehuacán to both build a corps of lay activists and access sought-after educational training.

As Mexico sank into economic crisis and high inflation with the debt crisis of 1982, communities such as San Antonio Cañada searched for ways to respond and adapt to the losses of familial income that combined with rising prices and the beginning of neoliberal structural adjustment that often marked a retreat of state programs from rural Mexico. There is, of course, a deep body of literature on the ways in which communities resisted and adapted to structural change.<sup>4</sup> My contribution here follows the lead of

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<sup>3</sup> I follow the lead of John Tutino here in conceptualizing the linkages between community and metropolis as "capitalist dependencies." John Tutino, *The Mexican Heartland: How Communities Shaped Capitalism, a Nation, and World History, 1500-2000* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Lynn Stephen, *Zapata Lives!: Histories and Cultural Politics in Southern Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Tinsman, *Buying into the Regime*; Matthew Guttman, *The Romance of Democracy: Compliant Defiance in Contemporary Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Wright, *The Death of Ramón González*; McCann, *Hard Times in the Marvelous City*; Brodwyn Fischer, *A Poverty of Rights: Citizenship and Inequality in Twentieth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Stanford:

previous scholars who have insisted on subaltern agency as the poor, indigenous and not, navigated powerful economic forces as protagonists and not just victims.<sup>5</sup> However, particularly in the case of rural Mexico, I insist that religion and religious practice are central to understanding how and why indigenous communities in the Tehuacán region responded as they did to neoliberal change.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, the next section explores the ways in which the community's struggles to adapt to economic crisis and neoliberal structural adjustment met, and changed, the pastoral programs and initiatives of Church agents and activists like Padre Tacho and his pastoral team. I show how Padre Tacho built a pastoral team of community members and key outsiders, and the ideas and initiatives that his team-members brought to San Antonio Cañada. In response to community member input, Tacho and his pastoral team were instrumental in supporting the creation and operation of numerous producer and consumer cooperatives in the municipality, an approach to pastoral activism that spread across southern, indigenous Mexico as a means to make capitalist dependencies a little less predatory and a little more just. Further, the Belgian missionary sister on the pastoral team, Madre Maria van Doren, had additional ideas of gender, women's empowerment, and inclusion that changed the gendered fabric of community relations in the *rancherías* above San Antonio Cañada. Finally, as pastoral activism adjusted to economic realities and gained the trust of indigenous communities, Church agents intensified their cultural

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Stanford University Press, 2010); Mallon, *Courage Tastes of Blood*; Han, *Life in Debt*; Paley, *Marketing Democracy*.

<sup>5</sup> I think here too of Florencia Mallon, *Peasant and Nation: The Making of Postcolonial Mexico and Peru* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and Peter Guardino, *The Time of Liberty: Popular Political Culture in Oaxaca, 1750-1850* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) for how indigenous communities engaged with the nascent Mexican state over their own ideas of liberalism and inclusion.

<sup>6</sup> Rebecca Overmyer-Velázquez is notable among this body of literature for including the interactions between liberationist clerics and indigenous communities in Guerrero. Rebecca Overmyer-Velázquez, *Folkloric Poverty*.

work that explored what it would mean for the Church to support, and not just tolerate, indigenous Catholicisms.

### **San Antonio Cañada: Gateway to the Sierra Negra**

To get to San Antonio Cañada today, one can catch a *combi* (a minibus/van) in Tehuacán at the corner of Calle 3 Oriente and Calle 7 Sur. In the middle of the day, the *combis* usually have free seats. In the mornings and evenings, however, they fill to the brim with students, employees, laborers, market vendors, and the men and women who have gone to the city to make bulk purchases. Only the older women retain “traditional” dress, wearing their flowery embroidered *mantas*. Fewer still speak Náhuatl in public. It is an uneasy relationship between the past and present, indigenous roots and modern society, all in the midst of the discrimination that persists against the indigenous. To operate in the *mestizo* urban space, most San Antoneros dress themselves in the latest fashions and the knockoff Levi's made in loosely legal sweatshops in and around Tehuacán. Each day they shuttle back and forth between the (semi)anonymous city and the village in which everyone knows each other and gossip flies as quickly as the wind. More than once, upon meeting a new person, they mentioned that they had heard about the *norteamericano* poking around town asking questions about the recent past.

On Sundays, much of the community can be found in and around the town's church. Dating to the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, the parish was originally a Franciscan mission.<sup>7</sup> The Franciscans, based out of two convents in the Valley of Mexico and Huejotzingo, Puebla, received sanction by the Crown to evangelize the great

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<sup>7</sup> The earliest document found in the parish archive is a book noting baptisms from the 1630s; Archivo Parroquial de San Antonio Cañada (hereafter APSAC) .

settlements of indigenous peoples in central Mexico and stretching to the Mixteca.<sup>8</sup>

Under the control of the convent in Huejotzingo, Franciscans arrived to Calchualco (old Tehuacán, to the southeast of the current city and on the route out toward San Antonio Cañada) in 1536 and in subsequent years spread to surrounding villages to evangelize and build churches.<sup>9</sup> San Antonio Cañada is one of the first settlements that missionaries would have encountered as they traveled southeast out of the Tehuacán valley and into the Sierra Negra. San Antonio Cañada occupied, and still does, a bridge between the indigenous mountain villages and the creole/mestizo city. The earliest references to San Antonio Cañada are cited in a socio-religious study undertaken by seminarians in 1986. The authors reported that they found a map in the Agrarian Registry (Mexico City) from 1590 that includes San Antonio Cañada. They posited two scenarios: first, that the village existed prior to the conquest or second, that the village is a result of the conquest, an area settled by indigenous peoples who fled the conquistadors in the Tehuacán valley to hide in the inhospitable terrain of mountains, canyons, and ravines.<sup>10</sup> By the end of the colonial period, San Antonio Cañada had long been the site of the missionary parish and was an agricultural community intimately connected to the market economy of Tehuacán.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Raúl Bringas Nostti, *Historia de Tehuacán: De tiempos prehispánicos a la modernidad*, 2nd ed. (San Pedro Cholula, Puebla: Universidad Leonardo da Vinci, 2013), 60-85.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to San Antonio Cañada, other Franciscan parishes included Ajalpan, Zinacatepec, and San José Miahuatlán. Further to the south, near the border with Oaxaca, Dominicans were charged with the task of evangelization and they built a convent in Tepexi de Rodríguez; "Historia de la Diócesis," Oficina de la Diócesis de Tehuacán.

<sup>10</sup> I did not come across the map that they referenced while doing research at the Registro Agrario in Mexico City, nor do they fully cite their source. However, I have no reason to doubt their archival research. Jose Ambrosio Lezama Cariño and Enrique Domingo Camargo Melendez, "Estudio Socio-Pastoral de San Antonio Cañada," July 1986, 9-10.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

San Antonio Cañada is today both the municipal and parish seat, the meeting of secular and religious geographic demarcations common to rural Mexico. The church itself, like in most Mexican villages, sits at the center of town, facing the municipal government building across the town basketball court and open plaza. If facing the Church, wooden shacks built to the left house corner stores and taco stands, generally only open on Sundays when the community congregates for masses and a small market. To the right is the parish office, staffed by a secretary (invariably a woman in all of the parishes I visited) who controls the daily activities of the parish priest. Should anyone want to request a blessing, a mass, or any rites from the priest, she is the person to schedule with and pay, because all religious services come at a price. Behind the office, hidden by high walls, a courtyard opens up. Here, women from the community, serving



Image 2: Parroquia de San Antonio Cañada, Puebla. Photos by author, 2017.

on a basis of rotating community responsibilities, cook the priest's meals on a *comal* and wash his clothes.<sup>12</sup>

The busiest man on Sunday is unquestionably the parish priest. Priests tend to be reassigned from parish to parish every four to five years under the logic of not allowing them to get too comfortable in one place. During my research period, Padre Valentín, a young Mazatec priest, only a few years removed from the seminary, was the parish priest in San Antonio Cañada.<sup>13</sup> In addition to two regularly scheduled masses at the parish seat, Padre Valentín spends most of every Sunday shuttling from one chapel to the next, down to San Esteban Necoxcalco and up to La Lobera and Cuitlaxtepec, in his black Volkswagen Beetle outfitted with heavy duty tires, sometimes with additional stops to perform requested religious services in private households.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, Sundays are the only days when it is generally guaranteed that the municipal government will be open for business. All of the municipal officials work elsewhere during the week (even if only on their own land) and thus Sunday they are in

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<sup>12</sup> A *comal* is a slightly concave metal griddle, placed directly over wood fire for general cooking. Traditionally, the *comal* was ceramic, although today most families seem to use metal.

<sup>13</sup> Currently, the parish of San Antonio Cañada serves the neighboring communities of San Esteban Necoxcalco directly below San Antonio and San Isidro Lobera (commonly known as La Lobera) and Cuitlaxtepec in the mountains above San Antonio. For the years that this project encompasses, the parish of San Antonio Cañada additionally served San Bernardino Lagunas, Santa Catarina Oztolotepec, San Luis del Pino, and San José Rancho Cabras, communities that now pertain to the parish of Nicolás Bravo. Each community that falls under the parish also has its own chapel, sometimes more than one as in the case of San Esteban Necoxcalco which also has a small hillside chapel where their patron saint, San Esteban, appeared to community members in the late-seventeenth or early-eighteenth century.

See Morris, *Soldiers, Saints, and Shamans*, 30 for origin stories of indigenous communities in the Gran Nayar. Although situated on the other side of Mexico, the patterns he identifies are roughly similar: a god (or Catholic saint in this case) miraculously appeared in a sacred space - often a cave, river, or mountain - and communicated the location where the chapel, worship, or ritual space should be constructed. For a collection of folklore on the ways in which saints interact with, protect, and intercede in the everyday lives of people and communities, see James Griffith, *Saints, Statues, and Stories: A Folklorist Looks at the Religious Art of Sonora* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> On one Sunday, I accompanied Padre Valentín for most of the day. One of our stops was at a home where the family had asked the priest to come and bless the new pickup truck they had recently purchased.



Image 3: Map of Tehuacán region and San Antonio Cañada. Courtesy of Albert Ho.



their offices should anyone need to deal with a municipal issue. Rather than separate spheres, the operations of the Church and municipality are tightly linked. The committees responsible for the annual patron saint festival, for material improvements to the church, and for daily responsibilities of cleaning the church and feeding the priest, all are organized within the structures and edifices of the municipal government.<sup>15</sup> Documents regarding patron saint festivals and church committees reside in both parish and municipal archives, sparse and unorganized as they are. Although there is growing religious diversity within the parish, mostly with a small, but growing, Protestant and Evangelical population in the municipality, including some community members who command considerable economic and social respect, the religious and civic spheres remain tightly intertwined.<sup>16</sup>

For most of the nineteenth century, San Antonio Cañada fell under the governing auspices of Tehuacán.<sup>17</sup> In 1895, in the middle of the Porfiriato, San Antonio Cañada

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<sup>15</sup> Field notes, March-May, 2017. The daughter and son-in-law of Mauro Damian were serving on the committee for the *mayordomía* of San Antonio de Padua, the patron saint of San Antonio Cañada. As Saint Anthony's feast day, June 13, approached, they were increasingly busy nearly every weekend on preparations that included some building repair to the church, contracting for celebratory fireworks, and bulk purchases of food and drink from wholesalers in Tehuacán. The organizing meetings took place in the office of the municipal president.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, notes in the parish archive regarding who in the community contributed to community collective work obligations, "Faena general del 15 de Mayo 1983," May 15, 1983, undated book of parish notes, APSAC.

<sup>17</sup> INEGI, *División territorial del Estado de Puebla de 1810 a 1995* (México, CDMX: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, 1997), 55-74.

Following independence, Puebla's first state constitution (1824) divided the state into twenty-one territorial parties (*partidos*). Shortly thereafter, the 1826 Ley de Gobierno Político (Law of Political Government) reorganized the state into seven districts, with each district comprising multiple *partidos*. Tehuacán, and presumably San Antonio Cañada, fell under the district of Tepeaca. In 1837, the state reorganized again, eliminating four of the *partidos* but also now enumerating the municipalities that fell under each *partido*. In this restructuring, Tehuacán (as the 13th *partido*) oversaw the governance of San Antonio de la Cañada and twelve other mostly indigenous municipalities in the region. In 1861, Puebla wrote a new Constitution in which each *partido* was renamed as its own district. Tehuacán, District 14, still oversaw San Antonio Cañada, although the district lost some municipalities to the south and gained a handful to the north of the city. In 1880, Puebla recognized a greater number of municipalities, placing the newly recognized San Gabriel Chilac and San Sebastián Zinacatepec, both Nahuatl communities, also under

theoretically gained full control over its own municipal governance. Given what we know about the Porfiriato, it is likely that San Antonio Cañada did not, in fact, have autonomous municipal governance, but rather was most likely under the control or supervision of an appointed *jefe político* or a functionary reporting upwards in the centralized structure of Porfirian power.<sup>18</sup> As the nineteenth century drew to a close, semblances of municipal autonomy did not necessarily mean access to lands and land ownership. Near the end of the Porfiriato, haciendas made up nearly 65 percent of the land in what had been the district of Tehuacán.<sup>19</sup> A map of the hacienda La Trinidad shows that nearly the entirety of the San Antonio Cañada fell within the bounds of the hacienda.<sup>20</sup>

San Antonio Cañada was one of the early benefactors of land reform in the post-revolutionary era. Almost immediately following the enactment of the 1917 Constitution, San Antonio Cañada petitioned for an ejidal land grant. Their first request was sent on May 11, 1917 to the state government in Puebla, which was then forwarded to the federal government.<sup>21</sup> By Adolfo de la Huerta's presidential resolution, San Antonio Cañada received 1,940 hectares on September 2, 1920, notice of which was officially published in the *Diario Oficial* on December 13, 1920.<sup>22</sup> However, they did not officially take

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the district of Tehuacán. In 1895, however, the state dissolved the system of districts, and recognized the previously subordinate municipalities as autonomous municipal entities.

<sup>18</sup> Frederick Katz, "The Liberal Republic and the Porfiriato, 1867–1910," in *Mexico since Independence*, ed. Leslie Bethell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 49–124; Alan Knight, *The Mexican Revolution* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

<sup>19</sup> Bringas Nostti, *Historia de Tehuacán*, 292–93.

<sup>20</sup> AGN, Administración Pública Federal S. XX, Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, Dirección General de Crédito, c. 83, exp. 503. Note that the church in San Antonio Cañada falls within the boundaries of the hacienda, as do the *rancherías* Cuitlaxtepec and Lobera that would later become official dependencias of San Antonio Cañada.

<sup>21</sup> Registro Agrario Nacional, Oficina de Documentos Básicos, Registro 1231, San Antonio Cañada, Asunto Ampliación y Dotación.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

possession of their land grant until June 13, 1925.<sup>23</sup> The grant was for 194 heads of household, calculated to ten hectares per grantee because the land surveyed was unsuitable for cultivation, only suitable as pasturelands.<sup>24</sup> In other words, this suggests that grantees would have received fewer than 10 hectares per person had the land been of better agricultural quality. Of the 1,940 hectares, 1,429 came from Donato Bravo Izquierdo's Hacienda La Trinidad and 511 from the widow Moro's Hacienda San Ignacio.<sup>25</sup> While I could find little on the widow Moro, Bravo Izquierdo inhabited the military circles of power of post-revolutionary Mexico, particularly within the Ávila Camacho *cacicazgo*, distinguishing himself as a general during the Revolution and was appointed by President Calles to an interim governorship of Puebla in 1927-28.<sup>26</sup>

Bravo Izquierdo dragged San Antonio Cañada into national political debates that would come to define the contours of post-Revolutionary Mexico. First, shortly after San Antonio Cañada and San Esteban Necoxcalco took definitive possession of their ejidal lands in 1925, Bravo Izquierdo began sending letters to the Comisión Nacional Agraria and to President Calles requesting indemnization for the expropriated lands. In what appeared to be his first letter asking for indemnization, Bravo Izquierdo estimated the total value of his hacienda (12,828 hectares) to be 65,000 pesos. He said that he was open to an updated appraisal of his lands, but that he should certainly be remunerated at an

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<sup>23</sup> Donato Bravo Izquierdo, *Un soldado del pueblo*, (Puebla: Editorial Periodística e Impresora de Puebla, 1964), 323.

<sup>24</sup> Registro Agrario Nacional, Oficina de Documentos Básicos, Registro 1231, San Antonio Cañada, Asunto Ampliación y Dotación.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, there is no other information in the sources that I found that give the full name of the Moro widow.

<sup>26</sup> Bravo Izquierdo, 286.

appropriate level, in line with the law, for the 1,429 hectares given as an ejidal grant to San Antonio Cañada.<sup>27</sup>

Of Bravo Izquierdo's nearly 13,000 hectares, almost 11,000 were distributed across five communities (San Antonio Cañada, San Esteban Necoxcalco, Santa María del Monte, Santa María Nativitas, and San Juan Ajalpan), leaving Bravo Izquierdo with 1,996 hectares by the early 1930s.<sup>28</sup> In 1938 Bravo Izquierdo still had not received the compensation he had requested over a decade prior. But the context was now different. In March 1938, President Cárdenas expropriated the oil properties of US companies who refused to abide by a Mexican court's decision regarding labor compensation. To compensate the companies (albeit at a rate much lower than what the companies demanded), Cárdenas used the maneuver as a rallying cry of Mexican nationalism. Citizens around the country donated money, jewelry, or what they could to help the government pay the compensation.<sup>29</sup> Bravo Izquierdo sent President Cárdenas an urgent letter in which he renounced any claims for compensation for his expropriated lands in the name of "trying to patriotically cooperate for the prosperity of Mexico."<sup>30</sup>

Thomas Rath situated General Bravo Izquierdo as a staunch supporter of the *avilacamachista* political machine in Puebla.<sup>31</sup> While this bloc periodically had its disagreements with President Cárdenas, the close personal relationship between President Cárdenas and Manuel Ávila Camacho, dating back to their military service during the

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<sup>27</sup> AGN, Administración Pública Federal S. XX, Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público/ Dirección General de Crédito, c. 83/159484/5/exp. 305/521.5/13638, November 12, 1926.

<sup>28</sup> Bravo Izquierdo, 325. Note that four of the communities fell under Padre Tacho's ministry from the parish of San Antonio Cañada, with only Ajalpan pertaining to another parish.

<sup>29</sup> On oil expropriation and its significance to Mexican nationalism, see Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil*; and Gilly, *El cardenismo*.

<sup>30</sup> Bravo Izquierdo, 326.

<sup>31</sup> Rath, *Myths of Demilitarization*, 111.

Revolution, forestalled any serious conflict between the competing factions within the Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM, renamed the Party of the Institutional Revolution, PRI, in 1946). As the 1940 elections approached, General Bravo Izquierdo's entreaty to President Cárdenas was likely embedded within intra-party competition for the presidential candidacy. Once Ávila Camacho received the nod from Cárdenas as the PRM candidate, his only serious challenger was General Juan Andreu Almazán who ran under the banner of the recently created National Action Party (PAN).

He never received compensation for the expropriated lands. In his autobiography published in 1964, Bravo Izquierdo painted himself as a selfless man who gave up opportunities of wealth to fulfill the revolutionary ideals of the nation.<sup>32</sup> He portrayed himself, as the title proclaimed, as a "soldier of the people." He expressed regret for purchasing Hacienda La Trinidad, moreso that he left the lands unattended. Gone were the requests for indemnization that pervaded his communications decades earlier, and in their place were explanations that the villagers, many of whom had been "soldiers that fought under my command and, in the meetings among revolutionaries in the camps, had heard us say that when we were triumphant in our cause we would distribute the lands of the haciendas to the people who lacked land."<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, Bravo Izquierdo claimed to be one of the authors of Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution, which declared land to be property of the Mexican people and that it could be expropriated and distributed by the

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<sup>32</sup> The military autobiography is a genre unto itself and Bravo Izquierdo trots out many of the well-worn tropes of selflessness, sacrifice, and the importance of nation. On military autobiographies in a slightly different context, see Ching, *Stories of Civil War in El Salvador*, chapter 3 in particular. The genre of military biographies has not been studied, as far as I am aware, in Mexico. Bravo Izquierdo's narrative raised many of the same themes as the Salvadoran military writers that Ching analyzed, principally that any and all actions were always in defense of the nation.

<sup>33</sup> Bravo Izquierdo, 322.

government.<sup>34</sup> How, he asked, could he abandon his principles given his revolutionary credentials.<sup>35</sup>

In contrast to Bravo Izquierdo's claims of having mobilized the region, the seminarians' socio-religious study identified another narrative, that of the Revolution as a time of severe hardship for the community. The oral histories they conducted revealed that community collective memory construed the community as victimized by surrounding communities and bandits who raided their village and plundered seeds and agricultural production. They identified General Francisco Barbosa, born in the neighboring municipality of Ajalpan, as the individual who returned calm and peace to the community by going after the "bandits."<sup>36</sup> While definitive apportionment of involvement and mobilization may be impossible to determine, the narratives are not mutually exclusive. The relative emphasis of each, revolutionary involvement versus community victimization, almost certainly reflected the authorship and the context in which each narrative was told. Bravo Izquierdo's narrative of self-sacrifice (both his own and of the communities he mobilized and led) was consistent with the genre of military autobiography and its tropes of service, sacrifice, and nation.<sup>37</sup>

The early land petition, less than three months after the promulgation of the Revolutionary Constitution, indicates that the community was intimately familiar with the goings-on of the Revolution. I too heard the stories that the former seminarians

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<sup>34</sup> Article 27 was the foundational piece to agrarian reform, and ultimately the cardenista oil expropriation, in Mexico. It was also the constitutional article subject to complete revision as a precondition of NAFTA in 1992, thus allowing for the privatization of previously inalienable collective land grants held by rural and indigenous communities. See, among the literature on the reverberations of NAFTA, Alyshia Gálvez, *Eating NAFTA: Trade, Food Policies, and the Destruction of Mexico* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 322-23.

<sup>36</sup> Lezama and Camargo, "Estudio Socio-Pastoral de San Antonio Cañada," 14-15.

<sup>37</sup> See Ching, *Stories of War*.

reported - that the mountaintops were a refuge from the worst violence of the Revolution, but that the period was a time of hardship for the communities.<sup>38</sup> In the mid-1980s, in the midst of the debt crisis, mounting inflation, and the dismantling of the post-revolutionary order, there may have been strong reasons for community members to downplay histories of revolutionary involvement.<sup>39</sup> With neoliberal transformation, no longer did appeals to revolutionary legacies carry the same weight in pleas for resources and state and/or outside assistance. Rather, narratives of hardships and struggles in the midst of forces larger than community life likely resonated within the economic crisis and persistent inflation of the 1980s. However, both narratives almost certainly hold truth to the inhabitants of San Antonio Cañada, that they both suffered from and were intimate participants in the Revolution, to such an extent that they were able to immediately file land claims following promulgation of the 1917 Constitution.

Although Rath cited Bravo Izquierdo's participation in 1940 election mobilization to ensure the victory for Ávila Camacho, there is no evidence that Bravo Izquierdo ever received the compensation that he spent decades pursuing. More likely was that the rewards provided as part of the *avilacamachista* inner circle more than made up for those of potential recompense for land expropriation. The land that he did retain may have still been protected, however. Residents of both San Antonio Cañada and San Esteban Necoxcalco petitioned for an expansion of ejidal lands in the 1940s but were given only part of what they asked for, with the lands of General Bravo Izquierdo omitted from further distribution.<sup>40</sup> The communities remained, through the bulk of the twentieth

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Apolinaria Ramos Jinéz, San Isidro Lobera, San Antonio Cañada, Puebla, May 19, 2017.

<sup>39</sup> Ching, *Stories of War*.

<sup>40</sup> Registro Agrario Nacional, Oficina de Documentos Básicos, Registro 1510, San Antonio Cañada, Asunto: Ampliación de Ejido, February 9, 1946.

century, a mix of private landholdings and ejidal lands, the majority of which were privatized in 1992.<sup>41</sup>

Whether community members were active participants in or fearful witnesses of the Revolution (or both!), they clearly were involved and knowledgeable enough to immediately begin land claims following the promulgation of the 1917 Constitution. The pattern of land requests foreshadowed much of the interaction between community and state for the remainder of the twentieth century. The archival evidence available points toward a relationship of state absence but not necessarily neglect. San Antonio Cañada seemed mostly content to manage its affairs without the interference of state or federal intervention. Yet when conflicts and needs arose, the community was also quick to petition distant state powers for intervention, mostly in the form of resources. Whether asking for additional police to help with the patron saint festival, an additional teacher for the public school, or pleading for resources after a particularly bad storm and a landslide washed away buildings and livestock, San Antonio Cañada almost exclusively appears as petitioner rather than as a site of proactive state programs.<sup>42</sup>

The archival trail seems to indicate that the state government was generally open to granting the small requests. They did, for instance, approve the request from the

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<sup>41</sup> Registro Agrario Nacional, San Antonio Cañada, 1/120, Asunto: Ampliación y dotación, January 26, 1944 and November 21, 1945. Interview with Estefana Damian and Mauro Damian, San Esteban Necoxcalco, January 28, 2017.

<sup>42</sup> On additional police for the patron saint festival, Archivo General del Estado de Puebla (hereafter AGEPE), Gobernación, San Antonio Cañada, "Asunto: Solisitando Ayuda para obtener AUXILIO que se le expresa (sic)," caja 13, expediente 4, May 2, 1972; on petitioning for additional teachers, AGEPE, Gobernación, San Antonio Cañada, "Letter from Professor Gabriel Herrera Gonzalez, Director General of Public Education of Puebla, to the President of the Education Committee of San Antonio Cañada," c. 13, exp. 4, November 23, 1959; letter from the state promising materials and an engineer to help rebuild the municipal building, AGEPE, Gobernación, San Antonio Cañada, "Letter from Lic. Mario Mellado Garcia, Secretario General de Gobierno del Estado de Puebla, to Isabel Pacheco Linares, Presidente Municipal de San Antonio Cañada," c. 13, exp. 4, June 1, 1971.



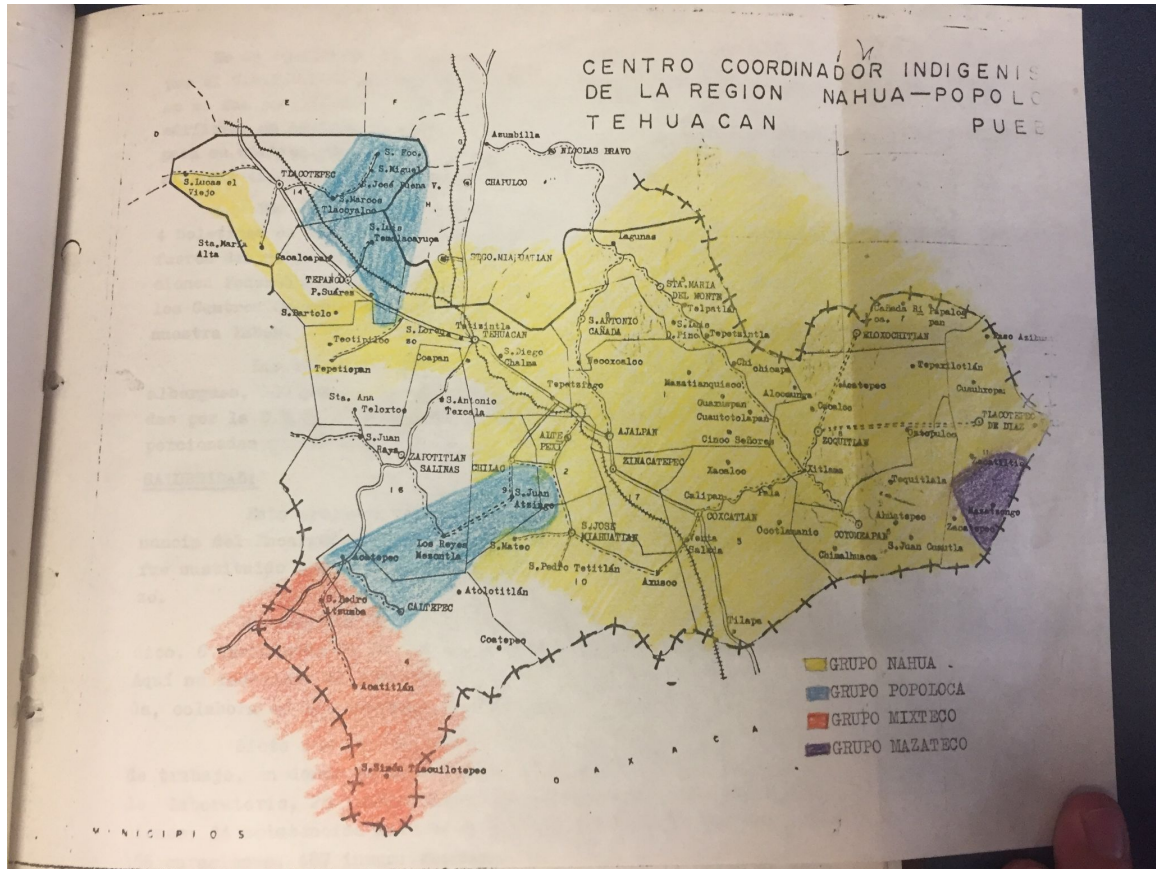


Image 4: INI – CCI Tehuacán map of region to highlight geographic distribution of indigenous peoples.  
 Source: Centro Coordinador Nahua-Popoloca, “Informe de labores correspondiente al periodo Septiembre 1976 - Agosto 1977,” FD 21/0083, CDI/INI, Biblioteca Juan Rulfo.

Committee of Heads of Family of the School Lázaro Cárdenas (Comité de Padres de Familia de la Escuela Lázaro Cárdenas) for an extra school teacher the following year.<sup>43</sup> In 1971, the municipal authorities appealed to the state government for materials to repair the center of the municipality, including the municipal offices, the school, and the Church.<sup>44</sup> Apparently sidestepping the question of the state government potentially assisting in the repairs of a church, the state government wrote back that it would supply

<sup>43</sup> Lic. Alfonso Velez López, Secretario General de Gobierno de Puebla, “Memorandum,” AGEP, Gobernación, San Antonio Cañada, exp. 13, exp. 4, November 17, 1959.

<sup>44</sup> Petition from San Antonio Cañada to the Governor of Puebla, AGEP, Gobernación, San Antonio Cañada, c. 13, exp. 4, April 24, 1971.

materials and technical assistance, an engineer to oversee the labor given by the community, to repair the municipal offices.<sup>45</sup>

However, the relative absence of the state began to change with President Echeverría's expansion of federal indigenous policy in the form of additional INI Coordinating Centers throughout the country.<sup>46</sup> The expansion of the INI meant that Tehuacán received its first coordinating center (CCI, Centro Coordinador Indigenista Nahua-Popoloca) in August 1972, and with it, periodic campaigns that traveled into San Antonio Cañada and its dependencies.<sup>47</sup> Among the initial programs were polio vaccination campaigns, associated health and medical work, assistance in planning for public school expansions, and extensive anthropological and ethnographic work to better understand the conditions of the region.<sup>48</sup>

The subdirector of the new CCI Nahua-Popoloca, Anthropologist Adrián Breton Esparza, in one of the first reports, spent considerable time describing and categorizing the seventeen indigenous municipalities that now fell under the auspices of INI programming. In one section, he sorted them by altitude and aridity (to classify agricultural possibilities), elsewhere by ethnic group (Nahua, Popoloca, Mazateco, Mixteco), and finally, by population percentage that the INI classified as indigenous, determined on the grounds of spoken language. When compared to other indigenous regions, he noted, "they present an elevated level of transition between their indigenous

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<sup>45</sup> Letter from the Secretario General de Gobierno de Puebla to the municipal authorities of San Antonio Cañada, AGEP, Gobernación, San Antonio Cañada, c. 13, exp. 4, July 1, 1971.

<sup>46</sup> On the expansion of INI see Lewis, *Rethinking Mexican Indigenismo*.

<sup>47</sup> On the foundation of the CCI Tehuacán, "Informe de las labores desarrolladas durante el periodo del 1o. De septiembre de 1972 al 28 de febrero de 1973, en ese Centro Coordinador Nahua-Popoloca," FD 21/0083, Archivo Instituto Nacional Indigenista, Biblioteca Juan Rulfo (hereafter INI/CDI).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

culture and the national culture. At first glance they appear more like the common campesino that prevails in the country than the indigenous that they are. However, they present aspects that are characterized as nahuas, popolocas, mazatecos and mixtecos (techniques in artisan craftwork, agricultural techniques, language, custom, behavioral norms, etc).<sup>49</sup>

In the collection of monthly and annual reports, San Antonio Cañada appeared sporadically, perhaps reflecting the CCI's judgment that only 48% of the municipal population was indigenous, or their transition toward "national culture."<sup>50</sup> But the dependent communities of the municipalities San Antonio Cañada, Nicolás Bravo, and Vicente Guerrero, the same settlements that made up the parish of San Antonio Cañada, appeared more frequently, particularly through the later 1970s. Cuitlaxtepec, a dependent *ranchería* of San Antonio Cañada, was a particular focus of CCI programs. There, CCI bilingual promoters actively worked on Spanish-language acquisition, literacy campaigns, provision of basic foodstuffs to combat hunger and malnutrition, and health promotion campaigns that offered vaccinations and basic medical provision.<sup>51</sup> Although the reports available do not say so outright, the oral histories indicate that it was during this time period that Cuitlaxtepec began to receive educators more frequently to staff the school room attached to the auxiliary municipal office.<sup>52</sup> Yet, even into the 1980s, one resident reported that primary school was a sporadic occurrence that came second to

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> "Informe de actividades desarrolladas en el CCI Nahua-Popoloca durante el mes de Noviembre 1975," FD 21/0024, CDI/INI. Although her focus is on an earlier period of educational expansion, during which "socialist education" was state policy and was a bridge to connect remote communities to the priorities of the expanding revolutionary state, see Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Juan Lezama and family, Cuitlaxtepec, February 9, 2017.

family agricultural obligations, and that it was the pastoral work of Madre Maria who helped the school-age children with literacy.<sup>53</sup> In one particularly revealing report however, it seemed that the CCI promoters were frustrated with Cuitlaxtepec when, in the midst of describing ejido land tenure, near total illiteracy in the community, and problems in agricultural production, they noted that “there is excessive consumption of alcohol and little interest in the affairs of the community.”<sup>54</sup> As we will see below, Cuitlaxtepec in fact showed quite a bit of interest in the “affairs of the community,” but apparently their interests did not always coincide with those of the state. Rather, while the CCI may have been concerned with alcohol consumption, Cuitlaxtepec and Santa María del Monte successfully leveraged CCI interest in the community such that, in addition to widespread health and education campaigns, Cuitlaxtepec received new recreational space in the form of a basketball court and Santa María del Monte received an entirely new civic plaza.<sup>55</sup> In other words, the attention that the Echeverria administration (1970-76) lavished upon indigenous communities that had not previously been so served by INI programming meant real material and infrastructural improvements even if staffing was not always present to facilitate the educational goals of the campaigns. As the INI touted its shift in focus to a participatory model more responsive and collaborative, the ultimate goals of the programs remained similar: greater incorporation of indigenous communities into “national culture.”<sup>56</sup> The monthly reports say little about cultural preservation,

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Rosa Lezama, Cuitlaxtepec, February 12, 2017

<sup>54</sup> “Informe de labores desarrolladas en el mes de Septiembre de 1976,” FD 21/0069, CDI/INI.

<sup>55</sup> Centro Coordinador Nahua-Popoloca, “Informe de labores correspondiente al periodo Septiembre 1976 - Agosto 1977,” FD 21/0083, CDI/INI.

<sup>56</sup> “Informe de las labores desarrolladas durante el periodo del 1o. De septiembre de 1972 al 28 de febrero de 1973, en ese Centro Coordinador Nahua-Popoloca,” FD 21/0083, CDI/INI.

instead focusing on material construction, education and health campaigns, and agricultural assistance.

However, collective memory in San Antonio Cañada has persisted in casting state intervention as unnecessary and, at times, misguided. I casually asked a former municipal president about state and federal programs of the past and present, pointing in particular at the DIF (Desarrollo Integral de la Familia) logo, painted on the sides of buildings around town, he laughed at the premise of the question and said that the INI, the CDI, and the DIF were and are only there to make the elites and directors look good.<sup>57</sup> A recent federal action was illustrative: the Peña Nieto administration (2012-2018) launched their anti-poverty program Cruzada Nacional contra el Hambre (National Crusade against Hunger) in 2013 and announced a series of infrastructural development plans throughout the country.<sup>58</sup> In San Antonio Cañada, this took the form of building bathrooms, standalone outhouses complete with a toilet and sink, for all of the households in the *rancherías* of Cuitlaxtepec and La Lobera. However, there is currently no plumbing infrastructure or running water for any of these to connect to, thus rendering them useless to residents until some future development project.<sup>59</sup> The majority of these new bathrooms sit unused, or have become a storage repository for household items.<sup>60</sup>

While eager to take state resources when offered, San Antonio Cañada seemed also quite content to have state and federal power keep their distance and leave the community alone. What comes through in the archival documentation is that, far from

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<sup>57</sup> Field notes, April 29, 2017

<sup>58</sup> Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, “Informativo Sin Hambre, N.2,” November 2013, [http://www.sedesol.gob.mx/boletinesSinHambre/Informativo\\_02/](http://www.sedesol.gob.mx/boletinesSinHambre/Informativo_02/), accessed April 16, 2019.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Field notes, April 29, 2017.

being the ignorant and backward indigenous folks in need of saviors, San Antoneros shaped their relationships with central power to suit their needs and to extract resources as necessary. There is no question that the community was and is economically impoverished. But, as we have seen and as we will see, they were never the isolated or “closed corporate peasant community” that mid-century state and Church indigenous policy-makers imagined them to be.<sup>61</sup>

### **The Arrival of Padre Tacho**

On November 27, 1980, Padre Tacho, the young indigenous priest, arrived in San Antonio Cañada for his first parish assignment. He had graduated from SERESURE the previous year and had spent almost a year as a deacon in the Mazatec community San Pablo Zoquitlán, working with fellow SERESURE graduate Mario Ordiano on a pastoral team with the parish priest.<sup>62</sup> 1979 and 1980 had been eventful for the newly ordained priest. During the 1979 CELAM meeting in Puebla (Jan 27-Feb 13, 1979), Tacho and a group of his fellow seminarians cut school, an act for which they were later punished, to be present at what they hoped would be a deepened commitment to Liberation Theology on the part of the Latin American bishops.<sup>63</sup> While there, Tacho and his compatriots made it a point to meet the liberationist theologians that, up to this point, they had only been reading.<sup>64</sup> And, in a fortuitous turn of events, Tacho also went to Mexico City and

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<sup>61</sup> Eric Wolf, "Closed Corporate Peasant Communities in Mesoamerica and Central Java," *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 13, no. 1 (1957): 1-18.

<sup>62</sup> Padre Mario was also a deacon at that time, they had graduated SERESURE together; Interview with Anastacio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, Tehuacán, Puebla, May 11, 2017.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Anastacio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, Tehuacán, Puebla, May 9, 2017

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. He specifically mentioned meeting Gustavo Gutierrez, Leonardo Boff, and Clodovis Boff. Many other theologians were also present as “extramural” advisors to various bishops participating in the CELAM meeting. See also, Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*.

joined Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador to concelebrate a mass in the auditorium of the Colegio de México, where students and allies had organized an event in solidarity with Salvadoran exiles.<sup>65</sup>

By March of 1980, Archbishop Romero had been assassinated, and the same fate would befall four churchwomen in El Salvador only days after Tacho arrived in his new parish. As a one who fervently identified with the liberationist current of the Church, Tacho entered San Antonio Cañada as “a young priest with many illusions and much questioning.”<sup>66</sup> On one hand, he was shaken and upset by the violence visited on his ideological fellow travelers. On the other hand, the assassinations, including those visited upon Mexican priests in the preceding years, animated the young priest to deepen and solidify his determination to accompany the poor in all their struggles.<sup>67</sup> In other words, Padre Tacho felt ready to upend the world, starting in his first parish assignment.

In the weeks prior to arriving in San Antonio Cañada, Padre Tacho had finished his diaconate in San Pablo Zoquitlán and had gone back to Tehuacán to speak to Bishop Ayala about his future and to be ordained into the priesthood. Following a modest ordination ceremony on October 4, 1980, Bishop Ayala told Padre Tacho to relax and to be more cautious with his politics, that the complaints that came in from senior priests about Tacho’s marxist ideas made it difficult to keep supporting him. However, Bishop Ayala told Tacho to return in a week and there would be a parish assignment for him.

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Anastacio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, Tehuacán, Puebla, May 9, 2017

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Anastacio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, Tehuacán, Puebla, May 17, 2017. In this and other interviews while capturing Padre Tacho’s personal narrative, Padre Tacho repeatedly employs the word, “inquietudes” in various forms to describe his transition from the end of seminary study into the priesthood. It’s clear that he felt that even the seminary was not liberationist enough, and that the priesthood, in his vision, demanded a radical commitment to social change.

<sup>67</sup> Padre Rodolfo Aguilar was assassinated on March 21, 1977 in Chihuahua and Padre Rodolfo Escamilla on April 27, 1977 in Mexico City, both for their activism. See Barranco, “México, líder en asesinatos de sacerdotes.” Pensado, “The Silencing of Rebellious Priests.”

Upon Padre Tacho's return, they first talked about an assignment in Ajalpan, working under Padre Enrique Diaz, a traditionalist priest some 30 years senior to Tacho. Tacho asked for a different assignment. Bishop Ayala then proposed Tlacotepec de Juárez, a parish with a high percentage of Popoloca indigenous residents, working with a priest, Padre Olea, widely considered even more conservative than Padre Enrique. Padre Tacho also declined Tlacotepec de Juárez. Bishop Ayala sent him away that day and asked him again to return in a week to settle the parish assignment. At Tacho's second visit to receive an assignment, he remembered Bishop Ayala telling him, "You talk a lot about the poor. I did not want to send you to a parish like this, but I will send you to San Antonio Cañada, where the priest is Padre Armando Carrillo. I know he does not live in the parish, so go find him at his house, he lives in Colonia Electricistas, and tell him that you are the new priest."<sup>68</sup>

It seems that Bishop Ayala worried about the ability of the young priest to adequately support himself in San Antonio Cañada. As such, the Bishop financially subsidized Padre Tacho's stint in the parish, employing him as a professor of Náhuatl and of social science classes on the "Mexican Reality" at SERESURE.<sup>69</sup> The economic realities of San Antonio Cañada, as Padre Armando judged them, meant that it was impossible to live there if he was to live and eat with any modicum of comfort.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Anastacio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, Tehuacán, Puebla, May 9, 2017.

<sup>69</sup> "SERESURE: Directorio de formación: Efemérides 1986-1987," DT/SM.

<sup>70</sup> I am relying here on the interview with Padre Tacho. Padre Armando Carrillo unfortunately passed away just as I arrived in Tehuacán but before I had the opportunity to speak to him, on October 19, 2016. Padre Armando had only been ordained a few years prior to Padre Tacho, in 1974, was still quite young, and was, by all accounts, a good and decent priest. He was never part of the progressive current within the diocese, but nor did any of them report that he was antagonistic to their ideological tilt. Instead, I place him in that early generation of *seresurianos*, like Uriel Gómez (from Chapter 4, who left prior to graduating), who were invested in lay involvement in Church projects but did not undertake the political commitments and ideological stances of the liberationist graduates that followed in subsequent years.



Consequently, Padre Armando only ventured into the parish on Thursdays and Sundays, saying as many masses and performing as many paid rites as he could on those days before returning to the city of Tehuacán where he picked up the bulk of his income saying mass and performing rites as a priest-for-hire around town.<sup>71</sup> This did not mean that Padre Armando entirely neglected the parish. He was, for instance, critical in soliciting and gathering donations from Socorro Romero and other wealthy and pious *tehuacanos* to rebuild damaged municipal buildings after a particularly bad storm flooded the stream that ran through the village in the late 1970s.<sup>72</sup> Padre Tacho accompanied Padre Armando on a few visits, making the rounds of the more accessible settlements (San Antonio Cañada, San Esteban Necoxcalco, San Bernardino Lagunas, and Santa Catarina Oztolotepec) while leaving the mountain settlements (San José Rancho Cabras, Cuitlaxtepec, San Isidro Lobera, and San Luis del Pino) for Padre Tacho to venture to on his own. And so, after the brief introduction to the parish, Padre Tacho moved into the rectory at the parish seat in November, 1980.

While Padre Tacho may have arrived with visions of ending the marginalization and exploitation of communities like San Antonio Cañada, he certainly knew enough from his previous pastoral training and diaconate experiences that the priest was only as effective as the parish community allowed him to be.<sup>73</sup> And so, Padre Tacho began the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Don Fernando Amador, San Antonio Cañada, May 11, 2017. I mention Socorro Romero specifically here for two reasons. First, Don Fernando mentioned her by name as someone who donated to help the municipality. And second, she was probably the most generous donor to the Tehuacán-area Catholic Church, having also been critical in raising funds to construct SERESURE and the minor seminary before that. See Hallo de Salto, *Rafael Ayala Ayala*.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 11, 2017. Interview with Ricardo Rivera, April 21, 2017. Padre Ricardo spoke at length about how he employed his training at SERESURE and spent weeks and months just listening and learning at every new parish assignment - knowing that he would not be an effective or respected priest if he disregarded the desires and orientation of his new parish.

slow work of building a pastoral team, trying to organize CEBs (or at least, as they turned out in this parish, informal discussion groups), and shifting the norms of what a parish community could and should expect of their priest. But first and foremost, following the principles of *pastoral de conjunto* and the pastoral training from the seminary, Tacho wanted to form a pastoral team and figure out what the people wanted and needed.

The parish in 1980, since reorganized, consisted of the eight communities listed above, with the parish seat in San Antonio Cañada, and two of which (Cuitlaxtepec and San Isidro Lobera) were only accessible by foot or horse until the mid-1990s.<sup>74</sup> While uniformly poor to outside observers, there were clear economic and political hierarchies in the parish and in the municipality of San Antonio Cañada. As Elizabeth Fitting detailed in her study of San José Miahuatlán, just to the south of Tehuacán, access to water reserves in the region was different than access to ejidal land, which had gone to all heads of household at the time of petitioning and use rights had passed to descendants. And those who owned a greater share of the community water allotment not only had healthier crops, but could also sell excess water to fellow villagers who did not own sufficient water shares.<sup>75</sup> Further, the economic divides between the municipal/parish seat and the mountain were (and are) stark, with the mountain settlements far more reliant on self-sufficient agriculture and periodic trips down the mountain to sell collected piñon

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<sup>74</sup> Encompassed by the parish were San Bernardino Lagunas, Santa Catarina Oztolotepec, San José Rancho Cabras, Cuitlaxtepec, San Isidro Lobera, San Luis del Pino, San Esteban Necoxcalco, and the parish seat of San Antonio Cañada. Cuitlaxtepec and Lobera were only accessible by foot or horse, and they remain the most isolated of the communities within the municipality of San Antonio Cañada. Population figures in the 1980s range from roughly 150 residents in San Isidro Lobera to nearly 1000 residents in San Antonio Cañada.

<sup>75</sup> Elizabeth Fitting, *The Struggle for Maize: Campesinos, Workers, and Transgenic Corn in the Mexican Countryside* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011). This dynamic was also explained to me by Estefana Damian, field notes, February 2017.

(pine nut) from the forest commons than San Antonio Cañada or San Esteban Necoxcalco which had long been enmeshed in capitalist dependencies of the Tehuacán region.

Upon assuming his post as parish priest, Padre Tacho invited a Belgian missionary sister and a Mexican medical doctor to form a pastoral team to more adequately attend to the necessities of the parish communities. Further, employing a team of mostly female catechists drawn primarily from the two largest communities, San Antonio Cañada and San Esteban Necoxcalco, the pastoral teams in the parish embarked upon holistic ministry, addressing spiritual, physical and socio-economic well-being in the parish.<sup>76</sup>

In putting together his team, Padre Tacho benefitted from the organizing work that Bishop Ayala and missionary organizations had already implemented in the diocese. Just off the central plaza in Tehuacán, the Mexican missionary order of Josephine Sisters ran Casa Betania. In their center, they received laity from all corners of the diocese for short term retreats for catechism and pastoral training courses. As the participants remembered many years after the fact, the short retreats involved much singing and worship combined with doctrinal and pastoral classes, so that the participants could return to their parishes and teach youth catechism and family catechism.<sup>77</sup> The family catechism, or *catequesis familiar*, was particularly strong in the Diocese of Tehuacán.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> It is worth noting that the catechists in Oaxaca and Chiapas were predominantly males although there were also model efforts to elevate women into leadership roles in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. See Meyer, Gallardo, and Ríos, *Samuel Ruiz en San Cristóbal*, 12; and Norget, "Knowing Where we Enter," 171.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Estefana Damian and Mauro Damian, San Esteban Necoxcalco, January 28, 2017.

<sup>78</sup> It is still strong in the region. The Bishop of Tehuacán during my research period, Rodrigo Aguilar Martínez, was the head of the Mexican Episcopate's Commission on the Family. The Commission organized marches and protests around the country in the fall of 2016 against the Mexican Supreme Court's decision to legalize same-sex marriage.

In addition to Casa Betania's short-term weekend retreats, the "Rafael Ayala" Cultural Center took young women for five-month-long courses. Built in 1970, opened in 1971, Bishop Ayala invited sisters from the Religiosas Misioneras de San Juan Bautista to run the center. In addition to training the young women to be Apostoles Seglares (Secular Apostles, a layperson active in evangelization and pastoral work, closely associated with Catholic Action), the sisters expanded the courses to include a "*formación integral*," a rounded religious training that encompassed domestic life as well as the religious and cultural spheres. The young women learned songs and prayers; cooking and domestic hygiene; sewing, embroidery, and weaving; reading and writing. As their courses neared an end, the women would work in teams under the supervision of religious sisters in nearby communities to engage in evangelization and pastoral work. It functioned on the premise that the women would return to their home communities and work with the parish priests on pastoral work, ministering to the sick, teaching catechism classes to the youth, among other projects and finally, that they would be good wives in the future.<sup>79</sup>

It may seem contradictory that the religious sisters were training young women to be both religious leaders in the community and preparing them for the domestic sphere. The two roles could and did clash at times, and some particularly high profile laywomen in Mexican catholicism never married, probably precisely because of their duties and responsibilities as religious lay leaders.<sup>80</sup> Yet, the Church in fact imagined that its educational programs made these women into both better catholics and better wives and

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<sup>79</sup> Hallo del Salto, *Rafael Ayala Ayala*, 128-37. Hallo del Salto uses "muchachas" to describe the attendees of the training courses.

<sup>80</sup> Andes, *The Mysterious Sofia*.

mothers, ensuring that religious education of children would begin in the home under the tutelage of devout, active, and properly trained mothers.<sup>81</sup> As Kristina Boylan astutely noted regarding Church priorities in the post-revolutionary era, “religious practice began at and permeated the home, but was ultimately intended to be a public endeavor, with participants engaging in actions visible to their churches and communities.”<sup>82</sup> In other words, even in an era of peace between the Church and state, the defensive posture of the Church meant placing high priority on the perpetuation of “proper” catholicism through women’s bodies, both inside and outside the home.

From the beginning of Padre Tacho’s tenure, attendees of these courses were the youthful core of an invigorated lay community. Changes in the Church itself had certainly encouraged a new vibrancy in the region, as much perhaps as a result of Vatican II as it was of the simple fact that the Church was more present than ever in the villages. Indicative of the new energy were the young priests and seminarians coming out of SERESURE, excited and (mostly) committed to working in indigenous space and listening to the desires of community members. However, the lay catechist training courses themselves were not ideologically radical in any political sense. Padre Tacho and his like-minded colleagues recognized this.<sup>83</sup>

For a clerical cohort oriented toward working with the indigenous, they saw clearly that the courses encouraged women to move toward publicly presenting as mestizas and assuming the “traditional” roles of christian wives and mothers. Quite similar to Tacho’s painful experience in the minor seminary, attendees were to discard

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Kristina Boylan, “Gendering the Faith,” 216.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Mario Ordiano, April 24, 2017.

textile markers of indigeneity and adopt “modern” but modest clothing. Furthermore, all coursework and interaction was in Spanish. Yet even if the lessons taught encouraged a modest and urban Catholicism - an imagined universal Catholicism - the fact remained



*Image 5: The young women of Cuixtlaxtepec who worked primarily with Madre Maria. Undated, mid/late 1980s. Photo courtesy of Rosa Lezama, Cuixtlaxtepec, featured in the top row, third from the right*

that it served the purposes of extending education that indigenous young adults were clamoring for, and it encouraged and empowered community participation and leadership.<sup>84</sup> Some quickly, as in the photo above, redonned their indigenous dress upon return to the community and subverted the full intentions of the religious sisters by only

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Estefana Damian and Mauro Damian.

appropriating certain elements of the education.<sup>85</sup> Others, caught between community “tradition” and the persistence of anti-indigenous discrimination in Tehuacán and other mestizo towns, villages, and cities, many in the generation coming of age in the late 1970s and early 1980s chose to obscure their indigeneity to avoid the persistent anti-indigenous racism.<sup>86</sup> Of the latter, some now regret that choice as a more multicultural Mexico has placed a premium on indigenous language ability and acquisition. Mauro commented that, if he had known Náhuatl and had taught it to his children, it would have opened up additional economic opportunities based on their bilingualism. The fact remains, however, that the modest additional educational opportunities offered by the religious retreats were eagerly attended.

For all the shortcomings that Padre Tacho and his cohort saw in these courses, they persisted in sending streams of young adults to the retreats and to the courses. To begin with, these courses increased interaction between the official Church and the “long neglected” indigenous villagers. The courses focused on the cultural, musical, and moral aspects of Catholicism while side-stepping the elements of social engagement that were being taught in SERESURE. However, they built the nucleus of active lay participants that clergy wanted and needed to undertake an expansion of lay responsibilities. This young generation became the corps of catechists to assist in religious education and engagement. It was precisely these individuals that Tacho would send around the parish, not only bringing the newly learned songs and modes of worship to the chapels in the mountains, but fundamentally building a Christian community with a renewed and

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with Juan Lezama and family, Cuitlaxtepec, February 9, 2017.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Estefana Damian and Mauro Damian.

youthful vigor.<sup>87</sup> One villager remembered that Padre Tacho had sent him for a three-day retreat at Casa Betania, and upon his return, he was tasked with finding other youths who could be sent to subsequent courses and retreats. And so, through peer recruitment, Padre Tacho began building youth “*grupitos*” that, while not necessarily engaging in the social or political questions of the moment, acted as an animating force, bringing music, singing, and a contemporary vibrancy to mass and religious celebrations.<sup>88</sup>

Among those who were slightly older than the growing corps of involved youth was Bonifacia. Bonifacia had attended the five-month course at the Cultural Center in 1978 at the urging of her family and the encouragement of Padre Armando.<sup>89</sup> There, Bonifacia learned reading and writing, weaving, sewing, and cooking. In the religious realm, her group of young women from San Antonio Cañada and subsequent graduates of the program formed their own chapter of a lay organization dedicated to veneration of the Virgin of Carmen.<sup>90</sup> As *Socias de Carmen* (Partners of Carmen), the young women, and their new families as they began to marry, were responsible for sponsoring the annual celebration of the Virgin on July 16 and making regular trips around the parish to give family catechism courses. What that entailed, in Bonifacia’s telling, was “find those who were going to get married, and then it was our job to ensure (*vigilar*) that they were married, that the kids were baptized, ...that the children did their first communion, and

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Mauro Damian, January 28, 2017. Note: Mauro, like a number of the interviewees, spent a few years deeply involved in work with the Church and Padre Tacho and then began to drift away from his involvement to meet working and family responsibilities.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Bonifacia Silvestra Paredes, San Antonio Cañada, February 2, 2017.

<sup>90</sup> The Virgin of Carmen, also known as the Virgin of Mount Carmel, is the patron saint of the Carmelite religious order. In Europe, the Virgin of Carmen is often associated with seaside towns and protects mariners. In southern Mexico, however, the Virgin has taken on other associations, having made appearances during the colonial period in Campeche, Veracruz, Puebla, and Oaxaca. Thus, there remains a particularly strong popular devotion long divorced from the European origins of the Virgin.



confirmation.”<sup>91</sup> In other words, Bonifacia and her young married women colleagues were the ones walking the entirety of the parish, giving religious education, and enforcing participation in Catholic rites and rituals.

Bonifacia was far from the only interviewee to comment on the degree of lay participation during Padre Tacho’s stint in the parish. They communicated to me that it was a high point, eclipsing both previous lay involvement (although Padre Armando had encouraged some to attend the retreats) and the subsequent lay involvement that declined after Tacho was reassigned.<sup>92</sup> This may be true, but I do not have the evidence to quantifiably verify the extent to which lay involvement changed over time. What these narratives indicate, however, is that these particular individuals experienced a change during Padre Tacho’s tenure. They felt invited in, included, and empowered as Catholics and as community members. The extent to which lay empowerment focused on religious education and catechism reflected what one Lobera resident described as a disconnect between folk Catholicism and the “proper” Catholicism that was taught in the retreats in Tehuacán.<sup>93</sup>

Beyond increased involvement, proper education, and lay empowerment, a number of parish members remember a real economic change when Padre Tacho arrived. As mentioned above with Padre Armando, masses and religious rites are performed for a cost. In a church that does not pay priests a salary, their standards of living depend on the relationship with and generosity of the parish community as well as the frequency with

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<sup>91</sup> Interview with Bonifacia Silvestra Paredes, San Antonio Cañada, February 2, 2017.

<sup>92</sup> See also, interviews with Mauro Damian, Toña Damian, Apolinaria Ramos Jinéz, Rosa Lezama.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with Apolinaria Ramos Jinéz, San Isidro Lobera, San Antonio Cañada, Puebla, May 19, 2017. She said: “Si, todos son creyentes y son católicos, pero no. Digamos que no se dedican a estar nada más en la iglesia, no, ellos van cuando creen necesario.” (Yes, all are believers and Catholics, but no. We can say that they are not dedicated to being in the church, no, they only go when they think it is necessary.)

which they perform extra duties. Padre Tacho relied heavily on the rotating unpaid work of families in San Antonio Cañada to ensure that he was fed and that the parish seat was clean. The *mayordomos*, the families who took on a one-year obligation to raise money and organize the patron saint festival, also took on the shared duties of maintaining the parish and feeding the priest for the year.<sup>94</sup> But more importantly, he began charging on a sliding scale, accepting whatever people offered in return for religious services previously unavailable (or only available at great cost). Juan Lezama, one of the elders in Cuitlaxtepec, recalled that Padre Tacho would accept a few pesos, food, or a bundle of firewood as payment whereas previous and subsequent priests charged much more, up to 500 pesos to perform the mass for the patron saint festival and 200-300 pesos for a baptism.<sup>95</sup>

Slowly but surely, Padre Tacho was trying to shift the expectations within the parish as to what parishioners could expect from their priest and what the role of the Church could be in the community. Like his classmates at SERESURE, he reasoned that engagement within the communities in the form of conversation circles, ecclesial base communities, and bible study groups could and would blossom into the socially engaged religious practice that they had imagined from their time in the seminary. Tacho was trying to practice the key ideas that appeared and reappeared in the pastoral training documents and surveys: bringing the Church close to the community (*acercar*) and

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<sup>94</sup> Interviews with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón (number 3) and Bonifacia. Also, interview with Doña Porfiria Montoya, San Antonio Cañada, May 7, 2017 - she said that there were some 17 families, the *mayordomos*, who took on annual responsibilities for feeding Padre Tacho and keeping the Church grounds clean and maintained. On *mayordomías* in neighboring Oaxaca, and the way that the practices encourage wealth redistribution in the community, see Lynn Stephen, *Zapotec Women: Gender, Class, and Ethnicity in Globalized Oaxaca* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Jeffery Cohen, *Cooperation and Community: Economy and Society in Oaxaca* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Juan Lezama and family, Cuitlaxtepec, San Antonio Cañada, Puebla, February 9, 2017; Interview with Rosa Lezama, Cuitlaxtepec, February 12, 2017

molding the Church to indigenous religiosity rather than trying to educate away indigenous religious practices (*encarnación*).<sup>96</sup>

### **A Parish Team and Forming Cooperatives**

Prior to his assignment in San Antonio Cañada, Padre Tacho and Padre Mario had gone to a CENAMI summer course in Mexico City with Padre Mario. At this course, the two of them met the recently arrived Belgian missionary sister, Maria Van Doren. Although she spoke little Spanish, the two of them invited her out to do her mission in San Pablo Zoquitlán. Madre Maria had previously been on mission in India and had asked her superiors for reassignment to Latin America where she believed she would find a more socially engaged Church given the innovations and excitement of Liberation Theology percolating throughout the continent even in the midst of military dictatorships and widespread human rights abuses. While the invitation from Tacho and Mario was well-received, Madre Maria had already committed to some months in Córdoba, Veracruz and she had to turn them down for the moment. While in Córdoba, Madre Maria became quite ill and returned to Belgium to recuperate. But she remained in contact with Tacho and Mario, and agreed to meet them in Tehuacán when she returned to Mexico.<sup>97</sup>

In June 1981, almost a year after they had met, Madre Maria made the journey back to Mexico and went straight to Tehuacán. Between the two recently ordained priests, Mario was already better established with a pastoral team and they decided that

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<sup>96</sup> See, for example, “Presentación del SERESURE para el VIII Encuentro de la pastoral indígena,” April 3-5, 1986, DT.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Maria Van Doren, Skype, March 17, 2017.

Madre Maria would join Padre Tacho in San Antonio Cañada. Upon her arrival in Tehuacán, she first went to stay with Padre Tacho's aunt who was living in Tehuacán and then to the house of some members of the Damian family in San Esteban Necoxcalco. She described her initial experiences as somewhat hectic and frustrating. Before ever sitting down in the parish and getting to know anyone working with Padre Tacho, he took her up into the mountains for a patron saint festival in the village of Santa María del Monte where she was left to figure out what was happening on her own. After the celebrations, she went back to San Antonio Cañada with Padre Tacho and he suggested that she work with the women there.<sup>98</sup> It was here that Madre Maria began the work that would last long past Padre Tacho's tenure in the parish and into the late 1990s. We will return to Madre Maria's parish work below.

The other individual that Padre Tacho worked with in the parish was a lay doctor, Rodolfo Montaña Hernández. He joined in 1983, just out of medical school (Autonomous University of Veracruz) and after doing his social service work in the Oaxacan Mixteca, to help them work on health and education projects. Doctor Rodolfo, as he was affectionately remembered, was only there a few years, and left by 1985, well prior to Padre Tacho's reassignment, but they considered him an integral member of their pastoral team, not only helping with health and hygiene projects, but most often accompanying Madre Maria in pastoral projects in the smaller villages throughout the mountains. Rodolfo's work as part of the pastoral team deepened his personal commitment to the combination of medical and religious service, and spent, after a two-year stint as a professor of medicine in Guatemala, the rest of his life on medical postings

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

in Africa. His first posting was with the Catholic Mission of Ndague in the north of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Subsequent positions took him to Equatorial Guinea and Mozambique before he returned to Puebla around 2010 and passed away from cancer in 2015.<sup>99</sup> One of the nurses who worked as a health promoter in the region remembered working with Dr. Rodolfo. While she and her coworkers at the Tehuacán Centro de Salud (Health Center) would venture out on vaccination campaigns against polio, typhoid, and measles, and nutritional health campaigns, she recalled that Dr. Rodolfo was one of the few doctors who spent significant time in the mountain settlements. In particular, she echoed a number of other interviewees when she emphasized his work with pregnant women and prenatal care, directing specific attention to the elevated rates of infant and maternal mortality that plagued indigenous communities.<sup>100</sup> Further, to supplement the sporadic attention from state medical personnel, Padre Tacho and Dr. Rodolfo stocked a basic medical dispensary at the parish and began to train a handful of (mostly female) laypersons to administer medicine and give injections.<sup>101</sup> One of the women that Dr. Rodolfo helped train went on to get additional basic medical training and now works at the community medical center and dispensary in San Isidro Lobera.<sup>102</sup>

Thus, in the course of three years, Padre Tacho had built out a pastoral team that consisted of both community members and outsiders. By leveraging existing institutions, as socially conservative as some may have been, the cohort of community members

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<sup>99</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 11, 2017.

<sup>100</sup> Field notes, conversation with Maria Guadalupe López García, Tehuacán, May 12, 2017; Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 11, 2017; Interview with Rosa Lezama, Cuitlaxtepec, February 12, 2017.

<sup>101</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 11; Interview with Apolinaria Ramos Jinéz, San Isidro Lobera, San Antonio Cañada, Puebla, May 19, 2017. This stands in stark contrast to rural community suspicion, encouraged at times by clergy, of health and vaccination campaigns documented by Gema Kloppe-Santamaría earlier in the century. Kloppe-Santamaría, *In the Vortex of Violence*.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Apolinaria Ramos Jinéz, San Isidro Lobera, San Antonio Cañada, Puebla, May 19, 2017.

active in Church activities with a vibrant youth contingent increased dramatically during Padre Tacho's tenure. The community members who had received training in Tehuacán to lead catechism courses, youth activities, and singing modern worship songs injected vibrancy into religious life in the parish with the encouragement and support of Padre Tacho. The two principal outsiders working in the parish, Madre Maria and Dr. Rodolfo, corresponded to broader changes within the Church spurred on by the Vatican II era exhortations to missionary activity. Notwithstanding the continued reverberations of Ivan Illich's fierce criticism of foreign missionaries as a neocolonial invasion that was only holding back the Latin American Church, Padre Tacho and his contemporaries throughout southern Mexico seemed to be seeking a means by which missionaries were partners who responded to local imperatives and initiatives.<sup>103</sup>

A refrain often repeated by community members was that Padre Tacho and Madre Maria helped organize cooperatives. During their years in the parish, cooperatives took a variety of forms, but the overarching theme among the incarnations was that the cooperatives marked a foray by agents of the Church directly into the socio-economic organization of the communities. In the initial moments of Padre Tacho's ministry in the

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<sup>103</sup> Ivan Illich, "The Seamy Side of Charity," *America*, January 21, 1967, 88-91. Illich's criticism of the Papal Volunteers for Latin America (PAVLA) program, which was a US Church program despite the "papal" designation, centered around what he perceived to be a reconstitution of colonial relationships in which personnel and resources flowed from the North and dictated the actions in the global South with little input or interaction from local agents. As Illich himself had been tasked with setting up a language and missionary training school in Cuernavaca, Mexico - he had the firsthand experience of dealing with the waves of new missionary arrivals. Although Illich spoke predominantly about North American missionaries, he also referred to conservative European missionaries, Spaniards in particular, who arrived in Latin America with their Franco portraits destined for the parish office wall. At the core of Illich's argument was the paradox that the Church had become an institution with the legitimacy and clout to undertake projects aimed at "social change," but in reality, these programs prevented any sort of substantive social change. That North American donors could funnel their charity through the Church and through the hands of missionaries served a dual purpose: "publicity for private enterprise and indoctrination to a way of life that the rich have chosen as suitable for the poor."

parish, he endeavored to actively listen to his parishioners and find out what they wanted and how he and his pastoral team could help achieve said goals. Sometimes, the achievements were small, but meaningful, as when Padre Tacho assisted Cuitlaxtepec in petitioning the state government for permission to construct a cemetery so that they would no longer have to carry bodies for hours down the mountain.<sup>104</sup> The largest project, and the project that undeniably changed San Antonio Cañada, was the transportation cooperative. The origin story of the transportation cooperative varied depending on who was speaking, but the recollections share the common characteristic that the cooperative was the idea of a group of villagers and they approached Padre Tacho and Madre Maria for help in realizing their project.

One of the founding members, Fernando Amador, who was also the municipal president when Padre Tacho arrived in 1980, recalled that he and his friend Lauro Montoya were talking one day while walking through town. Both of them supplemented their family income as regional merchants, selling predominantly produce, and were talking about how difficult it was for them to get around. They had gone up to sell produce in a village just across the state border in Veracruz and it was there that they saw a similar village with unpaved roads using a big autobus instead of the more common pickup truck with benches placed in the back. When they first went to Padre Tacho with the idea that they pool money to buy a vehicle, Tacho suggested the truck with benches. But Dons Lauro and Fernando insisted that they wanted an autobus because it would fit

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<sup>104</sup> Lino Amayo Muñoz, El Inspector Aux. Mupal., to Governor Guillermo Jimenez Morales, “Asunto: Solicitando la creación o fundación de un PANTEÓN AUXILIAR MUPAL., en esta colonia Ejidal Cuitlaxtepec, Municipio de San Antonio Cañada, Pue. por encontrarnos a 5 Horas de camino al Municipio,” AGEP, Gobernación, San Antonio Cañada, “Acta de Conformidad,” c. 13, exp. 4, February 2, 1981.

more people. By late 1981, working alongside Tacho and Madre Maria, Fernando and Lauro had assembled a group of twelve who would form the cooperative.<sup>105</sup>

Similarly, Padre Tacho remembered the formation of the cooperative in village initiative. However, he emphasizes that his role in the process came about through the collaborative religious work that he was already doing. Both Fernando and Lauro were serving as catechists, and Padre Tacho would periodically accompany for the long walk up the mountain to la Lobera and Cuitlaxtepec. On these walks, they had wide ranging conversations about how to economically improve the community, and in particular, here was where the idea for a transportation cooperative was refined and planned.<sup>106</sup> To move from the initial stages of conversation to actual planning, the proposed entrepreneurs began holding meetings two or three times per week, always with the presence of either Padre Tacho or Madre Maria.

One highly notable aspect of the cooperative was that three brothers from a Protestant family were brought into the cooperative. Now years later, community members tend to talk about this ecumenism positively, as an example of Padre Tacho's ability to unite villagers toward a shared goal of material improvement.<sup>107</sup> But at the moment, inclusion of precisely those who had withdrawn from communitarian aspects of community civic and religious responsibilities was a highly contentious issue.<sup>108</sup> Don

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<sup>105</sup> Interview with Fernando Amador, May 11, 2017, San Antonio Cañada.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 11, 2017, Tehuacán.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Estefana Damian, January , 2017, San Antonio Cañada.

<sup>108</sup> A group of Oaxacan intellectuals has conceptualized the bonds that hold indigenous communities together, i.e. the civic/religious cargo system, the shared work of *faena*, the community assembly, as *comunalidad*. In this, membership and participation in the community is constitutive of indigeneity. And rejection of or withdrawal from community norms and membership, often because of religious conversion, although not exclusively, means abandonment of indigenous identity itself. But further, embrace of the collective responsibilities of indigeneity can be, in and of itself, an instrument of resistance to the exploitative and destructive elements of neoliberal, individualistic capitalism. See Juan José Rendón



Fernando remembers that the patriarch of the Ortíz family came to talk to him one day in 1981, while Don Fernando was still municipal president. The elder Ortíz had brought his three sons along and he told Don Fernando that the three of them should be included in the cooperative because they had already been thinking about buying a truck and here they could all work together and the sons would be the drivers.<sup>109</sup>

Initially, Don Fernando did not want the Ortíz brothers to join the cooperative because “there had always been minor problems (*problemitas*) between the Catholics and the Protestants.”<sup>110</sup> Although he does not know exactly what she said to the Ortíz brothers, Don Fernando credits Madre Maria with the smooth inclusion of the Protestants in the cooperative, apparently negotiating the means of cooperation so that no group would take over and control the enterprise.<sup>111</sup> Beyond supervised cooperation, the interventions of Madre Maria made the enterprise possible. She was able to secure nearly half the money necessary to purchase the first autobus, and she brought in advisors from Mexico City to assure that the formation of the cooperative was in accordance with Mexican law and regulation.<sup>112</sup>

On January 23, 1982, in a meeting at the house of Lauro Montoya, the twelve partners completed the paperwork with the help of Madre Maria’s contact from Mexico City, Ricardo García Arteaga Aguilar. As part of the Mexican legal structure of cooperative enterprises, the paperwork required various committees to run particular aspects of the enterprise, each committee containing three roles: president, secretary, and

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Monzón, *La Comunalidad: Modos de vida en los pueblos indios, Tomo 1* (México, CDMX: Conaculta, 2003).

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Fernando Amador, May 11, 2017, San Antonio Cañada.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 11, 2017.

treasurer. The presence of an Ortíz brother as a secretary or treasurer on nearly every commission while only one serving as a commission president (the Commission on Conciliation and Arbitration) may have been one of the negotiated settlements for their full inclusion while mitigating concerns among the rest that the Protestants would try to take over.<sup>113</sup>

Each of the twelve members, over the previous year or so of discussions and meetings, had been contributing money to the cooperative. As municipal authorities, *mayordomos*, and the sibling protestant converts who were not contributing to village religious life, were certainly among the higher economic strata of the community in their ability to contribute and save for the cooperative. According to Don Fernando, Padre Tacho was the individual responsible for collecting, holding, and noting every contribution until each member had reached the agreed 20,000 pesos necessary for the purchase of their first autobus. Upon signing the constituting paperwork, the cooperative was sitting on \$240,000 pesos that would go toward the purchase, with Madre Maria contributing the remaining \$180,000 pesos needed. Along with Padre Tacho and Madre Maria, the cooperative members went to Veracruz (Don Fernando said Orizaba, Padre Tacho said Cordoba) in early March 1982 to make their purchase.<sup>114</sup> In a comical twist, they soon found out that no one actually knew how to drive their new bus. They somehow managed to get it back to Tehuacán, where Padre Tacho reached out to some of his cousins who ran the transportation company in his home village of San Gabriel Chilac and they agreed to give driving lessons to the new cooperative. After a week or so of

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<sup>113</sup> “Acta y Bases Constitutivas de la Sociedad Cooperativa de Transporte San Antonio Cañada,” January 23, 1982, AH.

<sup>114</sup> I attribute the frankly irrelevant discrepancy to the distance of years since the formation of the cooperative.

driving lessons, Lauro Montoya became the full-time driver for the new transportation cooperative and they initiated four daily round-trip journeys between San Antonio Cañada and Tehuacán.<sup>115</sup>

Reflecting the intertwined nature of religion, civic life, and now cooperative economic endeavors, Don Fernando fondly recalled the inauguration of their new cooperative and new autobus: “Padre Tacho gave a mass for us. We bought flowers, adorned the bus beautifully, blessed it, and then we all went to eat together and celebrate with Padre Tacho and Madre Maria.”<sup>116</sup> Embedded in this memory is an articulation of community religious practices. The presence of flowers for mass in Náhuatl popular religiosity are not just objects of beauty, but represent the vitality of the natural world.<sup>117</sup> They are also, like *mayordomias*, a potentially significant monetary outlay that underlines the importance of the celebratory mass. Further, the meal afterward surely consisted of *barbacoa*, pit roasted goat, a regional delicacy that marks special events. Even with Protestant converts as part of the cooperative, the majority Catholic members clearly could not set aside the rituals of popular religious practice that exchange worship and devotion for protection from misfortune.<sup>118</sup>

Don Fernando’s recollection of relations with Protestant families as “*problemitas*” was, in short, an understatement surely borne out by the fact that tensions resolved by the 1990s and have not similarly reappeared since. However, at one moment in 1985, conflicts between Catholics and evangelical converts in San Esteban Necoxcalco reached

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<sup>115</sup> Interview with Padre Tacho, May 11, 2017, Tehuacán; interview with Fernando Amador, May 11, 2017, San Antonio Cañada.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Fernando Amador, May 11, 2017, San Antonio Cañada.

<sup>117</sup> Porfirio Méndez García, *Servir al mundo indio en su religiosidad: Experiencia y propuesta de evangelización desde la Mayordomía* (San Ildefonso, Hidalgo: U’ene, 2001).

<sup>118</sup> See Vanderwood, *Juan Soldado*.

such a boiling point that state authorities were needed to mediate the violence. San Antonio Cañada's isolation had insulated it somewhat from the spread of protestantism that had been on the rise since at least the 1940s.<sup>119</sup> In 1985, the first physical violence erupted in the municipality over religious conversions. Although there had been a handful of families in San Antonio Cañada itself who had converted to evangelicalism in the 1970s, it seemed that municipal authorities and Padre Tacho had successfully negotiated their continued participation in limited aspects of community life, including the transportation cooperative, enough to placate neighbors to avoid confrontation. However, San Esteban Necoxcalco only saw its first protestant converts in the late 1970s. When a family of six adults refused to participate in community collective work and monetary contributions, it prompted the municipal authorities to denounce the converts:

“[they] who supposedly pertained to the catholic religion passed on to one of the protestant sects and since that date until today they have instigated problems of an economic type, but since this *pueblo*'s progress has always been based in monetary cooperation and collective work (*faenas*) in different aspects, the thing is that these individuals, since their change of religion, have refused to collaborate with their own community, claiming that their religion does not permit it. Knowing that there is no law that requires us to cooperate for our own progress, but at the moment we live in an organized society, in which each member should be interested in the progress of their place of origin and based in the political constitution, when for each work that provides communal benefit more than 50% of the population agrees to participate, in these works, the rest should submit themselves to that decision.”<sup>120</sup>

This is not the first time that problems had arisen between the handful of protestant converts and the rest of the community. In May 1983, the civil leadership of San Esteban called a general assembly of the community to announce the resolution to the ongoing conflict that had been achieved with the mediation of the state government.

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<sup>119</sup> Hartch, *Missionaries of the State*; Ramirez, *Migrating Faith*.

<sup>120</sup> AGEPE, Gobernación, San Antonio Cañada, “Acta de Manifestación,” c. 13, exp. 4, June 23, 1985.

The auxiliary president announced that the individuals who were refusing to contribute to the village's water fund had been fined 500 pesos and their access to water had been restored.<sup>121</sup>

But the 1985 conflict seems to have been the most violent, when community members burned down the home of one of the evangelical families and (temporarily) drove them out of town. Padre Tacho recalls that he had been called away from the parish to give mass at a patron saint festival in another village. He heard the news the following day and rushed back, spoke with the secretary of the diocese, who himself had been in contact with government officials, and worked with state officials based in Tehuacán to negotiate a peace between the factions.<sup>122</sup> In retrospect, he described the conflict as a community in the midst of change, afraid that protestant conversion would destroy the fabric of the community and that they would be left without their Church and their patron saint festival. And, Tacho noted, the increasingly influential conservative lay movement, Escuela de la Cruz (School of the Cross) did not help matters with their teachings on “defending” the Catholic faith against all manner of attacks.<sup>123</sup>

Tensions returned in 1987, when the National Evangelical Defense Committee wrote the Puebla state government to demand protection for their coreligionists in San Esteban Necoxcalco. In the latest complaint, they charged that, once again, the community had cut off the water supply to evangelical households when they refused to

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<sup>121</sup> AGEP, Gobernación, San Antonio Cañada, “Acta de Conformidad,” c. 13, exp. 4, May 15, 1983

<sup>122</sup> Interview with Anastacio Simon Hidalgo Miramón, May 11.

<sup>123</sup> Escuela de la Cruz, founded by a Mexican laywoman in 1895, was only one of a slate of more conservative and spiritually-oriented lay organizations and apostolic movements in the diocese that included the aforementioned Cursillos de Cristiandad, training programs at the Cultural Center, and the Christian Family Movement. Bishop Ayala defied any simple ideological categorization in that he encouraged conservative lay movements and the liberationist orientation of SERESURE. *Hallo del Salto, Rafael Ayala Ayala*, 116-18.

contribute to community funds for the Catholic Church. The complaint listed a litany of abuses committed against the few evangelicals, including three instances of incarceration, violent physical attacks, and arson—all, it charged, instigated by the priest, Anastacio Miramón Hidalgo, Padre Tacho.<sup>124</sup> While I do not think that Padre Tacho encouraged violent assaults on the evangelical converts, priestly instigation was not out of the ordinary, and the National Committee had every reason to think that might be the case here too.<sup>125</sup> And, I suspect that the evangelicals in San Esteban Necoaxcalco included Padre Tacho in their denunciation precisely because of his role in brokering the fragile peace in 1983 and 1985 - a peace that clearly neither side was satisfied with. The documentation in the state archive does not extend past this letter, indicating, in all likelihood, that the matter was resolved. There is still an evangelical church in San Esteban Necoaxcalco, but “resolution” in the late 1980s amounted to, for some of the converts, the same fate as in so many other indigenous communities throughout southern Mexico: exile of the converts.<sup>126</sup>

Although the transportation cooperative disintegrated in the late 1990s, with groups connected by kinship (fictive and real) dividing the assets and running separate transportation services (coordinated so as not to overlap on trips to and from the city), it was briefly a model of inclusion, bridging the growing evangelical/catholic divide, as well as serving as a model for cooperative enterprise that extended beyond this sector. It

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<sup>124</sup> Comité Nacional Evangélico de Defensa, A.C. letter to Javier Moctezuma Barragan, Secretaria de Gobernación de Puebla, AGEP, Gobernación, San Antonio Cañada, “Acta de Manifestación,” c. 13, exp. 4, November 24, 1987.

<sup>125</sup> See Gema Kloppe-Santamaría, *In the Vortex of Violence* on Canoa and Marroquín, *El conflicto religioso*.

<sup>126</sup> San Juan Chamula, Chiapas is one of the more famous examples, but Oaxaca too saw serious bouts of intra-community violence over religious conversion that often resulted in exile of the converts. See Robledo Hernández, *Identidades femeninas en transformación*, Chapter 2 in particular; Marroquín, *El conflicto religioso*; McIntyre, *Protestantism and State Formation*.

is clear that the activist team of religious actors saw cooperatives as a potential answer to the inequities and inequalities of capitalism and neoliberal transformation in the Mexican countryside. It is important to note that, for all of the denunciations of capitalism present in the bishops' pastoral exhortations, most progressive Catholics remained in the "third way" camp, supporting neither capitalism nor communism but attempting to find a humane middle ground.<sup>127</sup> By this logic, the cooperative enterprise, intervening in the "free" market through collective action, was the third way.

### **Madre Maria: The Female Face of the Church**

It was after some two years in San Antonio Cañada that Madre Maria moved further up into the mountains. She had already built relationships with Cuitlaxtepec, Lobera, and San Luis del Pino by traveling up the mountainside at least once per month. She was pleased with the young and energetic corps of lay participants who had established a rhythm in their work in the parish seat and no longer needed her constant presence. Finally, she believed that her Spanish had improved enough that she felt confident to work on her own. In other words, she felt would not be sorely missed if she left San Antonio Cañada to work in the smaller communities of the parish.<sup>128</sup>

To begin with, understanding the work of the Belgian missionary sister requires some background and what led her to isolated settlements in the Sierra Negra. Maria Van Doren grew up in 1930s Belgium in a relatively progressive Catholic family. While she

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<sup>127</sup> See for example, Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, "Nuestro compromiso cristiano con los indígenas y campesinos de la Región Pacífico-Sur."

<sup>128</sup> Unless otherwise noted, this and the following come from interviews with Maria Van Doren, March 17, 2017 and April 7, 2017.

conceded that her father embraced his role as the head of household, he also pushed his two daughters to pursue post-secondary education and supported them in their professional development and endeavours. After finishing university with a degree in humanities, Maria decided to break up with her boyfriend and enter the convent of the Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary because she felt deeply that she needed something more from life, and that she could find that through missionary service. Although she was in Louvain, where the university was training the young cohort of theologians like Gustavo Gutierrez who would be instrumental in shaping Liberation



*Image 6: Undated photo of Padre Tacho (holding the chalice) and Madre Maria (speaking) in Cuittlaxtepec. Photo courtesy of Apolinaria Ramos Jinéz, copy in possession of author.*



Theology, the convent had little contact with the theological innovations percolating in the university.<sup>129</sup>

In the 1950s, the image of the missionary sister still conformed to notions of “women’s work” in health and education rather than involvement in political and social (or theological) questions. However, in the era of Vatican II, these notions were in the midst of change, and a number of women’s religious orders altered their structures, missions, and dress to meet changing times. The Maryknoll Sisters, for example, by the late 1960s, had largely shed the required use of habits, had reverted to their birth names in place of the names assigned to them when they took their vows, and had created an elected leadership council in the place of a singular mother superior.<sup>130</sup> Madre Maria too, after training to be an educator of blind students and serving many years in India at a school for the blind, embraced the new possibilities for women in the Church and petitioned for an assignment in Latin America where she felt she could become more involved in the social and political questions of the day.<sup>131</sup> In a retrospective talk, Madre Maria declared that her primary preoccupation throughout her years in the parish was to improve the situation for women in society and in the Church, even when it seemed that her advocacy in San Antonio Cañada clashed with “tradition” and *costumbre* at times.<sup>132</sup>

And so she moved up the mountain to begin working primarily, but not exclusively, with the women and young women of the scattered mountain settlements.

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<sup>129</sup> On the importance of Louvain for the elaboration of Liberation Theology, see Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology*, 87.

<sup>130</sup> Markey, *A Radical Faith*, 115. For a broader perspective on changing roles for women religious, see Chapters 7 and 8 in Margaret McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013).

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Madre Maria, March 17, 2017.

<sup>132</sup> Maria Van Doren, “Las mujeres en la Iglesia y teología feminista,” paper given at *Celebraciones Seminario SERESURE*, Tehuacán, Puebla, October 2009, personal papers of Madre Maria Van Doren, in possession of Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón.

Madre Maria began in Cuitlaxtepec, where there already was a small chapel, and a room for her to stay in. However, she also dedicated a significant amount of time to La Lobera, which, until shortly before her arrival, had fallen under the jurisdiction of Cuitlaxtepec as an *inspectoría* of San Antonio Cañada.<sup>133</sup> In the late 1970s, the small group of families in La Lobera had been agitating to split from Cuitlaxtepec because of what they perceived as discrimination and exclusion from the decision-making processes of the settlements. Although they anticipated that the process of separation would be difficult, the municipal authorities in San Antonio Cañada actually were quite agreeable to Lobera's petition to secede and form its own *inspectoría*, if only to lessen the responsibilities of the municipal authorities settling disputes between the two.<sup>134</sup> There was some disagreement in the interviews as to when precisely the separation was official, with most dating it to the early 1980s, but the municipal archives in San Antonio Cañada indicated that the *cabecera* recognized La Lobera as separate from Cuitlaxtepec actually in 1978.<sup>135</sup> And so, certainly by the early 1980s, with 23 families, La Lobera was no longer under the authority of Cuitlaxtepec.<sup>136</sup> I surmise that the discrepancy in dates was, in large part, due to Madre Maria's centrality in constructing the religious life of the new *inspectoría*.

In 1982, Madre Maria had worked in La Lobera during Easter week (Semana Santa) and, since there was no chapel yet, conducted meetings and religious ceremonies

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<sup>133</sup> An *inspectoría* is a dependent settlement secondary to the municipal seat. Other states have different terminology, but the municipal seat is generally known as the *cabecera municipal*.

<sup>134</sup> María Van Doren, ICM, and Anastacio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, *El Bautismo en la cultura indígena: Reflexiones de inculturación* (Tehuacán, Puebla, Centro de Derechos Humanos Rafael Ayala y Ayala A.C., 2015), 38.

<sup>135</sup> "Registro Civil, Actas de Nacimiento, Acta agregada de Lobera," Undated, 1978. Municipal Collection of San Antonio Cañada, Puebla. The first birth in La Lobera was recorded in 1979, and someone around that time began correcting other birth records, crossing out "Cuitlaxtepec" and writing "hoy Lobera" (today Lobera).

<sup>136</sup> Van Doren, ICM, and Hidalgo Miramón, *El Bautismo en la cultura indígena*, 38.

under the largest tree near the center of the settlement.<sup>137</sup> One of her first tasks, as she began to contemplate living in the settlements, was to assist La Lobera in building their own chapel. It was not until the mid-1990s that the road winding up the mountain to Cuitlaxtepec and La Lobera was widened enough to drive a truck up.<sup>138</sup> Thus, it meant that each trip up and down the mountain paths was on foot or maybe by horseback, although Padre Tacho had a motorbike that he would ride around to get to the corners of the parish. Yet the small group settlement, with collected savings supplemented by donations that Madre Maria collected via her missionary network, began to buy materials and cart them up the mountain by horse and donkey to begin construction of their chapel.<sup>139</sup> Within the month, they had their own chapel, rudimentary as it was, as an anchor of the new community.<sup>140</sup> One resident, who had married into a family in La Lobera, centered Madre Maria in the religious development of the community. Apolinaria remembered that not only did Maria help obtain materials to build their own chapel, a nodal point amidst the dispersed homes, but she also, in a community assembly, helped pick the patron saint (San Isidro) and brought his image back to the community for placement in the chapel after a trip to Mexico City.<sup>141</sup> In the pantheon of catholic saints, San Isidro is the patron saint of farmers and peasants, and seemed like the apt

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid, also, interviews with Apolinaria Ramos Jinéz, May 19, 2017, field notes

<sup>138</sup> Field notes, conversation with former *presidente municipal* Abraham Tellez Ortíz, San Antonio Cañada, April 29, 2017.

<sup>139</sup> Missionaries from the “developed” world frequently raised money from friends, family, and faithful back home. While I do not know exactly where Madre Maria raised this particular money, the Maryknoll Mission Archives are chock full of fundraising letters from missionaries, sent back to the United States from abroad, pleading for donations for particular projects. See, for example, letters from Maryknoll Sister Mildred (Madre Mili) Payne in Oaxaca to her family and friends in the United States throughout the 1980s. Maryknoll Mission Archives (hereafter MMA), Maryknoll Sisters/Creative Works/Payne, Sr. Mildred/Correspondence/ 1970-1992 Box 14, Folder 8.

<sup>140</sup> Van Doren, ICM, and Hidalgo Miramón, *El Bautismo en la cultura indígena*, 38.

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Apolinaria Ramos Jinéz, May 19.

choice for the community that lived largely by subsistence farming. Finally, Madre Maria was the one who, again with a combination of community contributions and outside donations, secured a bell for the chapel. San Isidro Lobera may have civilly separated from Cuitlaxtepec a few years prior, but it was not until the chapel, the patron saint, and a bell were at the center of the settlement that Lobera could conceive of itself as fully independent and autonomous. No longer did Lobera residents have to walk to Cuitlaxtepec for religious ceremonies in a chapel. And further, the annual celebration of the patron saint festival imbued the settlement with a legitimacy, as important as the *faena* and *servicio comunitario* (collective community work and rotating community leadership service), in defining *comunalidad*.<sup>142</sup>



Image 7: Undated photo, constructing the church bell in San Isidro La Lobera. Photo courtesy of Apolinaria Ramos Jínez, copy in possession of author.

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<sup>142</sup> Interview with Estefana Damian, who commented, “la fiesta patronal es la vida del pueblo.” Rendón Monzón, *La Comunalidad*.

Another group of missionaries, the Basilian Fathers, based in Tehuacán and Caltepec, a Mixtec and Popolocl community in the region, also commented on the centrality of the patron saint festival in the religious life of indigenous communities in the region. They structured their mission work with “the insistence on working through the popular religiosity of the people and acknowledging the value of the feasts and customs which have developed, over the centuries, from the first, and very deeply rooted, evangelization of the Spanish missionaries.”<sup>143</sup> Maria too was very quickly learning the intricacies of indigenous religiosity that structured the cycles of community life. Her experiences in Cuitlaxtepec and La Lobera later became the central focus of her doctoral work in theology at the Graduate Theological Union with additional courses at UC Berkeley. There, her dissertation, since published in Mexico, tackled indigenous conceptions of God, the dualisms that structure the world, and the centrality of Tonantzin, the mother god, in indigenous religiosity.<sup>144</sup> Her interpretation of the duality of mother god and father god as a meditation on gender equality, upending Roman Catholic doctrine, earned her the ire of Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera (Mexico), who insisted that she no longer be allowed to teach in any Catholic seminaries in Mexico.<sup>145</sup>

The work on La Lobera’s chapel was only the beginning of Madre Maria’s time in the mountain settlements. She undertook two other major projects that had lasting impacts on the household and community levels. Like Padre Tacho and corps of

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<sup>143</sup> S. Raphael O’Loughlin, C.S.B., “An Overview of the Basilian Fathers’ Apostolate Among the Spanish-Speaking: Texas - Detroit - Mexico, 1936-1986,” 1986, p. 58, internally published for the Basilian Fathers in Sugar Land, TX.

<sup>144</sup> Maria Van Doren, *Imágenes de dios para nuestro tiempo* (Puebla: Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla, 2009).

<sup>145</sup> Kristien Justaert, “Interview of Maria Van Doren,” *Centre for Liberation Theologies Newsletter*, KU Leuven Faculty of Theology, June, 2012.

liberationists throughout southern Mexico, Madre Maria viewed cooperatives as vehicles to economic empowerment.<sup>146</sup> The fallout from the debt crisis and state austerity was squeezing family livelihoods, even those who mostly lived off subsistence agriculture.<sup>147</sup> The state retreated from the ambitious *indigenista* and rural development programs launched during the Echeverria administration, reducing the outlays that went toward material and programmatic aid to communities like Cuitlaxtepec and Lobera as well as dismantling agricultural subsidies by dissolving institutions like INMECAFE, that had, in this case, propped up coffee production as a central buyer and exporter of small coffee production.<sup>148</sup> As a result, community members increased temporary outmigration to supplement family incomes. While there had long been temporal and sporadic migratory work patterns, often young men and women worked for a few years in the city before receiving their land allotment upon marriage and starting a family, the financial crunch and persistent inflation of the early to mid-1980s forced community members to start working elsewhere.<sup>149</sup> Many ended up in the onyx mines south of Tehuacán, clustered in the municipality of Zapotitlán Salinas.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> One of the most celebrated cooperatives in Mexico emerged in Tehuantepec, organized with the assistance of Catholic activists, as a coffee cooperative that was in the vanguard of the fair trade movement. The Union de Comunidades Indígenas de la Región del Istmo (UCIRI) was founded in 1984 and still operates today. See Horacio Almanza-Alcalde, "UCIRI in Oaxaca, Mexico," *Revista Vinculando*, 2005.

<sup>147</sup> Madre Mili (Maryknoll) in Oaxaca explained in her letters back to the United States how the skyrocketing prices were causing families to go hungry and to undermine her work helping CEBs run small *cajas de ahorro*, community savings banks. MMA, Maryknoll Sisters/Creative Works/Payne, Sr. Mildred/Correspondence/ 1970-1992 Box 14, Folder 8.

<sup>148</sup> Richard Snyder, *Politics after Neoliberalism: Reregulation in Mexico* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 53.

<sup>149</sup> Apolinaria, for example, spent most of her teenage years in the 1970s working as a maid in Tehuacán before she married and settled in La Lobera. Interview with Apolinaria Ramos Jinéz, May 17, 2017, San Antonio Cañada, Puebla.

<sup>150</sup> Van Doren, ICM, and Hidalgo Miramón, *El Bautismo en la cultura indígena*.

And so, she facilitated the formation of two cooperatives divided along gendered lines, that intended to materially and spiritually improve the lives of community members. For interested men and heads of household, Maria and Tacho hired a master carpenter from another town to come and teach the fundamentals of carpentry. After that training, and using the pines common to the mountains, shared tools were available to anyone who wanted and needed to construct furniture for their own homes. And further, the group of community members collectively constructed additional items for the chapels in Cuitlaxtepec and Lobera, such as benches and an altar, to continue improving their chapels so that no community member would continue to sit on the floor during mass.<sup>151</sup>

For the women, Madre Maria secured two gas powered corn mills, one for Cuitlaxtepec and one for Lobera. Prior to the mills, which were disassembled and carried up the mountain by donkey, women in each household were up prior to dawn every day in order to grind the corn, by hand with a *metate*, needed for the household tortillas. Now, pooling community resources to buy gasoline for the mill, the mills not only significantly alleviated the household labor required to grind corn by hand, but they also provided an additional gathering space for women free from male oversight. It was here, similar to spaces provided by CEBs and bible discussion groups, that Madre Maria talked to the women about family life, violence, abuse, and the place of women in the community.<sup>152</sup> And there were moments that resulted in significant friction. One incident, recounted by multiple people, was a moment when a drunk spouse came over to drag his wife away

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<sup>151</sup> Interviews with Juan Lezama, Apolinaria Ramos Jinéz, Madre Maria Van Doren, Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, Estefana Damian.

<sup>152</sup> Interviews with Rosa Lezama, Apolinaria, Maria Van Doren.

from the mill and bring her back home. Shocking everyone, Madre Maria let loose on him, “get out of here, you are drunk. Don’t even think about hitting your wife or I’ll lock you up.”<sup>153</sup> In recounting this, Rosa exclaimed, “and he was afraid of her!”

The corn mills were obsolete within a decade, when, after the 1994 Zapatista uprising, the Zedillo administration embarked on a new round of rural development and brought electricity to the mountain settlements in the mid-1990s. But their legacy, in both Madre Maria’s recollection and in the recountings of the women involved, went far beyond mechanical assistance for domestic labor. They served as nodes where women could gather, discuss their issues, and come to solutions. In a certain manner, the corn mill was the setting for base ecclesial communities, where the women of Cuitlaxtepec and Lobera talked about the issues they faced and, with the help of Madre Maria, discussed how their faith and their religious practice could render solutions. And, as a concrete space where women managed the finances (meager as they were) to buy gasoline and keep the mills maintained, they demonstrated ability and leadership.

Although men were resistant to female encroachment into the economic and religious realms of the community, the “new” roles in expanded pastoral projects became the vehicles through which women took leadership in the religious realm.<sup>154</sup> While impossible to prove a negative, it is hard to imagine that this work did not lay the groundwork for the election of the first woman to political office in the municipality when María Antonia Trinidad Montes Medrano (Toña) became *inspectora* in

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<sup>153</sup> Interview with Rosa Lezama. Estefana Damian also shared similar stories that she had heard about Madre Maria.

<sup>154</sup> Van Doren, ICM, and Hidalgo Miramón, *El Bautismo en la cultura indígena*, 40-41.



Cuitlaxtepec in the early 2000s.<sup>155</sup> Toña said that the previous inspector had approached her and asked her to run in the upcoming election. While that was a bit of a surprise to her, she spoke with her family, the priest, and some other men in the village and they all agreed that she would be well suited for the position based on her religious leadership.<sup>156</sup> And so, as a candidate with the PRD, she ran and won and served three years as the municipal authority.<sup>157</sup> To date, Toña remains the only woman to have served in elected office in the municipality.<sup>158</sup> However, as in the case of Apolinaria, who now functionally runs the medical clinic in La Lobera, female religious and community leadership has taken many different forms besides political service.

### Conclusion

The Catholic answer to the financial crisis, rising inflation, and state austerity largely came down to cooperatives. But it is more complex than that. Through the cooperative format, Catholic activists improvised base ecclesial communities, labored toward building and improving the edifices of religious practice (chapels, pews, and

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<sup>155</sup> The *inspector(a)* position is equivalent to an auxiliary municipal president, elected leader of the municipal dependency.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with María Antonia Trinidad Montes Medrano, Cuitlaxtepec, March 23, 2017.

<sup>157</sup> The Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) is a leftish, social democratic party that emerged from dissident PRI members in the aftermath of the 1988 presidential election.

<sup>158</sup> Margarita Dalton, *Democracia e igualdad en conflicto: las presidentas municipales en Oaxaca* (México, CDMX: Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación and Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2012), examined female participation in Oaxaca under the two electoral systems of balloting or *usos y costumbres*. Although, since the 1960s, fewer than 1% of municipal authorities in Oaxaca have been women, Dalton noted some distinct patterns about where female political leadership does emerge. In particular, she finds that in spaces where the public and the private spheres overlap, the smallest municipalities and dependencies, the direct relationship between authorities and the governed can be conceived of similar to a woman's management of the household, potentially increasing the opportunity for particularly capable women to show their management skills. Further, in municipalities riven with conflict, particularly conflicts regarding traditionalism and modernization, there have been women political authorities who emerged precisely to break and broker the ongoing political conflict between men. Given the diversity of Oaxaca and its 570 municipalities, no single explanation fully accounts for the growth in female political participation, although she identifies patterns in smaller municipalities and situations of conflictive relations.

bells), and fostered a space within which women in the Cuitlaxtepec and La Lobera could hone and demonstrate leadership capabilities and find solutions to domestic and community problems. Importantly, these were all developments that came directly from interaction between Church agents and the faithful. San Antonio Cañada became a space where Padre Tacho, his pastoral team, and young seminarians on pastoral training assignments met, shaped, and were shaped by a reality that did not always correspond to liberationist dreams of upending the systems of exploitation in the region.

Padre Tacho was reassigned in 1987, moving to the south in the Sierra Negra to Coxcatlán. Madre Maria went back and forth between graduate school, teaching positions, and sporadic residence in the parish through to the mid-1990s. Maria, drawing upon her experiences in Cuitlaxtepec and Lobera, wrote her doctoral dissertation, later published as a book, as a contribution to indigenous theology.<sup>159</sup> Similarly, Padre Tacho, in his next parish, began to expand upon his initial steps toward indigenizing religious practice. In San Antonio Cañada, his efforts to indigenize Catholicism were met with mixed results. Many of the individuals I interviewed said that Padre Tacho spoke Náhuatl from that altar, beginning experiments to translate pieces of the liturgy into Náhuatl.<sup>160</sup> However, by the 1980s, Náhuatl as a primary language had long been on its way out, at least in the municipal seat and in San Esteban Necoxcalco below it. The Damian family reported that their parents did not teach them Náhuatl precisely so that they might avoid the discrimination against those who sound and present as indigenous when and if they

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<sup>159</sup> Van Doren, *Imágenes de Dios*, 19-25.

<sup>160</sup> This is still an incomplete project, building a Náhuatl liturgy. Ricardo Rivera is currently on a committee of priests and laypeople who are working on a translation that will be mutually intelligible across as many variations of Náhuatl as possible. Interview with Ricardo Rivera.

went to Tehuacán.<sup>161</sup> And so caught between two linguistic worlds, some did not appreciate the Padre's insistence that an indigenous community that had long been transitioning to "national culture" could reclaim and relearn its linguistic heritage.<sup>162</sup>

Notwithstanding some hesitancy to embrace cultural revival of an indigenous past, those who did embrace the initiative eagerly joined Padre Tacho at the nearly annual summer *encuentros* at SERESURE on *pastoral indígena*.<sup>163</sup> In general, though, the communities seemed pleased and open to Tacho's embrace of their religious practices as evidenced by, for example, San Esteban Necoxcalco inviting Padre Tacho as the first priest to accompany the community up the mountainside to the shrine and the sacred space where the patron saint allegedly appeared many generations ago.<sup>164</sup> And some continued to work with Padre Tacho after his reassignment in the Network for Agents of Indigenous Ministry (Enlace de Agentes de la Pastoral Indígena, EAPI), a loosely organized body that coalesced in 1991 in the aftermath of SERESURE's closure.

San Antonio Cañada, then, in the brief period of the 1980s, constituted a meeting ground for historical processes far bigger than itself. Economic crisis, persistent inflation, and state austerity undermined family economics, poor as they were already, and prompted changes in migration patterns and new links of capitalist dependencies to surrounding towns, industries, and cities like Tehuacán and beyond. While migration to the United States would begin in earnest in the 1990s after NAFTA, it was during the 1980s that the initial wave of migrants from San Antonio Cañada went to "the other side"

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<sup>161</sup> Interviews with Mauro, Estefana, and Toña Damian.

<sup>162</sup> Interview with María Antonia Trinidad Montes Medrano, Cuitlaxtepec, March 23, 2017.

<sup>163</sup> "Reporte: VIII Encuentro de Pastoral Indígena, Seminario Regional del Sureste, Tehuacán, Puebla, 3-5 de abril de 1986," DT.

<sup>164</sup> Interview with Estefana Damian.

to earn for their families.<sup>165</sup> But more common was migration to Tehuacán, Puebla, or Mexico City to find work in the metropoli. Previous patterns of migration had often included stints of domestic labor, particularly for young indigenous women, while men labored in construction or agriculture.<sup>166</sup> In addition to the onyx mines of Zapotitlán Salinas, a nascent textile industry emerged in Tehuacán in the 1970s that drew increasing numbers of young indigenous laborers from their villages in the Sierra Negra. The industry saw continued growth through the 1980s before it spectacularly increased in size following the implementation of NAFTA in 1994.<sup>167</sup> Increased migration and industrial labor only further accelerated long-term processes of assimilation into *mestizaje*, or the “national culture” as the INI anthropologists called in the early 1970s.

And then there were the liberationists, the progressive currents of the Church as embodied by Tacho and Maria, who offered to the community a Church different from that of the past. Padre Tacho and his colleagues often pointed toward the examples they wanted to replicate, like the producer cooperatives like UCIRI in Tehuantepec that both improved the economic standing of indigenous communities *and* reinforced communitarian governing structures.<sup>168</sup> And they tried in San Antonio Cañada, with the transportation, carpentry, and corn-milling cooperatives. However, in paradoxical fashion, the transportation cooperative may have facilitated the links of capitalist dependencies that tied indigenous villagers to migratory patterns for low-wage labor.

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<sup>165</sup> Jose Ambrosio Lezama Cariño and Enrique Domingo Camargo Melendez, “Estudio Socio-Pastoral de San Antonio Cañada,” July 1986.

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Trini, Chapulco, March 24, 2017.

<sup>167</sup> National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, *Cross border blues: a call for justice for maquiladora workers in Tehuacán* (Chicago: National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, 1998).

<sup>168</sup> Almanza-Alcalde, “UCIRI in Oaxaca, Mexico.”

The radical projects of liberation theologies were always based in a tradition of Catholic social doctrine, particularly as it emerged in the early twentieth-century.<sup>169</sup> The liberationist contribution, from a theological and pedagogical standpoint, was to reconceptualize sin as a social and collective problem, and then to allow the faithful themselves to be agents of their own liberation.<sup>170</sup> In the case of San Antonio Cañada and the transportation cooperative, Padre Tacho and Madre Maria studiously followed the innovations within Catholic activism - the cooperative was borne as an idea from those involved, out of long group conversations during pastoral work. But if the radical imaginations of liberationist action hoped to overturn the relations of exploitation between classes, a project like the transportation cooperative reveals some of the contradictions and limitations of this strand of progressive Catholicism. Even while the project unquestionably benefitted the communities as a profitable enterprise for the cooperative members and as a cheaper and more frequent transportation option for those traveling to or from San Antonio Cañada for work or to sell agricultural production, it also meant that San Antonio Cañada became further enmeshed in a regional economy increasingly built on low wages and export capitalism. But this was precisely what the community members wanted, to cut the distance between their community and potential economic opportunities. Even in the exploitative capitalist relations of the nascent neoliberal capitalism, the community members in San Antonio Cañada were protagonists of their own destinies. The community is, undeniably, materially better off today than it

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<sup>169</sup> Calles Barger, *The World Come of Age*.

<sup>170</sup> On sin, see Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*. For “agents,” one can see the pastoral letters from the Bishops of the Pacific South Region, as well as one of the most impactful contributions to this idea of empowerment via Freirian pedagogy and base ecclesial communities from Cardenal, *The Gospel of Solentiname*.

was in the 1980s. This is true for a variety of reasons, one of which is certainly that debt has financed improved living conditions.<sup>171</sup>

And additionally, there was a growing current of *pastoral indígena* that was about to burgeon into indigenous theology. CENAMI, the driving intellectual force behind the regional pastoral *encuentros* over the prior two decades, was now under the leadership of the Zapotec priest Eleazar López Hernández and counted on the assistance of priest and anthropologist Clodomiro Siller. As the 1980s came to a close, they began to expand on the summer *encuentros* at SERESURE that they closely collaborated on and started to organize a series of conferences to systematize indigenous theology. They brought, from across the Americas, theologians, clergy, men and women religious, and laity, to speak about indigenous religiosity and cosmovisions in order to think about shared characteristics as well as the particularities of Nahua theology or Maya theology.<sup>172</sup> Madre Maria, as she began to elaborate on indigenous conceptions of dualism and God, was a frequent collaborator with the CENAMI teams.<sup>173</sup> And thus, out of concrete experiences in communities like Cuitlaxtepec and La Lobera, theologians began to grapple with the multiplicity of theologies in the Catholic world and how indigenous religious cosmovisions, or organic theologies, could inform the greater body of Catholicism.

Lastly, the end of the Cold War was bringing changes that would reverberate far beyond the conflict between the two global superpowers. In 1989, amidst a growing

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<sup>171</sup> Bianet Castellanos, *Indigenous Dispossession*; Han, *Life in Debt*.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Efrén Hernández Maldonado (Sacerdote Maya), Acaxochitlán, Hidalgo, February 21, 2017.

<sup>173</sup> The first international conference on indigenous theology was held in Mexico City in 1990 and published the following year as CENAMI, ed., *Teología India: Primer encuentro taller Latinoamericano, México* (México, CDMX: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, 1991).

independent union movement, Gumaro Amaro Ramírez, the head of the Independent Movement of Maquiladora Women (MODIM), was assassinated. The violence perpetrated against union leaders, many of them indigenous women, forestalled the possibilities of independent and democratic unionism in the textile industry of Tehuacán.<sup>174</sup> The crushing of a burgeoning labor movement, which had been operating with the aid and assistance of progressive clergy and the Rafael Ayala Human Rights Center, coincided with a series of broadsides against progressivism in the Church and beyond.<sup>175</sup> In Tehuacán, Bishop Norberto Rivera Carrera, on orders from Rome, ended the experiment that was SERESURE. The apparent consolidation of neoliberalism, the Washington consensus, the impending shadow of NAFTA, and the demise of an alternative to capitalism seemed, to some observers, to mark the end of progressive options in Mexico.<sup>176</sup> And to the proponents of SERESURE and the liberationist Catholic activism in southern Mexico, the attacks against their institutions and initiatives felt deeply painful. The final two chapters examine the closing of the seminary and the ways in which progressive Catholics in indigenous southern Mexico adapted their actions and activism accordingly, increasingly elaborating an indigenous cultural activism just like Padre Tacho had begun doing in San Antonio Cañada.

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<sup>174</sup> National Interfaith Committee for Worker Justice, *Cross border blues*, 3.

<sup>175</sup> The Human Rights Center was founded by Padre Tacho and others in the mid-1980s as part of the Catholic wave of human rights organizations. Bishop Rivera Carrera did not want to cede the terrain of human rights to liberationists in his diocese and founded a competing organization, the Human Rights Center “Mano Amiga” (Friendly Hand).

<sup>176</sup> John Williamson, “A Short History of the Washington Consensus,” *Law and Business Review of the Americas* 15, no. 1 (2009): 7-23.

## Chapter 6: “Impregnated by a Marxist Cosmivision:” The Closure of SERESURE, 1990

### Introduction

In 1990, after an apostolic visit the year prior, the Vatican ordered that SERESURE undergo a “reorientation” under the sole leadership of Bishop Norberto Rivera Carrera (Tehuacán) to align itself with doctrinal orthodoxy and discard its open embrace of liberation and indigenous theologies. For Padre Tacho, the closure of SERESURE was a “golpe,” a painful blow from the highest echelons of the Church against the work that they had been undertaking for two decades.

However, that is not the end of the story. Even as the Vatican marginalized and repressed the liberationist and progressive currents within the Church, Padre Tacho and his colleagues opened new spaces with varying degrees of (in)formality that continued the cultural and political work among indigenous communities. And further, perhaps paradoxically, the work with the indigenous was affirmed in repeated Church documents. The 1992 CELAM meeting in Santo Domingo produced a final document that reflected the fierce struggle between Church progressives and conservatives. Yet, it managed to retain the “preferential option for the poor,” further endorse CEBs, and added a “special denunciation” of violence against “the poorest groups in society - peasants, indigenous people and Afro-Americans.”<sup>1</sup> In Tehuacán, a 1993 diocesan synod affirmed the Church’s commitment to the indigenous.

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<sup>1</sup> For the summary of CELAM Santo Domingo, see Alejandro Crosthwaite, “Aparecida: Catholicism in Latin America and the Caribbean at the Crossroads,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 28, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2008): 164-65. For the quotations from the final document, see Alfred T. Hennelly, ed. *Santo Domingo & Beyond: Documents and Commentaries from the Historic Meeting of the Latin American Bishops' Conference* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1993), 167.



This chapter and the next examine the contradictory twin processes that marked the Church at the end of the Cold War: conservative dominance that sidelined the liberationist currents, and a deeper participation by Church agents in the flourishing indigenous rights movements. On one hand, conservative rule in the Vatican, in CELAM, and in the Mexican episcopate were ascendant from the mid-1980s. However, even as liberationists were punished, silenced, and reassigned, those same elements of the Church, in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, founded new organizations that embraced indigenous religiosity, affirmed their commitments to defending human rights, and marched side by side with indigenous social movements that demanded multicultural inclusion in the modern state.<sup>2</sup>

These last two chapters ask how progressives in the Church adjusted to the foreclosure of avenues to socio-economic reform with triumphs in the realm of cultural diversity in the Church. In this chapter, I first take a broad look at the violence, physical and institutional, enacted upon liberationists. Liberation Theology produced a long string of martyrs in Latin America, including assassinated priests in Mexico. While not so different in content to the violence visited upon leftist movements, particularly in the era of military dictatorships, murderous violence was always shocking when visited upon the clergy. Institutional marginalization, however, seemed to be more consequential for the liberationists as it was implemented by the very institution to which clergy had vowed

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<sup>2</sup> There is a paradox here that a number of scholars, including Charles Hale and Rebecca Overmyer-Velasquez, have examined. Multiculturalism and inclusion into neoliberalism often meant a tradeoff in which socio-economic reforms disappeared. Charles Hale, *Más que un indio*; Overmyer-Velasquez, *Folkloric Poverty*.

For new organizations, in addition to the Mexican iterations I discuss below, the Andean Superior Ecumenical Institute of Theology (Instituto Superior Ecueménico Andino de Teología) was founded in 1994 to bring together groups across congregational lines who were working on Andean Indigenous Theology. See Josef Estermann, *Teología andina: el tejido diverso de la fe indígena* (La Paz, Bolivia: Instituto Superior Ecueménico Andino de Teología, 2006).

their lives. And so, I recount the closing of SERESURE, placing it properly within a history of physical violence and institutional repression, with particular emphasis on ideological issues at stake for members of the Catholic Church. The following chapter continues after the closure of SERESURE and examines the ways in which the liberationist clergy and lay activists in southern Mexico adjusted to the abrupt loss of institutional support and physical space for their endeavors.

### **Repression of Liberation Theology Inside and Outside of the Church**

The first major broadside against liberationists came in 1984, when Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (future Pope Benedict), head of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published a short treatise, “Instruction Concerning Certain Aspects of Liberation Theology.”<sup>3</sup> In it, and in a widely published book-length interview by Vittorio Messori, Cardinal Ratzinger expounded on the faultlines coursing through the Church and began to solidify the Vatican’s stance toward the “new” theology.

He expressed a certain frustration over the way in which liberation theology presented “an almost irresistible logic... and this total view seems to respond fully both to the claims of science and to the moral challenges of our time, urging people to make Christianity an instrument of concrete world transformations.”<sup>4</sup> However, it did so, Ratzinger argued, by not only employing a “materialist-marxist philosophy, in which history has taken over the role of God,” but also by changing the meaning of key concepts (Hope, Love, Kingdom of God) from the gospel.<sup>5</sup> Yet, by using the language of

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<sup>3</sup> The “instruction” is reproduced in Messori and Ratzinger, *The Ratzinger Report*, 174-86.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 185.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 182-183.

the Church, grounding liberation theology in the tradition of Catholic social doctrine, it was near impossible to point exactly to what made the theology heretical. And so, Cardinal Ratzinger's critique was somewhat simple: that liberation theologies employ a new hermeneutics that uses Marxism to interpret the Bible, leading to unacceptable conclusions over hierarchy and community within the institution of the Church. And these ideas place the "people of God," in a Marxist conception, in opposition to the supposed oppressors, the hierarchy of the Church.<sup>6</sup>

Further, and importantly, Cardinal Ratzinger dismissed ideas that liberation theology was an organic product of the "Third World." Rather, he argued, it only existed because of philosophers and theologians born or educated in the developed Western world, disguising German and French ideas behind Spanish and Portuguese words.<sup>7</sup> As such, he took aim at one of the central premises of the emerging liberation theologies, that classical European theology and philosophy were insufficient to meet the realities of the Third World. And, without saying so explicitly, this seemed to minimize, if not discard, the embrace of multiculturalism in the Church that Vatican II heralded in with *Gaudium et Spes*. However, the cultural question that the emergence of indigenous theology raised was clearly of less importance to Cardinal Ratzinger than the secularizing, anti-authority, and historical materialist marxist positioning of Liberation Theology that meant "political," rather than spiritual, action to build the Kingdom of God.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 180-181.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 186.

The next major broadside against the liberationists was directed at an individual. Leonardo Boff, the Brazilian theologian who was publishing prolifically, was called to the Vatican in 1984 by Cardinal Ratzinger to answer charges of doctrinal heterodoxy for a recently published collection of essays that examined the nature of power and hierarchy within the institution of the Catholic Church.<sup>8</sup> Although the Congregation's proceedings remained secret, the punishment handed to Boff was a period of mandatory silence during which he was not allowed to publish or preach should he wish to remain in the Church.

Boff accepted the silencing and retreated to a Franciscan monastery in Petrópolis even as colleagues and allies were protesting on his behalf. The sense among Latin American liberationists, having first felt the blows of the "Instruction" and the long interview, was that Boff's silencing was "a clear warning to that whole movement."<sup>9</sup> Even as Cardinal Ratzinger released a follow-up letter in 1986, the "Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation," that was slightly more conciliatory toward liberation theology, the messages were clear from the Vatican. The use of Marxist social science and the political commitments that liberation theology entailed were both verboten.<sup>10</sup>

The Vatican's moves against the liberationists were not without precedent. In fact, conflicts over the new theology had been roiling in Mexico since the late 1960s when Iván Illich raised hackles in Mexico and beyond with his fierce critiques of developmentalism, charity, and missionary work.<sup>11</sup> He was, in 1968, called to Rome to

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<sup>8</sup> Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1985), originally published in Portuguese in 1981.

<sup>9</sup> Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> After he published "The Seamy Side of Charity," discussed in Chapter 5, the both CELAM and the Mexican Episcopate began to keep a closer eye on Illich. Bishop Miguel Larrain (Talca, Chile), president of CELAM, wrote to Archbishop Darío Miranda asking him to intervene in Cuernavaca, Miguel Larrain to Darío Miranda, March 18, 1966, AHAM, Base DM, c. 184, exp. 2.

answer questions about doctrinal orthodoxy, particularly over his critiques of bureaucratization of the Church, yet he left largely without punishment.<sup>12</sup> At the request of Pope Paul VI, Illich mostly stopped commenting on ecclesiastical matters, even as he maintained his barrage against the shortcomings and hypocrisies of developmental modernity. As he turned away from critiquing the Church, the Mexican Episcopate largely left him alone even as they (and the state security forces) remained wary of his activities.<sup>13</sup> Illich, by 1976, a few years after he had resigned from active priesthood and concerned over his own participation in the creation of a new institutionalized CIDOC, closed the center and dispersed the collected academics and activists.<sup>14</sup> The closure of CIDOC left a gaping hole in the intellectual space of Mexican progressive catholicism. While no other institution rose to the level of centrality of CIDOC, the collection of human rights centers, documentation centers, pastoral centers, and the arrival in Mexico City of Enrique Dussel all helped to fill the space left by CIDOC's closure. SERESURE also took up some of the space left by CIDOC's absence one under a more progressive ideological constellation of bishops from 1977 until 1985, and became an important space not just for the teaching of liberation theologies, but for the intellectual development of liberation and indigenous theologies during the summer conferences and *encuentros*.

Also in Mexico, theologian José Porfirio Miranda had drawn scrutiny from the Episcopate in the early 1970s when he published his doctoral dissertation, *Marx and the*

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<sup>12</sup> Hartch, *Prophet of Cuernavaca*, 84-90.

<sup>13</sup> The publicly available records on Ivan Illich from Mexico's intelligence agencies span 1967 to 1979. See "Iván Illich," AGN, Versión Pública, DFS, Legajo Único, c. 211; and "Ivan Illich," AGN, Versión Pública, IPS, Legajo Único, c. 211.

<sup>14</sup> Todd Hartch, *Prophet of Cuernavaca*, 143-44.

*Bible* and spoke publicly and repeatedly in favor of the Mexican student movements.<sup>15</sup>

Miranda, however, left the Church on his own terms rather than as punishment, resigning from the Jesuit order. As Miranda walked away from the priesthood, he wrote, “I could not continue to collaborate with a structure that supports capitalism. When I took my vows and the obligation of celibacy, I thought that the clergy would not delay in supporting the revolution of the poor.”<sup>16</sup> And even after his resignation, Miranda continued publishing both in theology and in popular social commentary in the wave of new critical outlets that emerged in the 1970s.<sup>17</sup>

Alongside Porfirio Miranda, other groups of clergy, many of them members of religious orders, affirmed in the early 1970s their affiliations to liberation theology and a commitment to work with and on behalf of the poor. This sparked periodic conflicts within the Episcopate, one of the most notable being the liberationist turn of the SSM. The SSM, which had been part of the Mexican Episcopate since 1920 and was an integral component in encouraging Catholic Action and associated lay movements, undertook a progressive turn in the 1970s that sparked conflict with the Episcopal hierarchy.<sup>18</sup> A simmering conflict over the political orientation of ministerial work between the SSM, led by Jesuit priest Manuel Velázquez, and the CEM’s Episcopal Commission on Social Ministry (la Comisión Episcopal de Pastoral Social, CEPS), came to a head in early 1973

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<sup>15</sup> "Memorándum sobre los acontecimientos actuales" AHAM, Base Can, c. 117, exp. 2, 1970.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in María Adela Oliveros de Miranda, “José Porfirio Miranda de la Parra: Una vida entre Marx y la Biblia,” *Signos filosóficos*, no. 7 (Jan-Jun, 2002): 300.

<sup>17</sup> A selected bibliography that includes numerous columns in *Unomasuno*, *La Jornada*, and *Proceso* appears in Oliveros de Miranda, “José Porfirio Miranda de la Parra.” See Smith, *Mexican Press and Civil Society*, Chapter 4.

<sup>18</sup> See Chapter 1 for SSM midcentury activities regarding rural development.

when the CEM revoked support for the SSM and attempted to evict them from their offices in Colonia Roma.

The conflict had begun in earnest in 1968 when Father Pedro Velázquez, head of the SSM from 1941 until his death in December 1968, fiercely and openly critiqued the Episcopate and Archbishop Ernesto Corripio for their silence and temerity in the face of state violence committed against the student movement in the massacre at Tlatelolco (October 2, 1968). The CEM's open letter from October 9, 1968 called for dialogue between the students and authorities without mentioning the bloodshed at the hands of the Mexican security forces. And although Pedro Velázquez passed away only a few short months after, his brother, Manuel Velázquez, S.J. assumed the role at the head of the SSM and continued in the same direction.<sup>19</sup> Over the subsequent years, the SSM publicly condemned the Diaz Ordaz and then Echeverría governments for human rights violations and the emergence of the Dirty War, and they viewed President Echeverría's "democratic opening" with deep suspicion.<sup>20</sup> And further, the SSM nurtured the nascent liberationist movement within the Mexican clergy, the Priests for the People (*Sacerdotes para el Pueblo*), which emerged in 1972 and immediately met condemnation from the Episcopate.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> María Martha Pacheco Hinejosa, *La Iglesia Católica en la sociedad mexicana, 1958-1973: Secretariado Social Mexicano, Conferencia de Organizaciones Nacionales* (México, CDMX: Instituto Mexicano de Doctrina Social Cristiana, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> Open letter, sent to the CEM, "¿Que es actualmente el Secretariado Social Mexicano?," January 5, 1973, AHAM, Base Can, c. 119, exp. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Little has been written about *Sacerdotes para el Pueblo*, although Jorge Puma, PhD Candidate at Notre Dame is currently working on a dissertation that examines progressive clerical movements. The single article on the organization is Young-Hyun Jo, "Movimiento 'Sacerdotes para el Pueblo' y la transformación socioeclesial en México," *Revista Iberoamericana* 21, no. 1 (2010): 81-104. On the CEM's efforts to marginalize the new clerical organization, see *Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado, Informe Histórico a la Sociedad Mexicana* (México, CDMX: Procuraduría General de la República, 2006), 434.

Although the CEM evicted the SSM from Episcopal-funded offices, their actions and activities had already been conducted under autonomy from the CEM since 1970.<sup>22</sup> And the SSM certainly did not disappear even as the CEM cut remaining financial support for the organization. In fact, the SSM continued to rankle both Church and state, as in 1977 when it intervened on behalf of a parish priest in the Diocese of Torreón. Padre Jose Batarse Charur had been arrested by the police of Coahuila, and the SSM wrote to the CEM insisting that the episcopate come to the defense of the priest subject to political persecution. If not, Manuel Velázquez begged, “we still have not recovered from what the assassinations of Padres Rodolfo Aguilar and Rodolfo Escamilla have meant.”<sup>23</sup> Shortly thereafter, the SSM did finally dissolve, and new organizations sprung up in its wake.

The two Rodolfos perhaps embodied the greatest threat to liberationists in the 1970s and moving into the 1980s: extralegal violence rather than Vatican or Episcopal censure. In the copious popular literature on liberation theology, the themes of persecution and martyrdom ring strong.<sup>24</sup> And they have reason to: the violence visited upon liberationists was indeed extraordinary. As in the case of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador in 1980, not even the highest levels of the Latin American Church hierarchy were safe from right-wing violence.<sup>25</sup> Padre Rodolfo “el Chapo” Aguilar had been murdered two months prior in Chihuahua while organizing

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<sup>22</sup> Open letter, sent to the CEM, “¿Que es actualmente el Secretariado Social Mexicano?,” January 5, 1973, AHAM, Base Can, c. 119, exp. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Manuel Velázquez to the Mexican bishops, May 17, 1977, AHAM, Base Can, c. 117, exp. 2.

<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People*.

<sup>25</sup> For the most recent work on Archbishop Romero, his work, and his assassination, see Matthew Philipp Whelan, *Blood in the Fields: Oscar Romero, Catholic Social Teaching, and Land Reform* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2020).



landless families to build a new neighborhood.<sup>26</sup> And Rodolfo Escamilla S.J. was gunned down by a death squad in Mexico City in April 1977 for his political activism.<sup>27</sup> They were not alone in being targets of paramilitary violence. In extraordinary cases, bishops too were targeted. Sergio Méndez Arceo in Cuernavaca survived an assassination attempt in 1972 by members of Mexico's ultraconservative Catholic secret society, now known as El Yunque (The Anvil), and was attacked with sulfuric acid during an event in Mexico City the same year.<sup>28</sup>

In southern Mexico, Bishop Arturo Lona of Tehuantepec drew the ire of paramilitaries and *guardias blancas* (white guards, landowner armed and operated paramilitary groups), as well as the notice of the state intelligence agencies. As a result, he survived some eleven assassination attempts.<sup>29</sup> Some were straight out the PRI playbook, as in 1983 when a group of "fired-up youths" who were of the "*porro* type" attacked and vandalized the offices of the diocese, broke windows and shouting threats against Bishop Lona Reyes.<sup>30</sup> The use of "*porros*," or hired thugs, often youth, was a well-documented tactic of the PRI that helped the ruling party avoid responsibility.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in 1985, mobs attacked and tried to lynch Jesuit priests serving in the Oaxacan isthmus for being "political clergy."<sup>32</sup> Such brazen attacks on bishops and clergy were a

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<sup>26</sup> Froilán Meza Rivera, "La muerte del padre Rodolfo 'Chapo' Aguilar, a 34 años," *La Crónica de Chihuahua*, March 2011.

<sup>27</sup> Fiscalía Especial para Movimientos Sociales y Políticos del Pasado, *Informe Histórico a la Sociedad Mexicana*, 434; Pensado, "The Silencing of Rebellious Priests."

<sup>28</sup> Barranco, "México, líder en asesinatos de sacerdotes."

<sup>29</sup> Francisco Gómez Maza, "Análisis al fondo: Obispo de los pobres," *Índice Político*, November 2, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> "Clero en Oaxaca," February 13, 1983, AGN, Lona Reyes, Arturo, DFS 1/1 Versión Pública, c. 297, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Pensado, *Rebel Mexico*; Smith, *Pistoleros*.

<sup>32</sup> Press clippings retained in the Jesuit archives, AHPM, Sección IV, exp. 706, Ixhuatán, Oaxaca. "Guerra contra clérigos políticos," *Noticias* (Oax., Oax.), November 12, 1985; "En Ixhuatán, a punto estuvieron de linchar a curas instigadores," *El Informativo Regional* (Juchitán, Oax.), November 30, 1985.

step too far, and elicited condemnation from the CEM even when the perpetrators of violence were ultraconservative Catholic groups themselves.<sup>33</sup>

However, the support for liberationists within the Church may have always been conditional on the public extent of the violence levied against them. The ideological constellation of moderate and progressive bishops in the Pacific South Region from 1977 through the late 1980s meant that, with a few notable exceptions, the bishops generally supported even the most politically radical members within their ranks. While this caused consternation in the Episcopate, the relative autonomy of diocesan governance meant that there was little the CEM could or would do regarding, say, Arturo Lona's support of liberationists in the Diocese of Tehuantepec.<sup>34</sup>

However, the Vatican itself had more tools at its disposal. One of the primary means for the Vatican to change the orientation of the Church on the national level is to appoint bishops of a particular ideological current. In the 1960s, the apostolic delegate Luigi Raimondi had driven changes in the Mexican Episcopate by creating new dioceses and recommending to the Vatican a cadre of new bishops who were mostly moderate, but modernizing and open to social reform driven by modern technologies and sciences. In 1978, Pope Paul VI, shortly before his passing, appointed to Mexico Giralomo Prigione as the new apostolic delegate. Prigione inspired wildly polarized opinions. Among conservatives, he was revered for negotiating constitutional reforms with the Salinas government that, in 1992, legalized and regularized the status of the Church and officially

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<sup>33</sup> On page 20, the bishops denounce the ultraconservative group TECOS, which later became El Yunque, for its violence, particularly against other Catholics, "Panorama de la Iglesia en México: Informe presentado a la Secretaría del Sínodo por los Obispos Delegados," 1977, AHAM, Base Can, c. 84, exp. 10.

<sup>34</sup> On the autonomy of dioceses, see Camp, *Crossing Swords*.

removed the anticlerical provisions and laws dating back to the Mexican Revolution.<sup>35</sup>

Among progressives, however, Prigione’s machinations to marginalize liberationists were nefarious.<sup>36</sup> In the Pacific South Region, it began when Bishop Rafael Ayala passed away in 1985 and a young seminary rector from Durango, Norberto Rivera Carrera, was named and ordained as the new bishop of Tehuacán.<sup>37</sup> Coming precisely at the moment when the Vatican was starting to punish liberationists, the appointment of a young conservative bishop set off alarms for the progressives in the Pacific South Region.

### The Closing of SERESURE

<b>La Puerta Abierta</b>	<b>The Open Door</b>
<p>Ya está cerrando el SERESURE lo convirtieron en diocesano por la visita que nos hicieron y por la carta del Vaticano</p>	<p>SERESURE is now closing they converted it to diocesan because of the visit they made and because of the letter from the Vatican</p>
<p>Han de pensar que estando cerrado van a acabar la vida del pueblo aunque “DE IURE” sea diocesano pero “DE FACTO” somos hermanos</p>	<p>They must think that being closed they're going to end the life of the people although "DE JURE" it's diocesan but "DE FACTO" we are brothers</p>
<p>PERO LA CARTA NO ES LA CULPABLE QUE EL SERESURE ESTÉ CERRADO SON DOS OBISPOS QUE ASÍ QUISIERON EXTERMINAR NUESTRAS ESPERANZAS</p>	<p>BUT THE LETTER IS NOT THE REASON THAT THE SERESURE IS CLOSED THEY ARE TWO BISHOPS WHO WANTED THIS TO EXTERMINATE OUR HOPES</p>
<p>Pero aunque cierren mil seminarios las esperanzas no matarán de estar con Cristo sirviendo al pueblo y así sus luchas acompañar</p>	<p>But even if they close a thousand seminaries they will not kill the hopes to be with Christ serving the people and accompanying them in their struggles</p>
<p>- EX-estudiantes del SERESURE<sup>38</sup></p>	<p>- Former students of SERESURE</p>

<sup>35</sup> Upon his passing in 2016, the Mexican Episcopate released a glowing statement expressing profound gratitude for his “diplomatic service.” CEM, “Comunicado: Sensible fallecimiento de Monseñor Girolamo Prigione,” May 27, 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Madre Maria Van Doren, Skype, April 7, 2017. She describes Rivera Carrera, and Prigione supporting him, as nefarious, or “nefasto.”

<sup>37</sup> Program for the ordination ceremony of Norberto Rivera Carrera, Bishop of Tehuacán, December 21, 1985, AH.

<sup>38</sup> Former students of SERESURE, “La Puerta Abierta,” *Boletín Vereda: Órgano Informativo del Consejo Presbiteral, Arquidiócesis de Oaxaca*, No.3, 1990, 27, AH.

Rumors still float around as to the ultimate reason that SERESURE was closed. Among those who lament its closing, there are two primary speculations: that SERESURE threatened the authority of the Church and that SERESURE threatened the neoliberal project of the state during negotiations over constitutional reform. In the first, the closing was an issue of the Church that resonated on a national and international level. They argue that “the Church of the Poor was a threat to the interior of the ecclesiastical structure, not just for its theology, but for its social and ecclesial practice that sought the transformation of society and Church on behalf of the oppressed and exploited poor.”<sup>39</sup> This argument looked to preceding events, particularly the appointments of outspoken conservatives Norberto Rivera Carrera as Bishop of Tehuacán (1985) and Héctor González Martínez as Archbishop Coadjutor of Oaxaca (1988), as signals that SERESURE was being targeted for closure by the Vatican.<sup>40</sup>

Both bishops arrived at their appointed posts and immediately began to critique SERESURE. Norberto Rivera Carrera, in his first interview with the Tehuacán press, warned against the “ideologically-driven” use of social sciences that “bring us to a distorted vision of our reality and to ruinous contradictions that would undo our pastoral plans.”<sup>41</sup> Although Rivera Carrera did not name SERESURE explicitly in his interview, there was no mistaking his critique of the pastoral methodologies both taught and used in the Región Pacífico-Sur. As such, Rivera Carrera clearly aligned with Pope John Paul II

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<sup>39</sup> Anastacio Hidalgo Miramón, “Contexto en que nació, se desarrolló y fue suprimido el SERESURE,” *Christus* 74, no. 780 (Sept-Oct 2010): 24.

<sup>40</sup> In practice, an (arch)bishop coadjutor is an assistant (arch)bishop named to the (arch)diocese as the future intended successor to the sitting prelate who would be approaching the retirement age of 75.

<sup>41</sup> “La pastoral será de conjunto y de unir fuerzas”: Rivera Carrera,” *El Sol de Tehuacán*, January 22, 1986.

and Cardinal Ratzinger's critiques of Liberation Theology.<sup>42</sup> Rivera Carrera's words were read as messages meant for multiple audiences: on one hand professing agreement with the Vatican in what was an accelerating attack on Liberation Theology, and on the other hand issuing a warning to his fellow bishops and the clergy of the Región Pacífico-Sur that he was not in agreement with the path that they had been charting over the previous twenty years.

The second theory was far more speculative, but it too involves the words and deeds of Bishop Rivera Carrera. During Mexico's long process of democratization and political reform, Church spokespeople often lamented the continued existence of anticlerical articles in the 1917 Constitution. Rivera Carrera had been, as a staunch ally of Prigione, publicly advocating for constitutional reform from the moment he arrived in Tehuacán, calling for democratization while simultaneously assuring that there was no room for partisan politics in the project of evangelization.<sup>43</sup> Through the copious documentation generated by the Dirección Federal de Seguridad, Mexico's intelligence service, it is clear that the state remained preoccupied by the potential political activities of Church actors. Jean Meyer argued that the Church was the single institution with the moral and mobilizing power to challenge the secular state. Thus, government policy throughout the PRI's twentieth century was largely aimed at controlling the threats posed by the Church.<sup>44</sup> Prelates such as Rivera Carrera took it upon themselves to reiterate the apolitical mission of the Church as discussions progressed between the Church and

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<sup>42</sup> Ratzinger, "Instruction on Certain Aspects of the 'Theology of Liberation.'"

<sup>43</sup> Ibid; "Prohibición a la Iglesia Para Participar en Política: Determinantes Declaraciones del Obispo Rivera Carrera," *El Sol de Tehuacán*, June 3, 1989; "La Tiranía del Artículo 130 Tiene que Terminar," *El Mundo de Tehuacán*, August 23, 1989.

<sup>44</sup> Jean Meyer, *La Cristiada: El conflicto entre la Iglesia y el estado, 1926-1929* (México, CDMX: Siglo Veintiuno, 1973), 44-47.

President Salinas. Their efforts culminated in the January 1992 constitutional reforms that legally recognized and restored civil liberties to religious institutions.

In the midst of the debt crisis of the 1980s, it is no surprise that the most potent threat posed by the Church came from the left wing of the Church as the state retreated from its social programs in the name of neoliberal restructuring. Girolamo Prigione, the Apostolic Delegate since 1978, had made it his mission to unify the Church in favor of regaining legal recognition. Marginalizing the Church's outspoken critics of the government became one of his primary activities in the quest for constitutional reform. As seen from the perspectives of SERESURE supporters, the closing of the seminary was one of Prigione's many machinations that also included open advocacy for the removal of the "renegade" bishops like Sergio Méndez Arceo and Samuel Ruiz.<sup>45</sup> Although no definite causation can be established with available documentation, some former *serasurianos* speculate that closing SERESURE was one of the key concessions to the Mexican state in return for legal recognition.<sup>46</sup>

Regardless whether one places the ultimate responsibility on the rightward swing of the global Church or on the negotiations between President Salinas, Prigione, and Rivera Carrera, there is no denying that the closure of SERESURE was a contentious series of events that left uncertain the mission of the Church in southern Mexico. The process began with an apostolic visit conducted from November 29 - December 3, 1989. The seminary had received distinguished visitors over the years, including Delegate Prigione who went to one of the conferences on indigenous pastoral work, but they had

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<sup>45</sup> Anthony Gill, "The Politics of Regulating Religion in Mexico: The 1992 Constitutional Reforms in Historical Perspective," *Journal of Church and State* 41, no. 4 (October 1999): 778.

<sup>46</sup> Manuel Arias Montes, "Obispos del SERESURE 'Padres de los indios' en la Región Pacífico-Sur: Los Obispos—profetas de México en el Siglo XX," *Christus* 74, no. 780 (Sept-Oct 2010): 20.

not yet been subject to an official visit sanctioned by the Mexican Episcopate.<sup>47</sup> The visit was expected, as all the seminaries in Mexico were being inspected as part of preparing for the Bishops Synod on priestly formation that was to be held at the end of 1990. However, while other seminaries were visited by a sole bishop, SERESURE hosted two bishops. A former student believes that this fact demonstrates that “SERESURE was treated in a special manner.”<sup>48</sup>

On November 29, 1989, Alberto Suárez Inda, Bishop of Tacámbaro (later Archbishop of Morelia), and Emilio Berlié Belauzarán, Bishop of Tijuana (later Archbishop of Yucatán), arrived at SERESURE to meet with students, professors, and Bishop Rivera Carrera over the following days. Almost immediately after their visit, the Bishops of the Pacific South Region closed the preparatory course, el Propedéutico, in ETLA, Oaxaca for a “grave crisis.”<sup>49</sup> Without public justifications or pronouncements resulting from the apostolic delegation, supporters of SERESURE were quite concerned about the future of the seminary. Former students immediately responded, sending a letter to the bishops asking for clarification on the reasons behind the closing in ETLA and if it was the first step toward closing SERESURE.<sup>50</sup> Former professors similarly sent a letter to the bishops reminding them that SERESURE embodied a vision and practice of

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<sup>47</sup> On Prigione’s visit: Jesús Mendoza Zaragoza, “El SERESURE en tiempos de primavera y de invierno,” *Christus* 74, no. 780 (Sept-Oct 2010): 36.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>49</sup> Supposedly, the bishops suspended the introductory course in ETLA because of a student revolt led by students from Tehuacán who were disciples of the rector of the Tehuacán minor seminary, Rodrigo Pacheco. Tacho reported that Pacheco remains a notably conservative priest in their diocese and that he worked hard to keep SERESURE students away from the minor seminary to avoid corrupting the youth with “crazy ideas.” Interview Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 10, 2017, Tehuacán. On the alleged student revolt, see Consejo Presbiteral de Oaxaca, “Carta a Arzobispo Adolfo Suárez, Cardenal Ernesto Corripio, los Obispos de la Región Pacífico Sur, a los Visitadores Apostólicos, a los Obispos Mexicanos y Presbíteros de las Diócesis Hermanas, a todo el Pueblo de Dios, 15 de octubre de 1990,” *Boletín Vereda: Órgano Informativo del Consejo Presbiteral, Arquidiócesis de Oaxaca*, No.3, 1990, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Letter from priests/former students to the bishops,” February 14, 1990, AH.

collegiality over authoritarian decision making and that the seminary was oriented toward responding to the needs of the region and working for those with the most need. They warned that changing the mission of SERESURE to a “historical conception of the seminary divorced from reality” would kill the ongoing project and reverse the successes of SERESURE.<sup>51</sup> They were all well aware that similar seminaries in Recife, Brazil and in Tula, Mexico had already been shut down for similar reasons, so they had every reason to be suspicious of what would come.<sup>52</sup>

Within the Diocese of Tehuacán itself, division was brewing. Following the February letter, a second group of priests in Tehuacán felt the need to communicate their loyalty to Bishop Rivera Carrera. Their letter, signed by 42 of the roughly 70 diocesan priests, was abundantly clear in their submission to the dictates of authority. They forcefully declared that the February letter “IS NOT THE FEELING OF PRESBYTERY AS SUCH, AND WE ARE NOT IN AGREEMENT WITH THE LETTER’S CONTENT, NOR WITH ITS AGGRESSIVE, INSULTING, AND DISRESPECTFUL FORM; regarding SERESURE, we are totally in agreement with whatever the Holy See determines.”<sup>53</sup> At stake here, it seemed, was the functioning of the diocese itself. Padre Tacho reported that Rivera Carrera arrived in Tehuacán with a fixed notion that the diocese was brimming with rebellious and subversive priests. As a result, he was never close to the majority of the diocesan clergy.<sup>54</sup> If true, it made sense that the brewing

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<sup>51</sup> Letter from ex-formadores to the bishops, February 15, 1990, AH.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Javier Gálvez Mora, May 2, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla. In Tula, the Jesuit seminary that had transferred from Montezuma, NM was closed in 1979 for reasons that some thought had to do with its progressivism. Interview with Padre José Rentería, San Bartolo Coyotepec, Oaxaca, July, 2015.

<sup>53</sup> Capitalization in the original, Letter from diocesan priests of Tehuacán to Norberto Rivera Carrera, March 9, 1990, AH.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 17, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.



trouble would prompt reassuring declarations of loyalty in order to avoid real or imagined future punishment in the form of undesirable parish assignments.

However, it does not appear that Rivera Carrera responded in writing to his critics or his supporters. Without adequate responses from Rivera Carrera, former students continued sending letters and appeals to powerful figures within the Mexican Church. In June 1990, a group of former students wrote to Bishop Adolfo Suárez, the president of the Mexican Episcopal Conference. They argued that SERESURE had undoubtedly benefited both the Church and the region in which they serve. The seminary had fostered among its graduates “commitment, solidarity, and sincere and unselfish involvement in the life of the people.” They allowed that there may have been errors in seminary training, but that those were not unique and also existed in places like Durango. By including Durango, the former students made an unsubtle criticism of Rivera Carrera, who had been the rector of Durango’s seminary prior to his elevation to the bishopric. They continued that the biggest error committed in the region was precisely the dissolution of fraternity and collegiality under the leadership of Rivera Carrera.<sup>55</sup> The letter writers appealed to the President of the CEM just as the CEM was meeting to deliberate progress on organizing for the Synod on priestly formation. They may have been partially successful in their pleas as the CEM pronounced that SERESURE would continue to operate and that Rivera Carrera was under the obligations of the seminary contract that specified that decisions would be made in consultation with the Council of Bishops, the formation team, and the students.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Letter from ex-students to Bishop Adolfo Suárez, President of the CEM, June 14, 1990, AH.

<sup>56</sup> Hidalgo Miramón, “Contexto en que nació, se desarrolló y fue suprimido el SERESURE,” 24.

### *The Letter*

Despite the CEM's reaffirmation of SERESURE's future and collegiality, the letter arrived from Rome in early August. Sent by the Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, the letter was clearly based on the report, unavailable in the archives consulted, from the apostolic visit nine months prior. The letter confirmed the continued existence of SERESURE as a regional seminary, but it also confirmed the worst fears articulated in the flurry of letters written over the previous months. Rome had dissolved the *consejo de obispos* and vested the entire direction of SERESURE in the hands of Rivera Carrera, simultaneously demanding a series of "corrections" in order for the seminary to continue functioning with the approval of the Vatican.

The letter began with basic data on the founding of the seminary and the number of students that had passed through the seminary in its 20 years of existence. It began its critiques with the formation team, allowing that surely there were capable teachers, but quoted the apostolic visit report: "There are at least three cases of members of the formation team who do not have an adequate theological preparation, and some of them have serious deficiencies in their priestly witness."<sup>57</sup> There was no explanation as to what or whom they referred to.

Regarding the internal structure of the seminary and the organization of students into *colonias* separated by diocese, the letter called for a reorganization of students into interdiocesan communities divided by class year. It claimed that the *colonias* "at times constitute a type of 'ghetto.'"<sup>58</sup> The final critique regarding the students involved

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<sup>57</sup> Sacra Congregatio pro Institutione Catholica, Prot. N. 1056/90/7, August 9, 1990.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



Image 8: Cover page of "Nuestra Palabra: Organo Informativo de la Diócesis de Tehuantepec," Sept.-Oct. 1990, AH. The building broken in half is a rendering of the front of the chapel at SERESURE and the map is of the participating dioceses in the regional seminary.

discipline. The letter noted that the seminary's mission of "self-formation" did indeed have positive aspects in that it promoted a maturity among the students, but that there was a severe lack of discipline. How, they asked, will the students learn to accept the celibate life if they are permitted to come and go as they please during the weekends, participate in parties and dances, and drink alcohol.<sup>59</sup> Discipline had long preoccupied the Church,

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

and it was precisely the disciplinary regime that pushed many students out of the seminary. Fundamentally, the critiques of lax discipline represented the chasm between a pre-Vatican II notion of priestly asceticism approaching the holiness of Jesus Christ and a post-Vatican II notion, certainly not universally accepted, that the priest must be in and understand the modern world while still maintaining celibacy and moderation of earthly pleasures.<sup>60</sup> Further, “discipline” often served as a codeword to euphemize unacceptable sexual activity by seminarians and/or clergy. Without further evidence or corroboration, it is nearly impossible to know precisely what the critiques referred to: same-sex sexual activity among seminarians, sexual activity with people outside the seminary, or, quite possibly, a paranoid conservatism that imagined moral dissolution, linked to progressivism, in all aspects of society.<sup>61</sup>

The most forceful critiques, however, aimed for the ideological foundation of the seminary. The letter argued that the seminary promoted a one-sided priestly identity, “an agent of social change, whose mentality, characterized by a particular ideology, invades all aspects of formation.”<sup>62</sup> Quoting directly from the apostolic visitor’s report, “the students have assumed a committed position and a critical attitude, which intend to transform the social context; but it is using a revolutionary method of class struggle and radical change to oppressive structures.”<sup>63</sup> The visitors concluded that “all of the elements come together to favor an ideological frame of Marxist inspiration that easily leads to political commitments.”<sup>64</sup> Here, the authors got closest to the uneasy relationship

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<sup>60</sup> Serbin, *Needs of the Heart*, 187-92 on rebellious seminarians, Chapter 4 on discipline broadly.

<sup>61</sup> See Cowan, *Moral Majorities Across the Americas*, particularly Chapter 1, for Catholic ultraconservative moral panic.

<sup>62</sup> Sacra Congregatio pro Institutione Catholica, Prot. N. 1056/90/7, August 9, 1990.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

between the Church and state. Although they left the relationship with the Mexican state unspoken, they saw the project in SERESURE as a distortion of what it meant to be a priest. In their vision, the priesthood did not and should not have as its mission the change of social structures through the assumption of political leadership and much less “a secret hope that class struggle can achieve that.”<sup>65</sup> Rather, even as the authors acknowledged the unjust social structures of the region, they advanced a conception of the priesthood oriented toward prayer, evangelization, and the supernatural mystery of spirituality. In other words, the project of SERESURE had advanced an unacceptable vision of the priesthood and the mission of the priest in the modern world that necessarily involved political commitment.

The authors argued that not only were the seminarians insufficiently focused on their spiritual development, but that the spirituality that did exist in the seminary was also incorrect. While there may have been regular liturgical celebrations and daily communion, the visitors noted that the seminarians took excessive liberties with the standard liturgy. “The spiritual life is centered in a liturgy understood as a celebration of the struggles of oppressed people in search of liberation in the historical figure of Christ... including an excessive celebration in the *colonias* of the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran Masses.”<sup>66</sup> The Nicaraguan and Salvadoran Masses were a series of songs meant to accompany a Catholic mass. They took the standard format of a Catholic mass and explicitly introduced a spirituality of liberation in which oppressed peoples worked hand in hand with a “God of the poor” in their path toward liberation and salvation. There

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

were a number of variations in the lyrics, open to local adaptations that focused on specific sectors such as *campesinos* or urban-based Christian base communities. In Nicaragua, the Nicaraguan Mass was prohibited for some time by the ecclesial hierarchy. The Nicaraguan Episcopate picked specific lines, such as “Jesus Christ, born of our people,” and argued that the mass overlooked Marian devotion and denied virgin birth.<sup>67</sup> The Central American masses themselves symbolized a more participatory religious celebration that subsumed the authority of the clergy to a role more as accompaniment of the people in their path to liberation. Thus, this issue was not so much that the students were engaging in liturgical innovation and adaptation to their regional reality, a goal set forth in Vatican II and reiterated in the CELAM councils in Medellín (1968) and Puebla (1979), it was that they were celebrating a mass that explicitly declared a partisanship on the side of the poor and the oppressed.

Regarding the seminary’s academic offerings, the visitors critiqued both the philosophical and theological curricula. To begin with, “the Philosophy that is taught is impregnated by a Marxist cosmovision.”<sup>68</sup> The authors did not explain the evidence behind such a conclusion, only that Marxism was incompatible with Christianity, and that teaching this philosophy did not prepare the students for their subsequent theological studies. The professor who taught philosophy courses that included Marxism shed some light on the possible explanations, even as he defended his teaching of Marxism as necessarily critical and following the doctrine of the Church. Javier Gálvez Mora, a laicized Jesuit and lifelong educator, had been teaching at SERESURE for four years

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<sup>67</sup> José María Vigil and Angel Torrellas, *Misas Centroamericanas: Transcripción y comentario teológico* (Managua, Nicaragua: Centro Ecuémico Antonio Valdivieso, 1988), 5.

<sup>68</sup> Sacra Congregatio pro Institutione Catholica, Prot. N. 1056/90/7, August 9, 1990.

when the apostolic visitors arrived in late 1989. In their interview with him, he said that they sat him down and immediately began to ask him about teaching a class on Marxism.

He answered by explaining that the best way to criticize a philosophy is to know it. Just as he taught Descartes to his students and criticized Descartes's rationalism, he had his students begin with Kant and moved through various texts by Marx and up to some texts by Lenin. Only once his students knew the material did he believe that they could adequately make informed criticism of the material that was complementary to the social doctrine of the Church. However, Gálvez Mora continued, "the entire process was like a trial by the Holy Inquisition... they knew exactly what they were looking for."<sup>69</sup>

After the letter arrived from Rome, Bishop Rivera Carrera called Gálvez Mora to meet him at his office in the center of Tehuacán. Once there, they rehashed the same line of questioning that Gálvez Mora had undergone with the apostolic visitors nearly a year prior. It ended with Rivera Carrera accusing Gálvez Mora of inadequately teaching the Church's perspective on Marxism, and that copies of student notes had already been sent to Rome as evidence against him. Whether this was true or not, the point was moot roughly a month later when the seminary closed its doors and Gálvez Mora was no longer teaching there under the authority of Rivera Carrera.

However, Gálvez Mora still resented the entire process, particularly being accused of inadequate teaching when he was one of the few teachers with a graduate degree. Additionally, Gálvez Mora saw the criticism as stemming from very different perspectives on the utility of Marxist philosophy and social sciences. On one side were those who, encouraged by the openings provided by Vatican II, advocated the inclusion

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Javier Gálvez Mora, May 2, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

of Marxist social sciences as part of a methodological and pedagogical toolbox. On the other side were those, whether embodying a pre-Vatican II mentality or part of the conservative backlash that swept the Church in the 1980s, who perceived the inclusion of anything approaching Marxism as blasphemous.<sup>70</sup>

More fully supported was the claim in the Vatican letter that the “orientation of the theological studies has a clear line of Theology of Liberation.”<sup>71</sup> The bishops in charge of SERESURE had long explicitly opted for a line of studies oriented toward Liberation Theology, although they, as Church hierarchs, strove to remain within the limits imposed by the Vatican.<sup>72</sup> Unlike the case of Marxism and Gálvez Mora’s protestations of unwarranted criticism, nobody denied or argued against the conclusions in the Vatican’s letter regarding Liberation Theology in the seminary, only that the warnings in the letter seemed unnecessary. The authors warned, “be attentive not to accept nor allow yourselves to be imbued by conflicting views of human existence or by ideologies that advocate class hatred or violence, even when they seek to cover themselves under theological epigraphs.”<sup>73</sup>

Finally, the letter criticized the pastoral formation of the students by warning that it should not interfere with the students’ dedication to their studies. There was overwhelming silence regarding SERESURE’s ambitious pastoral training program, the single aspect that most marked SERESURE as different from other seminaries. The entire document made not one mention of the indigenous peoples of the region that the seminary was training future priests to work for and with. Only once, in the paragraph on

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Sacra Congregatio pro Institutione Catholica, Prot. N. 1056/90/7, August 9, 1990.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Javier Gálvez Mora, May 2, 2017, Tehuacán, Puebla.

<sup>73</sup> Sacra Congregatio pro Institutione Catholica, Prot. N. 1056/90/7, August 9, 1990.



visions of the priesthood, does the letter acknowledge the injustice of the regional social structures. It is precisely these glaring absences that made students and former students so upset. They felt as though, as Javier Gálvez Mora articulated, the apostolic visitors arrived with a mission, knowing exactly what they were looking for in order to fundamentally alter the nature of SERESURE.<sup>74</sup>

In the end, Rome had followed through on exactly the fears that the flurry of letters sent since the apostolic visit portended. Rome vested the entire direction of the seminary in the hands of Bishop Rivera Carrera, although it conceded that it would be in the best interests that the seminary remain a regional venture between dioceses. As the students and professors began to arrive to start their school year, a sense of disillusionment and disappointment hung over the institution. It would not be long before the students manifested their anxieties and displeasure with the steps that Rome had taken.

### **The Protest**

Among the first responses were open letters directed to Bishop Rivera Carrera and to the bishops who conducted the apostolic visit the year prior. Published in the fall issue of the Oaxacan archdiocesan bulletin, the archdiocesan presbyterial council (an advisory council of priests in the Archdiocese of Oaxaca) shared their letter refuting the Vatican letter point by point. They began by arguing that a three-day visit was hardly sufficient to understand an “experience, reality, and situation” far different than the regional realities of the visiting bishops. Further, the way in which the visit was conducted devalued the

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<sup>74</sup> Conversation with Padre Tacho, November 9, 2016, Tehuacán, Puebla.

efforts of the founders of SERESURE and the atmosphere of episcopal collegiality. Rather, the proposed changes to the seminary do a “disservice to the region and to our local Churches.”<sup>75</sup> Their argument, based in Church documents, largely boiled down to an accusation that the severe criticism of SERESURE in the Vatican letter was based on misinformation and was an effort dating back years to contain the more progressive aspects of seminary training. They, as others had before, conceded that SERESURE was far from perfect, but that “there is not a single ideal seminary or history.”<sup>76</sup> They denied the charge that graduates were assuming positions of political leadership and defended the liturgical innovation as reflecting and celebrating the life of the people, just as the early Christians did.<sup>77</sup>

The Oaxacan priests invoked and emphasized precisely that which the Vatican letter obscured, the existence of a regional indigenous reality that demanded accommodation, accompaniment, and solidarity from the Church. Simultaneously, the Oaxacan priests advanced a vision of the Church simultaneously global and local, in which Catholics in Rome and southern Mexico worshipped the same holy figures and abided by the same doctrine, even as they reserved the right to celebrate the liturgy as they saw fit and to actively “fight for the Reign of God and his justice, which collides with a reality of injustice and oppression.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Consejo Presbiteral de Oaxaca, “Carta a Arzobispo Adolfo Suárez, Cardenal Ernesto Corripio, los Obispos de la Región Pacífico Sur, a los Visitadores Apostólicos, a los Obispos Mexicanos y Presbíteros de las Diócesis Hermanas, a todo el Pueblo de Dios, 15 de octubre de 1990,” *Boletín Vereda: Órgano Informativo del Consejo Presbiteral, Arquidiócesis de Oaxaca*, No.3, 1990, 27.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 29.

Published in the same issue was an open letter from the SERESURE faculty to the bishops of the region as well as Bishops Suárez Inda and Berlie Belausarán, the visitors who wrote the initial report. In comparison to the Oaxacan priests, the formation team struck a much more conciliatory tone. They thanked the visitors for spending time at SERESURE and for the Vatican's suggestions of how to improve the seminary. But they too questioned the process: they doubted the ability of the visitors to judge in three days a 20-year process; they argued that concerns were not communicated to the formation team in order to immediately begin improvements; and they charged that some, but not all, of the bishops of the region were informed outside of official channels that changes would be demanded.<sup>79</sup> They defended themselves against the vague accusations of inadequate academic preparation and priestly virtue by pointing out that members of the team were selected by the bishops precisely because of their academic preparation and that it must have been a recently disciplined student who complained about particular professors.<sup>80</sup> Just as Gálvez Mora explained, the team felt that their professional abilities were being unjustifiably attacked to accomplish a predetermined conclusion.

By the end of October, the students began to organize in the same way many Mexican students prior to them had, by planning a public march. They sent letters to priests and allies, informing them that although the seminary technically remained regional, by law it was now diocesan and under the sole control of Bishop Rivera Carrera. The change in leadership had "caused much bewilderment and many changes within the seminary, including clear signs that he will take us on another path, another

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<sup>79</sup> Equipo Formador del SERESURE, "Carta a Excmos. Sres. Obispos del Consejo Episcopal del SERESURE, 12 de Septiembre de 1990," *Boletín Vereda: Órgano Informativo del Consejo Presbiteral, Arquidiócesis de Oaxaca*, No.3, 1990, 17.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

line of formation very different to that which the Seminary has had for 20 years, not to mention the confusion that reigns in the entire region about the Seminary.”<sup>81</sup> But the purpose of their letter was not just to inform, it was to invite potential supporters to a public “pilgrimage” from the seminary to the Cathedral in the center of Tehuacán for a day of fasting and collective prayer.

It was no coincidence that they chose November 16 as their day of action. It was the first anniversary of the assassinations of Jesuit priests at the Universidad Centroamericana in San Salvador.<sup>82</sup> By picking this date, the students were clearly signaling which side they were on. They both commemorated the martyrs and denounced the violence. Standing against the Bishop of Tehuacan, and by extension, the Vatican, the students proudly aligned themselves with the particular Latin American Catholicism that provoked murderous violence by military regimes across the continent, particularly against rural and indigenous communities in Central America.<sup>83</sup>

The faculty opted not to participate in the march, but they collectively signed an open letter indicating that they supported the students, 95% of whom were participating.<sup>84</sup> Point by point they recited the history and orientation of SERESURE, and that for twenty years “the line of studies and clear option for the poor based in the Magisterium, has led it to be the target of constant questions and, on occasion, open attacks.”<sup>85</sup> They pleaded

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<sup>81</sup> Letter from Alumnos de Teología to Padre Anastasio Hidalgo Miramón, October 31, 1990, AH.

<sup>82</sup> For a first-person account of the extralegal state violence perpetrated against the Church in El Salvador, and specifically at the UCA, see Lucía Cerna and Mary Jo Ignoffo, *La Verdad: A Witness to the Salvadoran Martyrs* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014).

<sup>83</sup> See, for broad journalistic accounts of repression against progressive Catholics, Penny Lernoux, *Cry of the People*.

<sup>84</sup> “Comunicado del equipo formador del Seminario Mayor de Tehuacán (ex-SERESURE) a la comunidad diocesana de Tehuacán y a las iglesias particulares de la región, con motivo de la procesión realizada en esta fecha,” November 16, 1990, AH.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

for the public not to believe, based on “distorted” media coverage, that the changes to the seminary were merely superficial. Rather, they warned, such changes promised “practically the termination of a 20 year experience of ecclesial communion.”<sup>86</sup> And so, while they would not participate in the procession and the day of fasting and prayer, they fully supported the students who were doing so, knowing the consequences, to let the truth about the fate of SERESURE be known and to commemorate the Jesuit priests murdered one year prior.

And so the students marched. Roughly one hundred students and supporters began at the seminary on the morning of the 16th.<sup>87</sup> After an initial prayer, they mourned and remembered the “martyrs of El Salvador: Ignacio Ellacuría y compañeros.”<sup>88</sup> As they marched the kilometers from the seminary grounds on the outskirts of the city and into the city center, they prayed together, reciting the rosary as they walked. Upon reaching the cathedral in the center of Tehuacán, they found that Bishop Rivera had closed the cathedral doors to the public and would not permit its use for the activities planned by the seminarians. They improvised, and in the central plaza in front of the cathedral, the seminarians once again remembered and mourned the martyrs, and spoke about the “relevant problems of the [Pacific South] region.”<sup>89</sup> From there, in a procession to perform the “stations of the cross” (*via crucis*), the “pilgrimage” made “a march with chants around the principal streets of the city.”<sup>90</sup> They returned to the space in front of the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> “Polémica por el Cierre del Seminario del Sureste, Procesoión de Protesta de Estudiantes del Seminario Diocesano,” *El Sol de Tehuacán*, November 17, 1990.

<sup>88</sup> Flyer, “Solemne procesión por el cierre del ‘SERESURE: Orden del día,” November 16, 1990, AH.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> María de Jesús Garrido, “Crisis religiosa en el seminario de Tehuacán,” *El Universal*, November 17, 1990.

cathedral for songs, prayers, and speakers, to recount the process of SERESURE's closure and refute Bishop Rivera's assurances that only minor changes were happening. They read letters of support and solidarity that had come in from base communities, from religious orders, from diocesan priests, and from their own professors at SERESURE.<sup>91</sup> And after giving thanks and prayer, the seminarians ended their day of prayer and fasting and returned to the seminary.

The day after the march, on November 17, 1990, Bishop Rivera Carrera cancelled classes at SERESURE. He wrote a letter to the bishops who had once been part of the Council of Bishops, although they now had no control over the direction of the seminary, to inform them “of **the public demonstration and the occupation (*plantón*) and fast**, that during a day SERESURE celebrated in front of our Cathedral church.”<sup>92</sup> More than anything else, Rivera Carrera was preoccupied over who had organized the protest, and he reasoned that pausing the seminary would give him and the other bishops time to apportion responsibility and make the “corresponding decisions.” He wrote, “the protests were held under the responsibility and initiative of a group that is difficult to fully identify, in the area of Theology, and with the participation and support of almost all of the students.”<sup>93</sup> Due to the secrecy of the students, Rivera Carrera complained, it was practically impossible to figure out who the ringleaders were. Therefore, he asked each bishop to meet individually with their own students and with an advisor. He asked that,

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<sup>91</sup> Collection of letters and cards in support of SERESURE, November 1990, AH.

<sup>92</sup> Emphasis in the original, Letter from Bishop Norberto Rivera Carrera to fellow bishops, November 17, 1990, AH. The *plantón* is an integral part of Mexican social movement repertoire, and generally connotes an occupation of space (like a central plaza) or a blockade. On its long use as an annual negotiating tactic by the teachers' union in Oaxaca, see Lynn Stephen, *We Are the Face of Oaxaca: Testimony and Social Movements*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

following those meetings, that the bishops “only send to this Seminary, which will remain at your disposition, the students least responsible [for the protest] and who expressly show in writing a petition for reentry and the desire to accept the Basic Standards for the Priestly Training in Mexico and the orientations and dispositions that the Holy See has communicated to us.”<sup>94</sup> In other words, Rivera Carrera would brook no dissent and made it clear that students who were not prepared to accept the new orientation of the seminary would no longer be welcome.

Almost immediately, both Bishop Lona and Bishop Ruiz responded to Bishop Rivera Carrera. Arturo Lona’s letter was more conciliatory, reporting that he had spoken with his students and the personnel from Tehuantepec that worked at SERESURE. The students took full responsibility for their actions, forthrightly affirming that they had indeed undertaken a procession and a day of fasting and prayer, and they understood that “some acts, imprudent on their part, gave rise to various interpretations.”<sup>95</sup>

Bishop Samuel Ruiz, however, after some opening pleasantries, rather diplomatically communicated that he thought that Bishop Rivera was acting rashly and overly harsh. If indeed nearly all of the students had taken part in the event, Bishop Ruiz posited, then “I think that signals the convenience of a dialogue with them and with others who could clarify what happened, to determine those responsible for participation in an act that does not appear excusable in your judgment.”<sup>96</sup> Ruiz then reminded Rivera of seniority, history, and experience, saying that he had reached out to his fellow

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Letter from Arturo Lona Reyes, Bishop of Tehuantepec, to Norberto Rivera Carrera, Bishop of Tehuacán, November 19, 1990, AH.

<sup>96</sup> Letter from Bishop Samuel Ruiz to Bishop Norberto Rivera Carrera, November 20, 1990, AH.

“founding bishops of the REGIONAL Seminary of the South East.”<sup>97</sup> As a group, “as a conclusion we intend to give you, your eminence, on whom [the seminary] ‘de jure’ depends, following the cited documents, and the trajectory of the Seminary, the following petition: Let our students finish the first semester, so that we can take steps for them to continue their formation in our diocesan major seminary, whose activity we had transferred to Tehuacán when the Regional Seminary started.”<sup>98</sup> Lastly, and specifically noting that he was not condoning or excusing the actions of the students, Ruiz questioned Rivera’s description of the entire event. He said:

We judge that the events cannot be classified as what today we would call a ‘*planton*,’ attentive to the intentions of the participants, the things that they did and the way in which it unfolded.<sup>99</sup> (And a *planton* itself is not reprehensible as a mechanism of expression or of clarification). The request, with the recitation of the rosary, the prayer, the fasting, the pilgrimage, that an Institution revert to an ecclesial communion based in the participation in the decision and less in juridical compliance that does not replace the unity with charity; they are not objectionable things.<sup>100</sup>

Bishop Rivera did not immediately agree to the requests from the fellow bishops, presumably still trying to determine the seminarian ringleaders for exemplary punishment. In the meantime, the seminarians remained at SERESURE and the standoff between them and Bishop Rivera intensified to the point that it was covered in the Mexico City press. On November 18th, the seminarians began to refuse supplies and foodstuffs from the diocese “to show that they could survive without the help of the

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>99</sup> The *planton* is an integral part of Mexican social movement repertoire, and generally connotes an occupation of space (like a central plaza) or a blockade. On its long use as an annual negotiating tactic by the teachers’ union in Oaxaca, see Stephen, *We Are the Face of Oaxaca*.

<sup>100</sup> Letter from Bishop Samuel Ruiz to Bishop Norberto Rivera Carrera, November 20, 1990.



bishopric of the city.” They argued “that the faithful, at the root of the conflict, had taken upon themselves the task of sending enough food for the institution.”<sup>101</sup>



Image 9: No identified author, flyer, November 1990. DT, Cancillería, SERESURE

Further, while one segment of the laity was supplying the rebellious seminarians with foodstuffs, another portion of the Tehuacán laity, as evidenced by the flyer above, not only had access to the precise language of the Vatican’s letter but was disseminating the accusations in order to finally end the liberationist experiment. In all likelihood, the traditionalist and conservative lay organizations of the diocese,

like the Christian Family Movement, were the allies of Bishop Rivera in the campaign to rein in SERESURE. The traditionalist lay movements certainly had their coreligionists in the press. The same outlets and writers who, for years, had been railing against the “red

<sup>101</sup> María de Jesus Garrido, “Se niegan miembros del Seresure-Tehuacán a recibir alimentos; respaldo de la comunidad,” *El Universal* (México, CDMX), November 22, 1990.

bishops” and who would later accuse Samuel Ruiz, the liberationists, and the Jesuits of fomenting the Zapatista uprising, pounced on the censure of SERESURE to enumerate the “deviations” of the liberationist currents. In one trilogy of articles by María Ángeles Fernández, a frequent critic of the progressive currents in the Church, she charged that the rebellious seminarians refused to be celibate, that a “black hand” was guiding the protests, and that the liberationists devalued priestly virtues.<sup>102</sup>

Facing a refusal of the seminarians to fully accede to the changes ordered, Bishop Rivera again decreed the closure of the seminary on November 23. That evening and into the following day, it was completely shut down and the students “began to abandon the Regional Seminary of the Southeast... with the idea of not returning.”<sup>103</sup> Rivera took a firm stance and refused, again, the petitions from his fellow bishops to allow their students to finish the semester before deciding how and where to continue their seminary studies. Instead, he put out a press release reiterating his stance that he would only permit students to return if “they are disposed to studying in conformity with the norms of the Church.”<sup>104</sup>

### Conclusion

Once the dust settled, only six students remained. The rest had left, returning to their home dioceses, or leaving the seminary altogether. The six remaining, according to the news reports, met with Bishop Rivera, re-enrolled in their studies, and promised to abide by the Bishop’s guidelines.<sup>105</sup> In sensational fashion, the conservative press

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<sup>102</sup> Ma. Ángeles Fernández, “El celibato, incólume factor del ministerio;” “Habr  expulsiones; hay ‘mano negra;” and “Se despreciaban las virtudes sacerdotales,” *El Heraldo de M xico*, November 19, 1990.

<sup>103</sup> “Sin alumnos el Seminario Regional del Sureste,” *El Sol de Tehuac n*, November 25, 1990.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in “Eminente Cierre del Seminario Regional,” *El Sol de Tehuac n*, November 26, 1990.

<sup>105</sup> “Abandonan este fin de semana el total de instalaciones,” *El Sol de Tehuac n*, November 25, 1990.

celebrated the victory. With provocative headlines, *El Herald* exclaimed that “Various bishops of the Southeast challenge dispositions from Rome,” and “The nonconformists, they should leave, warns the CEM.”<sup>106</sup> But more importantly, it was clear in public statements that the CEM fully supported Bishop Rivera and his hardline stance vis-a-vis his fellow bishops and the students. Bishop Javier Lozano Barragán of Zacatecas (later named Cardinal by Pope John Paul II in 2003), president of the Episcopal Commission for the Doctrine of the Faith, affirmed in an interview that the Church was assuredly not a democracy. If anyone was upset with the orders from Rome and the decisions of Bishop Rivera, they needed to remember that “the only valid” path is that decreed by the Vatican, “not by a majority of votes.”<sup>107</sup>

Embedded in Bishop Lozano Barragán’s affirmation of Bishop Rivera’s leadership was a not-so-subtle disavowal of the collegial structure, the Council of Bishops, that had governed the seminary for the past twenty years. Following the arrival of Bishop Rivera, the meetings of the bishops had clearly become more contentious as the ideological camps clashed over the direction of the seminary. But further, in a brash statement that bore little resemblance to observable reality, Bishop Lozano Barragán commented how “a group of priests ‘alienated and traitorous’ try to yoke the indigenous and the poor in a system of ‘hunger,’ of misery and without future, just as the countries in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have done. ‘They have a lust for power, searching for hierarchical positions at the cost of the success of the poor.’”<sup>108</sup> In other words, even if we ignore the editorialization by María Ángeles Fernández with her comparison to the

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<sup>106</sup> Ma. Ángeles Fernández, “Desafían varios obispos del sureste disposiciones de Roma,” and “Los inconformes, que se vayan, advierte la CEM,” *El Herald de México*, November 26, 1990.

<sup>107</sup> Ángeles Fernández, “Los inconformes, que se vayan, advierte la CEM.”

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

Soviet Union, Bishop Lozano Barragán leveled a charge that the liberationists were only using the indigenous and the poor to further their own quest for power within the Church, and presumably, within society as well.<sup>109</sup>

That a commission president of the CEM would make such a claim indicated the degree to which the ideological tides had turned in the course of a decade. The liberationists, buoyed by their victories at the CELAM meeting in Puebla (1979), had involved themselves in the pressing social questions of the day, railing against human rights violations, the devastating effects of economic crisis and neoliberal structural change, the persistence of *caciquismo* and corruption, and stepping in to minister to the droves of refugees fleeing military violence in Guatemala. Yet, after a decade of conservative consolidation of power under Pope John Paul II, mediated by Cardinal Ratzinger, and implemented in Mexico by the apostolic delegate Giralomo Prigione, the closing of SERESURE struck at the heart of the socio-political programming of the liberationists.

However, there was a certain sense that the opposing sides were talking past each other. The ascendant conservative faction focused almost exclusively on an imagined insidious marxism that “impregnated,” or permeated, all aspects of progressive Catholicism. The use of “impregnated” was no accident. It rendered marxism, or threat thereof, as a damaging force, like water that seeped in and inundated the purity of proper spirituality. And the progressives, and even the moderates, were left frustrated, accused of an imaginary threat that bore little resemblance to observable reality. But most

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<sup>109</sup> See Cowan, *Moral Majorities across the Americas*, for similar ultraconservative broadsides divorced from observable reality.

frustrating to them was that the accusations entirely ignored the direction that liberationism had taken in southern Mexico. Here, there was no revolutionary uprising like Nicaragua. The meetings between liberationists and the indigenous communities they served had transformed their activism and outlook to something else. Catholic activists were at once agitating for improved socio-economic conditions, of course, but they were pairing them with a clamor for indigenous rights and a multicultural pluralism that recognized and supported indigenous catholicisms. In the wake of SERESURE's "reorientation," the liberationists in Tehuacán and beyond would try, formally and informally, to recreate the spaces for intellectual and pastoral innovation that SERESURE had previously facilitated.

## Chapter 7: The First Misa Náhuatl

### Introduction

Buried in the chaos of SERESURE's closure were questions about the physical and intellectual space that SERESURE had provided for the series of conferences and *encuentros on pastoral indígena*. The glaring absence of SERESURE's pastoral training program from the Vatican letter indicated to the *seresurianos* that the apostolic visitors, Rome, and perhaps Bishop Rivera himself, did not fully understand the work that was being done there and what it meant for the Church's way of being in the world in southern Mexico. While much ado was over the process of the closure, the end of "collegiality," the accusations of Marxism, and liberation theology, it seemed that only the proponents of SERESURE were clamoring over what the closure meant for the Church's work with the indigenous. The primary concern for Bishop Rivera and his allies was a question of obedience, authority, and doctrinal orthodoxy.

This final chapter explores the ways in which the closure of SERESURE, embedded in the broader marginalization of liberationists in the Mexican Church, opened new paths and spaces for catholic activism. Many of the liberationists in southern Mexico continued into the realm of indigenous rights and indigenous cultural revitalization. Others, including Padre Tacho, found themselves adjacent to and part of clandestine revolutionary movements. And a few of the aggrieved left the Church, reasoning that the Rivera Carrera faction was too powerful in the institution. But most significant, I argue, was the way in which liberationism in southern Mexico, as a result of 20 years of work

with indigenous peoples, found real success in making catholicism itself more multicultural and participating in the flourishing of indigenous rights and cultural revival.

I open with the creation of a new network for clergy, men and women religious, and lay activists who were involved with indigenous ministry: The Network for Agents of Indigenous Ministry (Enlace de agentes de la pastoral indígena, EAPI). I demonstrate how, even as discussions for the new network began prior to the closure of SERESURE, EAPI was in fact a product of SERESURE's closure and an attempt to create new spaces for interdiocesan coordination and sharing of best practices.

I then return to Padre Tacho and his colleagues to show how the turn toward indigenous cultural activism emerged in the Diocese of Tehuacán. From Coxcatlán, Padre Tacho and his fellow priests in the region spearheaded the organization of a "Dia de la Raza" 1992 protest that marched from the Nahuatl villages of the Tehuacán valley and Sierra Negra to the outskirts of Tehuacán to commemorate 500 years of indigenous resistance. The 1992 march and the additional aspects of Padre Tacho's involvement in *pastoral indígena* help us further understand the directions in which liberationist elements of the Church turned following the Vatican's crackdowns on Liberation Theology. And finally, I close the chapter with a discussion of the linkages between progressive catholics in southern Mexico and the clandestine revolutionary movements operating in the region. Taken together, as the revolutionary option appeared to fade from the realm of possibility, new forms of activism to counter the changed circumstances under neoliberalism emerged, setting the stage for the social movements of the twenty-first century.

## The Formation of EAPI

In the Oaxacan archdiocesan bulletin, the students wrote out a timeline of events leading to the closure of SERESURE and the consequences of the closure.<sup>1</sup> They argued that Bishop Rivera's decisions were "an action that sought to stop the organization of our suffering people who search for more just conditions; work that they have tried to concretize in the *encuentros de Pastoral Indígena* that took place in SERESURE."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, a letter from Jesuit seminarians expressing solidarity with the SERESURE seminarians affirmed, "we know that the studies in SERESURE are strongly tied to the destiny of the indigenous peoples of the Southeast region. We think that an intervention in a Formation Center like yours will bring negative consequences for the pastoral accompaniment of these peoples."<sup>3</sup>

Another priest, a SERESURE alumnus, wrote a very personal letter to Bishop Rivera from Temaxcalapa, a Nahuatl community in the Cañada Morelos municipality due north of Tehuacán. Contained within the seven handwritten pages were some questions that struck at the core of how the two sides were failing to understand the other. He wrote, "the Church has been concerned that the Gospel should be incarnated in the [indigenous] cultures, to do that it is important to train autochthonous agents, especially priests. SERESURE was in a moment of flourishing vocations and a high percentage of indigenous young men and you know how many from your diocese. Isn't this an affront

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<sup>1</sup> Comunidad de alumnos (community of students), "Breve reseña histórica y crónica sobre el cierre del SERESURE," *Boletín Vereda: Órgano Informativo del Consejo Presbiteral, Arquidiócesis de Oaxaca*, No.3, 1990, 6-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

<sup>3</sup> Letter from the Comunidad Interreligiosa de Estudiantes del Instituto Teológico to the Queridos Hermanos estudiantes del SERESURE (dear brother students), México, CDMX November 13, 1990, AH.



to the indigenous cultures (and people)?”<sup>4</sup> Jorge Pastor Salvador revealed the central disconnect. Those who sought to close or change SERESURE narrowly focused on the accusations of marxism, while those who celebrated the institution looked to the pastoral experiences and accompaniment of indigenous peoples in their struggles as broadly defined, be they socio-economic, political, cultural, or religious. As such, the role of religious agent took on divergent definitions. In the conservative traditionalist perspective, the religious agent was to prioritize the religious and spiritual realms over all else. The progressives and liberationists, however, as this project has demonstrated at length, saw in religious agents the responsibility to use the Gospel as a means to “respond to and walk alongside the necessities of the people.”<sup>5</sup> And SERESURE had provided the academic, theological, and most importantly for its proponents, pastoral training to work with the indigenous.

The sudden removal of physical space and institutional resources supporting national, regional, and diocesan cooperation on *pastoral indígena* left a vacuum of sorts. SERESURE had been the physical space and infrastructure that supported the myriad meetings, conferences, seminars, summer courses, and retreats dedicated to *pastoral indígena* and the emerging *teología india*. SERESURE’s role as a space of contact between indigenous catholic laity and the core of theologians and clergy in the midst of developing a corpus of indigenous theological thought had been nearly as central to its importance as its role as a seminary itself. However, such an attack on the orientation of the Church in southern Mexico prompted quick action by the aggrieved. The Alliance of

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from Jorge Pastor Salvador, Temaxcalapa, Cañada Morelos, Puebla, to Bishop Norberto Rivera Carrera, December 13, 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Letter from CEBs Tehuacán to the Bishops of SERESURE, February 15, 1990, AH.

Indigenous Ministry Agents (Enlace de Agentes de Pastoral Indígena, EAPI) was one of the projects that immediately arose to fill the sudden absence.

The meetings and correspondence had begun as soon as it appeared that SERESURE was in potential danger. Padre Tacho and his colleagues were asking themselves what they should do if SERESURE indeed was going to close. Their answer, in part, was to create a new space modeled on the informal networks that they had already been part of for years, like the alumni network of ex-seresurianos.<sup>6</sup> At a 1989 meeting in Etna, Oaxaca of the Network of Priestly Solidarity (Red de Solidaridad Sacerdotal, RSS), the first ideas for EAPI took shape.<sup>7</sup>

Indigenous pastoral work was not the primary focus of the RSS. The network had been active across Mexico since the 1970s, born out of the dissolution of the SSM when it ran afoul of the CEM. Out of the ashes of the SSM, and the closely-related *Sacerdotes para el Pueblo*, the RSS brought together a collective of priests involved in the social issues. As one participant described it, they were on the fringes and margins of mainstream pastoral priorities, working with *campesinos*, shantytown residents, some university students, sweatshop workers, and helping organize popular savings, consumption, and production cooperatives.<sup>8</sup> In essence, this network of socially active priests was a model for the loose organization that those involved in indigenous ministry wanted to create.

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<sup>6</sup> In the following year, 1991, the *ex-seresurianos* held a meeting in Santa Maria Coapan, the Náhuatl community bordering the southern edge of Tehuacán, where they discussed evangelization and the spiritual and material commitments with the “unprotected classes.” “Importante ‘encuentro sacerdotal,’ abre este día en Santa Maria Coapan,” *El Sol de Tehuacán*, April 9, 1991; “Volver hacia los pobres no debe confundirse con la práctica del marxismo: 40 sacerdotes,” *El Universal*, April 10, 1991.

<sup>7</sup> EAPI, *La flor de la palabra: Memoria del primer encuentro nacional* (Ixhuatlancillo, Veracruz: Privately published, 2001), 6-7.

<sup>8</sup> Jesús de la Torre (parish priest in Diocese of Torreón), “Encuentro nacional de Red de Solidaridad Sacerdotal,” *Milenio*, Aug 15, 2015.

Following the RSS meeting in Etna, Oaxaca, the priests who proposed the new space for sharing best practices came together in Mexico City at CENAMI in February 1990 to formalize their ideas. The events that would lead to the closing of SERESURE were already well in motion, with the letters of support and concern flying across Mexico trying to discern what would become of the seminary. The closure of the preparatory course in Etna in December 1989 only lent further urgency to their planning.

In Mexico City, the group managed to put together a tentative program, set for February 1991, and came up with their first theme and a name for the new group: EAPI. Linguistically, the use of *enlace*, or alliance (or union or fellowship), was quite important regarding how they imagined the new group. Rather than an organization, an association, or a network, EAPI would instead be a series of linkages between, across, and among the diverse regions of indigenous Mexico. It would, they hoped, operate without a directorate but with rotating coordinators in each participating diocese and archdiocese. In this manner, EAPI sought to borrow from forms of indigenous organizing and communality in which authority is vested on a rotating basis by the community itself.<sup>9</sup> That the coordinators would only be priests was an issue left untouched, even to this day. But in spite of this apparent contradiction, EAPI also concertedly took as its mission to increase lay indigenous participation in the sharing of best pastoral practices and the future endeavors of EAPI.<sup>10</sup>

This form of organizing EAPI accomplished two things at once. First, EAPI imagined itself to be the inheritor of the *pastoral indígena* meetings that had been

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<sup>9</sup> See Rendón Monzón, *La Comunalidad*.

<sup>10</sup> EAPI, *La flor de la palabra*.

happening, with the help of CENAMI, in Tehuacán almost annually since 1970. It thus drew on an existing past, all of the intellectual, clerical, and lay participants who transitioned from the conferences to EAPI gatherings, and deepened a commitment to incorporating indigeneity into the church itself— a concrete step toward legitimizing and putting into practice the ideas of an *iglesia autóctona* that had been forefront in discourse from people like Bishop Samuel Ruiz and Eleazar López Hernández for decades already.

Second, EAPI's informality also distanced the practitioners of *pastoral indígena* from hierarchical control. If the Church itself was in the midst of a “cleansing” that claimed SERESURE as a casualty in the enforcement of orthodoxy, an informal network that relied on community/parish organization and generosity could avoid the imposition of hierarchical control. They still relied on the good will of bishops who permitted the involvement of their priests, or at least refused to prohibit involvement.

In early February 1991, mostly diocesan clergy converged on Zongolica, Veracruz for the first national *encuentro* of EAPI. While many of the organizers were graduates of SERESURE, those who were not had certainly been in frequent contact with *seresurianos* through the *encuentros* and CENAMI summer courses.<sup>11</sup> Their first theme was indigenous symbology—an exploration of indigenous symbols, their meanings in indigenous cosmovision, and their syncretic application in indigenous catholicisms. The idea behind the first round of programming was that they could bring together theologians, clergy, and laity to discuss and discern the ways in which indigenous cultural heritage continued to structure the governance and religious practices indigenous

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with Anastasio Hidalgo Miramón, May 17, 2017.

communities. Or, one priest argued, “indigenous symbology is so important that only through understanding it can we comprehend the pueblos that we serve.”<sup>12</sup>

The *encuentro*, its workshops, and its academic and historical presentations focused almost exclusively on Nahua symbols drawn from the region (Sierra Zongolica) and from the codices preserved from the initial decades of colonial contact in central Mexico.<sup>13</sup> For Zongolica, the individual most responsible for transcribing and disseminating indigenous religious symbology was Padre Porfirio Méndez García. One of the founding members of EAPI, colleague and collaborator of Padre Tacho, Méndez García put together the collection of Nahua symbols predominant in the Zongolica region for the first EAPI meeting, and he later published on the significance of *mayordomías* for structuring and perpetuating indigenous cultural and communitarian life.<sup>14</sup> He argued not only for the importance of understanding indigenous religious practices as a means of evangelization, but conversely argued that the lessons learned could transform the modern world.<sup>15</sup> In a recent interview, he outlined, “the indigenous project puts its flowers at the disposition of the entire world, to construct, together with all peoples, a society more humane; and it also offers to the Church its spiritual and theological heritage, that will enrich the Church, and transform all of us.”<sup>16</sup> In other words, just as SERESURE in the late 1980s was imagining how indigenous communitarian structures could inform the organization of the seminary itself, the founders of EAPI too questioned

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<sup>12</sup> EAPI, *La flor de la palabra*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> “Símbolos y su significado en el decanato de Zongolica,” in EAPI, *La flor de la palabra*, 33-46; and “Taller de lectura e interpretación de Códices Indígenas de México,” in EAPI, *La flor de la palabra*, 47-75.

<sup>14</sup> Méndez García, *Servir al mundo indio en su religiosidad*.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 189-91.

<sup>16</sup> Agustín García Márquez, “Las mayordomías: atisbos a la situación actual,” *Diario El Mundo* (Orizaba, Ver.), July 6, 2019.

not just how the Church could better serve the indigenous, but how indigenous structures and traditions could counteract the most destructive tendencies of neoliberal capitalism.<sup>17</sup>

Although the first meeting was predominantly about Nahua cosmology and symbols, the attendees spanned southern and central Mexico. Nahuas arrived from Tehuacán, Guerrero, Puebla, Zongolica, and Tulancingo, Hidalgo. Also represented were Zapotecs (Sierra Norte and Isthmus of Oaxaca), Mixtecs (Guerrero and Oaxaca), Tlapanecs (Guerrero), Hñäh`nu/Otomi (Mezquital and Toluca), Mazahuas (Toluca), Huicholes, Coras, and Tepehuanes from the Nayar, Zoques and Tzotzils (Chiapas), and Mixes and Mazatecs from Oaxaca. Each group arrived prepared to share their particular struggles and concerns. The participants from Tulancingo, the Mezquital Valley and Toluca, for instance, shared that their primary concerns involved migration and loss of indigenous cultural identity.<sup>18</sup> The Mixtecs from Oaxaca added that they wanted to build knowledge of their “origins so that we are not ashamed of ourselves and so that we do not lose what is ours.”<sup>19</sup>

Others shared the strengths of the pastoral work in their home parishes and dioceses. Oaxaca, for example, had the Diocesan Center for Indigenous Ministry of Oaxaca (Centro Diocesano de Pastoral Indígena de Oaxaca, CEDIPIO) and an ally in the archbishop, Bartolomé Carrasco, who was supporting work throughout the state. The Zoques and Tzotzils from Chiapas shared the work of the indigenous catechists, one of the central pillars of Bishop Samuel Ruiz’s pastoral program, as well as the socio-economic work in the diocese in the form of cooperatives, human rights defense,

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with Enrique Camargo, March 15, 2017, Camargo especially highlights the ways in which participants have challenged the exploitation of *cacicazgos* in the sierra negra.

<sup>18</sup> EAPI, *La flor de la palabra*, 9-10.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

commissaries, and conscientization.<sup>20</sup> In other words, even if the theme was historical and symbological in nature, the political connotations were always present, even at the lowest point for liberationists and their allies in the aftermath of SERESURE's closure. And work in future years often tackled the socio-economic and socio-political challenges that indigenous communities were facing. The 2005 theme for the national *encuentro* that was held in Xochimilco, CDMX (Nahua territory), was "Nomads of the Third Millennium: Indigenous Migration."<sup>21</sup> Participants discussed the factors that were driving migration, the consequences of migration, and what could be done so as to counteract the destructive effects on indigenous cultures that migration sometimes wrought.<sup>22</sup> And in 2011, under the theme "Proyecto indígena," the meeting started with the objective "to recognize the active resistance of our peoples, to the invasion [colonization], the wars of political independence, the revolution and to neoliberalism, to value the validity and promote the indigenous project."<sup>23</sup> In other words, EAPI asked a central question about how indigenous history and indigenous practices had faced the challenges of the past and would face the challenges of the present and the future.

CENAMI remained involved in the EAPI *encuentros* as it had in the SERESURE *encuentros*. It often sent a representative to give a talk on a specific topic regarding indigenous theology, or to assess the work done during the meeting, as Padre Clodomiro

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 10-11.

<sup>21</sup> EAPI, *Nómadas del tercer milenio: migración indígena* (San Ildefonso, Hidalgo: U'ene, 2006). Xochimilco is famous for the Mexica/Aztec agricultural technologies of floating islands, chinampas, in the shallow lake bed. It was once the proverbial breadbasket of Tenochtitlán/Mexico City. Matthew Vitz, *A City on a Lake: Urban Political Ecology and the Growth of Mexico City* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 9-32.

<sup>23</sup> EAPI, *Proyecto indígena: Memoria, resistencia, compromiso y esperanza* (San Ildefonso, Hidalgo: U'ene, 2012), 4.

Siller did for the first national *encuentro*.<sup>24</sup> But CENAMI itself, under the direction of Padre Eleazar López Hernández, was moving away from the everyday involvement in indigenous pastoral work and more toward nurturing the nascent indigenous theology movement. Padre Eleazar located the roots of indigenous theology in the prior work done in *pastoral indígena*, that the former would not have existed without the latter. But he saw the two as different.

Padre Eleazar celebrated the monumental steps taken within the Catholic Church since Vatican II, and noted that there is clear evolution in *pastoral indígena* over time as shown through the CELAM documents. Medellín (1968), for example, urged Church action for the indigenous because the indigenous were still conceived of as out-of-time, and stuck in a static backwardness and poverty. Puebla, however, saw indigenous peoples as historical subjects, rather than merely objects, with whom the Church owed dialogue over evangelization and the Gospel.<sup>25</sup> Santo Domingo (1992) was yet another step forward, outlining that the Church no longer saw indigenous just as “the poor,” but as peoples with their own identities, possessing rich heritage that formed the foundation of Latin American identity, and who carry “the seeds of the word.”<sup>26</sup> However, there remained traditionalist strands of *pastoral indígena* in which the indigenous remained objects upon which the rich or powerful should “act in favor of” in order to improve the lot of the poor and marginalized.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> EAPI, *La flor de la palabra*.

<sup>25</sup> Eleazar López Hernández, *Caminar de la pastoral indígena y de la teología india en América Latina* (México, CDMX: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, 2008), 3.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 4-10.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 5.



Indigenous theology, however, asked different questions about indigenous heritage and knowledge. José Llaguno, Bishop of the Tarahumara (and longtime ally of Bishops Samuel Ruiz and Arturo Lona), commented, “Indigenous theology, which has always been present but never sufficiently valued, is a vein of life that, by irrigating better conditions not only for indigenous peoples, but also in the Churches, will be a new source of rejuvenation and vitality for all.”<sup>28</sup> Similar to the concepts that EAPI was trying to grapple with on the ground - how indigenous cosmovisions and religious practices could extend beyond the indigenous community and into the world—indigenous theology was asking how indigenous religiosity, as concretized through dialogue and workshops, could enter into dialogue with other theologies, whether they be theologies of other groups, Latin American theology, or Christian theology as a whole.<sup>29</sup>

Padre Eleazar and CENAMI took this challenge and organized the first Latin American conference on Indigenous Theology. It met at a difficult moment, September 1990, right as the SERESURE closure was unfolding. It brought together, however, representatives from Protestant Churches, and participants, theologians and activists, from all Latin American countries save El Salvador, Colombia, Argentina, and Uruguay. The Ecuadorian contingent, Ediciones Abya Yala, a publishing house in indigenous studies, anthropology, and theology connected to the Salesian University (Politecnica Salesiana University) in Cuenca, Ecuador, became key partners with CENAMI and co-published subsequent compilations that arose from meetings and conferences.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> José Llaguno, “Presentación,” in *Teología India: Primer encuentro taller Latinoamericano*, ed. CENAMI (México, CDMX: Centro Nacional de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas, 1991), 4.

<sup>29</sup> López Hernández, “Prólogo,” 5-8.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Paulino Montejo and Xuaco Arnaiz, eds., *Los pueblos de la esperanza frente al neoliberalismo* (Cuenca, Ecuador: Ediciones Abya Yala, 1996), which compiled the papers and talks given at the 1995 continental gathering on Indigenous Theology in Cumbayá, Ecuador.

But the two strands of Catholic indigeneity, pastoral and theological, have taken interestingly different paths. CENAMI, like the SSM before it, separated from the CEM in the mid-1990s in order to gain independence and autonomy. While the priests involved, Padre Eleazar and his team, technically still belong to their home dioceses (Tehuantepec in the case of Padre Eleazar), they are on indefinite “loan” to CENAMI. EAPI, over time, became more closely linked to the CEM as more dioceses signed on as participating members in the network. While initially quite small, EAPI has expanded immensely in the nearly 30 years since its founding to include active participants spanning the entirety of indigenous Mexico, from the Rarámuri (Tarahumara) of northern Mexico to the Yucatecan Maya.<sup>31</sup> Participants range from those involved more in indigenous cultural and linguistic revitalization to those who accompany communities in ecological struggles, resistance to massive extractive projects such as hydroelectric dams and mining—each bringing to the group their concrete experiences on the ground and the knowledge that they have a support network to work through problems and conceptualizations in a cooperative manner.

EAPI currently falls under the purview of the Episcopal Commission of Social Ministry (la Comisión Episcopal para la Pastoral Social, CEPS). This sometimes leads to friction, as I witnessed when the CEM dictated that EAPI’s theme for the 2017 national *encuentro* was to be “the natural family” so as to be consistent with the Episcopate’s crusade against Mexico’s legalization of same-sex marriage. However, a sufficient degree of autonomy remained such that one priest felt entirely comfortable criticizing the CEM, commenting during his presentation how inappropriate and unuseful the theme was for

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Padre Tacho, May 17, 2017.

EAPI, but that they would abide by it and conceptualize “the family” instead as “community” and the communitarian practices that buttress *comunalidad*.<sup>32</sup> And another priest added that “one cannot talk about the family if you are not talking about mother earth... other cultures do not maintain the relationship between family and earth because land is only considered a place of work.”<sup>33</sup> EAPI’s place within the CEPS reflects a central argument of this project. The transformation of liberationist activism into the realm of indigenous cultural and religious revival concretely succeeded in changing the pastoral priorities of the Mexican Catholic Church to incorporate indigenous religiosity into the official programming rather than merely tolerating indigenous religious practices.

### **500 Years of Evangelization or 500 Years of Resistance?**

The other project that coincided with the closure of SERESURE was closer to home for Padre Tacho. From his new posting in Coxcatlán, Padre Tacho became increasingly involved in indigenous cultural activism in addition to the socio-economic activism that he had facilitated in San Antonio Cañada. While organizing on a national level to form EAPI, he was simultaneously involved in building stronger indigenous ministry on the local level alongside his priest colleagues in the Náhuatl villages south of Tehuacán. In 1992, they were the driving force behind the local march, protest, and celebration of 500 years of indigenous resistance.

Just as CENAMI was organizing continental conferences and *encuentros* to develop the nascent indigenous theology, indigenous rights movements across the

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<sup>32</sup> Field notes from XVII EAPI Región Volcanes, November 22-24, 2016, Parroquia de San Sebastián, Zongolica, Veracruz.

<sup>33</sup> “Iluminación del P. Porfirio sobre la familia humana,” in “Memoria del XVII EAPI Región Volcanes,” November 22-24, 2016, Parroquia de San Sebastián, Zongolica, Veracruz.

Americas were beginning, by the mid-1980s, to work across borders and build the networks that would herald in a spectacular coordination of protests on October 12, 1992. Indigenous rights movements in Latin America had been pressuring national governments and international organizations alike to update and revise the contract between nation states and the indigenous. A driving force in uniting indigenous movements across national borders had been a 1982 proposal to the UN General Assembly, cosponsored by Spain and the Vatican (a non voting member of the UN), that 1992 be celebrated as the year of “encounter” between Europeans and the indigenous in the Americas, “with the Europeans bearing the gifts of civilization and Christianity.”<sup>34</sup> What made the proposal more galling to indigenous movements was the fact that five years prior, in 1977, the UN had sponsored a conference in Geneva, “Indigenous Peoples of the Americas,” where the final conference document had proposed that 1992 be declared a “year of mourning” and that October 12, be redesignated as the “International Day of the World’s Indigenous Peoples” instead of commemorating Christopher Columbus and the onset of European colonization.<sup>35</sup>

In the end, the UN reached a sort of compromise, granting neither demand, but declaring that, starting in 1994, the UN would be recognizing a decade dedicated to indigenous peoples.<sup>36</sup> And although Spain and the Vatican spend considerable sums of money on 1992 programming to commemorate the “encounter,” their efforts were far overshadowed by developments in indigenous rights in the previous years, the Nobel

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<sup>34</sup> Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, *An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2015), 197.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 197-8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

Peace Prize awarded to Rigoberta Menchu of Guatemala, and of course, the wave of protest across the continent for October 12, 1992.

In 1989, the International Labor Organization (ILO), an agency of the United Nations, published an updated convention on the rights of indigenous peoples. ILO Convention 169 revised Convention 107, which had been increasingly criticized for its midcentury assimilationist assumptions.<sup>37</sup> Of particular note in Convention 169 were the explicit right of indigenous peoples' self-determination, the right to land, and the process of "free, prior, and informed consent" for development and extractive projects that would impact indigenous communities. Riding the tailwinds of the ILO Convention, indigenous representatives and organizations began planning in earnest for a continental gathering the following year in Quito, Ecuador.

Not a month before the First Continental Gathering of Indigenous Peoples (el Primer Encuentro Continental de Pueblos Indios), programmed for July 17-20, 1990, Ecuadorian indigenous movements launched a week of protest that brought Quito to a standstill. It was a demonstration that both surprised onlookers and emboldened and heartened other movements across the continent, including the Zapatistas who had not yet announced themselves to the world.<sup>38</sup> At the *encuentro*, the representatives from across the Americas hammered out a final document that was wide-ranging in scope. Critical, however, were a few elements. In addition to demands for land, the respect for indigenous territories, and the right to self-determination, the conclusions declared that "the Indigenous organizations of the Americas should confront together the 500th

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<sup>37</sup> Peter Bille Larsen and Jérémie Gilbert, "Indigenous rights and ILO Convention 169: learning from the past and challenging the future," *The International Journal of Human Rights* 24, no. 2-3, (2020) 83-93.

<sup>38</sup> Nick Henck, *Subcommander Marcos: The Man and the Mask* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 130.

anniversary, planning coordinated actions and reclaiming significant dates such as October 12th.”<sup>39</sup> In other words, here is where planning for the coordinated events of October 12, 1992 started to coalesce. The document also specifically addressed the cleavages within the Catholic Church, noting that “the church has two faces, one belonging to the poor and the other to the rich.”<sup>40</sup> The committees were clear that although some clergy were steadfast allies to the movements, the institution of the Church had increasingly demonstrated its opposition to the movements.

They were not wrong. Bishop Rivera was steadfast in his opposition to the involvement of his priests in the quincentenary protest. However, there was little he could do unless he wanted to publicly sanction his priests, which would have likely provoked more protests in Tehuacán, the last thing that the bishop wanted leading up to his victory in helping negotiate constitutional reforms. Mexico’s constitutional reforms that took effect in January 1992 removed the anticlerical articles (principally Article 130) and set the basis for legislation some months later that regularized and legalized the status of religious institutions and importantly, allowed for clerical participation in the political realm.<sup>41</sup> Ironically, this facilitated and legalized the very thing that Bishop Rivera and his conservative allies feared. With the reforms, a group of priests could now lead a public protest while dressed in clerical garb (contravening the defunct Article 130 of the 1917 Constitution) without the worry that the state might employ the rarely enforced constitutional prohibitions on their actions.

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<sup>39</sup> “Declaration of Quito,” July 1990, available at [http://www.cumbrecontinentalindigena.org/quito\\_en.php](http://www.cumbrecontinentalindigena.org/quito_en.php).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Gill, “The Politics of Regulating Religion in Mexico.”

In essence, Bishop Rivera was caught in a bind. He had spearheaded the negotiations with the Salinas administration over the constitutional reforms. Considered a protege of Prigione, Rivera had led the Episcopate in walking the fine line of publicly both disavowing any political pretensions of the Church *and* advocating for human rights and democratization.<sup>42</sup> Key to Rivera's tightrope walk was, as Gill noted and as the *exeresurianos* suspected, was the marginalization and suppression of the Church's liberationist indigenous wing.<sup>43</sup>

Leading up to the final months before the constitutional reforms, and still roughly a year prior to the 1992 quinqucentenary protest, Bishop Rivera went on a public offensive in Tehuacán. In a series of press releases and public statements, he spoke to Tehuacán and asked that the faithful to "neither worry or disorient themselves" because of the actions of "rebel clerics."<sup>44</sup> He accused the progressives of leading a "defamation campaign" with "demonstrations of hatred and bitterness." Worse, Bishop Rivera communicated, was that the disaffected priests "used as 'cannon fodder' good and simple people...[and] they used the ecclesial base communities for these shameful and low ends."<sup>45</sup> In other words, Bishop Rivera was recycling the anticommunist fears of the mid-century that indigenous communitarian practices and lack of proper education rendered them particularly vulnerable and susceptible to communist manipulation.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 792-3. For an example of an article in which Bishop Rivera Carrera managed to do both at once, see "Monseñor Rivera Carrera motiva a feligreses: exhorto a ejercer el voto, lanza el obispo." *El Sol de Tehuacán*, August 15, 1991.

<sup>43</sup> Gill, "The Politics of Regulating Religion in Mexico," 793.

<sup>44</sup> María Ángeles Fernández, "Obispo de Tehuacán insta a no angustiarse por la actitud de clérigos rebeldes," *El Heraldo de México*, September 1, 1991.

<sup>45</sup> "Agradeció el Obispo Rivera C., Respaldo recibido sobre el caso del seminario regional," *El Sol de Tehuacán*, September 1, 1991.

<sup>46</sup> "Letter from Bishop of Tehuantepec Jesús Alba Palacios to Archbishop Miranda," January 9, 1962, AHAM, Base DM, c 154, exp. 67.

Further, without naming names, Bishop Rivera made it entirely clear that he was targeting the cohort who were most involved in the growing indigenous social movements. He, with gratuitous editorializing by Ángeles Fernández at *El Heraldo*, accused them of using the quincentenary to wage a “campaign of disorientation... dedicated to spreading, in indigenous communities, hatred against the Church and lies about the work of the first missionaries that arrived in these lands. Said priests, boosters of the most radical interpretation of Liberation Theology, inspired by the marxist thesis of class warfare and atheism, are bent on broadcasting a black legend to disparage the Church.”<sup>47</sup> In only slightly less sensational language, the local paper in Tehuacán also reported the bishop’s accusations, that “some priests” were “commemorating a group instead of performing gratitude for the gift of the faith.”<sup>48</sup>

The broadsides continued in the following month, now getting more specific by naming the parishes while still not naming the “rebel priests” themselves. In an interview given to *El Sol de Tehuacán*, Uriel Gómez, in his capacity as the president of the diocesan Council of the Laity (*consejo de laicos*), assured readers that the heterodox theology was not representative of the region even though there were indeed “at least 10 priests who are inclined toward the theology of liberation... he mentioned that they are found in Coxcatlán, San José Miahuatlán and in this city.”<sup>49</sup> In Coxcatlán was, of course,

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<sup>47</sup> María Ángeles Fernández, “Obispo de Tehuacán insta a no angustiarse por la actitud de clérigos rebeldes,” *El Heraldo de México*, September 1, 1991.

<sup>48</sup> “Agradeció el Obispo Rivera C., Respaldo recibido sobre el caso del seminario regional,” *El Sol de Tehuacán*, September 1, 1991.

<sup>49</sup> “Gómez Juárez, Srio. Diocesano, ‘la teología de la liberación, difícil que sea representativa de la Zona Tehuacanera,’” *El Sol de Tehuacán*, October 26, 1991.



Padre Tacho. In Miahuatlán was Padre Miguel Ángel, who was not a SERESURE alumnus, but was an indigenous priest and collaborator of Padre Tacho.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps fortunately for Padre Tacho and his colleagues, other events overtook Bishop Rivera's interest. The passage of the constitutional reforms sent Rivera on a voting advocacy campaign, something that he and the progressives agreed on, exhorting priests to register themselves to vote and telling the faithful that voting itself was a "moral obligation."<sup>51</sup> And locally, Bishop Rivera was enmeshed in a complicated conflict with an Ecuadorian missionary priest who refused to change parishes and the presence of an ultraconservative "false priest," part of the Society of St. Pius X and a follower of excommunicated Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre.<sup>52</sup> And so, with his attention elsewhere,

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Miguel Ángel Ruiz Cortés, Tlacotepec de Benito Juárez, Puebla, April 24, 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Renée de la Torre, "La Iglesia Católica en el México contemporáneo." *L'Ordinaire des Amériques*, no. 210 (2008) 27-46; "Mensaje del Obispo Norberto Rivera Carrera, Exhortó a sacerdotes para empadronarse," *El Sol de Tehuacán*, March 10, 1992.

<sup>52</sup> For the conflict with the Ecuadorian priest, see "Por el conflicto político religioso de Azumbilla, bloquearon la carretera," *El Sol de Tehuacán*, May 13, 1992. Gonzalo Hallo de Salto, Ecuadorian missionary priest, insisted that the deceased bishop, Rafael Ayala y Ayala, had entrusted him with the parish of Azumbilla in perpetuity. Bishop Rivera disagreed, and tried to assign a new parish priest. In response, and in a complicated intersection with municipal elections, supporters of Hallo de Salto blocked the highway and briefly kidnapped state authorities who arrived to figure out what was happening. Hallo de Salto remained in the parish for another few years until 1995, when Mexican immigration authorities announced that the Ecuadorian was in Mexico without proper authorization and he was deported to Ecuador. Hallo de Salto still lives in Azumbilla.

For the "false priest, see, "Se dice 'Lefebvriano' y vive en San Vicente Ferrer, Denuncia la diócesis a un falso sacerdote," *El Sol de Tehuacán*, September 18, 1992. The "false priest," operating under at least one alias, was living and working in a working class neighborhood on the northern edge of Tehuacán. He carried with him a document, which the diocese claimed had been altered, attesting to his clerical ordination at the Jesus and Mary Roman Catholic Chapel of El Paso, Texas, a chapel in the network of the Society of St. Pius X. Before being denounced to the authorities, the "false priest" apparently had been performing the sacraments of confession and the eucharist at private homes in the neighborhood.

French Archbishop Lefebvre founded the Society of St. Pius X as a rejection of the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. They perform mass and the other sacraments in Latin according to the Roman missal from prior to Vatican II. And they reject what they view as the secularization of the Church, insisting on the mediaevalsque attire and trappings of spiritual authority. Lefebvre and others were excommunicated by Pope John Paul II in 1988, although their excommunications were rescinded by Pope Benedict in 2009. See Cowan, *Moral Majorities Across the Americas*, chapter 1 in particular on the ultraconservative Catholic movements.

Padre Tacho and his colleagues were able to continue apace in their organization of the march to commemorate 500 years of indigenous resistance.

Ironically, noted one of the fellow organizers, it was Bishop Rivera himself who had grouped these priests together in the southeastern diaconate of the diocese (*decanato del sureste*), the “zona náhuatl” comprised of the traditionally Náhuatl indigenous communities south of Tehuacán, in the Tehuacán valley and rising into the Sierra Negra. While not all of them were liberationists, those who were not were still pastoralists who embraced the multiple means of engaging their laity.<sup>53</sup> As a group, most of them had attended the first EAPI meeting in Zongolica in February 1991 and returned to their parishes excited by the possibilities of starting or strengthening the indigenous cultural work in their parishes.<sup>54</sup>

They organized an *encuentro* just for their diaconate, hosted in San Francisco Altepexi where the parish priest was Padre Armando Carrillo, who had also been Padre Tacho’s predecessor in San Antonio Cañada.<sup>55</sup> There, the gathered priests, laity, and indigenous activists discussed and presented “the traditions, the customs, the role of the *mayordomos*, the songs, the dress, the craftwork, the food,” and how the Church could help “not rescue but conserve the indigenous traditions.”<sup>56</sup> Among them, those who could speak fluent Náhuatl also started further experiments with using Náhuatl during mass, as a vernacular liturgical language. Padre Miguel Ángel remembered that, without real translations, they began improvising and introducing songs in Náhuatl into the

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with Miguel Ángel Ruiz Cortés, Tlacotepec de Benito Juárez, Puebla, April 24, 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Interview with Miguel Ángel Ruiz Cortés, Tlacotepec de Benito Juárez, Puebla, April 24, 2017 and Anastasio Hidalgo Miramón, Tehuacán, Puebla, May 17, 2017.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Miguel Ángel Ruiz Cortés, Tlacotepec de Benito Juárez, Puebla, May 16, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

celebration of mass and that he performed his first marriage ceremonies completely in Náhuatl.<sup>57</sup>

Padre Miguel Ángel was not alone. As early as 1986, a SERESURE graduate from the Oaxacan Mazateca, Heriberto Prado, was publishing worship songs in Mazateco.<sup>58</sup> Further, following the practice of Bishop Samuel Ruiz in Chiapas, the priests in diaconate instituted a mobile catechist training program to train indigenous catechists. The catechists were then responsible for the fundamentals of religious and sacramental education in the parishes, acting as religious agents in teaching the meanings of, for example, baptism.<sup>59</sup> But, the important element was that agents of the Catholic Church were not just valorizing indigenous cultural and religious practices, but beginning to actively incorporate them into mass. The experimentations, improvisations, and group translation work culminated at the end of the march on October 12, 1992 when the collected priests concelebrated what may have been the first mass in Náhuatl.<sup>60</sup>

The meetings and *encuentros* over the prior 18 months had all led to the two days in October, when the group of parish priests and their indigenous parishioners started a pilgrimage from Coxcatlán and ended in Coapan, on the southern edge of Tehuacán, where they celebrated the Náhuatl mass. Leading up to the event, local media reported on the invitation that the organizers extended to the public: “The procession for the dignity of the *pueblos indígenas* will be accompanied by the Virgin of Guadalupe, mother of our

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<sup>57</sup> Interview with Miguel Ángel Ruiz Cortés, Tlacotepec de Benito Juárez, Puebla, April 24, 2017.

<sup>58</sup> Faudree, *Singing for the Dead*, 95-98.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Miguel Ángel Ruiz Cortés, Tlacotepec de Benito Juárez, Puebla, April 24, 2017. Enrique Camargo too extols the work of the indigenous catechists, in particular for their community leadership on challenging *cacicazgos* in one of his early parish assignments. Interview with Enrique Camargo, March 15, 2017. On Samuel Ruiz’s catechist training program, see Meyer, Gallardo, and Ríos, *Samuel Ruiz en San Cristóbal*.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Miguel Ángel Ruiz Cortés, Tlacotepec de Benito Juárez, Puebla, April 24, 2017.

cultures, with which we seek to live the desert experience of the People of God, uniting ourselves as indigenous peoples in the historical path of Latin America that has lasted 500 years, through a procession to recuperate our identity and continue fighting for the life and dignity of our peoples.”<sup>61</sup>

Both Padres Tacho and Miguel Ángel remembered the days fondly, as a triumph that they had managed to pull off. There were nine or ten parishes involved, with two branches of the march starting in different regions and meeting on the second day. The marchers started in Coxcatlán, Padre Tacho’s parish, and spent the first night in San Sebastián Zinacatepec, having “walked with joy and gusto, with songs and everything.”<sup>62</sup> Beginning again at six AM the next morning, the marchers met those from San José Miahuatlán at the highway and they walked together to Ajalpan, and then Altepexi, until they paused at the highway intersection just outside of San Gabriel Chilac. There they met up with the second group who had begun that morning from San Marcos Necoxtla, San Pablo Tepetzingo, and San Antonio Cañada, and the two groups proceeded together to Coapan where the march finished around five in the afternoon. It took, according to the local paper, over an hour and a half for the entire march to make it to the parish seat at Coapan where the gathered priests celebrated the Náhuatl mass.<sup>63</sup> The outpouring surprised even the organizers. They thought that each parish might have 1000 people join, but from ten parishes they ended up with over 22,000 attendees.<sup>64</sup> Padre Miguel Ángel remembered, “it was impressive, children walked, young folks walked, adults

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<sup>61</sup> “Proximidad del 12 de Octubre, el decanato del sureste organiza la procesión de la dignidad de los pueblos,” *El Sol de Tehuacán*, September 26, 1992.

<sup>62</sup> Interview with Miguel Ángel Ruiz Cortés, Tlacotepec de Benito Juárez, Puebla, May 16, 2017.

<sup>63</sup> “Procesión por los 500 años de resistencia indígena popular,” *Diario El Mundo* (Tehuacán), October 14, 1992.

<sup>64</sup> This figure is cited in *Diario El Mundo* and Miguel Ángel, April 24, 2017.

walked and the elderly walked. But really it was impressive how the indigenous women carried their babies and infants on their backs and that even the grandmothers were walking, it was the resistance of the indigenous woman, the indigenous person.”<sup>65</sup>



*Image 10: Toppling a conquistador. Source: Photo by Antonio Turok. San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, October 12, 1992.*

Importantly, not all of the simultaneous marches across the Americas, or even in Mexico, were so infused with indigenous catholicism. In Chiapas, Bishop Ruiz, consistent with his longtime public stance on the side of the indigenous, celebrated mass on the evening of October 11 to inaugurate the indigenous protests that continued the following day. On the twelfth, to Bishop Ruiz’s dismay, the protests culminated in tearing down the statue of the conquistador Diego de Mazariegos from the center of San Cristóbal de las Casas. Other cities in Mexico too saw the destruction of monuments to

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Miguel Ángel Ruiz Cortés, Tlacotepec de Benito Juárez, Puebla, April 24, 2017.

colonization. In Morelia, Michoacan, protesters toppled a statue of a Spanish viceroy, and in Mexico City, a Christopher Columbus statue was the target.<sup>66</sup>

But, in most Mexican cities, October 12, 1992 was a split screen of indigenous protests on one side and the “people of reason” (*gente de razon*) celebrating 500 years of evangelization and “encounter.” Local Tehuacán reporting captured the dissonance between the events:

The march in Coapan was huge, crowded, there were more than twenty thousand people, tired but content and enthusiastic, and there was also a group of nuns from San Gabriel Chilac. The celebration lasted approximately an hour and a half. In it one could feel the force of faith and the majority indian presence. The great majority were speaking in náhuatl, they understood perfectly whether it was in náhuatl or in spanish, those from Coapan with those from San José Miahuatlán, and with those from Chilac and Ajalpan. Of course, the ones from Ajalpan that did not come are those they call “of reason,” those who came were the poor, the *macehuelme* (sic, náhuatl for the commoner class). Nor did the rich from Tehuacán attend. They were celebrating 500 years of evangelization, including marching with the flag of Spain. The march in Coapan was brown, was indian, without a doubt.”<sup>67</sup>

Padre Tacho had the last words at the Náhuatl mass. He brought together the past, the present, and the future. He proclaimed that day, October 12, to be a celebration, not a mourning. But it was a celebration not of discovery, not of conquest, not of encounter, but a *fiesta* “because ‘here we are,’ because they could not finish us, because we are fighting for our dignity and we have resisted everything, thanks to *Tonantzin Ipalnemouacni*, the God because of which we all live, and our peoples are alive like Jesus Christ *Totemacquisticatzin*.”<sup>68</sup> And, in spite of the defeats suffered over the previous few years, he called for a new commitment from the Church and from the faithful to work

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<sup>66</sup> Thomas Benjamin, “A Time of Reconquest: History, the Maya Revival, and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 2 (April 2000): 442.

<sup>67</sup> “Procesión por los 500 años de resistencia indígena popular,” *Diario El Mundo* (Tehuacán), October 14, 1992.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

toward building a different future. He closed, “the Church like all of the faithful should commit itself to building a *yáncuítl altépetl* - a new community -, a *yáacuítl tlácatl* - a new person -, a *yáncuítlaltipac* - a new world -, and a *yancuítlanentoquilstli* - a new evangelization, which is to say, a liberatory evangelization.”<sup>69</sup>

### **The Revolutionary Option**

Simultaneous to the work with his colleagues on organizing the October 12, 1992 protest march and Náhuatl mass, Padre Tacho had also been working with guerrilla organizers connected to the EZLN in his parish. Few were aware until evidence of Padre Tacho’s involvement surfaced a little more than a year after the Zapatistas, an army of indigenous men and women in Chiapas, rebelled on January 1, 1994, and declared war on the Mexican government, demanding fulfillment of the long-deferred promises from the Mexican Revolution.<sup>70</sup> Conservative Tehuacán finally received the confirmation that they had been right all along. They *knew* that SERESURE had been not just an incubator for *pastoral indígena*, but a marxist, communist, atheist, guerrilla training school. The “red bishops” and their cohort of guerrilla priests had incited the indigenous Chiapanecos into rebellion.<sup>71</sup>

Even years later, rumors circled regarding the mission of SERESURE. I was drinking coffee and reading at a cafe on Tehuacán’s central plaza when an elderly woman saw that my book was on liberation theology. After asking what I was working on, she earnestly informed me that Subcomandante Marcos had been to SERESURE and

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Carlos Tello Díaz, *Rebelión de las Cañadas* (México, CDMX: Cal y Arena, 1995).

<sup>71</sup> José A. Perez Stuart, “Portafolios,” *Excelsior* January 24, 1994.

recruited seminarians to join the guerrillas.<sup>72</sup> The involvement of Padre Tacho with Zapatista-adjacent organizations clearly fed the Tehuacán rumor mill even though no evidence suggested that SERESURE students or graduates joined the EZLN itself, much less that Marcos personally tried to recruit seminarians.<sup>73</sup>

The Zapatistas did however have an interesting relationship with the Catholic Church in Chiapas. Much to the consternation of Bishop Samuel Ruiz, the extensive network of lay indigenous catechists that he spent decades training proved critical to the expansion of the EZLN, as many of them joined the EZLN and used their positions of community religious leadership to recruit others.<sup>74</sup> However, institutional support for the guerrillas from clergy, secular and religious, and Church hierarchy largely did not exist except in the conspiratorial fantasies of the right-wing press.<sup>75</sup> Various Mexican bishops and Giralomo Prigione repeatedly responded to questions from the press. First, they said that the Church had nothing to do with the uprising. And second, if there were priests involved, the Church would assuredly deal with and punish them.<sup>76</sup> Anticipating that repercussions would reverberate beyond national borders, the provincial superior of the Jesuits wrote to the Jesuit Superior in Rome to inform him that the Jesuits in Bachajón, Chiapas had absolutely nothing to do with the uprising. He acknowledged that they had

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<sup>72</sup> Field notes, April, 2017.

<sup>73</sup> Christopher Gunderson, "The Provocative Cocktail: Intellectual Origins of the Zapatista Uprising, 1960-1994," (PhD diss., City University of New York Department of Sociology, 2013), Chapter 6.

<sup>74</sup> See Mattiace, *To See With Two Eyes*; and Chojnacki, *Indigenous Apostles*.

<sup>75</sup> The Jesuit archive collected all the newspaper articles that they could find in the immediate aftermath of the uprising, worried about accusations that Jesuit priests were involved with (if not leading) the EZLN. One of the most frequent writers that they collected was the columnist José Pérez Stuart, writer of "Portafolios" in *Excelsior*, who argued that Chiapas represented the long-term goals of liberation theology to infiltrate Mexican society and foment unrest with Marxist goals. See AHPM, Sección IV, exp. 654 "Misión de Chilón."

<sup>76</sup> Angeles Fernández M., "La iglesia, al margen del conflicto en Chiapas: Si hay sacerdotes involucrados, que asuman su responsabilidad: Prigione," *El Heraldo*, January 3, 1994.



heard rumors for the past decade that there was guerrilla activity, but that the Mexican government was also fully aware of these rumors.<sup>77</sup> To further distance the Church from the events in Chiapas, multiple dioceses published letters urging peace and the CEM organized a national day of prayer for peace and justice in Chiapas on January 23, 1994.<sup>78</sup>

There were however, two cases of clergy connected to SERESURE having contact with guerrillas. The first, predating the Zapatista uprising, was Felipe Blanco Ricci, one of the priests who came from San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas as part of the initial formation team in 1969.<sup>79</sup> Blanco served for nearly ten years in SERESURE as assigned by Bishop Samuel Ruiz. But when he returned to ministry full time back in Chiapas, on the outskirts of Comitán, Blanco and his partner, the religious sister Paula Isabel Uria, joined the Guatemalan Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP, Guerrilla Army of the Poor) in the mid-1980s. They kept their religious responsibilities during the day and assisted the guerrillas “afterhours,” providing religious, moral, and material support to populations oppressed by the Guatemalan military dictatorship, and never (in their telling) took up arms.<sup>80</sup>

In their unpublished joint autobiography, Blanco and Uria describe their involvement with the EGP as born out of everyday interactions with the affected populations that were fleeing Guatemala en masse to escape the Guatemalan military’s

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<sup>77</sup> Letter from José Morales Orozco S.J. to Peter Hans Kolvenbach S.J., January 9, 1994, AHPM, Sección IV, exp. 654, Misión de Chilón. On the Mexican government being aware of the guerrilla activity, in large part because the army stumbled on a training camp in 1993, see Henck, *Subcommander Marcos*, 171.

<sup>78</sup> “Editorial: Chiapas,” *Effata* (Diocese of Tehuacán), March-April 1994; “CEPS-Caritas: Jornada nacional por la paz y la justicia en Chiapas,” *Effata*, March-April 1994.

<sup>79</sup> “Probándonos en la vida pastoral,” in Felipe Blanco Ricci and Paula Isabel Uria, *Religiosos, Solidarios, Revolucionarios: Felipe e Isa, vidas paralelas*, unpublished manuscript, n.d., 11-13, AH.

<sup>80</sup> “Comienza nuestra vida oculta,” in Felipe Blanco Ricci and Paula Isabel Uria, *Religiosos, Solidarios, Revolucionarios: Felipe e Isa, vidas paralelas*, unpublished manuscript, n.d., 11-13. In possession of Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón. See also, Fredy Martín Pérez, “El teólogo de la liberación, Felipe Blanco Ricci, falleció en la ciudad de Comitán,” *Chiapas Paralelo*, September 26, 2020.

campaign of terror and to find refuge in Chiapas. In the early 1980s, Bishop Samuel Ruiz had been at the forefront of organizing and finding land for refugee camps and providing basic necessities for the Guatemalan refugees.<sup>81</sup> The Mexican government had tried to walk a fine line (as it did for much of the Cold War) between providing exile and shelter for those threatened by military dictatorship while refraining from publicly speaking out against the Guatemalan regime who found a stalwart ally in Reagan's United States.<sup>82</sup>

In 1982, as the Rios Montt dictatorship terrorized indigenous Guatemala, the trickle of refugees into Chiapas became a stream. Bishop Ruiz not only secured land for refugee camps and assigned clergy to minister to the material and spiritual needs of the refugees, but they also collectively denounced the cross border raids by the Guatemalan Army and the Mexican government's inactivity in stopping the violence.<sup>83</sup>

Notwithstanding DFS accusations that Samuel Ruiz had a cadre of nuns trafficking guns for the Guatemalan guerrillas, few knew about the involvement of Blanco and Uria until years later.<sup>84</sup>

As for Padre Tacho, although documentary evidence is thus far sparse as to the activities of guerrillas in and around the Tehuacán region, the guerrillas were certainly there. Under a Mexican state that found itself very preoccupied with armed resistance in the second half of the twentieth century, the absence of accessible security and intelligence reports on the Tehuacán area is somewhat odd, but not entirely puzzling.

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<sup>81</sup> See Meyer, Gallardo, and Ríos, *Samuel Ruiz en San Cristóbal*.

<sup>82</sup> On Mexican international relations during the Cold War, see Keller, *Mexico's Cold War*; Thornton, *Revolution in Development*; and Zolov, *The Last Good Neighbor*. On the relationship between the United States and Guatemala, see Weld, *Paper Cadavers*; and Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

<sup>83</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, "Sobre la situación de los refugiados."

<sup>84</sup> "Obispo de San Cristóbal subersivo (sic)," June 8, 1981, Ruiz Garcia, Samuel, Versión Testada .DFS, 2a Parte.

According to both Carlos Tello Diaz and Padre Tacho, guerrilla organizers arrived in the region in the late 1980s.<sup>85</sup> Given that (partial) access to DFS documents only extended to 1986, and President Lopez Obrador only opened up CISEN records in 2019, any state documentation on guerrilla activities in the Tehuacán region resided in an inaccessible void during my research period.

That clandestine or guerrilla organizers were operating in the Tehuacán region is significant, even if they never engaged in armed actions and have seemingly only been mentioned in passing.<sup>86</sup> Not only does it expand our knowledge of where Zapatista organizers were operating prior to the 1994 uprising, but it also reminds us that the conditions precipitating the uprising in Chiapas were also present in pockets, primarily indigenous, around the country, including in the relatively wealthy state of Puebla. Further, Padre Tacho's role as a pivot between clandestine and open organizing illuminates the particular space that progressive Catholics occupied between indigenous rights movements and armed organizations.

In Coxcatlán, similar to the experiences of Blanco and Uria, Padre Tacho was approached at his parish one day by the guerrilla organizers. Frank, a nom de guerre, had been part of the original FLN group that had moved to Chiapas in 1983, but left for the Sierra Negra and the communities around Coxcatlán at some point in the late 1980s.<sup>87</sup> Tacho remembered that Frank first approached him early in his parish assignment, as a courtesy to the new priest whose reputation preceded him. Frank told Tacho that they admired his work, and while they hoped he would continue the consciousness-raising

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<sup>85</sup> Tello Díaz, *Rebelión de la Cañada*.

<sup>86</sup> Henck, *Subcommander Marcos*, 139.

<sup>87</sup> Henck, 139.

bible study groups and pastoral projects, he should know that they were also preparing people to take a future military option. While Tacho declined to participate in the military wing, he was not about to report the guerrilla organizers provided they had the support of the local populace.<sup>88</sup>

When Frank was chosen to lead a new indigenous campesino organization, the Independent National Campesino Alliance Emiliano Zapata (Alianza Nacional Campesina Independiente Emiliano Zapata, ANCIEZ), he once again approached Padre Tacho for assistance. Padre Tacho presided over the founding ceremony, held at his parish in July 1991, hosting representatives from across Mexico who came to create the new ANCIEZ. He welcomed the gathered delegates with the following: “Currently we live in a situation of inhumane poverty, institutionalized injustice, permanent violation of the dignity of the human person, especially for the impoverished majorities. This reality awakens the desires for liberation and hope of the poor to build the new man and the new society.”<sup>89</sup> Echoing both Che Guevara and Liberation Theology, Padre Tacho presented quite the syncretic, but entirely legible to the gathered participants, combination of marxist and Catholic thought.<sup>90</sup>

The statement of founding principles was widely distributed in the following months, in which ANCIEZ declared their demands for “land, water, credit, and the democratization of all of the rural organizations.” They castigated the government for its near complete retreat from the rural sector under the guise of neoliberal orthodoxy. Further, they declared that they would be entirely independent of both government and

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<sup>88</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 17, 2017.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Tello Díaz, *Rebelión de las Cañadas*, Chapter 4.

<sup>90</sup> Ernesto Guevara, *El socialismo y el hombre en Cuba* (Atlanta: Pathfinder, 1988).

Church control, although they made clear distinctions between a government siding with “bourgeois power,” and progressive catholics who accompany but do not lead the struggle.<sup>91</sup>

Although founded in Coxcatlán, ANCIEZ quickly moved its center of operations to Chiapas.<sup>92</sup> From there, it was a vehicle for organizing protests, marches, and was at the forefront of the 1992 Dia de la Raza protest in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas in which the marchers toppled the statue of Diego de Mazariegos, conquistador and founder of San Cristóbal. Once the Zapatistas launched their uprising, ANCIEZ almost immediately disappeared. It was clear then that ANCIEZ had been a front organization for the still-clandestine EZLN, and perhaps its organized marches and protests in San Cristóbal de las Casas and Ocosingo, Chiapas had been dress rehearsals for the uprising.<sup>93</sup>

What to make of Padre Tacho’s involvement? His presence at the founding of ANCIEZ is only mentioned in the Tello Diaz account of the Zapatistas. In some of the more comprehensive accounts in English that appeared at the same time and shortly thereafter, those of John Ross, Neil Harvey, and later, Nick Henck, ANCIEZ is mentioned, but Padre Tacho is absent.<sup>94</sup>

Harvey and Henck both cited reports that Tello Diaz had sources inside Mexico’s intelligence agencies who provided resources unavailable to other scholars, reporters, and commentators. In doing so, they paint Tello Diaz’s account as anti-Zapatista and pro-PRI

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<sup>91</sup> Tello Diaz, *Rebelión de las Cañadas*.

<sup>92</sup> Benjamin, “A Time of Reconquest,” 442.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> John Ross, *Rebellion from the Roots: Indian Uprising in Chiapas* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1995); Harvey, *The Chiapas Rebellion*; Henck, *Subcommander Marcos*.

regime. The absence of Padre Tacho in the other accounts does not necessarily mean that Ross, Henck, and Harvey were unaware of the full details of the formation of ANCIEZ. However, it is perhaps strange for all of them to omit the presence of a clearly sympathetic element within Mexican Catholicism given the clear political positions of Ross and Harvey and their empathy for the work of Samuel Ruiz and the indigenous of Chiapas. I extrapolate that Tacho's appearance in Tello Diaz's account is then one of two issues, or some combination thereof: an intelligence source fed him the information that included Padre Tacho's participation and the contemporaries (Ross) did not have access to that source, and/or Tello Diaz was explicitly trying to tie elements of the Church to the Zapatistas in ways that coincided with the views of the conservative press. Hopefully, with the recent opening of the security archives that include CISEN, the intelligence service that was borne out of the dismantled DFS in 1989, future research can fill in the intricacies of clandestine activity in the Tehuacán region and what the Mexican intelligence agencies may have known.

Padre Tacho's friends and colleagues urged him to go underground after his name appeared in the Tello Diaz book. He certainly had reason for concern as others working in the area, even though they denied participation in the guerrilla military wing, were swept up by Mexican intelligence forces, held for months, and certainly tortured for information.<sup>95</sup> Ramiro Arciga, public school teacher and outspoken activist in the region was one of them. Arciga recalled that his torturers repeatedly questioned him about Padre Tacho during his year-long imprisonment.<sup>96</sup> But Padre Tacho decided to stay in his

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<sup>95</sup> Gladys McCormick, "The Last Door: Political Prisoners and the Use of Torture in Mexico's Dirty War," *The Americas* 74, no. 1 (2017): 57-81.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Ramiro Arciga, Tehuacán, Puebla, May 16, 2017.

ministry, gambling that everything he had done was out in the open and that the state would not likely go after a priest who had been working under Bishop Rivera Carrera. In an interview he gave to *Proceso* in 1996, after Arciga had been released due to lack of evidence, Padre Tacho accepted the charges that EZLN organizers had been in the region doing “conscientization work,” but maintained ignorance of who exactly was involved. He said, “I have had many meetings with campesinos and the indigenous. I still have them. But I do not know if ANCIEZ was born in one of those [meetings].”<sup>97</sup>

In Chiapas, security forces were less restrained in their targeting of the Church. They raided Dominican and Jesuit houses, offices of NGOs associated with the diocese, and parish offices and rectories in search of arms, finding nothing.<sup>98</sup> In fact, as he stayed free, Tacho continued to work in solidarity with the Chiapanecan rebels. Within his parish, community members dedicated a portion of agricultural production to send to the Zapatistas who were encircled by the Mexican army. In his words, they were “*cultivando para los compas*” (growing for the compañeros).<sup>99</sup> But the surveillance did not stop. For years, Tacho said, it was clear that security agents, sometimes state police, came to Church and were recording his homilies. In one particularly clear act of intimidation in 1998, army helicopters repeatedly flew over the EAPI meeting in Coyutla, Veracruz while soldiers arrived and were stationed in nearby towns.<sup>100</sup> Even *pastoral indígena* in the 1990s, the exploration and sharing of indigenous religiosity, was suspect in the aftermath of the Zapatista uprising. An association of all things potentially progressive with the bogeyman

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<sup>97</sup> *Proceso*, February 26, 1996, cited in Tello Diaz, *Rebelión de las Cañadas*, Chapter 4. This inclusion came in the revised 2nd edition of the Tello Diaz book, published in 2000.

<sup>98</sup> Henck, *Subcommander Marcos*, 287. Raided were the offices of the Coordination of Non-Governmental Organizations for Peace (CONPAZ) and the rectory of the Teopisca parish.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 17, 2017.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Anastasio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, May 17, 2017.

of Liberation Theology, the successful work of conservative commentators who cried “communist,” meant the presence of the army to intimidate Catholic activists while they spoke about indigenous religious practices.

I suggest that the role of Padre Tacho and a handful of his religious colleagues both within and beyond Chiapas points to important relationships between the Zapatista movement and elements of the Church that have been lost between two strains of thought: a leftism that romanticized liberation theology but generally preferred social movements to remain secular, and a conservatism that saw mortal danger in every shade of progressive Catholicism. That Tacho did not end up imprisoned was more likely due to his place in the diocese of Bishop Rivera Carrera than to some measured response of Mexican security forces.<sup>101</sup> In this, the actions of a parish priest intersected with national political machinations between Church and state in a tumultuous period post-constitutional reform, in the midst of indigenous uprising, economic crisis, and political assassinations convulsing Mexico in the mid-1990s.

But Padre Tacho’s life story, parallel to and intersecting with the development and indigenization of the Zapatistas, also reveals that the revolutionary possibilities of earlier decades had been foreclosed by the mid 1990s. The Zapatista communiques notably evolved over time. The first communique, the declaration of war (First Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle), contains nary a mention of indigenous peoples even if the opening line, “we are a product of 500 years of struggle,” was an indirect

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<sup>101</sup> For instance, paramilitaries operating with the knowledge and consent of the Mexican government massacred 45 unarmed indigenous people in the village of Acteal, Chiapas in December 1997. Fabiola Martínez, “Reconoce el Estado su responsabilidad por caso Acteal,” *La Jornada*, September 3, 2020.



reference.<sup>102</sup> Subsequent communiqués and interviews of Subcomandante Marcos increasingly embraced the “indigenous agenda” of autonomy and territorial sovereignty. Some observers, including John Womack, asked if the EZLN's turn toward indigenous rights, even while still linked to national reform, reflected the impossibility of wholesale reform and the fulfillment of revolutionary promises.<sup>103</sup> Ultimately, I do not think that Womack was right, even as Mexico descended into a spiral of narcoviolence and state violence in the twenty-first century.<sup>104</sup> Rather, Womack was writing at what appeared to be a transition, not fully legible yet, between the revolutionary utopias of the past and a flourishing of rights, legal protections, and multicultural pluralism that were about to sweep through Latin American electoral politics with the Pink Tide as well as in the Catholic Church itself when Pope Francis recognized Náhuatl as an official liturgical language and encouraged the “first” Náhuatl mass.<sup>105</sup>

## Conclusion

Despite opposition from Bishop Rivera Carrera, and from conservative elements in Mexico and in the Church more broadly, the liberationists in Tehuacán had managed,

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<sup>102</sup> “The First Declaration from the Lacandón Jungle,” in *The Zapatista Reader*, ed. Tom Hayden (New York: Nation Books, 2002), 218.

<sup>103</sup> John Womack, *Rebellion in Chiapas: An Historical Reader* (New York: New Press, 1999).

<sup>104</sup> On the transformation of policing into militaryesque counterinsurgency tactics, which would have real consequences for leftist movements in the United States after the end of the Cold War and into the War on Terror, see Stuart Schrader, *Badges Without Borders*. On the US involvement in the massive escalation of the “drug war,” see Horace Bartilow, *Drug War Pathologies: Embedded Corporatism and U.S. Drug Enforcement in the Americas* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019); and Dawn Paley, *Drug War Capitalism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2014). On Mexico in particular, and the consequences that narco/drug war violence has visiting upon social movements, see Sergio González Rodríguez, *The Iguala 43: The Truth and Challenge of Mexico's Disappeared Students* (Boston: MIT Press, 2017); Anabel Hernández, *Narcoland: The Mexican Drug Lords and Their Godfathers*, trans. Lorna Fox and Iain Bruce (London: Verso, 2013); and John Gibler, *I Couldn't Even Imagine They Would Kill Us* (San Francisco: City Lights Publishers, 2017).

<sup>105</sup> Raul Madrid, “The Rise of Ethnopolitics in Latin America,” *World Politics* 60, no. 3 (April 2008): 475-508; Omar Encarnación, “The Rise and Fall of the Latin American Left,” *The Nation*, May 9, 2018.

in the course of two years, to limp out of crushing defeat that was the closure of SERESURE into a triumphant display of social organization and indigenous resistance. The marches in 1992, coordinated by indigenous groups across the Americas, were often accompanied by religious allies, but were rarely so explicitly organized and led by a group of parish priests as in the Tehuacán region.

Although they did not recreate the march in subsequent years to celebrate “*dia de la raza*” on October 12, that day was a springboard for further collaboration between the involved priests, active laity, and the various elements of the indigenous rights movements.<sup>106</sup> The priests continued training indigenous catechists to be empowered religious agents and actors in their own communities. They organized indigenous cultural festivals, events, and interchanges that brought together Nahuas, Mixtecs, and Popolocas in the region. The more intrepid clerics accompanied communities and tried to leverage the promises of ILO Convention 169 in their resistance to extractive industries, mining, forestry, and hydroelectric projects that irremediably changed the landscapes.<sup>107</sup> And still others slowly got to work on compiling translations in order to systematize náhuatl versions of masses and sacraments.<sup>108</sup>

They outlasted their bishop, who was elevated to the Archbishopric of Mexico (and later made Cardinal) in 1995, a “prize” that the aggrieved suspect was given for his success in closing SERSURE and marginalizing liberationists from the workings of the Church hierarchy. But the successor to Bishop Rivera, Bishop Mario Espinosa Contreras,

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Miguel Ángel Ruiz Cortés, Tlacotepec de Benito Juárez, Puebla, April 24, 2017.

<sup>107</sup> Martín Barrios Hernández, “En la Sierra Negra resistencia contra megaproyectos,” *Ojarasca* 233, September 2016.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Ricardo Rivera Barragán, April 21, 2017, Chapulco, Puebla.

broke up the group in the late 1990s and dispersed them throughout the diocese.<sup>109</sup> Yet even with the dispersal, they had already built the networks and organizations, EAPI, the network of *ex-seresurianos*, the Rafael Ayala Human Rights Center, that allowed for local, regional, and national coordination and collaboration on liberationist and indigenous action outside of the hierarchical structures of the Catholic Church.

Further, the demonstration of 1992 signaled to the hierarchy the popular support for a Church that opted for a robust indigenous ministry. Shortly after the continental protest, Bishop Rivera convened the first diocesan synod, a meeting of clergy, men and women religious, and laity to use the “see, judge, act” methodology and elaborate a pastoral plan that would guide future pastoral action.<sup>110</sup> Similar to the CELAM Santo Domingo final document, the diocesan synod ended up, given Bishop Rivera’s antagonism toward the liberationist priests in the diocese, remarkably supportive of integral and wide-ranging indigenous ministry.<sup>111</sup> It embraced some elements of the progressive currents even as it stuck to some particularly conservative ideas such as the rejection of ecumenism and the designation of protestants as “sects.”<sup>112</sup>

The liberationists were mostly excluded from the coordinating committee, but a few of their allies in *pastoral indígena* were considered for the task. Yet the final document emerged frank in its assessments: too few had access to land, and fewer still had irrigation; the recent industrial growth is in *maquiladoras* who employ mostly

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<sup>109</sup> Padre Tacho suspected that Rivera had given Contreras a list of “los malos,” the priests who refused to go along with Rivera. Further, Contreras was, in Tacho’s estimation, now the second bishop in a row who was not a pastoralist, did not interact much with the faithful, a “naive... and gray bishop” (*ingenuo, un obispo gris*). Interview with Anastacio Simón Hidalgo Miramón, Tehuacán, May 17, 2017.

<sup>110</sup> “Presentación,” *El Sínodo Diocesano de Tehuacán* (Tehuacán: Diocese de Tehuacán, 1993), 2.

<sup>111</sup> On CELAM Santo Domingo embracing *pastoral indígena*, see the co-authored pastoral letter, Bartolomé Carrasco Briseño, Samuel Ruiz García, Arturo Lona Reyes, and Hermenegildo Ramirez, “Santo Domingo y la pastoral indígena,” March 25, 1993.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

women and in factory farming, neither of which pay sufficient salaries and are “committing injustices;” nearly half of the working population in the diocese earns less than the minimum wage and there is insufficient government assistance for rural and urban poor.<sup>113</sup> In the political realm, the synod diagnosed the corruption and fraud of the PRI, and lamented the ways in which party politics had subsumed and destroyed indigenous community’s traditional structures of governance. It did however, celebrate what the diocese saw as greater political awareness and participation in the region, whether in independent organizations or in opposition parties.<sup>114</sup> Perhaps most significantly, the synod echoed the language of Santo Domingo and recognized that the region is, although majority of “occidental culture,” undeniably pluricultural and that the autochthonous groups “have been able to maintain their cultural identity.”<sup>115</sup>

And so, to meet the contemporary challenges, the synod called for integral and liberatory evangelization. It both embraced and warned against the language of liberation theologies. It called for pastoral attention “to the entire person, to the rights and responsibilities of all peoples, to family life, to communitarian life and society, to peace, justice, and development.” But it warned that “evangelization cannot reduce itself only to the economic, political, social or cultural aspects.”<sup>116</sup> In other words, while it echoed some liberationist priorities, particularly employing *pastoral de conjunto*, it also echoed the conservative accusations that liberation theology was secularism in clerical garb.

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid, 21-22.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, 22-23.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 23-34.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 28.

And, it repeated the Santo Domingo document, that “the new evangelization demands the pastoral conversion of the Church.”<sup>117</sup>

How does one draw conclusions from a document that both quotes from CELAM’s Puebla document on the importance of including economic, social, and political concerns in pastoral work while simultaneously warning against focusing too much on economic, social, and political concerns? Like Santo Domingo, it had something for everyone. Liberationists, pastoralists, and conservatives alike could point to the elements that supported their positions while minimizing the elements that did not. And while “something for everyone” perhaps weakened the point of the diocesan document, it also indicated that some remarkable changes had occurred within the Church and within Mexican society in the previous decades. Indicative of such a change, due, I argue, to the concrete interactions between progressive clergy and indigenous peoples, were the following demands that the synodal document made of one of the more conservative bishops in Mexico, Norberto Rivera Carrera:

May the bishop rekindle a perspective based in the experiences of the poor, so that he is more open to creativity, dialogue, simplicity, participatory, easy to talk to, patient in listening, may he deepen his knowledge of the [indigenous] cultures.... May [the bishop] promote and accompany more closely indigenous ministry, social and prophetic, and promote women so that there is a significant change within the structures of the Church and society.<sup>118</sup>

Perhaps then, Padre Tacho and his colleagues might be thought of as hinges between socio-economic, class-based activism of the 1970s and the cultural activism that began to flourish in the 1980s and 90s. The revolutionary strain of Latin American Catholicism that began with Colombian priest and guerrilla Camilo Torres, coursed

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 85.

through Chile and the Christians for Socialism movement, ran through Central America and the Church's embrace of human rights in the face of genocidal military violence, came to a close with the gradual tightening of the neoliberal noose. Cold War military and police technologies throughout the Americas were retooled against new social movements.<sup>119</sup> Within the Church, Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI gradually but thoroughly made it evident that the post-Cold War Catholic Church had little room for the liberationist strands of the 1970s and 80s. But in the place of socio-economic change, revolutionary or reformist, Padre Tacho and his colleagues found space for different activism in their advocacy of indigenous territorial, cultural, and linguistic rights, in defense of human rights, in advocacy for biodiversity and native food sources free of GMOs, in natural medicine and indigenous ancestral knowledge.<sup>120</sup> And significantly, they have often found an ally in the current Pope Francis, who announced to the world, in *Laudato Si*, an unprecedented Catholic commitment to ecology and protection of the sacred spaces that give life to indigenous communities in Mexico and across the globe.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Schrader, *Badges Without Borders*. Paley, *Drug War Capitalism*; González Rodríguez, *The Iguala 43*.

<sup>120</sup> Gálvez, *Eating NAFTA*; Fitting, *The Struggle for Maize*. On the opening for multiculturalism that neoliberalism seemed to have promoted in place of socio-economic reform, see Charles Hale, *Más que un indio*; Overmyer-Velazquez, *Folkloric Poverty*.

<sup>121</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': Encyclical Letter of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home* (Rome: The Vatican, May, 2015).

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_encyclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclica-laudato-si.html).

## Conclusion

The mid-1990s were a low point for progressive Catholic activism. Hierarchical sanctions and government surveillance circumscribed the liberationists' spaces. But out of the painful blow that was the closing of SERESURE, I have shown the ways in which networks of indigenous and indigenist liberationists continued to carve out new spaces for cultural and socio-economic activism. Contemporary events such as the annual Náhuatl masses at the Basilica of Guadalupe indicate some ways in which the liberationist experiments in *pastoral indígena* and *teología india* saw long-term realization. After years of agitation, petitioning, informal translations, and “unauthorized” celebrations like the first Náhuatl mass in Coapan in 1992, the Vatican finally gave the nod of approval: the use of Náhuatl was now permitted in liturgical celebrations as of December 12, 2015.<sup>122</sup>

If the most radical proposals and projects of Liberation Theology had been deemed dangerous, heterodox, and unacceptable to the Church, it appeared that the cultural and linguistic projects were, after many years, not just deemed acceptable but fully endorsed by the highest seat of the Church. Caveats remained. Any future translation of the liturgy must be first approved by the CEM and then the Sacred Congregation of the Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments before official use. The Vatican, however, fully encouraged the Mexican Episcopate to capitalize on their opportunity and go beyond translating the ordinary liturgy and compile translations

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<sup>122</sup> Letter from Archbishop Arthur Roche, Secretary of the Congregation of Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, to Archbishop of Guadalajara Mons. José Francisco Robles Ortega, President of the Mexican Bishops Conference, Vatican Prot N. 724/13, Dec. 12, 2015, in possession of author.

of the Bible, the Roman Missal, the Lectionary, and a collection of liturgical song - essentially sanctioning the work that priests, catechists, and lay activists had already been doing for years in the Tehuacán region.<sup>123</sup>

The official day of approval should not be overlooked. The CEM sent the petition to Pope Francis's Vatican in October of 2013, during the early months of his papacy. Two years later, on the Sunday (October 11, 2015) closest to Dia de la Raza (October 12), the CEM hosted the first official Náhuatl mass at the Basilica of Guadalupe, two months before the Vatican's official letter was released. This points toward a reasonable conclusion that the approval had been given and they were just waiting for the symbolic date to arrive before publishing. But most important here was not just a continuation of the special relationship between the Vatican and Mexico. Pope John Paul II visited Mexico more than any other country, not only spending significant time in southern Mexico specifically preaching and evangelizing to the indigenous, but he also legitimated popular indigenous religiosity when he, in 2002, canonized Saint Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin, the Nahuatl man to whom the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared.<sup>124</sup> Rather, Pope Francis took the additional step toward inculturation, indigenizing official Catholicism itself by giving Náhuatl Catholicism the stamp of approval from the Vatican.

Beyond Mexico, the 2019 Pan-Amazonian Synod met in Rome to discern the role of the Church in the region of the Amazon. While press coverage understandably fixated

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. The ordinary liturgy is the standard liturgy that does not change regardless of date, time, celebration, or liturgical year. The Roman Missal is a more comprehensive collection of liturgical texts and rubrics for the celebration of mass. The Lectionary contains the text for specific celebrations and the eucharist corresponding to the liturgical year.

<sup>124</sup> "Palabras de su Santidad a los indígenas de Oaxaca y Chiapas," and "Homilía en la Catedral de Oaxaca," in *Juan Pablo II Habla a la Iglesia de América* (México, CDMX: Librería Parroquial, 1979), 94-101; "Canonization of Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin: Homily of the Holy Father John Paul II," Mexico City, July 2002, [https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2002/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_hom\\_20020731\\_canonization-mexico.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_20020731_canonization-mexico.html)



on proposals to allow married priests and female deacons, the Synod was potentially more groundbreaking in other ways. Echoing CELAM Santo Domingo, the Synod called for a “conversion” of the institution of Church rather than of individuals to Catholicism.<sup>125</sup> And it placed indigenous voices and participants at the center of the synodal discussions. The preparatory work had taken over two years, during which “the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network, or REPAM, coordinated about 300 listening sessions in the Amazonian region. About 22,000 people were directly involved in the territorial assemblies and smaller dialogue groups, and another 65,000 people participated in parish groups.”<sup>126</sup> Representatives from indigenous groups also made the journey to Rome and presented testimony at the Synod for the gathered Bishops.

In other words, indigenous people themselves are more present, more heard, and more influential in the priorities, the programming, and the pastoral initiatives of the Catholic Church than ever before. While a good deal of this inclusion can be attributed to Pope Francis, the first Latin American pope, we cannot discount the ways in which the Vatican is in fact incorporating practices and experiments that had already been taking place for decades. The *encuentros* at SERESURE, beginning in the 1970s, began to place indigenous people at the center of developing *pastoral indigena*. The “first” *misa Náhuatl* in 2015 was preceded by the Náhuatl mass given by Padre Tacho, in Coapán, Puebla on October 11, 1992. And that too had been preceded by increasing use of indigenous languages in the liturgy and religious celebrations throughout southern Mexico in the decade prior by graduates of SERESURE. Even as the Catholic Church grapples with

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<sup>125</sup> This echoes the language from CELAM Santo Domingo that liberationists inserted into the Tehuacán 1993 diocesan synod regarding the conversion of the Bishop.

<sup>126</sup> Luke Hansen, “The Top Five Takeaways from the Amazon Synod,” *America: The Jesuit Review*, November 11, 2019.

sexual abuse, scandal, a conservative wing up in arms about nearly every papal utterance, the Church's unprecedented multiculturalism was in fact the product of years of debate and dissension, experimentation, and the patient organizing by a group of Mexican Catholics who held that building the kingdom of heaven on earth meant making the world a little more just and inclusive.

### **Catholicizing the Indigenous, Indigenizing Catholicism**

This dissertation has tracked, over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, the ongoing discussions, debates, experiments, and divisions within the Mexican Catholic Church regarding its relationship with indigenous Mexico. Mexican Catholics in the twentieth century, after the Cristiada, the establishment of *modus vivendi*, and the Second World War, stepped up to address the questions of the post-War era. Namely, they married the questions and promises of developmentalism and modernity with the long-running questions of conversion and the place of Catholicism in a secularizing world.

Hierarchs of the Mexican Catholic Church in the mid-century sparred over the shape of the tripartite relationship between Church, state, and indigenous community. Bishop Miranda in Tulancingo of the 1940s and 50s, open to modern agricultural technologies and social sciences to address both spiritual and socio-economic poverty of the region's indigenous people, found space for collaboration with the state that would have been unthinkable the decade prior. In Chiapas, however, Bishop Torreblanca argued for the Church to embrace its historical role as the "protector" of the *indios*, to complete the unfinished job of conversion from the conquest, and that the Church, rather than the state, was the proper interlocutor between indigenous communities and the world. To do

so, he argued, the Church needed to return to the practices of the conquest, the missions and missionaries who brought the “gifts” of conversion to the continent.<sup>127</sup> While one sector of the Church grappled with coexistence in a secular world, a traditionalist wing sought retrenchment as a buffer against the winds of change.

In illuminating this internal Church disagreement, not only did I show the foundations of Catholic indigenous activism in the decades that followed, but I demonstrated how central and involved the Mexican Church was in questions often considered the realm of secular state policy. Churchmen and women weighed in on the national debate over *indigenismo*, assimilation, *mestizaje*, and rural and indigenous development on a scale thus far unacknowledged in the historical literature.<sup>128</sup> Rather than residing on the sidelines, the Church was simultaneously collaborating and competing with the Mexican state, corresponding with and exchanging ideas with the primary architects of *indigenismo*, and warily eying Protestant incursion.

Just as state *indigenismo* moved away from its top-down approaches, so too did the Mexican Catholic Church.<sup>129</sup> A group of bishops in southern Mexico combined the moderate and traditionalist programs of their immediate predecessors with the promises and possibilities of Vatican II and nascent Liberation Theology. While the predominant narrative in the literature on progressive Catholicism has rightly highlighted the contributions of Sergio Méndez Arceo and Samuel Ruiz, this project relocated the sphere of analysis to Tehuacán, where Samuel Ruiz and his bishop colleagues opened a

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<sup>127</sup> Langer, *Expecting Pears from an Elm Tree*; Wilde, *Religión y poder*.

<sup>128</sup> See Roseblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race*, particularly Chapter 2 on Moises Saenz and the national debate over *mestizaje*. On rural development, Boyer, *Political Landscapes*; Emily Wakild, *Revolutionary Parks*; Wolfe, *Watering the Revolution*.

<sup>129</sup> Dawson, *Indian and Nation*; Lewis, *Rethinking Mexican Indigenismo*.

seminary that played host to multiple conferences on indigenous ministry and, for 20 years, trained a generation of clergy, many of them indigenous themselves, to work with and among Mexico's indigenous peoples.

Jennifer Scheper-Hughes, a decade ago, challenged scholars of religion in Mexico to look beyond the towering figures of liberationism to instead probe the "grassroots origins."<sup>130</sup> I count myself as part of a cohort of new scholarship that is in the midst of rethinking the narratives of Liberation Theology in Mexico and beyond.<sup>131</sup> The early scholarly literature assessing Liberation Theology was often pessimistic in its outlook, communicating narratives of defeat and loss, counting the movement as a shadow of its former self under the weight of neoliberalism after the end of the Cold War.<sup>132</sup> However, the liberationists like Padre Tacho and his collaborators point toward another possibility, one in which the long-term reverberations of Liberation Theology have yet to be fully assessed, and I am certain that there are similar stories across the Americas that have yet to be written.

Prolonged contact between the liberationists - bishops, clergy, men and women religious, and lay agents - and indigenous communities in southern Mexico changed Liberation Theology, the Church, and Mexico itself. If traditionalists asked how to catholicize the indigenous, progressive and liberationist factions of the Church

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<sup>130</sup> Scheper-Hughes, "The Catholic Church and Social Revolutionaries," 250.

<sup>131</sup> Wright, "The Counternarratives of Doña Lucha;" Espino Armendáriz, "Feminismo católico en México;" Yee, "Shantytown Mexico;" Pensado, "The Silencing of Rebellious Priests; forthcoming dissertations from Jorge Puma at Notre Dame and Madeleine Olsen at University of Texas, Austin.

Outside of Mexico, see Büschges, Müller, and Oehri, eds., *Liberation Theology and the Others*; Casey, "The Religion Question;" Keeley, *Reagan's Gun-Toting Nuns*; Sierakowski, *Sandinistas: A Moral History*; Fitzpatrick-Behrens, *The Maryknoll Catholic Mission in Peru*; Hernández Sandoval, *Guatemala's Catholic Revolution*.

<sup>132</sup> Burdick, *Looking for God in Brazil*; Burdick, *Legacies of Liberation*; Lancaster, *Thanks to God and the Revolution*.

increasingly asked, instead, how to indigenize Catholicism. Contact and interaction spawned new theological conversations on Indigenous Theology that spread across the continent, drawing upon indigenous religious practices to inform Catholicism itself. Mexico's burgeoning indigenous rights movements counted committed Catholics and clergy among leaders and members as they insisted upon the legal, cultural, and political rights due to indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples and indigenous communities were protagonists of their own stories, not merely victims of neoliberal structural change or the agendas of Church or state.

The Church's turn toward indigenous rights and indigenous cultural revival was, I argue, a product of these concrete interactions between indigenous peoples and Church agents in the late twentieth century. Concurrent with the Mexican state's turn toward "participatory indigenismo" during the Echeverría presidency, the Church too increasingly opened fora and spaces for indigenous peoples to exercise agency and make contributions to the transition from a *pastoral indigenista* to a *pastoral indígena*.<sup>133</sup> Crucial to the change in nomenclature was a change in position vis a vis the indigenous. No longer would the Church be working merely for, or "in favor of," the indigenous. Rather, *pastoral indígena* meant, in the words of the Bishops of the Pacific South Region, that the indigenous were to be "agents of their own liberation," and that the Church's responsibility was accompaniment rather than direct leadership.<sup>134</sup> Importantly, this transition was marked by greater inclusion of not just indigenous people but also

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<sup>133</sup> On participatory indigenismo, see Muñoz, *Stand up and Fight*.

<sup>134</sup> Obispos de la Región Pacífico-Sur, "Nuestro compromiso cristiano con los indígenas y campesinos de la Región Pacífico-Sur."

indigeneity itself (or what the Church imagined that to be) in the articulation of pastoral necessities.<sup>135</sup>

And so, a generation of clergy, trained in Liberation Theology, marxist social sciences, and an active pastoralism, met indigenous Mexico in their own communities. In these spaces, the pastoral teams responded to concrete necessities and demands of the communities and unquestionably improved the everyday lives of the villagers. They never upended capitalism, but the Padre Tachos of the Church assisted communities that sought greater connection to the world for better economic opportunities, an end to exploitation by middle-men that siphoned off the wealth of rural agricultural production and artisan crafts, a respect for and recognition of indigenous cultural and religious practices, an end to the discrimination and racism against the indigenous, and an end to *caciquismo* that circumscribed community political agency.

Of course, these are all still incomplete stories that are neither solely Catholic nor solely Mexican. The multicultural pluralism of Latin American constitutions rewritten during the Pink Tide enshrined decades of work to enumerate the legal rights of indigenous peoples. Shane Dillingham recently argued that the origins of official state multiculturalism are to be found in “midcentury development models, New Left antiracism and anticolonialism, and the grassroots struggles around education reform.”<sup>136</sup> I posit, particularly as we see Latin America’s growing influence at the Vatican and multiculturalism enshrined in the heights of the Catholic Church, that the liberationist catholic activism of southern Mexico is another place for us to find the origins of

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<sup>135</sup> “Reflexión crítica de la situación de nuestra región: VIII Encuentro de Pastoral Indígena, Seminario Regional del Sureste, Tehuacán, Puebla, 3-5 de abril de 1986,” DT. For a parallel argument regarding state policy earlier in the century, see Chapter 4 of Roseblatt, *The Science and Politics of Race*.

<sup>136</sup> Dillingham, *Oaxaca Resurgent*, 178.

contemporary multicultural pluralism. In fact, looking at the questions of revolution, reform, and the melding of cultures through the lens of religion and religious practice helps historicize our current moment, to see how the conflicts over indigeneity, Catholicism, and inclusion have been present and contentious since the conquest itself.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Brading, *Mexican Phoenix*; Voekel, *Alone Before God*; Scheper-Hughes, *Biography of a Mexican Crucifix*; Patricia Lopes Don, *Bonfires of Culture: Franciscans, Indigenous Leaders, and Inquisition in Early Mexico, 1524-1540* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010).

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