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**PRAXIS OF PEACE**  
**THE PASTORAL WORK AND THEOLOGY OF BISHOP SAMUEL RUIZ AND THE**  
**DIOCESE OF SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS, CHIAPAS, MEXICO**

by

Michel Andraos

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology at Regis  
College and the Department of Theology of the Toronto School  
of Theology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in Theology  
awarded by the University of St. Michael's College.

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Doctor of Philosophy in Theology, Faculty of Theology,  
University of St. Michael's College, 2000.

**ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION**

A new pastoral vision and process emerged in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas a few years after the coming of Bishop Samuel Ruiz to the diocese in 1960. The focus of this new pastoral process has been to develop a praxis of peace in a situation of poverty and cultural, economic and political systemic violence in which the Indigenous people of Chiapas have lived for so long.

The pastoral workers of the diocese and the diocesan organizations made an option to accompany the poor *campesino* and Indigenous communities and their social movements in their struggle for a better life. This accompaniment advanced the process of social mobilization which has taken place in south-east Chiapas since the 1970s. This study, building on widely held views by diocesan sources and some scholars about the root causes of violence in Chiapas, provides a brief background to the long and complex history of this social conflict which culminated in an Indigenous armed uprising that erupted on January 1, 1994.

This work examines the stages of the pastoral process of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, its origins and theological foundations, and highlights its significant turning points. This thesis claims that there has been a clear focus on and commitment to a concrete line of pastoral praxis since the early 1970s. The focal point of this praxis has been the building of *iglesias autóctonas*, autochthonous churches, where the Indigenous communities of Chiapas and their concerns became central to the diocesan pastoral work.

Bishop Ruiz's charisma and experience were key to the creation, development and articulation of the new diocesan pastoral praxis. Based on key theological essays, pastoral letters and homilies of Bishop Ruiz over more than twenty-five years, this study also explores the origins of Ruiz's theological insights.

In the final part, this thesis offers a critical reflection on the analysis of violence and the praxis of peace of the Diocese of San Cristóbal in the broader context of Catholic social teaching and Latin American liberation theology. It highlights the theological and pastoral contribution of the peacemaking praxis of this local church and the ways in which this praxis expands the universal Church's horizon and understanding of its mission and ministry of peacemaking.

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## INTRODUCTION

The majority of the world's peoples, together with the rest of God's creation, are yearning for peace. Peacemaking, at this moment of our history, is urgently needed on a global scale. The theme of peace occupies a central place in the Bible. In Luke's gospel, peace to the people of the earth was the first good news from heaven at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:14). And in his proclamation of and witness to the Reign of God, Jesus was essentially launching a project of reconciliation and peacemaking with self, God, neighbour, community, society at large, and the earth. The absence of peace at this global juncture calls Christian churches around the world to engage in a new reflection on social peacemaking, each in their own context.

Though peace is a central theme in most world religions, scholars in the area of theology of peace from different Christian traditions often note that theological reflection on peace and its pastoral implications has not been given enough attention.<sup>1</sup> I believe this remark speaks as well for other world religions.<sup>2</sup> This thesis, "Praxis of

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<sup>1</sup>Theologians and biblical scholars from different Christian traditions argue that there has not been enough attention given to the topic of peace in the biblical and theological research. See Stephen E. Lammers, "Peace," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, ed. Judith A. Dwyer (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1994); Perry B. Yoder and Willard M. Swartley, eds., *The Meaning of Peace*, Biblical Studies, Studies in Peace and Scripture, Institute of Mennonite Studies (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), Preface, x, xiii.

Peace: The Pastoral Work and Theology of Bishop Samuel Ruiz and the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico," seeks to advance our critical thinking about the pastoral process, theological contribution and challenge of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, and in so doing, contributes to theology and to the peacemaking mission of the Church in the new global context.

In this introduction, I will describe the context of my research topic, give a history of the genesis of this thesis, discuss the method and resources I use, present an outline of the following chapters, and set a working definition of *praxis*--a key term in my title and work.

### **General Context**

This thesis is a study of the praxis of peace in the pastoral process of the Diocese of San Cristóbal and the theology of Bishop Samuel Ruiz over the last three decades, with a particular focus on the 1970s, the years when this pastoral praxis was launched. The social movements of the poor campesino and Indigenous communities of Chiapas claim that their people have been historically marginalized, exploited and oppressed by the big landowners and the power elite. This practice, they maintain, has continued with the

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<sup>2</sup>William Klassen, *Love of Enemies: the Way to Peace, Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 1; idem, *Religion and the Gift of Peace, Occasional Papers Series* (Jerusalem: Ecumenical Institute, 1986), 2-3, 20-21.

present post-revolutionary Mexican political system and its subsequent governments.

At its general meeting in 1975, the assembly of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas made an option to stand in solidarity with its poor campesino and Indigenous communities and to support their struggle for a better life. This pastoral option came one year after the First Indigenous Congress. According to diocesan sources, this congress marked a turning point in the history of the social movements in the region and also in the pastoral work of the Diocese of San Cristóbal.<sup>3</sup> The diocesan teams and Bishop Ruiz worked together with representatives of the largest ethnic communities of the diocese in organizing the congress. According to Bishop Ruiz, after listening to the analyses and demands of the Indigenous communities expressed at the congress, the pastoral workers of the diocese began to rethink their pastoral plans because they realized that these plans were not responding to the real needs of the people.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>See Mario B. Monroy, ed., *Pensar Chiapas, Repensar México: Reflexiones de las ONGs Mexicanas Sobre el Conflicto* (Mexico City: Convergencia, 1994), 69-73; Jesús Morales Bermúdez, "El Congreso Indígena de Chiapas: Un Testimonio," in *Anuario 1991 del Instituto Chiapaneco de Cultura* (n.p.: Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas, Instituto Chiapaneco de Cultura, 1992), 242-370; Christine Marie Kovic, "'Con Un Solo Corazón:' The Catholic Church, Indigenous Identity and Human Rights in Chiapas," in June C. Nash, et al., *The Explosion of Communities*, IWGIA 77 (Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 1995), 101-110.

<sup>4</sup>Samuel Ruiz, *En Esta Hora de Gracia, Carta Pastoral* (Mexico City: Dabar, 1993) 26-27; English translation, "In This Hour of Grace," in *Origins*, vol. 23:34 (February 10, 1994), 591-602.

The local and global economic changes of the 1980s promoted by the power elites and governments led to the "liberalization" of local economies which made life more difficult for the poor people on a global scale. Chiapas was no exception. The new social movements in Chiapas began to protest against the imposed state of poverty and misery.<sup>5</sup> In the late 1980s and early 1990s, these movements were persecuted by the power elites of the state who used their private "white guards," the police force, and at times the federal army to oppress them. The persecution included violence against their leaders, community organizers, and the institutions that supported them such as the Diocese of San Cristóbal. The pastoral programs of the diocese and the work of its affiliated organizations had been contributing to the growth and development of these new social organizations and supporting their struggle for a better life, freedom and democracy. Many pastoral workers and community catechists were harassed, imprisoned, their homes and centres searched and destroyed, and some were murdered. In the early 1990s, as a result of the implementation of new

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<sup>5</sup>See George A. Collier, *Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* (Oakland: Food First, The Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1994); Eduardo Luis Duhalde, *Chiapas, la Nueva Insurgencia: la Rebelión Zapatista y la Crisis del Estado Mexicano* (Buenos Aires: Ediciones del Pensamiento Nacional, 1994); Asociación para el Desarrollo de la Investigación Científica y Humanística en Chiapas (ADICH), *Foro Regional, Tratado de Libre Comercio, Reformas al Artículo 27 Constitucional, Reforma Educativa*, eds. Daniel Villafuerte et al., (San Cristóbal, Chiapas: ADICH, 1993); Neil Harvey et al., *Rebellion in Chiapas, Rural Reforms, Campesino Radicalism, and the Limits to Salinismo* (California: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California at San Diego, 1994); Monroy, ed., *Pensar Chiapas, Repensar Mexico*.



economic policies that were supposed to prepare Mexico to join the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the frustration of activists and their supporters in the social movements increased, almost reaching despair.<sup>6</sup>

On the eve of January 1, 1994, the Zapatista Army for National Liberation (EZLN), an Indigenous community-based army with its headquarters and strongest basis of support within the geographical boundaries of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, declared war on the Mexican Army and system. According to the "Declaration of War" of the EZLN, their uprising was a protest to change the miserable social conditions in which the majority of their people had lived for so long. The leaders of the EZLN repeatedly stated that the armed uprising was their last resort after all attempts for a peaceful social change had failed. They had, according to their declarations, exhausted all the legal means to improve their life conditions. "Enough is Enough!" became their slogan; between dying of disease and hunger on their knees and dying with dignity, they said, they chose the latter.<sup>7</sup>

The Mexican government responded to these popular protests and to the Zapatista uprising by sending thousands of troops of the federal army, essentially militarizing the State of Chiapas and making the Mexican Federal Army an

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<sup>6</sup>See Yvon Le Bot, *El Sueño Zapatista: Subcomandante Marcos* (Barcelona: Plaza & Janés, 1997).

<sup>7</sup>*Zapatistas, Documents of the New Mexican Revolution, December 31, 1993-June 12, 1994.* (New York: Autonomedia, 1994).

important actor in the social conflict in Chiapas. Far from solving the cultural, social, political and economic problems of the region, the presence of the military complicated the situation, and increased violence and misery in many communities. At the present moment, the south east region of Chiapas is highly militarized.<sup>8</sup> The peace talks between the Mexican government and the EZLN, which began shortly after the uprising, did not reach any results and have been stalled since 1996. Many analysts describe the present situation in Chiapas as a low intensity war that is being waged against the community-based support of the Zapatistas. Thousands of poor peasants have been displaced from their homes and communities; paramilitary groups are proliferating, dividing many communities against each other; people are murdered almost on a daily basis; and the government's militarism and repression are constantly increasing. On December 22, 1997, a group of forty five unarmed displaced civilians, mostly women and children members of a pacifist group called "Las Abejas" (The Bees), were massacred while praying in a chapel in the village of Acteal. Several reports affirm that the planning and execution of this massacre involved state, police and army officials. Foreigners who are in Chiapas representing international humanitarian and human rights organizations

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<sup>8</sup>*Militarization and Violence in Chiapas*, Comp. by Coordination of Non Governmental Organizations for Peace (CONPAZ) et al. (Mexico City: CONPAZ, 1997); *Ni Paz Ni Justicia*, various authors, comp. by Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas (San Cristóbal, Chiapas: Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, 1996).

are routinely harassed and deported. According to many observers, Chiapas is ungovernable, and the prospect of true peace between the EZLN and the government is very slim.<sup>9</sup>

The Mexican federal government and its provincial representatives, together with the economic and political elite of Chiapas, have accused Bishop Ruiz and the diocesan pastoral workers of being the main movers behind the Zapatista uprising, and, thus, of being the root cause of violence and social unrest in Chiapas.<sup>10</sup>

In the midst of all this chaos and suffering, there are powerful signs of hope and peacemaking founded on reconciliation, justice and dignity. These signs are emerging among the campesino, Indigenous and poor communities of Chiapas. Communities are coming together, affirming their political, economic and cultural rights, and taking their position in society as subjects of their own history. Their voice is being heard for the first time in many centuries. These movements are radically changing the lives of many communities. The diocesan pastoral process has been a significant moral and social force that supported the creation, development and continuity of these social movements.

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<sup>9</sup>Jesús Evaristo Sánchez, "Chiapas: Militarización e Ingovernabilidad," in *Tiempo* (22-28 de Julio, 1997), 13-15.

<sup>10</sup>Pazos, *¿Porque Chiapas?*; Arturo F. Reyes, and Miguel Angel Zebadúa Carboney, *Samuel Ruiz, Su Lucha por la Paz en Chiapas* (Mexico City: Ediciones del Milenio, 1995); Carlos Fazio, *Samuel Ruiz: El Caminante* (Mexico City: Espasa Calpe, 1994); Carlos Tello Díaz, *La Rebelión de las Cañadas* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 1995).

### **Origin of this Work**

I visited the Diocese of San Cristóbal for the first time in the summer of 1994 as part of the Globalization of Theology program offered by St. Michael's Faculty of Theology in Toronto. In the summers of 1995 and 1996, I returned to Mexico to deepen my understanding of church and society. I took three summer courses which were organized by the Antonio de Montesinos Centre (CAM) and the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (CRT) in Mexico City. During these courses, I had the opportunity to meet with pastoral workers and theologians who participated in these sessions from across Mexico. The main objective of these sessions was to help participants do an analysis of the social context in Mexico and reflect theologically on their pastoral work. One of the themes that many participants repeatedly referred to was the Indigenous uprising in Chiapas. This uprising, they affirmed, has shocked the conscience of the Mexican Church and society and opened the eyes of many people to the reality of systemic violence and poverty among the Native people of Mexico. These reflections inspired me to return to Chiapas and learn more about the work of mediation and peace of the pastoral teams of the Diocese of San Cristóbal and Bishop Ruiz.

In June of 1997, I visited the Diocese of San Cristóbal again and participated in a two week peace camp at *Laguna*

*Santa Elena*, a small community in the heart of the Lacandon jungle of about fifty campesino families who belong to the same ethnic group (Tzeltal) and same denomination (Roman Catholic). These peace camps are fruits of an agreement among some Indigenous communities, the National Mediation Commission (CONAI) presided over by Bishop Ruiz, and the human rights centre of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, *Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas*. They invite foreign observers to monitor violation of human rights in the communities where the Mexican federal army is present. After participating in the peace camp, I did volunteer work during the month of July at the *Fray Bartolomé Human Rights Centre* and the *Centro de Información y Análisis de Chiapas (CIACH)*. During the same period, I attended several diocesan groups' meetings and held discussions and interviews with pastoral workers, including Bishop Ruiz.

In the summer of 1998, I coordinated a two-week exposure and solidarity visit to the Diocese of San Cristóbal of a group of members from the Canadian Catholic Organization of Development and Peace (CCODP). We visited several communities, discussed the work of the diocese and the situation in Chiapas with pastoral workers, and we also held interviews with diocesan leaders, including Bishop Ruiz.

In the summer of 1999, I was invited by the Diocese of San Cristóbal as part of a team to study the diocesan lay pastoral movement, *El Pueblo Creyente*, and explore

possibilities for future theological collaboration with this movement. I maintain a close contact with this movement and I am looking forward to finding more concrete forms of theological collaboration in the near future.

My last and theologically most significant visit to the diocese was in January 2000. I participated as the representative of CCODP at the diocesan theological-pastoral conference, "*Del Concilio Vaticano II al Tercer Milenio*" (From Vatican II to the Third Millennium), January 22-25. The occasion was to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Bishop Ruiz. The conference was attended by more than 800 participants from across Mexico, including many Catholic and non-Catholic Church leaders, theologians and international delegates. The conference participants discussed the diocesan pastoral process over the past four decades and celebrated its achievements. My various visits to the Diocese of San Cristóbal since the summer of 1994, and my participation in people's daily life activities, worship and celebrations, have been invaluable in giving me first hand knowledge of the pastoral work of the diocese and its affiliated organizations.

### **Method and Sources**

Participants in diocesan organizations and movements seek a theology based on a critical analysis of the social reality on which it reflects. Theology for them is a

critical reflection on faith understood as *praxis* of liberation, not only elaboration of abstract categories and frameworks. This approach to theology informed the method I followed in writing my dissertation. I began with an analysis of the social context in the terms of local diocesan actors (chapter one), then I examined the pastoral and theological response to the context (chapters two and three), and finally I did a critical reflection on this process (chapter four). The method of each of the four chapters was adapted to the goal of the chapter. However, due to the nature of the topic, it was difficult to draw a clear line in each chapter among context, pastoral work, theology (and spirituality). These aspects overlap in reality, in the pastoral praxis of the diocese and in my treatment of them. My approach finds echo in Sandra Schneiders' comments on method. Her work addresses mainly the study of spirituality; however, her remarks are relevant to other fields as well. The author notes:

Until relatively recently methodology dictated what a respectable scholar could study, namely those questions which the accepted method in one's discipline was designed to answer. Increasingly scholars are studying [relevant] topics and problems which overflow the boundaries of a single discipline and demand the use of different kinds of methods from within and outside one's own discipline or field.

...

Self implication [in the research project] also implies that we care personally and not just academically about the answers of our questions.

...

Care and commitment not only do not contaminate thought but enhance it and becoming more is not

inimical to knowing more but should be its organic outcome.<sup>11</sup>

Schneiders' comments on self implication in the research project, as part of the method used, lead me to make another clarification. I did not try to hide my "care and commitment" in this report on my research. In addition to my academic theological interest in this topic, my commitment to the people of Chiapas and the work of the Diocese of San Cristóbal grew as my study deepened.

My sources are also different in each part of the thesis. In the first part on the background of the conflict, I used the terms of local actors as expressed in diocesan documents and in many articles by sympathetic outside observers. In the part on the work of the diocese and the theology of Bishop Ruiz, I relied mostly on the diocesan pastoral letters, other published documents, manuscripts and interviews, as well as the published theological works by Bishop Ruiz and other diocesan voices. Some of these works are available only in manuscript form and most of them exist only in the Spanish language. Unless indicated otherwise, all the translations used in this thesis are mine. The original Spanish version is provided in the footnotes.

A final note about translation is important. Some texts are sections of documents that were written about thirty years ago. Most of these texts do not use inclusive

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<sup>11</sup>See Sandra M. Schneiders' article "The Study of Christian Spirituality," in *Christian Spirituality Bulletin*, vol. 6, 1 (spring 1998), 7, 9 and 10.



language. I chose not to change these language forms because these texts reflect the specific context and time in which they were written. Translating theological texts from one culture to another is not an easy task. I tried my best to present a translation that makes sense to the English reader, and is also faithful to both the spirit and the literal meaning of the texts.

### **Thesis Statement and Outline**

The focus of this thesis is the pastoral process of the Diocese of San Cristóbal and its praxis of peace in the context of the systemic violence that denies people their basic rights to a life with dignity, and oppresses their social movements. The pastoral work and theology of Bishop Ruiz, the pastoral workers of the diocese, its communities, movements and affiliated organizations developed a response to this systemic violence. This thesis claims that the totality of the pastoral practices of the diocese, together with the renewal of the ecclesial structure and the diocesan pastoral vision and theology, constitute a pastoral praxis of social peacemaking. The praxis of peace of this diocesan church is not one among its other pastoral projects; it is an essential characteristic of the whole diocesan pastoral process.

This thesis builds on the important teaching and method of the Latin American church leaders in the area of analysis

of structural violence. Latin American liberation theologians have developed this teaching and method based on their experience in specific contexts. This thesis uses the same method for understanding the conflict in Chiapas. The pastoral response of the Diocese of San Cristóbal is best understood in the context of Latin American Church teaching and theology. The three decades from the meeting of the Latin American bishops in Medellín (1968) to the present moment in Chiapas, have witnessed consistent development of pastoral actions and theological reflections which seek to be in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed in their struggles for freedom, justice and peace, understood as essential components of proclaiming God's Reign in history. Situating the pastoral work of the Diocese of San Cristóbal within the larger contexts of Catholic social teaching on peace, the teachings of the Latin American bishops and liberation theology provides a better understanding of this pastoral action for peace and its contribution to the universal Church. Furthermore, this thesis shall also offer a critical response to the claim that liberation theology and the work of the diocese of San Cristóbal have promoted violence in Chiapas, as many Mexican officials and certain sectors of the Mexican Church contend.

Chapter one, "The Context of the Conflict in Chiapas," provides a brief background to the long and complex history of the social conflict in Chiapas up to the Zapatista uprising on January 1, 1994. This chapter is not an

historical study of the conflict. Rather, it is a summary of widely held perspectives by diocesan sources and some sympathetic scholars about the root causes and character of this conflict. The diocesan analyses and views are the result of long processes of consultation, discussion, debate and reflection on the pastoral work of the diocese as part of their way of contextualizing their work.

In chapter two, "A New Pastoral Vision and Praxis," I present a summary of the development of the pastoral process and highlight its significant turning points. I focus in particular on the beginnings of this process in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and then I describe the development of its vision and praxis. This chapter also describes the persecution of the Indigenous and campesino social movements and their supporters, including the pastoral workers of the diocese and Bishop Ruiz himself, which intensified in the late 1980s and through the 1990s.<sup>12</sup>

Chapter three, "Bishop Ruiz's Key Theological Insights," is a systematic survey of the origins of Bishop Ruiz's theological thinking. I focus in particular on the themes of violence and peacemaking in his theology. This chapter is based on my study of his key theological essays, pastoral letters and homilies over more than twenty-five

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<sup>12</sup>A recent study elaborated by the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Human Rights Centre documented 251 cases of aggression against the diocese and its pastoral workers between 1994 and 1997. See "La Verdad Nos Hará Libres: Reporte sobre los Atentados al Derecho a la Libertad Religiosa en Chiapas," (San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas: Centro de Derechos Humanos 'Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas' A. C., 1999), 2; also see Appendix I for a copy of the appeal to the international community on behalf of the Diocese of San Cristóbal on June 21, 1997.

years. Bishop Ruiz's pastoral letters include his personal reflections as well as those of the diocesan teams; he does not speak only for himself, he speaks for the diocesan pastoral process as well. Thus, this chapter also offers an examination of the theological foundation of the pastoral work of the diocese.

Chapter four, "The Praxis of the Diocese of San Cristóbal in the Context of the Church's Teachings on Social Violence And Peace," situates the analysis of violence and praxis of peace of the Diocese of San Cristóbal in the broader context of Catholic social teaching and Latin American liberation theology. This chapter brings together the analyses of the previous chapters and highlights the theological and pastoral contributions of the peacemaking praxis of the Diocese of San Cristóbal and the ways in which this praxis expands the Church's understanding of its mission and ministry of peacemaking.

The conclusion recapitulates the main themes of this thesis and highlights the hopes that are emerging from the experience of faith of the Indigenous peoples of Chiapas in the midst of their suffering and oppression. I also point to the centrality of these hopes and the challenge they present to the universal Church and to theology in the new global context.

## A Working Definition of "Praxis"

*Praxis* is a term rich in theological meaning. There are numerous philosophical and theological works that discuss this concept and its meaning.<sup>13</sup> In the context of this thesis, *praxis* is understood as a category in theology which combines concrete, faith inspired social action for liberation, justice and peace, and theology as critical, theoretical reflection on the action.

According to Bishop Ruiz, theology without a pastoral praxis can not be justified. Theology, in the context of the pastoral process of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, is defined as a critical reflection on faith understood as pastoral praxis of liberation, not merely as affirmation of abstract

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<sup>13</sup>The term "praxis" was borrowed from the Greek philosophy and has been used as a theological concept from the very early centuries of Christianity. As Tomas Spidlik notes, early Christian theologians asserted in their discussions on Christian life that one arrives at theory (*theoria*) through praxis, and they warned of the danger of seeking theory without praxis. See Tomas Spidlik, S.J., *The Spirituality of the Christian East: A Systematic Handbook*, trans. Anthony Gythiel (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publication Inc., 1986), 177-179, 66 and 71.

Theologians and philosophers pointed to the distinction that Aristotle made between praxis as technical skill involved in making something, and praxis as a basic way of life. But in general, "theologians use the term 'praxis' to emphasize a configuration of meaning and action." This is based on a Christian belief in Jesus as a configuration of God's meaning and action. "Jesus does not so much bring a new knowledge (*gnosis*) as he expresses the reality of God in a concrete life-praxis." See "Social Mission of the Church," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, ed. Judith A. Dwyer (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1994), 165.

Francine Cardman links praxis to ecclesiology and doctrine. The author defines praxis as "the dynamic and reciprocal relationship of action and reflection, the ongoing, historical embodiment of justice, love and faith. Developing the praxis of ecclesiology in the light of Jesus' relationship to the reign of God would remind us that doctrine is always at the service of love and justice." See Francine Cardman, "The Praxis of Ecclesiology," in *CTSA Proceedings*, 54 (1999), 36.

truths. Don Samuel argues for an ecclesiology and theology based on praxis. In Bishop Ruiz's words:

[Orthodoxy] is not the mere acceptance of abstract truths; rather, it is to live the truth in a life of charity translated into actions; ... Theology does not judge praxis, theology is rather justified by its praxis.<sup>14</sup>

Don Samuel criticized the post-conciliar Latin American Church leaders and liberation theology because until then they have not developed sufficiently an ecclesiology based on a praxis of liberation, an "ecclesiology of liberation." This is precisely where the pastoral process of the Diocese of San Cristóbal makes a contribution to the Latin American Church. This diocese has developed over several decades an ecclesiology based on a praxis of liberation.

Latin American liberation theology lacks ... an ecclesiology of liberation based on praxis. ... There has not been any development of a post-conciliar ecclesiology nor an ecclesiology based on liberation theology. ... [This] demands pastors who nurture a pastoral praxis that inspires a different ecclesiology as an expression of a praxis.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>"[La ortodoxia] no es la mera aceptación de verdades, sino vivir la verdad en la vida de caridad traducida en acontecimientos, en acción; ... La teología no juzga la praxis sino la teología se justifica por su praxis" (Samuel Ruiz, "Condicionamientos Eclesiales de la Reflexión Teológica en América Latina," in *Liberación y Cautiverio, Debates en Torno al Método de la Teología en América Latina. Encuentro Latino Americano de Teología* [Mexico City: 1975], 86).

<sup>15</sup>"Le falta a la teología de la liberación, ... una eclesiología de la liberación a partir de la praxis. ... No se ha desarrollado una eclesiología postconciliar ni una eclesiología de la teología de la liberación. ... [Esto] exige Pastores que propicien una praxis pastoral que impulse o estimule al menos, una eclesiología diferente a partir de una praxis." (Ruiz, "Condicionamientos Eclesiales de la Reflexión Teológica en América Latina," 88).

Relatedly, added Don Samuel, there is a great need for the development of a pneumatology based on the action of the Spirit among the poor of Yahweh.

Finally, praxis, according to Bishop Ruiz, is a strategic, concrete, sociopolitical, historic process of working for social justice and integral liberation. In his words,

Praxis is not just any action; it is an efficient strategic action of those who are structurally dependent in Latin America and who are searching for political and economic liberation from the established sociopolitical system (understood as "structural injustice," "institutional violence"). Praxis embraces liberation which is a permanent and progressive process toward new stages in "becoming more human" and realizing the full human capacity and potential; ... [Praxis] is about a liberation which is not only "spiritual," and not only "political," but a true integral liberation.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to "praxis," "diocese," is another term in the title of my dissertation that needs clarification. By "diocese" I mean the pastoral workers and teams as well as the totality of the diocesan church of San Cristóbal. This includes the bishops, lay men and women pastoral workers, priests, religious, deacons, catechists, and all those who have pastoral responsibility in their communities and who participate in the activities of the diocesan church.

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<sup>16</sup>"La praxis no es cualquier acción, sino la acción estratégica y tácticamente eficaz de la dependencia estructural de America Latina, como liberación política y económica del sistema sociopolítico establecido (captado como 'injusticia estructural', 'violencia institucional') pero abarca también la liberación como proceso permanente y ascendente hacia nuevas formas de 'ser más' actualizando la capacidad y potencialidad humanas; ... Se trata por lo tanto, de una liberación ni solo 'espiritual', ni solamente 'política', sino de una verdadera liberación INTEGRAL" (Ruiz, *Los Cristianos y la Justicia en America Latina* [Lima: MIEC-JECI, Secretariado Latinoamericano, 1973], 9-10).

**Personal Note**

As I am writing the final pages of this dissertation, my country of origin, Lebanon, and the village where I grew up in South Lebanon, on the Lebanese-Israeli border, have been the scene of a new wave of violence. Civilians on both sides of the border continue to live in fear and anxiety, without peace. Watching the news in the last few days brought to memory the fears I grew up with as a little child in the 1960s, and the anger I experienced later because of the lack of justice which led to our uprootedness. Continuously transformed by faith in the Risen Lord of Peace, these memories which I continue to carry in my heart have been the source of my yearning for peace, my commitment to peacemaking, and the main motivation for choosing the "praxis of peace" as a topic for my thesis.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE CONTEXT OF THE CONFLICT IN CHIAPAS

The Indigenous problem is the crossroads of the problems of our whole society, and we cannot hope for a solution without finding a solution for the problem of all our society. Trying to change the Indigenous situation, without changing our social structures, is unworkable.<sup>17</sup>

Don Samuel Ruiz, 1972

#### Introduction

On the eve of January 1, 1994, a group of a few thousand peasants, mostly Indigenous, calling themselves the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) rose up in arms in the southern Mexican State of Chiapas, and declared war on the Mexican Army. They attacked army positions and occupied several cities and towns of the region, including the colonial city of San Cristóbal, the see of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. The attack lasted for only a few days before the EZLN troops were forced to retreat back to their towns and communities in the jungle and the highlands. There were about two hundred casualties in all, including soldiers of both armies and civilians.

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<sup>17</sup>"El problema indígena es la encrucijada de los problemas de toda nuestra sociedad, y no podemos esperar su solución sin la solución del problema de toda nuestra sociedad. Una acción allá sin una acción en el cambio de nuestras estructuras sociales es inoperante" (Samuel Ruiz y Javier Vargas, "Pasión y Resurrección del Indio," in *Estudios Indígenas*, II, 1 [September 1972], 46).

The main demands of the EZLN concerned: land, work, education, health care, housing, freedom, democracy and justice for the Indigenous and campesino communities. Their First Declaration from the Lacandon Jungle, "Today We Say Enough is Enough!" defines in their own words who they are, whom they represent, and what they demand:

TO THE PEOPLE OF MEXICO: MEXICAN BROTHERS AND SISTERS  
We are a product of 500 years of struggle: first against slavery, then during the War of Independence against Spain led by insurgents, then to avoid being absorbed by North American imperialism, then to promulgate our constitution and expel the French empire from our soil, and later the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz denied us the just application of the Reform laws and the people rebelled and leaders like Villa and Zapata emerged, poor men just like us. We have been denied the most elemental preparation so they can use us as cannon fodder and pillage the wealth of our country. They don't care that we have nothing, absolutely nothing, not even a roof over our heads, no land, no work, no health care, no food nor education. Nor are we able to freely and democratically elect our political representatives, nor is there independence from foreigners, nor is there peace nor justice for ourselves and our children.<sup>18</sup>

This chapter provides a brief background to the long and complex history of the social conflict in Chiapas which culminated in the Zapatista uprising on January 1, 1994. This chapter is not an historical study of the conflict. Rather, it is a sketch of widely held perspectives by diocesan sources and some sympathetic scholars about the root causes and history of this conflict. This is the version of history reflected in diocesan conversations and documents. It shapes their understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the Church. Understanding it is

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<sup>18</sup>EZLN internet homepage <[www.ezln.org](http://www.ezln.org)>.

necessary to understanding the diocesan pastoral responses. I also explore in this chapter the origins and nature of the collaboration between pastoral workers, diocesan organizations and the Indigenous and campesino social movements. My study demonstrates that this collaboration was significant in the processes of social mobilization and transformation occurring over the last thirty years in south-east Chiapas. This chapter will set the context for understanding the stages of the diocesan pastoral process and the development of Bishop Ruiz's theology and praxis which I will discuss in chapters two and three.

### **A Brief Background to the Zapatista Uprising and its Impact on Mexican Society**

The Zapatista uprising took place mainly in the two regions of *La Selva Lacandona* (the Lacandon Jungle), and *Los Altos de Chiapas* (the Chiapas Highlands). Both regions are located within the boundaries of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, and their inhabitants are mostly Indigenous peoples.<sup>19</sup> The Mexican Army responded violently

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<sup>19</sup>Chiapas has three Roman Catholic dioceses (San Cristóbal de las Casas, Tapachula and Tuxtla Gutiérrez) and several other non catholic churches whose members form about 40 percent of the 3.2 million population. Mexico is more than 90 percent Catholic and Chiapas has the highest percentage of non Catholics among all Mexican states. The majority of the population in the diocese of San Cristóbal (more than one million) are divided among five main ethnic groups: Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Choles, Tojolabales and Zoques, and two other smaller groups, Mames and Lacandonos. More than 30 percent of the Indigenous population does not speak Spanish. See Onésimo Hidalgo, "El Estado de Chiapas en Cifras," in Monroy, comp., *Pensar Chiapas, Repensar Mexico*, 15-27; see

to this uprising; they bombarded from air and land several villages, militarized the region, and occupied many Native communities. After 11 days of fighting, and under growing national and international pressure, a unilateral cease-fire was declared by the Mexican government on January 12.<sup>20</sup>

According to the communiqués of the EZLN, this uprising came as a desperate cry after repeated protests against the miserable social conditions which the Indigenous people of Chiapas have endured for so long. The leaders of the EZLN stated that the Native peoples of Chiapas have exhausted all possible legal means to improve their living conditions without getting any results. "Ya Basta!" (Enough!) became their slogan. Faced with dying as a result of disease and hunger, or dying with dignity, they said, they chose the latter. So, they declared war against the system which they believe has been causing their death.<sup>21</sup>

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also the internet homepage of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas at <[www.laneta.apc.org/curiasc](http://www.laneta.apc.org/curiasc)>.

<sup>20</sup>"The final tally of 12 days of war," reports John Ross, "remains clouded in claim and counter claim. The CNDH [National Commission of Human Rights (in Mexico)], in its annual 1993-1994 report issued this June, lists 159 dead, including 16 soldiers and 38 security agents. The Commission says 67 civilians were killed and another 38 bodies remain unidentified, putting the Zapatista death toll at, at least 48." According to the same source, also 107 people were wounded. John Ross, *Rebellion From the Roots: Indian Uprising in Chiapas* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1995), 150. See *ibid.* 7-153 for a detailed report on the 11 days of fighting.

<sup>21</sup>*Zapatistas, Documents of the New Mexican Revolution, December 31, 1993-June 12, 1994*, (New York: Autonomedia, 1994), 49 ff.; on the use of the term "war of extermination," see the questions that the EZLN presented to Mexican civil society for national consultation on March 21, 1999 in "Chiapas al Día" (electronic bulletin), Center of Economic and Political Investigations of Community Action, A.C. (CIEPAC), 142 (January 22, 1999), Chiapas, Mexico, available at <[www.ciepac.org](http://www.ciepac.org)>; see also the EZLN "Fifth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle," July 1998, available at <[www.ezln.org](http://www.ezln.org)>.

The Zapatista uprising had a profound impact on Mexican civil society. "Mexico cannot be the same after January 1, 1994" is a statement that was heard repeatedly in Mexico in the summer of that year, and which we continue to hear today. Many Mexicans said that they had been led by the government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) to believe in, and dream of, a democratic and prosperous Mexico; this dream, however, did not correspond to the daily reality of the majority of the people. This was the main message of the Native peoples of Chiapas on January 1, 1994. Alma Guillermo, a Mexican journalist, illustrated well the existing contradiction between what she called the "Salinista myth," and the social reality of Mexico revealed by the Zapatista rebellion. Guillermo writes:

At a moment when the government of Salinas de Gortari appeared to have scored an unequivocal triumph ... nothing could have been more moving than the spectacle of a band of impoverished Indians tearing down the Salinista myths. The Zapatistas said, "This country is not rich, and it is not democratic. It is corrupt, it is poor, it is Indian, it is us, ...."<sup>22</sup>

The Salinas government preached to the Mexican people that signing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) would launch Mexico into the First World, leaving behind the poverty in which most Latin Americans live. The North American dream, many Mexicans believed, was finally about to be their's as well.<sup>23</sup> A theological reflection paper on the

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<sup>22</sup>Alma Guillermo, "Zapata's Heirs," in *New Yorker*, May 16, 1994, 56.

<sup>23</sup>Antonio García de León, professor of history at UNAM, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, author of several books on the

Chiapas uprising, published in the summer of 1994 by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection in Mexico City, commented on the Mexican North American dream, saying:

We were dreaming of a prosperous and developed Mexico, we were proud because we became part of the first world with NAFTA and all this ...! But ... the happy dream only lasted until December 31, 1993. On January 1, 1994, we woke up frightened. First we thought we were hearing fire works, but no, the EZLN made us realize what we were denying ... that in Chiapas, and in the rest of the country, there was misery, oppression, humiliation ...!<sup>24</sup>

The Chiapas uprising, according to the authors of the paper, awakened the consciousness of many Mexicans to the reality of the poverty of Indigenous peoples and other sectors of Mexican society.<sup>25</sup>

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history of Chiapas, and political advisor to the EZLN during the peace negotiations, affirmed during his talk in Toronto in April of 1997 that many of the intellectual elites of the Mexican left (including himself), believed that the neoliberal economic plan of President Salinas was going to solve Mexico's economic problems and bring prosperity to the country. After January 1, 1994, this was not the case anymore, said de León.

<sup>24</sup>"Estábamos soñando con que México era un país floreciente y progresista, estábamos llenos de orgullo porque ¡ habíamos entrado en el primer mundo con el TLC y todo eso ...!

"Pero ... el feliz sueño duró hasta el 31 de diciembre de 1993. El 1 de enero de 1994 despertamos asustados. Primero creímos que eran cohetes, pero no, el EZLN nos hizo reconocer lo que no queríamos ...! que en Chiapas, y en todo el país, había miseria, opresión, humillación ...!" ("Chiapas .... Buena Nueva a pesar de Todo", [Mexico City: Centro de Reflexion Teologica, 1994], 1).

<sup>25</sup>The Mexican theologian Carlos Bravo shares the same opinion. He commented on the EZLN uprising saying: "El enérgico ¡ya basta! que lanzaron los indígenas puso en jaque la imagen del país ante el mundo entero y nos mostró como en un espejo un rostro que desconocíamos, oculto como estaba por el maquillaje de las modernidades: mostró lo que Bonfill Batalla llamaba "el México profundo", negado y reprimido, pero que está en la base de la cultura mexicana, con una resistencia que, acallada y reprimida por años, ahora se rebelaba y mostraba una identidad honda, entrañable y temible a la vez" (Carlos Bravo, "Introducción," in *Chiapas: El Evangelio de los Pobres. Iglesia, Justicia y Verdad* [Mexico City: Temas de Hoy, 1994], 9).

Chiapas, like several other regions of Mexico, is a rich land; it is the richest state in natural resources; but its people are among the poorest in all of Mexico. The majority of the Native people in Chiapas live in extreme poverty, and this is not a new development. Thomas Benjamin, in *A Rich Land, A Poor People*, provides a detailed picture of the historic and socioeconomic situation in Chiapas over the past century. Benjamin quotes a work that described the state of Chiapas in 1823: "despite the fertility of this province, it is extremely poor ...." And, notes Benjamin, the same has been said about Chiapas time and again over the past century and half.<sup>26</sup> The reason for the continuing impoverishment of the majority of the people of Chiapas since Mexican Independence (1810), argues the author, is the alliance between the economic elites of Chiapas, whom he refers to as the *familia chiapaneca*, and the governments of Chiapas. These elites, argues Benjamin, have been capable of constantly manipulating and using government programs to their own interest.<sup>27</sup>

More than one hundred and fifty years later, maintains Benjamin, the structure of domination in Chiapas has not changed. This group of political and economic elites continues to manipulate provincial and local governments

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<sup>26</sup>Thomas Benjamin, *A Rich Land, A Poor People: Politics and Society in Chiapas* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), xiii. The author quotes Vincente Filisola, "Descripción de la provincia de Chiapa," November 28, 1823, Latin American Manuscripts, Lilly Library, Indiana University.

<sup>27</sup>Benjamin, *A Rich Land*, xv.

through its ties with the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the ruling party of Mexico, and continues to control the economy of the state. The Mexican Revolution, early twentieth century, was for Chiapas only "a chapter in the longer historical process of elite-directed modernization and reform."<sup>28</sup>

However, though poverty and misery have not been reduced, and the situation now is not better than it was in previous centuries, there had been no large scale popular revolts before 1994. The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), and the ensuing agrarian reforms and modernization, did not change Chiapas much. The big land owners manipulated the new reforms after the Revolution and maintained their power.<sup>29</sup> The formation of the *Partido Socialista Chiapaneco* in the 1920s did give rise to a few programs of modernization between 1920 and 1950. However, although these programs "appeared at the time to be remarkably successful in promoting commercial agriculture," argues Benjamin, "what the prospering elites of Chiapas did not see were the high costs of their 'progress' paid by the Indian and mestizo villagers, migrant laborers, and indebted servants."<sup>30</sup> The

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<sup>28</sup>Benjamin, *A Rich Land*, xvi.; Enrique Semo, a journalist from the Mexican weekly *Proceso*, points out that Chiapas has been governed since the nineteenth century by an oligarchy of about 20 families who control the economic and political power in the state. These families knew how to adapt their discourse to the changes in central Mexico and stay in power. This group constitutes the strongest opponent to social reform in Chiapas, maintains Semo. See *Proceso*, 1137 (Aug. 16, 1998), 38-39.

<sup>29</sup>Benjamin, *A Rich Land*, 143.

<sup>30</sup>Benjamin, *A Rich Land*, xvi, 222.



development of the industrial infrastructure of modern Mexico had its high social cost paid mainly by the poor. This is precisely the situation against which Bishop Ruiz and his diocese have protested. Don Samuel has repeatedly pointed out that the Indigenous peoples are forgotten and marginalized, that they have become strangers in their own land. "We cannot continue to build the Mexico of the future over their graves," he said. Faced with this situation of injustice, affirmed the bishop of San Cristóbal, the church cannot remain silent.<sup>31</sup>

The reforms initiated by President Cárdenas in the late 1930s did have some impact on Chiapas, but no major changes took place.<sup>32</sup> Benjamin points out that the 1950s and 1960s were a time of remarkable economic expansion, and agricultural production increased significantly, but the problem of land distribution, which has been the root cause of poverty all along, remained. In the author's words:

By 1960 the *minifundistas*--the small landowners who possessed properties of less than 10 hectares and constituted nearly one half of landowners--occupied less than 1 percent of all land. The *latifundistas*--the large landowners who owned properties of more than 1,000 hectares and constituted only 2.4 percent of all landowners--owned nearly 60 percent of all land. Just 44 fincas monopolized 25 percent of the land.<sup>33</sup>

The 1960s, notes Juan Salgado, was the decade of Mexican authoritarianism; it was the decade in which the

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<sup>31</sup>Samuel Ruiz, "The Rebellion of the Excluded, 1994 Lenten Reflections," in *Challenge*, 3 (summer 1994), 3-6.

<sup>32</sup>Benjamin, *A Rich Land*, 191-92.

<sup>33</sup>Benjamin, *A Rich Land*, 226.

Mexican political system re-established its mechanisms of control, and expanded its economic and political "clientalism." This situation contributed to the pattern of unequal economic growth in the 1970s: resources and investments were geographically and humanly unequally distributed, and regions like Chiapas, at the margin of the periphery, were completely marginalized.<sup>34</sup> The impact of these policies on the communities was devastating and it intensified the social conflicts, asserts Rodolfo Casillas.<sup>35</sup>

In the 1980s, the situation worsened. Absalón Castellanos Domínguez, a General in the Mexican Army and the PRI's "elected" governor of Chiapas, noted in 1982 that the state was a paradox, because it was "one of the country's three main food producers but also one of the three states with the most malnutrition and hunger." This situation seemed to be taken for granted by Governor Castellanos. He maintained that in Chiapas there is "no middle class ... [;] there are the rich, who are very rich, and the poor, who are extremely poor."<sup>36</sup> "Among the many oligarchs who have

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<sup>34</sup>See Oscar Altimir, "La Distribución del Ingreso en México, 1950-1977," in Carlos Bazdresch et al., comp., *Ensayos sobre la Distribución del Ingreso en México* (Mexico City: El Banco de México, 1982), 48-53; Cited by Juan Salgado, *DESMI: Trazando el Camino Hacia la Economía Solidaria* (Mexico City: Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos, 1977), 6-7.

<sup>35</sup>Rodolfo Casillas, "La Participación Social de los Creyentes. ¿Quién fija las Fronteras?" in Jane-Dale Lloyd and Laura Pérez Rosales, coordinators, *Paisajes Rebeldes: Una Larga Noche de Rebelión Indígena* (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1995), 285.

<sup>36</sup>Benjamin, *A Rich Land*, 239. The statistics from the 1980s affirmed Governor Castellanos' observation. Chiapas produces more

governed Chiapas," argues historian John Womack, "General Absalón Castellanos had proved by 1986 that he was one of the greediest, most corrupt, most rigid, and most violent."<sup>37</sup>

In fact, the problem of poverty in Chiapas goes back to the time of the Spanish invasion. Since 1521, the date of the arrival of the Spanish *conquistadores* to Mexico, the Indigenous peoples have been suffering from marginalization, poverty, discrimination, disdain to their culture, and the imposition of new economic systems, politics, culture and religion which did not respect their way of life. The Native peoples of Chiapas resisted the oppression of the

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coffee, oil and natural gas than any other state in Mexico. It is the second leading producer of corn. Its rivers and dams generate 55 percent of Mexico's hydro-electrical energy, yet more than one third of its people do not have light in their homes. 60 percent of school-age children in Chiapas do not attend school, life expectancy is about 61 years and the state has the highest infant mortality rate in Mexico. See Hidalgo, "El Estado de Chiapas en Cifras," 15-27; Alejandro Guevara, "C.I.P.M.A. III Seminario sobre Pobreza y Medio Ambiente, Perfil Socioeconomico de Chiapas," in *CENCOS Iglesias*, (Jan. 1994), 32-36.

<sup>37</sup>Womack, *Rebellion in Chiapas*, 199. The term of general Castellanos (1982-88) was one of the worst in the history of Chiapas, in terms of oppression and political assassinations. He is one of the biggest ranchers in Chiapas; his family, originally from Comitán, Chiapas, is among the largest landowners in the region. The militarization of Chiapas began during his mandate. During his governorship, 153 political activists were assassinated, 503 people were kidnapped and tortured, 327 campesinos disappeared, 407 families were expelled from their communities, and 54 small communities were expelled from their communal land. When his term ended in 1988, the state coffers were empty, leaving the government without funds even to pay the year-end salaries of teachers. Members of the EZLN attacked his house on January 1, 1994, and took him hostage. They sentenced him to a life-time of peasant work in one of their communities as a punishment for the oppression, stealing and assassination of Indigenous people during his mandate. But he was finally released on February 21, forty five days after his arrest. See *Chiapas En Cifras. Para Entender Chiapas* (Mexico: Centro de Información y Análisis de Chiapas, 1997), 45; George A. Collier, *Basta!: Land and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas* (Oakland: Food First, 1994), 131; Tello Díaz, *La Rebelión de las Cañadas*, 89-90, 194-95.

*conquistadores* and the dominant system on many occasions and in many ways. There were confrontations and uprisings in the early years after the conquest (1524-34): the Battle of Sumidero, 1693 in Tuxtla; 1700 in Chicomuscelo and Soconosco; 1712 in Cancuc; 1869 in San Juan Chamula; 1974 in San Andrés Larráinzar;<sup>38</sup> and the more recent EZLN uprising since January 1, 1994. The present Zapatista uprising is the most widespread and well organized of all.<sup>39</sup>

Andrés Aubry, among others, argues that although there were no large scale organized rebellions in the past, there has been, however, a continuous history of resistance. The EZLN uprising on January 1, 1994 is congruent with the long history of Indigenous resistance, maintains Aubry. The author describes this long movement as a "slow accumulation

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<sup>38</sup>Since January 1, 1994, San Andrés Larráinzar has again been a site of several confrontations between the Mexican Public Security Police and the Native communities of the region. For example, on April 7, 1999, the pro-PRI "elected" council supported by about 300 members of the Public Security Police force took back the municipal building in San Andrés which had been occupied by the members of the "autonomous municipal council," chosen by the community according to traditional customs. On the following day, April 8, 1999, about 3,000 pro-Zapatista Indigenous people marched in a pacific way and regained control of their municipal building, and re-installed their 'autonomous council'. *La Jornada*, April 9, 1999, 3, 4 and 5.

<sup>39</sup>On the various rebellions throughout the history of Chiapas see Elizabeth Pólito Barrios, "Las Autonomías," in *El Caminante, Boletín Interno de la Diócesis de San Cristóbal de Las Casas*, 2ª Epoca, (May 1996), 37-44; Andrés Aubry, "La Historia de Chiapas Identifica a Los Zapatistas," in *CENCOS Iglesias* (Sept. 1994), 25-35; Jan de Vos, "The Battle of Sumidero, A History of the Chiapanecan Rebellion Through Spanish and Indian Testimonies (1524-34)," in Kevin Gosner and Arij Ouweneel, eds., *Indigenous Revolts in Chiapas and the Andean Highlands* (Amsterdam: CEDLA, 1996), 9-25; Kevin Gosner, "Historical Perspectives on Maya Resistance," in Gosner et al., eds., *Indigenous Revolts*, 26-42; Jan Rus, "Whose Caste War? Indians, Ladinos and the Chiapas 'Caste War' of 1869," in Gosner et al., eds., *Indigenous Revolts*, 43-77; and Salgado, *DESMI ...*, 6-15.

of force in silence."<sup>40</sup> The history of many Indigenous communities in Chiapas--and elsewhere--demonstrates that there was no time when Indigenous people were not resisting the colonizers, even when their resistance was not noticed and recognized by the world around them. According to Aubry, many Native peoples have developed a *culture of resistance* which has become embedded in their way of life, community social organization, and popular religion. For many good reasons, this resistance has seldom been expressed in armed uprisings. Aubry also argues that historians are not in agreement about the nature of all these instances of resistance. He describes the sixteenth-century confrontations as part of the pacification of the conquest because the war had not ended yet. Some of the later confrontations, such as Chamula in 1869, were local conflicts which have not been studied yet, adds the author. Nevertheless, maintains Aubry, there is clear evidence of a continuous history and culture of resistance.<sup>41</sup>

During the 1970s, the Indigenous communities of Chiapas experienced a new social awakening. Many believe that this awakening was nurtured by the consciousness-raising popular

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<sup>40</sup>Aubry, "La Historia de Chiapas," 29.

<sup>41</sup>Studying the diverse aspects of cultural resistance of the Native communities of Chiapas is outside the scope of this work. For works on this topic, see Antonio García de León, *Resistencia y Utopía: Memorial de Agravios y Crónicas de Revueltas y Profecías Acaecidas en la Provincia de Chiapas Durante los Ultimos Quinientos Años de su Historia* (México City: Ediciones Era, 1985); Jean De Vos, *La Paz de Dios y del Rey, La Conquista de la Selva Lacandona (1525-1821)* (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación y Cultura de Chiapas, 1980).

education programs promoted by the pastoral workers and the catechists of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, among other factors. One of the most significant turning points in the history of collaboration between the diocesan teams and the Indigenous communities, according to many diocesan actors and external observers of this process, was the First Indigenous Congress which took place in 1974. The following section of this chapter will explore the context, process and outcome of this significant congress. It will also examine its impact on the future of Indigenous and campesino social movements in Chiapas, and on the diocesan pastoral process.

### **Beginnings of a New Social Movement: The First Indigenous Congress of Chiapas<sup>42</sup>**

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<sup>42</sup>Jesús Morales Bermúdez, "El Congreso Indígena de Chiapas," 242-370; Samuel Ruiz, *En Esta Hora de Gracia*, pastoral letter (Mexico City: Dabar, 1993), 6.4.1 (English translation, "In This Hour of Grace," in *Origins*, 23:34 [February 10, 1994], 591-602); idem, *Seeking Freedom, Bishop Samuel Ruiz in Conversation with Jorge S. Santiago*, Michel Andraos ed. and trans., (Toronto: Toronto Council of the Canadian Organization for Development and Peace, 1999), 11-18; Fazio, *Samuel Ruiz, El Caminante*, 103-107; Marina Patricia Jiménez Ramírez, "La Interacción Entre la Iglesia de la Diócesis de San Cristóbal y Los Procesos Sociales de las Comunidades Indígenas del Municipio de Pantelho, Chiapas," thesis, (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), 1994), 112-113; Collier, *Basta! Land and the Zapatista Rebellion*, 61-68; Pablo Iribarren Pascal, *Vino Nuevo en Odras Nuevos* (Mexico: Colección "Oasis" Tultenango, 1997), 11-20; Díaz, *La Rebelión de las Cañadas*, 66-69; Le Bot, *El Sueño Zapatista*, 46-48, 54-57; Monroy, *Pensar Chiapas, Repensar México*, 69-73; Garry MacEoin, *The People's Church, Bishop Samuel Ruiz of Mexico and Why He Matters* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996), 33-36; Michael Tangeman, *Mexico at the Crossroads* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 9-10; *Ni Paz Ni Justicia* (San Cristóbal, Chiapas: Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas, 1996), 59-62; Thomas Benjamin, "Una Larga Historia de Resistencia Indígena Campesina: Un Ensayo Sobre la Etnohistoriografía de Chiapas," in Jane-Dale Lloyd and Laura Pérez Rosales, coordinators, *Paisajes Rebeldes*, 202-203; Philip L. Russell, *The Chiapas Rebellion* (Austin, Texas: Mexico Resource Centre, 1995), 32-34; Andrés Aubry, "La

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and the conference of the Latin American bishops, CELAM II (1968) in Medellín, Colombia, were two events which transformed the Catholic Church worldwide, and particularly the Latin American Church. The Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas was no exception; a number of concrete pastoral steps were taken by the diocesan teams in response to the challenges of these two important Church events.

According to several diocesan sources, the single most important event which influenced the pastoral work of the diocese during that period, and which transformed its pastoral vision and action, was the First Indigenous Congress of Chiapas, "*Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas: Igualdad en la Justicia*" (Equality in Justice), which took place in October of 1974 in the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas. This Congress marked a new era of collaboration between the diocesan teams and the Indigenous communities, and set a pattern of pastoral work which continues to the present day. Bishop Ruiz mentions this event often in interviews and pastoral letters because it strongly marked his ministry as

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Historia de Chiapas . . .," 31; Christine Marie Kovic, "'Con Solo un Corazon': The Catholic Church, Indigenous Identity and Human Rights in Chiapas," in Nash ed., *The Explosion of Communities in Chiapas*, 104-105.

Many of those who wrote about the contemporary social movements in Chiapas mention the significance of the First Indigenous Congress in the formation of these movements. However, few attempt to explain how and why this Congress was important. Jesús Morales Bermúdez, an exception, offers a detailed description of this event and a bibliography. The above mentioned diocesan sources mention October 14-16, 1974, as the date of the Congress, while Bermúdez (268) mentions October 13-15. Some issues about the Congress still need clarification, including the dates.

bishop, and is still vivid in his memory. For example, in a recent interview, Don Samuel said that in 1974,

on the feast of [the five hundredth anniversary of the birth of] Bartolomé de Las Casas, the first bishop of this diocese, we organized together with other groups an Indigenous congress [the First Indigenous Congress] which was probably the first of its kind in the history of Chiapas. This congress was an opportunity for the various Native peoples in the Diocese to come together and become more aware of their identity, unity and strength as Indigenous peoples and communities. The subsequent governments of Chiapas and its power elites have never forgiven us for organizing this congress.<sup>43</sup>

In 1974, the governor of Chiapas, Manuel Velasco Suárez, also the honorary president of the "Comité Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas," wanted to celebrate the one-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of Chiapas as part of Mexico, and the five-hundredth birthday of Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas.<sup>44</sup> Several events were organized to commemorate the birth of the "defender of the Indians" during that year. One of these events was an Indigenous congress. The name Bartolomé de Las Casas, comments Bermúdez, did not say much to most Native people in Chiapas then. In the author's words:

That he [Bartolomé de Las Casas] was defender of the Indians, we knew, but this was not something that the Indians of Chiapas have experienced .... His teaching was not part of the discourse in Chiapas: neither for

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<sup>43</sup>Ruiz, *Seeking Freedom*, 60.

<sup>44</sup>The state of Chiapas, then Province of Chiapa, became part of Mexico in 1824. On September 12, 1824, by means of an "Act of Incorporation," Chiapa separated from Guatemala and united with the Republic of Mexico, as a result of a plebiscite (96,829 in favor, 64,400 against). Two days later, on September 14, the Province of Chiapa was solemnly declared part of the Mexican Federation. See Benjamin, *A Rich Land*, 10-11.



the state, nor for the Church, nor for the political organizations.<sup>45</sup>

Governor Velasco asked for help from Bishop Ruiz and the diocesan teams to co-organize the Congress. Some commentators say that the reason he asked for help is that his government realized that they did not have enough popularity to convoke the Indigenous communities to participate in such an event.<sup>46</sup> The original idea was to organize a series of events to which academics and specialists would come and speak about Bartolomé de Las Casas, and the Indigenous communities would be invited to come, listen and learn about their first bishop and defender. Don Samuel accepted the invitation, but with some conditions; he proposed inviting representatives of the Indigenous communities to plan and organize the Congress; otherwise, said Bishop Ruiz, the Congress would contradict to the spirit and work of Bartolomé de Las Casas who promoted respect and recognition of the Indigenous peoples and their cultures.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>"Que es defensor de los indios lo sabemos, pero como experiencia entre los indios de Chiapas no existe .... Su doctrina no ha sido discurso en Chiapas, ni para el Estado, ni para la Iglesia, ni para las organizaciones políticas ..." (Bermúdez, "El Congreso Indígena de Chiapas," 249).

<sup>46</sup>See *Ni Paz Ni Justicia*, 59-62.

<sup>47</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 103. Tangeman, commenting on this event, notes that "with the 'conscientization' process spurred by the new catechetical methods already underway, Ruiz and his pastoral teams were determined the congress should be an opportunity for indigenous delegates to meet, reflect upon, and discuss their common reality" (Tangeman, *Mexico at the Crossroads*, 9).

After a year of preparation, which included several regional assemblies by Indigenous communities to discuss the organization of this event, the majority of the communities agreed to participate, and to play an active role in planning and organizing the Congress. In one preparatory meeting in the Tzeltal region, 400 community leaders were present. The diocesan teams proved to be capable of convoking the Indigenous communities. A summary of the life and works of Fray Bartolomé was prepared and read in Tzeltal at the meeting. The following excerpt from the discussions which took place at this preparatory meeting reflect the movement of protest which was in existence among the communities. These words, articulated in the early 1970s, were heard time and again in the following years. We recognize in them seeds of what became more sharply articulated in the declarations of the EZLN in 1994.

We see how in our homeland we are not united, and we do not respect each other. The work of Fray Bartolomé seems to have been in vain and we have lost its effect. ... For this reason, we are gathered now to reflect on our life, so that we know how we are doing, and also what we need to do so that we become really united. Because we are not only exploited by *ladino* groups, but we also exploit one another. ... For this reason it is important that we reflect now on how we are going to organize ourselves so that the word of Fray Bartolomé becomes really alive among us. Enough exploitation, enough offenses, enough cheating.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>"Pero ahora vemos cómo en nuestra tierra no estamos unidos, no nos respetamos. Tal parece que fue en vano la obra de Fray Bartolomé, que la hemos echado a perder. ... Por eso nos reunimos ahora para reflexionar en nuestra vida, a fin de que aparezca bien cómo estamos y aparezca también lo que debemos hacer para que en verdad estemos unidos. Porque no solamente nos explotan grupos de ladinos, nosotros mismos nos explotamos. ... Por eso es muy importante que ahora reflexionemos cómo vamos a organizarnos para que en verdad viva entre nosotros la palabra

About two thousand people attended the Congress, representing a population of approximately four hundred thousand members of the Indigenous communities of the diocese.<sup>49</sup> These representatives, from the Tzeltal, Tojolabal, Chol and Tzotzil peoples, the four largest ethnic communities in the diocese, met from October 14-16 to discuss their situation. "We wanted," they said, "to make our unity our strength ... say our word ... walk in freedom" For the first time in 400 years, comments Fazio, "delegates of four ethnic groups met for three days to discuss the problems that caused their suffering: land, health care, education, and the commercialization of agricultural products."<sup>50</sup> These four areas were identified by the participants as issues on which they should focus their efforts for social change.

After several sessions of presentations and discussion, meetings in sub-groups and assemblies, the participants arrived at a common understanding of the root causes of the situation of misery, poverty, injustice and violence in

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de Fray Bartolomé. Que se acabe la explotación, que se acaben las ofensas, que se acaben las burlas" ("Segundo Encuentro de Ocosingo," in Carmen Lora et al., eds., *Signos de Lucha y Esperanza: Testimonios de la Iglesia en América Latina, 1973-1978* [Lima: Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1987], 282-284; an earlier version of this Spanish translation of the Tzeltal text was published in *Contacto* 2 (Abril, 1974), 64-66).

<sup>49</sup>The exact number of representatives who participated in the Congress varies moderately from one source to another. However, there is no disagreement that a large number of the communities of the region were represented.

<sup>50</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 103. Twenty years later, the main demands expressed in the Declaration of War of the EZLN on December 31, 1993, are basically identical to those of the Indigenous Congress. See *Zapatistas, Documents of the New Mexican Revolution*, 49.

which their communities were living. The theme most elaborated by the participants, and which seemed to have been and continues to be, the most urgent was the struggle for land. The assemblies agreed on short term and long term plans of action regarding each of the areas mentioned above, and they discussed strategies to achieve structural changes. Bermúdez notes that the Indigenous communities gave the Congress the character of a popular organization. In one of the final speeches, the president of the Congress said with great emotion:

Who is Bartolomé now, the new Bartolomé? ... The Bartolomé now is us; our communities; it is the Indigenous communities united, because only this way we could be strong. Because the strength of our communities is in their unity.<sup>51</sup>

"In our union is our strength" became the slogan of the communities in Chiapas, and remains to the present day. The Congress concluded with *fiestas*, music, and dance.<sup>52</sup>

Theologically, notes Iribarren, the Congress involved significant developments. A fundamental theological question emerged at the Congress, which we had to face as a diocesan Church: "How to live our faith, hope, love and freedom in a situation of economic, cultural, political and religious oppression?"<sup>53</sup> At a follow-up meeting in January 1975, a few

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<sup>51</sup>"¿Quién será ahora el Bartolomé, el nuevo Bartolomé? ... el Bartolomé ahora somos nosotros; son nuestras comunidades; son las comunidades indígenas unidas pues solo así podrán tener fuerza. Porque la unión es la fuerza de las comunidades" (Bermúdez, "El Congreso Indígena de Chiapas," 261-262, 256).

<sup>52</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 103-105.

months after the Congress, the pastoral team of the Tzeltal area of the diocese met to develop their theology of mission, more inculturated and incarnated in their history and identity as Tzeltal people. The new missiology articulated at that meeting, notes Iribarren, was significant.

[We want] a Church that puts itself and its ministries in the service of the world. The *raison d'être* of the Church is not itself, but the construction and promotion of the Reign of God and its justice; [we desire] a prophetic Church, that emerges from the Indigenous identity, a Church that proclaims the gospel to its own members and that moves the people forward so that they become historic subject of their liberation.<sup>54</sup>

The vision the Tzeltal Christians was of a Church, opened to the world, in service of the communities, prophetic, emerging from within the Indigenous identity and moving the people forward in their process of becoming subjects of their history. This theology drew on themes which were central to the message and ecclesiology of Vatican II and of Medellín. In the Diocese of San Cristóbal, they emerged through a process of theological reflection on issues such as inculturation, autochthonous church, and the prophetic mission of the Church among the Tzeltal people and

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<sup>53</sup>Iribarren, *Vino Nuevo*, 12. "¿Cómo vivir la fe, la esperanza, el amor, la libertad en la opresión económica, cultural, política y religiosa?" This question according to Gustavo Gutiérrez, and several other Latin American theologians, is the fundamental question that liberation theology has been trying to answer since its beginning.

<sup>54</sup>"... [Queremos] una Iglesia al servicio del mundo en sí misma y en sus ministerios. La razón de ser no es ella misma, sino la construcción, el impulsar el Reino de Dios y su justicia; una Iglesia profética, que surge desde la identidad indígena; que se proclama a sí misma el evangelio y que impulsa al pueblo a ser sujeto histórico de su liberación" (Iribarren, *Vino Nuevo*, 14, 16).

other groups in the diocese. I will return to these themes in more detail in the following chapters.

According to Iribarren, the catechists' experience of developing the agenda and organizing the Congress transformed them. It redefined and strengthened their position and role in their communities; in addition to their role as catechists, they also became, in a broad sense, community organizers. The catechists provided the link between the various teams and their communities. Some of "the catechists," notes Iribarren, "were converted into leaders of the campesino struggle and exercised political functions in the socioeconomic structures ...."<sup>55</sup> Some of the early catechists continue to exercise leadership in their communities to the present day.

In the years following the Congress, it has become clear to many outside observers that the Indigenous communities are capable of organizing themselves across the different ethnic groups, and that, as Indigenous peoples, they have in common a strong community-based culture and social structure. In addition, many commentators assert that the Congress launched a new Indigenous social movement, and that this movement helped to a great extent in mobilizing the communities. This new movement quickly was perceived as threatening by the power elites.<sup>56</sup> The State government of

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<sup>55</sup>Iribarren, "Document from the Diocese of San Cristóbal," quoted in Jiménez Ramírez, "Iglesia de San Cristóbal y Procesos Sociales," 102-103.

Chiapas, in response to this threat, began to create parallel pro-government Indigenous organizations to maintain its influence in the Native communities.<sup>57</sup>

The Congress also brought face-to-face representatives of the government of Chiapas with representatives of its marginalized Indigenous communities. The State Governor inaugurated the Congress, and senior officials were present

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<sup>56</sup>June Nash argues that, as a result of the mobilization which ensued the Congress, "... independent groupings of campesinos emerged out of the government-sponsored National Campesino Confederation to form the Independent Centre for Agricultural Workers and Campesinos (CIOAC) in 1975, and in 1977 the Coordination of Independent Revolutionary Campesinos expanded .... The new social forces released by the Indigenous Congress and the Bishop's outreach organizations in conjuncture with increasingly independent campesino organizations overcame the cooptive tactics of the PRI" (Nash, "Community, Ethnicity, ...," 27-28). Other commentators point to three main trends emerging in the mid 1970s as a result of the mobilization spurred by the Indigenous Congress. The first was the *Organización Campesina Emiliano Zapata* (OCEZ) which focus mainly on traditional communal agrarian demands such as land distribution. The second was the *Confederación Independiente de Obreros Agrícolas de Chiapas* (CIOAC) which traces its roots to the Mexican opposition parties and labour movement, and emphasize organizing campesinos as agrarian workers. The third main organization, *Política Popular* (PP), was more of a grassroots movement focusing on popular education. It helped campesinos analyze their situation, and together search for solutions. For this reason it was called *Política Popular*. The role of intellectuals in this movement was to accompany the campesinos. PP groups became close to some of the pastoral workers of the diocese of San Cristóbal whose philosophy was also based on respecting the rights of the Indigenous communities to develop according to their own needs and pace. Two other significant movements with political strategies also emerged in the late 1970s along the lines of the PP: the *Unión de Uniones* (UU), and the *Asociación Rural de Interés Colectivo* (ARIC). They later merged and entered into negotiations with the government and achieved limited progress in securing credits for campesinos. See Harvey, *Rebellion in Chiapas*, 26-33; *Ni Paz Ni Justicia*, 62-72.

<sup>57</sup>Worried about the growth and popularity of the new Indigenous movement, the *Confederación Nacional Campesina* (CNC), a government sponsored organization, convoked another "Congreso Indígena," a counter Indigenous congress, in 1975. Using the same name, "Indigenous Congress," their convocation initially created confusion among the Native communities. There was no high level of participation of official representatives from the communities. The government with those present at the CNC appointed *Consejos Supremos Indígenas* (Supreme Indigenous Councils) and harassed some of the communities which did not agree to join the new councils. Bermúdez, "El Congreso Indígena de Chiapas," 258, 256.

at all its sessions. They heard the plea of the Indigenous communities, their analyses of their problems, and their demands. The Congress provided an opportunity for the communities to speak their word loud and clear through the voice of their representatives, and the government heard them. But there is little evidence that the government has listened and responded to their cry. The events of 1994 demonstrated that the Mexican government failed to respond to this historic meeting. The Indigenous Congress of 1974 was a missed historic opportunity; it could have been the beginning of a genuine reconciliation and peacemaking process in Chiapas and beyond.

At a meeting two years later, the president of the movement of the Indigenous Congress affirmed that the Congress was meant to create "a supreme assembly of the representatives of Indigenous communities ... [so that] the Indigenous can have a voice." The message of the meeting in Bermúdez' judgment, was that in the past people like Fray Bartolomé spoke for Indigenous communities, but now they speak up for themselves.<sup>58</sup>

Accounts and reactions from the years following the Congress confirm that it was not a unique event. Rather, it

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<sup>58</sup>"una asamblea maxima de representantes indígenas de comunidades indígenas ... [para] 'que el indígena tenga voz' se decía" (Bermúdez, "El Congreso Indígena de Chiapas," 262). This meeting of the organization of the Indigenous Congress in San Cristóbal on March 17, 1977 was its last. The dissolution of the organization was announced by its president at that meeting. The movement continued in other forms of social and political organizations. See Bermúdez, "El Congreso Indígena de Chiapas," 276.



was a moment--a significant one--in the long history of struggle of the Native communities. As mentioned above, the Congress encouraged and gave a new form to a movement and an organization. Also, its inter-ethnic nature contributed to creating a new method for movement building and for broadening the base of social organization across the diverse ethnic communities. In his testimony, Bermúdez named the elements of this new method of organizing. I will mention some of them to illustrate the significance of this method.<sup>59</sup>

During the period of preparation for the Congress and in the years after, notes the author, the custom of holding assemblies, which is a traditional form of Indigenous "democracy," was revitalized among the communities at local and regional levels, including some inter-ethnic meetings. The participants in an assembly--after a long process of deliberation, which includes information, discussion, reflection and synthesis--reach an "acuerdo," a community agreement, to take a certain position or to do certain actions. Acuerdo has become a very significant term in the Chiapan Indigenous and campesino political culture. When an assembly reaches an acuerdo, it becomes binding on the people present and on the communities they represent.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Bermúdez, "El Congreso Indígena de Chiapas," 269-273.

<sup>60</sup>Marcos, the spokesperson of the EZLN, mentioned on several occasions that when they came as a military group to the Lacandon Jungle in the 1980s, they discovered that many Indigenous communities had already existing "democratic" practices. These practices, according to Marcos, influenced the political thinking and organization of the EZLN.

These assemblies also serve as a space for the education of the community, as part of a popular education method which they call "investigación participativa" (participatory investigation). In addition to their social function, the regional assemblies help in the promotion and use of Indigenous languages, and encourage people from different ethnic groups to learn each others' languages. These assemblies also contribute to inter-ethnic awareness and interest in the common good of the Native peoples beyond local and ethnic community boundaries, and also to the formation of regional leadership. These forms of debate, deliberation, and decision making are common practices in most communities and organizations in Chiapas today.

Bermúdez, who was the last president of the movement of the Indigenous Congress, affirmed that the Congress was the moment of birth of a new political culture in the jungle and the northern region of the Mexican Southeast. According to the author, this movement became the cradle of many contemporary campesino militant organizations. This was not a monolithic or uninterrupted process; it took different forms in different regions in the late 1970s and through the 1980s. When Bermúdez asked the question in 1991, when his study was published, about the future of this popular movement, his answer was: "Lo ignoro" (Who knows!).<sup>61</sup>

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See Subcomandante Marcos, pseud., *Yo, Marcos*, comp., Marta Durán de Huerta (Mexico City: Ediciones del Milenio, 1994), 41, 71.

<sup>61</sup>Bermúdez, "El Congreso Indígena de Chiapas," 276-277.

This process of organizing which emerged with the Congress inspired the organization of subsequent diocesan assemblies, and other newer organizations of the diocese, such as *El Pueblo Creyente* (The People of Faith) which will be discussed in detail in chapter two. The assembly became an organizational structure for involving grassroots and community-based groups in the diocesan decision-making process.

### **Social Mobilization in the 1970s and the 1980s**

The development of the social movements after the Indigenous Congress was different in different regions of Chiapas; and the factors that influenced these processes were also different. Andrés Aubry traced this development in two of the main regions of the diocese of San Cristóbal, La Selva and Los Altos, south-east and north-west of the city of San Cristóbal, the centre of the diocese.

The Lacandon Jungle, according to Aubry, became a "space of social construction" in the early 1970s. Several groups of landless campesinos came from various states of Mexico in search of land for survival, and began settling there in the late 1950s. In the early 1960s, they were joined by the internal refugees from Chiapas itself, mainly evangelicals from Chamula (Tzotziles from Los Altos) who were expelled from their communities because of religious and denominational conflicts. Aubry notes that many of these

communities crystallized around a sense of religious persecution and together formed new "cities of God" in the jungle. The early settlers gave their communities biblical names, such as Jerusalem, Jerico, and Betania.

In the late 1960s, the author points out, other groups from various ethnic backgrounds also migrated to the jungle searching for land. This journey in search of a piece of land, and a re-established community, was for them a journey of hope, notes Aubry. The names they gave to the newly formed communities, such as *El Triunfo* (triumph), *La Esperanza* (hope), *El Porvenir* (the future), etc., reflect their hope for a better future. They were adventurous pioneer communities who settled new lands where the climate was unfamiliar. Some later received official land titles through the national land partition programs; and some never did.

In the 1970s, another wave of poor campesinos began migrating to the jungle. They comprised workers who had lost their work on the coffee plantations in the central region, or who wanted to leave behind the burden of heavy, slave-like labour on these plantations. Some of these migrants interpreted their journey in biblical terms. Their analogy with the exodus of the people of God in biblical times, notes Javier Vargas, helped them understand their own life experience.

[It was an] exodus from suffering in their "Egypt," leaving behind the land where they were alienated, to a new land that they could call theirs; or better, to re-

possess the land that has been taken away from them. This is how the people interpreted their exodus.<sup>62</sup>

In this new "promised land" they forged a new more inclusive identity as oppressed people, according to Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, the noted Mexican sociologist. In the Lacandon Jungle, the author points out,

Tzeltales, Tzotziles, Choles, Zoques, Tojolabales and mestizos connected with each other. They became aware of their common identity as ethnic groups oppressed by the *finqueros*, cattle ranchers, and "kaxlanes," as they call the "ladinos" or mestizos. This identity began to emerge in the mid seventies.<sup>63</sup>

This new identity of the struggling campesino communities which emerged in La Selva, argues Casanova, united various ethnic groups and blended them together as a people. There is an analogy between Casanova's description of this social process and the Old Testament scholar Anthony Ceresko's study of the origins of people of Israel and their exodus. This analogy suggests key dimensions of the spirituality and theology of the exodus of the poor, campesino and Indigenous communities to the Lacandon jungle. Ceresko asks of the groups which joined to form Israel:

Who were these people living in the small, unwallled settlements perched on the hilltops, scratching an

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<sup>62</sup>"... sino su propio Exodo; su propio sufrimiento en el Egipto de su propia tierra la propia salida de ellos de esa tierra, en la que estaban enajenados, a la posesión de su nueva tierra; o sea, a la posesión de la tierra de ellos. Ese Exodo lo interpreta el propio pueblo en su situación real de hoy..." (Ruiz y Vargas, "Pasión y Resurrección del Indio," 45).

<sup>63</sup>"En la Selva, tzeltales, tzotziles, choles, zoques, tojolabales y mestizos se relacionaron entre sí. Surgió entre todos una identidad de etnias oprimidas frente a finqueros, ganaderos, y 'kaxlanes', como llaman a los 'ladinos' o mestizos. La identidad empezó a formarse a mediante de los setenta" (Casanova, "Causas de la Rebelión en Chiapas," 25).

existence out of the rugged hillsides of those central highlands? Why were they there? What were the social and political, and especially the economic forces which brought them there and motivated them in their struggle to create that early community Israel?<sup>64</sup>

Ceresko argues that the refugees from Egypt were joined by several other marginalized groups and together they developed a common new identity as oppressed people of God. In the new land, maintains Ceresko, the migrants from Egypt, escaping slave labour, encountered lower class marginalized groups of Cannanite society with whom they shared a common experience of oppression, and a common desire for freedom and building a new society. It was in this context that they forged a new political and social solidarity, nurtured by their desire for liberation and inspired by faith in Yahweh.<sup>65</sup>

There are interesting similarities between Ceresko's comments on the history of the people of Israel and the interpretations of Aubry and Casanova regarding the formation of the identity of the new settlers of the Lacandon Jungle. All point to the patterns of the formation of an oppressed people's identity, and their desire to build a new society based on equality and freedom inspired by their faith in the Divine. The stubborn faith of the people who made this journey of hope to the jungle of Chiapas was reflected in the early versions of their catechisms in the

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<sup>64</sup>Anthony R. Ceresko, "Potsherds and Pioneers: Recent Research on the Origins of Israel," in *Indian Theological Studies*, 34(1,2,3- March, June, September, 1993), 9.

<sup>65</sup>Ceresko, "Potsherds and Pioneers . . .," 16.

1970s, "*Estamos Buscando la Libertad*," (We are Searching for Freedom) which I will discuss in chapter two. Commenting on this catechesis, which profoundly marked the diocesan pastoral process in the early 1970s, Michael Tangamen notes,

[The] Tzeltal communities, encouraged by their catechists, began to recognize their own oppression in the slavery of the Israelites, their own forced migration to the Lacandón jungle in the flight of God's chosen people toward the promised land. ... Enthusiasm for the new catechesis had grown concurrently with the Indigenous congress, as communities reflected on a central theme: the discovery of God's plan for their salvation within the context of their political, economic, and historical realities of oppression and exodus.<sup>66</sup>

In the summer of 1997, I spent two months traveling in Chiapas. My trip included visits to the Lacandon jungle. I stayed for ten days at a civil peace camp in a community called Laguna Santa Elena.<sup>67</sup> Santa Elena is a community composed of about fifty families (approximately four hundred people), located in the heart of the Lacandon Jungle about 250 kilometers south-east of the city of Ocosingo. After five hours of traveling on agricultural roads from Ocosingo, one has to walk for another three to four hours on foot, on narrow and steep trails in the jungle, to reach Santa Elena; there is no road for vehicles. The village has no electricity, no medical or social services. People have been

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<sup>66</sup>Tangeman, *Mexico at the Crossroads*, 9-10.

<sup>67</sup>A civil peace camp is a space many Indigenous villages have created in their communities, where they invite a group of foreigners to stay with them for a certain period of time as observers and witnesses, in case of any human rights violations by the Mexican Federal Army, police force, or other organizations. These camps were organized by the human rights centre of the diocese and other civil organization in coordination with the communities.

living there, I was told by Don José, one of the community representatives, for more than thirty years. The majority of the population in that area are EZLN supporters. When the assembly of Santa Elena made a decision in 1993 to support the armed uprising, some of its families left the community out of fear that the army might attack the communities which joined the rebellion. They lived as refugees for nearly two years on the outskirts of Ocosingo, and came back to their community only after the Mexican Army took control of the area in February of 1995. Don José remembers that date very well. The helicopters of the Mexican Federal Army, he recounted, landed in the midst of their community and nearly destroyed their huts as a result of the air coming from their rotors. They fled to the jungle out of fear of the army, and only returned gradually in the following months. The army established a military base close to their community, and has maintained its presence ever since.

The metaphor of the journey of hope to the promised land is present among community members, and is reflected in their attachment to their land, as Don José and the other community catechists affirmed. This spirit was also reflected at the two community gatherings which I attended during my visit. The biblical readings on these two occasions were taken from the Book of Exodus, chapters 14 and 15, telling the story of the Pharaoh's army following the Israelites after their escape from Egypt. God was on their side and delivered them from the Egyptian army,



recounts the biblical narrative. I understood from the catechist, who was translating this reflection from Tzeltal, that this biblical story is important for them because it helps them understand their present history. The powerful Mexican Army, they said, has followed them to the jungle to take away their freedom. But they believe that God is on their side leading them to freedom, and thus they continue in their resistance.

The process of social mobilization in Los Altos of Chiapas was different. It was strongly influenced by the economic boom and crisis that the region witnessed in the 1970s and 1980s. The growing oil industry and the construction of hydroelectric dams in the 1970s provided work for many in Los Altos and offered temporary solutions to the problems of unemployment and land shortage. This situation changed in the 1980s after the Mexican debt crisis which began in 1982, triggered mainly by the international fall in oil prices. In addition, the Mexican government began in the 1980s to implement the "structural adjustment programs" which led to decreasing government spending on public projects. Many workers from Los Altos lost their jobs and returned to their rural communities to face the same old problems: shortage of land, unemployment, and poverty.<sup>68</sup>

The government of president Carlos Salinas initiated PRONASOL (The National Solidarity Program), a program

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<sup>68</sup>Nora Lustig, "The 1982 Debt Crisis, Chiapas, NAFTA, and Mexico's Poor," in *Challenge*, 38 (March-April, 1995), n.p.

directed toward reducing poverty in Mexico by providing assistance and creating infrastructures in poor areas. But, in the case of Chiapas, it arrived too late and did too little. It was launched in 1989 after the crisis had already taken its toll on the Indigenous and campesino communities of Chiapas.<sup>69</sup> Julio Moguel, economist at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), argues that PRONASOL, and similar other anti-poverty policies in Mexico, and in other countries of Latin America, were developed mainly by the World Bank and were applied simultaneously with neoliberal policies. The objective of these programs, argues Moguel, was not to find solutions for the problems causing poverty. In the author's words:

In neither the short nor the long term, were these programs intended to 'eradicate poverty.' Rather, they were holding actions, designed to make the bitter medicine of adjustment policies less painful.... They were not evaluated according to their ability to eradicate poverty, but their ability to assuage the growing misery which was becoming unmanageable and politically dangerous.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Lustig, "The 1982 Debt Crisis," 45; on PRONASOL see Julio Moguel, "Salinas' Failed War on Poverty," in *NACLA Report on the Americas*, 28 (July-August, 1994), 38-41. Moguel argues that PRONASOL had failed in all of Mexico and not only in Chiapas. When Carlos Salinas de Gortari became president of Mexico, notes the author, he promised that PRONASOL would confront poverty and eradicate it. "In 1988, he [Salinas]," notes Moguel, "announced a plan for a new war on poverty, one that would reach out to the 48% of the Mexican population then classified as poor, and especially to the 10% classified as extremely poor, or indigent. ... Six years later, ... it is clear that the program has fallen short of its goals. ... In the case of Chiapas--the poorest state in the republic--where around 70% of the population, or 2,247,347 *chiapanecos* fall below the official poverty line, Pronasol funds amount to 13 cents a day for each one of them. This represents about one eighth of what the World Bank considers to be the line of absolute poverty in Mexico--about three new pesos (one dollar) a day--and about one seventieth of what the country's National Population Council (Conapo) considers necessary to satisfy the basic needs of a family"(38).

The anti-poverty programs in Chiapas in the 1980s and the early 1990s were a failure, and the campesino movements were preparing to take action. The governor of Chiapas, Patrocinio González Garrido (1988-1993), argues Antonio García de León, managed to make President Salinas believe that the situation in Chiapas was under control, despite the confrontation that took place in the spring of 1993 between the Mexican Army and groups which later emerged as the EZLN. Governor González was promoted to become Salinas' Secretary of Governance. Salinas in turn, with his well publicized programs, points out de León, managed to impress his North American NAFTA partners with the image of a strong economy in Mexico that was ready and safe for foreign investment. "Salinas had paid an unprecedented eight visits to President George Bush," notes de León, "and revealed in the last month of his presidency that he had been hired by the Dow Jones company as an advisor."<sup>71</sup> The magnitude of the failure of the economic and political programs of President Salinas became clear a few months after President Zedillo took office in late 1994. The financial crash that Mexico experienced in December 1994 and the US-IMF bail out loan (Canada also contributed to this loan), maintains de León, implied "a ceding of sovereignty to international financial institutions and a greater US influence over Mexican policy-making." The Chiapas uprising, and the subsequent

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<sup>70</sup>Moguel, "Salinas' Failed War on Poverty," 40.

<sup>71</sup>Antonio García de León, "Chiapas and the Mexican Crisis," in *NACLA Report on the Americas*, XXIX, 1(July-August, 1995), 10-13.

developments in 1994-95, argues the author, demonstrated that the globalization of the free market undertaken under the auspices of transnational capital could accentuate structural violence against the disinherited sectors of society and lead to social and economic unrest. To cover up for its failure, argues de León, "the government unleashed a military offensive against the Zapatista rebels on February 9, [1995], laying siege to dozens of villages in Chiapas."<sup>72</sup>

The economic crisis of the 1980s left more than two hundred thousand workers unemployed in Los Altos, forcing many of them to return to their communities. This factor, added to population growth, made the land shortage crisis even more acute.<sup>73</sup> Migration to the Selva was not an option anymore because land there had also become relatively scarce. Working on coffee plantations was not an option either, because the owners of these plantations preferred the cheap seasonal labour provided by Guatemalan refugees who were coming to Chiapas in large numbers during that period. Also, argues Moguel, even among those who still had land to work, their real salaries between 1982 and 1991 fell by 51 percent as a result of economic crises and inflation. During the same period, notes the author, "the gap between rich and poor was colossal. In 1990, just over 2% of the

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<sup>72</sup>García de León, "Chiapas and the Mexican Crisis," 13.

<sup>73</sup>Casanova, "Causas de la Rebelión en Chiapas," 27.

Mexican population received 78.55% of the national income." <sup>74</sup>

Neil Harvey adds other elements to the story of the worsening economic situation in the 1980s. The demand for coffee, notes Harvey, began to decline in the mid 1980s due to the saturation of the international market. In June 1989, the world price of coffee fell by 50 percent. The consequences were catastrophic for many campesino communities in Chiapas whose survival depended on coffee production. On average, maintains the author, "small producers suffered a 70 percent drop in income [between 1989 and 1993].... Following the 1989 crisis, it took over three years of negotiations and mobilizations by producers before the government agreed to an emergency support program." <sup>75</sup>

Basic grain producers (Chiapas is the largest maize producing state of Mexico) in the same period did not fare any better. Due to the devaluation of the Mexican peso, the guaranteed maize prices fell below production costs, and more than half of the farmers were operating at a loss. The Salinas administration in 1989 accelerated free market trends by introducing a series of institutional reforms of agricultural structural adjustment according to the World Bank's prescription, and in line with the political logic of the neoliberal global market economy. These changes, argues the author, were not in the best interest of the local small

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<sup>74</sup>Moguel, "Salinas' Failed War on Poverty," 39.

<sup>75</sup>Harvey, *Rebellion in Chiapas*, 11.

producers. And this situation worsened with NAFTA. Over two million small producers of maize in Mexico, notes Harvey, were unable to grow maize anymore because average yields per hectare in Mexico are less than one third that of the United States. This situation applies to other grain products as well. Harvey concludes that "the transition to the free market in rural Mexico was governed by macroeconomic decision making far removed from the realities of the campesinos."<sup>76</sup> The author situates the Zapatistas' uprising in this global context. In his opinion, this uprising

is a response of Indigenous peoples to economic changes which threaten their main source of livelihood: access to land. These changes are not unique to Mexico but are part of the restructuring of capital on a global scale and the differential insertion of agricultural activities in the international political economy.<sup>77</sup>

The Salinas government proposed to deal with this crisis by increasing its spending on social development. But these funds were too little, compared to the size of the problems generated by the economic crises and "reforms," and arrived too late. In addition, notes a study by the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas centre for human rights, the government's social spending through its program *Solidaridad* was partial in favour of the communities which comprised campesinos who were members of the PRI, the political party in power, and their supporters. This deepened divisions and tensions in the communities". The campesino organizations,

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<sup>76</sup>Harvey, *Rebellion in Chiapas*, 12.

<sup>77</sup>Harvey, *Rebellion in Chiapas*, 3.

notes the study, lost hope completely in the government and came to the conclusion that "*ya no tenemos gobierno*" (we don't have a government anymore).<sup>78</sup> This conclusion led to further radicalization of the campesinos' movements, argue the authors of the study.

Harvey comments that "despite deteriorating economic and social conditions, campesino organizations demonstrated their capacity to respond to crises on several occasions, suggesting the cohesive strength of inter-community relations gradually built up over a period of twenty years."<sup>79</sup> In the early 1980s, organized campesinos protested in large numbers in various cities throughout the state. For example, in October of 1981, 3,000 campesinos marched to the state capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez; on August 11, 1985, 12,000 campesinos organized a march to Ocosingo; and on March 7, 1992, several hundred Indigenous campesinos marched for six weeks, all the way to the federal capital, Mexico City, protesting against the new agrarian reforms and the unfulfilled promises of the government.<sup>80</sup>

People from Los Altos began to migrate to the cities, resulting in the creation of new poor neighbourhoods; the poor landless campesinos became the unemployed poor of the cities. The proliferation of the poor Indigenous suburbs on the outskirts of the city of San Cristóbal is clear evidence

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<sup>78</sup>*Ni Paz Ni Justicia*, 67-68.

<sup>79</sup>Harvey, *Rebellion in Chiapas*, 31.

<sup>80</sup>Harvey, *Rebellion in Chiapas*, 31.

of this new social reality in Chiapas.<sup>81</sup> But not all those who migrated to the cities stayed there and accepted the new situation of misery and discrimination.

Moisés, one of the EZLN commanders, told his story to sociologist Yvon Le Bot.<sup>82</sup> He grew up in a family living in the Lacandon Jungle. Moisés did not know his grand parents, and when he asked his parents about them, they tried to avoid the question. Upon his insistence, his father told him that they had been working on a coffee plantation called *Las Delicias* (near *Ocosingo*) and they died there. Life was hard on the coffee plantation, and workers were not paid money for their work; the good workers were given some sugar and soap, and the bad workers were given alcoholic drinks. Moisés' parents left the plantation after the death of his grandparents and went looking for land in the jungle.

At the age of 13, Moisés began to go with his father to community assemblies. The problems discussed were: land, agrarian demands, credit, health care, and conflicts with other communities which were mainly over land issues. These problems were always the same, and so were the discussions. One day Moisés decided to leave and go to another community. But he heard there the same stories. Getting tired of this

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<sup>81</sup>See Aubry, "La Historia de Chiapas...", 32-34; Casanova, "Causas de la Rebelión en Chiapas," 25.

<sup>82</sup>This paraphrased story is taken from Le Bot, *El Sueño Zapatista*, 165-167.



kind of problems and of life in the communities, he decided to leave and look for work in the city.

It did not take him long to realize that life in the city was tough for people like him who did not know the language, among other things. "In the city no one offers you a glass of water, no one comes to you, and no one talks to you," he said. There was another thing in the city that Moisés did not like. He was working for an employer who owned some dogs: "His dogs were taken care of better than I was, and their food was more expensive than mine. What I was paid was not enough for me to survive. I decided to go back and live with my parents," recounted Moisés. He returned to his village and started going to community meetings again, and began organizing with the other campesinos to improve living conditions.

Moisés' story was typical of many among the ranks of the EZLN on January 1, 1994. Frustration and lack of possibilities for a better life for many Indigenous men and women were among the main factors contributing to the emergence of militant social organizations.

### **Political Repression, Exclusion and the Uprising**

Political repression of the campesino organizations grew more intense during the 1980s. Antonio García de León notes that the massive repression of the 1970s was followed in the 1980s by a "more selective repression, consisting of

the assassination of several peasant leaders." Those who carried these orders of repression, affirms de León, were "the federal army, the various police forces, and the armed private forces--the so called 'white guards'--at the service of the big landowners." To the Indigenous communities, the army "appeared as partisan force to be feared and eventually confronted," notes the author.<sup>83</sup>

De León adds that "of all the events leading to the uprising, the last straw was clearly Salinas' reform of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution." The amendment of Article 27 put an end to redistribution of land which offered many campesinos and their families, although in a slow and arbitrary manner, "small rays of hope that they might one day obtain a piece of land." Changing this article in the constitution, maintains de León, put the resolution of land disputes, concerning which the campesinos have well grounded historical claims, directly under the mercy of the big landowners who have been their historic enemies. It legalized the rumors that there was no more land for partition and permitted the privatization of communal land. "The landowners," adds de León, "finally had the government

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<sup>83</sup>Antonio García de León, "Chiapas and the Mexican Crisis," in *NACLA Report on the Americas*, XXIX, 1(July-August, 1995), 11. Between 1974 and 1987, 982 leaders of campesino organizations were assassinated in only one part of the Indigenous region of Chiapas; 1084 others were detained; 379 were seriously injured; 505 were kidnapped and tortured; 334 disappeared; 38 women violated; thousands of families were expelled of their homes and 89 community villages suffered total destruction. See Casanova, "Causas de la Rebelión en Chiapas," 30.

on their side, as well as the legal mechanisms to combat the organized peasant movement."<sup>84</sup>

The "reform" of Article 27, notes Harvey, was proposed in November 1991 and adopted just two months later. These changes placed the whole rural campesino economy at the mercy of the free market. Ranchers applauded the reforms while many campesinos' organizations protested against them. The former believed the reforms would attract foreign investment; the latter saw them as disastrous to their economic well being and culture. The Diocese of San Cristóbal, writes Harvey,

invited different organizations to reflect on the reforms at a special workshop held in January 1992. The workshop concluded that the ejido reform was part of the government's general strategy in favor of private capital; [that] the spirit of the original law had been broken as the public interest was subordinated to individual interest; that the reconcentration of land in few hands was likely; and that it reflected the objectives of the proposed NAFTA.<sup>85</sup>

Harvey argues that for many campesinos in Chiapas, *Salinismo*,<sup>86</sup> the Mexican version of "globalization," meant "increasing exclusion from markets, abandonment by the state, and the political manipulation of limited social

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<sup>84</sup>De León, "Chiapas and the Mexican Crisis," 11; See also Casanova, "Causas de la Rebelión en Chiapas," 27-28.

<sup>85</sup>Harvey, *Rebellion in Chiapas*, 25 ff. See also *Foro Regional, Tratado de Libre Comercio, Reformas al Artículo 27 Constitucional, Reforma Educativa*, Daniel Villafuerte et al., eds. (San Cristóbal, Chiapas: Asociación para el Desarrollo de la Investigación Científica y Humanística en Chiapas [ADICH], 1993), 60-93.

<sup>86</sup>"Salinismo" refers to the political and economic programs of the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, president of Mexico from 1988-1994, and the gamut of constitutional changes made to promote the liberalization of the economy and free trade.

spending."<sup>87</sup> The Indigenous theologian, Eleazar López Hernández, asserts that the impact of the advance of modernity, such as the above mentioned economic reforms, on the life of Indigenous communities in Mexico in general, is more deadly than the attacks of the previous centuries, because it targets the source of life of the Indigenous peoples: land, community, culture and faith.<sup>88</sup>

There are other interpretations of the events which led to the EZLN uprising. For example, Carlos Tello Díaz offers a very different interpretation focusing more on the political and ideological aspects, and less on the socioeconomic ones. In his book *La Rebelión de las Cañadas*, one of the first publications which attempted to investigate thoroughly the origins of the EZLN, the author presents an analysis of the beginnings of the new political organizations of Chiapas in the 1970s. Díaz notes that these movements were led by Maoist and Leninist student political activists who began to arrive in Chiapas in the late 1960s, escaping repression by the Mexican government, especially after the 1968 massacre of several hundred university students by the Mexican army in Mexico City. Some of these activists chose to leave the big cities and continue their struggle by helping campesino and Indigenous communities to organize in various regions of Mexico. A few went to

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<sup>87</sup>Harvey, *Rebellion in Chiapas*, 6.

<sup>88</sup>Eleazar López Hernández, "Los Indios Ante el Tercer Milenio" (The Native Peoples Facing the Third Millennium), CENAMI, Mexico City, 1998; available from <[www.uca.edu.ni/koinonia/relat/194.htm](http://www.uca.edu.ni/koinonia/relat/194.htm)>.

Chiapas, and some collaborated with the pastoral teams of the diocese of San Cristóbal, maintained Díaz.<sup>89</sup>

Aubry and Casanova strongly dispute this interpretation; and they question the motives and interests influencing it. Casanova identifies those who subscribe to this kind of interpretation as 'neoliberal ideologists' who "explain the Chiapas rebellion by saying that it is the work of 'Stalinists,' 'foreigners,' and other minorities, namely adventurers who manipulated the 'poor little Indians.'"<sup>90</sup> The author argues that this kind of interpretations does violence to the Native people. He does not deny that political activists from other parts of Mexico came to the region; but he argues that these activists were transformed

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<sup>89</sup>According to Díaz, there were two main political strategies or lines of action among these activists: one Maoist influence, and the other Guevarist. These two tendencies were reflected in the type of political organization and popular education of each movement. The Maoists focused on conscientization work and grassroots education, and they, notes Díaz, worked more closely with the pastoral workers of the diocese of San Cristóbal. The author suggests that these radical left wing political groups were able to infiltrate the Indigenous communities and movements with the help of liberation theology, Catholic priests, and the pastoral workers of the diocese. Those who stayed in Chiapas through the 1980s and into the 1990s were the main movers behind the 1994 uprising. This also was the initial official analysis of the EZLN uprising as expressed in the early government communiqués of January 1994. "Algunos de los sacerdotes católicos de la teología de la liberación y sus diáconos se han vinculado a estos grupos y les facilitan el apoyo con el sistema de radiocomunicación de la diócesis de San Cristóbal." (Some Catholic priests and deacons involved with liberation theology linked themselves with these groups and helped them through the radio-communication system of the diocese of San Cristóbal.) Díaz, *La Rebelión de las Cañadas*, 24. Díaz describes in some detail the situation of misery in Chiapas, but his final analysis leads to the conclusion that the January 1994 uprising was not the result of decisions of Indigenous communities, as the EZLN leadership claims. *Ibid.*, 69 ff.

<sup>90</sup>Casanova, "Causas de la Rebelión en Chiapas," 25.

by and integrated with the Native communities. In the author's words:

The revolutionaries learned that their rhythm is not the same as that of the Indigenous communities. They learned that it was not only a matter of organizing them, but also of learning how these communities were organized. They formed new organizations and politicized the existing ones. They were themselves politicized and they blended in with the people. They left their fundamentalist Marxist ideas and discovered that the 'reordering of the world' could only come as a result of a struggle for democracy which will include and emerge from the autonomies [of the Native peoples] and the rights of the Indian and the poor who are not Indian, and from there it extends to embrace the whole nation, including all its workers and people.<sup>91</sup>

In contrast to charges of Marxist manipulation by outsiders, Casanova points to eight factors which have contributed to social mobilization in Chiapas, eventually leading to the EZLN uprising: (1) the heritage of resistance and rebellion; (2) the on-going crisis of land ownership; (3) pastoral action; (4) the coming to Chiapas of political activists after the student massacre of 1968 in Mexico City; (5) population growth and land shortage; (6) the politicization of the Indigenous peoples; (7) the violence of the law; and (8), the violence of the political system.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup>"Los Revolucionarios aprendieron que los ritmos del pueblo no son los de ellos. Aprendieron que no sólo es cosa de organizar a los indios sino de aprender cómo están organizados. Construyeron organizaciones y politizaron a las existentes. Se politizaron ellos mismos y se confundieron con los demás. Dejaron sus ideas marxistas-fundamentalistas. Descubieron que el 'reordinamiento del mundo' sólo podría venir de una lucha por la democracia que incluyera y partiera de las autonomías y los derechos de los pueblos indios y de los pobres que no son indios hasta abarcar a toda la nación. Contando con ella, con sus trabajadores y su pueblo" (Casanova, "Causas de la Rebelión en Chiapas," 26); see also García de León, "Chiapas and the Mexican Crisis," 12.

<sup>92</sup>See Casanova, "Causas de la Rebelión en Chiapas," 25-33; Barry Carr, a noted scholar on social movements in Latin America, agrees with Casanova's analysis and conclusion. Barry Carr, "Zapatistas Then and

Among all these factors, the violence of the political system, which is the latest version of a long history of institutionalized violence, is, according to many social analysts, the main cause of uprisings. Casanova affirms that "in the racist and oligarchic regime of Chiapas, institutional violence is the law."<sup>93</sup>

In addition, June Nash highlights the impact of neoliberal policies on culture and community as an important element of the conflict between the social movements in Chiapas and the Mexican system. Nash notes that

the social movements that culminated in the uprising are the outcome of two decades of resistance and opposition to precipitous changes in which indigenous peoples have been integrated in neoliberal political and economic institutions that denied communitarian values and distinctive cultural practices.<sup>94</sup>

Mexican Jesuit missionary and scholar Ricardo Robles, who has worked for more than twenty years with various Indigenous communities in different parts of Mexico, including Chiapas, and has accompanied the EZLN as an advisor during the peace talks with the government, confirms that the political option of the EZLN has its roots in the Indigenous communities and their culture.

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Now," lecture at the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean (CERLAC), York University, February 11, 1997; see also Hernández Navarro, "The Chiapas Uprising," in Harvey, *Rebellion in Chiapas*, 51-63.

<sup>93</sup>Casanova, "Causas de la Rebelión en Chiapas," 29. The concept of "institutionalized violence" in the context of Chiapas, as understood by Bishop Ruiz and other Latin American theologians, and the development of a counter praxis of peace, will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

<sup>94</sup>June Nash, "Community, Ethnicity and the Mexican State," in Nash, et al., *The Explosion of Communities*, 22.

If we look at the positions taken by the EZLN and want to understand their roots, we have to see them as options which emerged from the culture of the Indigenous peoples. It is only through this perspective that we understand their deep and profound meaning. From the Indigenous perspective and heart, the reading of these events is well defined, clear and obvious.<sup>95</sup>

## Conclusion

The Mexican theologian Carlos Bravo asserts that the "Enough is Enough!" of the Indigenous people of Chiapas "from the depth of Mexico" has shocked the foundations of Mexican society and Church. In theological terms, he notes, the Mexican Church has discovered that God today has an Indigenous face.<sup>96</sup>

The social movement and uprising in Chiapas have not yet been studied sufficiently; scholars have not had enough distance and time to analyze its character, or to discern its impact on the life of Indigenous peoples in Chiapas, Mexico and beyond. But the outlines are clear. As indicated in the beginning of this chapter, the present conflict in Chiapas is complex with deep roots in history. It is the

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<sup>95</sup>"Si bien miramos la posición que ha tomado el EZLN y queremos entender sus raíces, tenemos que verlo como opciones tomadas desde la cultura indígena de sus pueblos. Sólo así cobra su sentido hondo, profundo. Desde el corazón indígena la lectura de estos acontecimientos es nítida, clara, evidente" (Ricardo Robles, "Sobre el Diálogo de Paz EZLN-Gobierno Federal: La Suspensión, su Lógica, sus Raíces" [On the Dialogue for Peace Between the EZLN and the Federal Government: Its Suspension, Logic and Roots], Mexico, September 6, 1996); available from Social Action of the Mexican Jesuits internet homepage at <<http://www.sjsocial.org/>>.

<sup>96</sup>Carlos Bravo, "Introducción," in *Chiapas: El Evangelio de los Pobres*, 11.



result of long-standing, unresolved social, economic, political and cultural problems. It is about the threatened cultural identity of the Indigenous communities and their search for life in peace and with dignity; it is about finding an inclusive form of government that respects their human rights and allows them equal participation in decision making and self determination; it is about finding a just economic system that is not based on exploiting their resources; it is about confronting the invasion of the new global free market economic and social forces which are threatening their livelihood, communities, culture, values and existence, as never before in their history. If peacemaking is the main task of Christians and the Church, how then would a local church proclaim the gospel, "the good news of peace," in the midst of such a complex conflict?

This chapter sketched the context for understanding the emergence of a new pastoral process of the Diocese of San Cristóbal. In chapter two, I will look at the origins, stages, theological creativity, and pastoral character of this diocesan process, and at how this local church in Chiapas is redefining traditional Christian notions of social peacemaking.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A NEW PASTORAL PRAXIS

Je suis en marche vers la verité et ... ce sont les plus humble de la terre qui m'y ont poussé: les Amérindiens du Mexique. ... À cause d'eux, j'ai commencé à désirer pour l'Eglise une nouvelle orientation, qui suppose une ecclésiologie différente de celle déjà connue et qui implique un nouveau type de pensée théologique.<sup>97</sup>

Bishop Ruiz, *L'Utopie Chrétienne* (1971)

Our diocesan church, in union with the Latin American and universal church, proclaims the praxis of Jesus and life in a participatory and loving community, committing itself to the people and their service, inculturating ourselves, as Jesus did, in the process of liberation of the oppressed. In this process they [the people] are the ones who decide their own history, and together we will build a new society as an anticipation of the kingdom.

Bishop Ruiz, *In this Hour of Grace* (1993)

### Introduction

Bishop Ruiz, his personal journey of faith, his theological development, and his pastoral leadership have had a strong influence on the pastoral process of the Diocese of San Cristóbal. His coming to San Cristóbal, without doubt, marked the beginning of a new era in the

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<sup>97</sup>"I am walking toward the truth, and it is the most humble people of the earth who led me in that direction: the Indigenous peoples of Mexico. ... Because of them I began to desire a new vision for the Church, a new ecclesiology different from the one we already know and which requires a new type of theological reflection."

history of the diocese and the region. The new bishop's experience in Chiapas in the early 1960s, and his participation in major Catholic Church events during that period, especially Vatican II and the second Latin American Bishops' Conference at Medellín, profoundly shaped his personal theological development and his vision of diocesan pastoral work. The full story of this diocesan pastoral process has not yet been written. Presenting a full description of four decades of pastoral work which has involved thousands of dedicated lay and religious men and women who constitute the pastoral workers, catechists and active faithful of the diocese is beyond the scope of this chapter; it is not possible in this space to do justice to the long history of such a rich and complex pastoral process. This chapter will sketch a provisional outline and indicate key turning points in the development of this pastoral vision and practice in order to better understand its contribution to peacemaking in Chiapas and to the theology and praxis of peace in general.

A new pastoral praxis emerged in the Diocese of San Cristóbal in the beginning of the 1970s as a result of a new awareness of the social context and reality of the majority of the people of the diocese, namely the poor Indigenous and campesino communities. After the Second Vatican Council, and more concretely after Medellín, many Latin American churches were inspired to engage in a contextual reflection on their mission. This new movement was not restricted to Latin

American churches; many Catholics around the world, among other Christians, were already reflecting on what it meant to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, announce the good news to the poor, and build the reign of God--of peace, love, and justice--in concrete historic contexts. The central contextual question for the Latin American churches then was (and continues to be today) what it means to be a church in a situation where the majority of the people live in extreme poverty, systemic violence, structural injustice and oppression. The fundamental theological question is: "What does it mean in such a situation to proclaim the gospel, "the good news of peace?"

Vatican II and Medellín were particularly significant historical moments for the Diocese of San Cristóbal. These events coincided with a specific historic moment in Mexico and Chiapas, argues Rodolfo Casillas.<sup>98</sup> The economic changes after the 1950s and their impact on the social life of the poor campesino and Indigenous communities induced the church of San Cristóbal, as in many other places in Mexico and elsewhere, to become more involved in the social arena, notes the author. Many local churches around the world began in the 1960s to focus their pastoral programs on the analysis and understanding of the social problems which were contributing to the misery and suffering of their people. They wanted to identify and deal with the structural root causes of these problems. This angered the powerful in many

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<sup>98</sup>Casillas, "La Participación Social de los Creyentes," 271-291.

countries. The case of the Diocese of San Cristóbal is no exception, argues Casillas.<sup>99</sup>

The Diocese of San Cristóbal currently defines its mission and lines of pastoral work as follows: (1) making an option for the poor and the liberation of the oppressed as a sign of the Reign of God; (2) openness to the world and service to the people; (3) shared and decentralized pastoral responsibility inculturated in local social context, history and cultures--particularly in the Indigenous cultures; and (4) doing all this in communion with the universal Catholic Church.<sup>100</sup> This mission statement reflects the evolution of the diocesan pastoral process over the past thirty years. The same vision was also outlined earlier in 1993 in the pastoral letter *In this Hour of Grace*, which summarized the history of the stages of diocesan pastoral praxis to that point.

Our diocesan church, in union with the Latin American and universal church, proclaims the praxis of Jesus and life in a participatory and loving community, committing itself to the people and their service, inculturating ourselves, as Jesus did, in the process of liberation of the oppressed. In this process they [the people] are the ones who decide their own history, and together we will build a new society as an anticipation of the kingdom.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>99</sup>Casillas, "La Participación Social de los Creyentes," 285-88.

<sup>100</sup>Available from the Diocese of San Cristóbal homepage: <[www.laneta.apc.org/curiasc](http://www.laneta.apc.org/curiasc)>.

<sup>101</sup>Samuel Ruiz García, *En Esta Hora de Gracia* (Mexico City: Dabar, 1993), 7.2.; English trans., "In this Hour of Grace," in *Origins*, CNS Documentary Service, vol.23, 34 (February 10, 1994), 591-602.

Four stages of the pastoral process can be identified in these texts. The first stage is the period of pastoral renewal in the 1960s, the early years of Bishop Ruiz in the diocese. This stage was inspired by the spirit of renewal introduced by Vatican II, and stimulated by the direct contact of Bishop Ruiz and some pastoral workers with the Indigenous communities and their situation of extreme poverty, exploitation and cultural isolation. The second stage began in the late 1960s and continued into the mid 1970s. The main characteristic of the period was the pastoral re-evaluation inspired by the second Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM II) at Medellín in 1968 and the events surrounding that conference. Through this process of pastoral evaluation, the diocesan assembly in 1975, shortly after the First Indigenous Congress, came to make an option for the poor and to embark on the development of pastoral work responding to the real needs of the people.

The third stage extended from the mid 1970s to the end of the 1980s; it was marked by a more developed articulation of the social, political and economic dimensions of the mission of the Church. This awareness, well articulated in the Diocesan Plan of 1986, was the fruit of a closer accompaniment of the Indigenous and campesino communities in their struggle for better life. The most recent stage, the 1990s, is characterized by the support of Indigenous communities and social movements in dealing with the consequences of the implementation by the Mexican government

of neoliberal socioeconomic policies and the effect these policies had on the daily life of the communities.<sup>102</sup> A significant pastoral landmark during this period is the writing of the pastoral letter *In this Hour of Grace*, which generated widespread opposition in both government and church. After the EZLN uprising on January 1, 1994, new pastoral challenges emerged in the areas of mediation for peace and reconciliation at community, state, national and international levels. At the present moment, the centre of attention in pastoral work is focused on the consolidation of the pastoral vision and process of the recent decades. The priority is strengthening the autochthonous churches. The movement toward autochthonous churches emerged in the early 1970s, and has become the most significant single expression of the broader pastoral vision and process, according to diocesan sources. In addition, peacemaking and reconciliation among the communities have also been identified as urgent pastoral priorities.<sup>103</sup>

The focus of this chapter will be on highlighting key turning points and theological developments in this evolving pastoral process. I will begin by looking back at this process through the eyes of the diocesan pastoral letter *In*

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<sup>102</sup>See *In this Hour of Grace*, 6.2.1, 2,3,4; Marina Patricia Jiménez Ramírez, "La Interacción Entre La Iglesia de la Diócesis de San Cristóbal y Los Procesos Sociales," 94, 105-106; Ruiz, *Seeking Freedom*, 8-24.

<sup>103</sup>See Samuel Ruiz and Raúl Vera, *Del Dolor a la Esperanza*, pastoral letter from the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, December 24, 1998; idem, *Para que la Justicia y la Paz se Encuentren*, pastoral letter from Diocese of San Cristóbal de las Casas, August 24, 1996.

*this Hour of Grace* and clarify key theological claims with reference to earlier diocesan documents and other relevant materials. Then I will explore the background and context of significant turning points and draw some conclusions regarding their contribution to the broader diocesan pastoral process. In the last part of this chapter, I will examine the attacks on Bishop Ruiz and the diocese. This chapter will provide the context for understanding Bishop Ruiz's theology, which I will discuss in chapter three.

### **Reading the Signs of the Times**

Bishop Ruiz presented the pastoral letter *In this Hour of Grace* to Pope John Paul II in August of 1993 during the Pope's third visit to Mexico. The pastoral letter comprises a theological reflection on the life of the Indigenous communities in his diocese, their social, economic and political reality, and on the diocesan pastoral work. Bishop Ruiz was mandated by many Indigenous communities in his diocese to speak on their behalf. The Pope wanted to meet with representatives of the Indigenous peoples after the fourth Latin American bishops' conference in Santo Domingo in 1992, the year which marked the five-hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the first Europeans to the American continent. There were two other occasions for the visit: the restoration of diplomatic relations between Mexico and the Vatican, which had been suspended since the



Mexican Revolution; and the United Nations' declaration of the International Decade of Indigenous Peoples. Izamal, Yucatan, the site chosen for the Pope's visit, was built on the ruins of the ancient city of Itzamatul, an important Mayan religious centre. Since the early days of the conquest, Itzamatul had been used as a centre for "evangelizing" that region. Six thousand representatives of Native communities from all over the continent came to meet with the Pope in Yucatan. The visit was very significant for the Indigenous peoples and their movements of resistance which were irrupting across the continent.<sup>104</sup>

*In this Hour of Grace* tells the story of more than three decades of pastoral work and struggle of Indigenous peoples, poor campesinos, their communities and social organizations, in the diocese and beyond. As its title indicates, the pastoral letter is a reading of "the signs of the times." In the letter's introduction, Don Samuel quotes Vatican II (*Gaudium et Spes*) on the Church's commitment to share "the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time." This is precisely the theme of *In this Hour of Grace*. Its intention is to make known the hopes and sufferings of the Indigenous and poor people of the diocese. "With this understanding, and faithful to the Gospel and the cause of the Kingdom," noted the pastoral document, "we want

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<sup>104</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 222-224.

to express the joy and the difficulties that our local church has encountered on its path."<sup>105</sup>

The Pope wanted to visit the Native peoples of the Americas and listen to them; Bishop Ruiz had something to say on their behalf; he had the credibility to say it; and he chose an opportune moment to do this. The Diocese of San Cristóbal, affirmed the pastoral letter, has become aware of its calling as heir of the prophetic vocation of the Dominican friar Bartolomé de Las Casas, the first bishop of Chiapas (1543) and 'defender of the Indians.' At the time of the Pope's visit, Ruiz had already been working with the Native peoples of Latin America for more than 30 years; he knew their situation well, and he was aware of his mandate and vocation as a prophetic voice in (and to) the Church.

*In this Hour of Grace* is a prophetic document which speaks with authority. The first draft of this pastoral letter was written collectively at an assembly of *El Pueblo Creyente* (The People of Faith), a diocesan grassroots movement representing many communities of the diocese (which will be discussed later in this chapter). Representatives of *El Pueblo Creyente* held a special assembly to prepare for the Pope's visit and write a message to John Paul II on behalf of their communities.<sup>106</sup> The pastoral letter provides

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<sup>105</sup>*In this Hour of Grace*, 1, 2.

<sup>106</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 224; Jorge Santiago, a member of the coordinating team of *El Pueblo Creyente*, and Fray Gonzalo Ituarte, Vicar for Justice and Peace of the diocese, were present at the assembly and confirmed this information in interviews with the author.

key insights into the diocesan process and its history to date, the hopes and shortcomings of its pastoral vision, as well as the suffering encountered on the path of transforming this vision into a reality. Finally, *In this Hour of Grace* provides a brief but thorough presentation of the theological and ecclesiological dimensions of the diocesan pastoral praxis.

What Bishop Ruiz shared with Pope John Paul not only reflected the experience of his diocese; the bishop of San Cristóbal was elected as president of the *Departamento de Misiones Indígenas del CELAM* shortly after Medellín, and held the position of president of the *Centro Nacional Episcopal de Ayuda a las Misiones Indígenas* and the *Centro Nacional de Pastoral Indígena* in Mexico for many years. He knew well the situation of the Indigenous peoples of the continent. Bishop Ruiz had the support and endorsement of many Indigenous communities from Mexico and other parts of Latin America.<sup>107</sup>

*In this Hour of Grace* uses strong language in its description of the atrocities committed against the Native peoples. The pastoral letter argues that in the name of

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<sup>107</sup>At the closing ceremony of the Second Summit of the Indigenous Peoples in Oaxtepec, Morelos, Mexico on October 8, 1993, convoked by Rigoberta Menchu, Don Samuel Ruiz was recognized as "Vocero Distinguido de los Pueblos Indígenas," (Distinguished Voice of Indigenous Peoples). There were 79 Indigenous delegations from 26 countries present at that meeting and they declared the decade from December 1994 to December 2004 as the the International Decade for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Rigoberta Menchu was also named at that meeting as ambassador of the Indigenous peoples to the United Nations. See *Encuentros, Informativo de la Diócesis de San Cristóbal de Las Casas*, 16 (Sept.-Oct., 1993), 17.

modernization, globalization and free trade, these peoples were being deprived of land, justice, education, democracy and the basic conditions needed for living a decent life. Their economic survival has become impossible, maintains the document.

Affirming that its mission is rooted in the spirit and work of Bartolomé de Las Casas, its first bishop, the diocesan church of San Cristóbal made an option to help improve the situation of the poor Indigenous and campesinos who constitute the majority of the people in the diocese. Diocesan teams committed themselves to accompany the Indigenous and campesino communities in their struggle for a decent life. Diocesan pastoral workers committed themselves to promoting a Church incarnated in Indigenous cultures, respecting the traditions and practices of those cultures. This option for the Native peoples of the diocese, affirms the letter, became

an experience that guides our faith reflection, our pastoral activity and our ecclesial goal of advancing toward the emergence of a native church that is aware of its own salvation history, that expresses itself through its culture, that is enriched with its own values, that accepts its sufferings, struggles and aspirations, and that with the strength of the Gospel transforms and liberates its culture.<sup>108</sup>

In the following section, I will review the historic developments which set the stage for this option which gradually evolved into a diocesan pastoral plan of action.

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<sup>108</sup>*In this Hour of Grace*, 5.6.

## From "Pastoral Indigenista" to "Pastoral Indígena"

From the Mexican revolution (1910-1917) to the 1970s, the agenda of consecutive Mexican governments--and of the Catholic Church--was to assimilate the Indigenous population into a single Mexican cultural identity. For this purpose, the Department of Indigenous Affairs was founded in 1936 by General Lázaro Cárdenas, then president of Mexico. In the 1930s, the Indigenous Mexican theologian Eleazar López Hernández points out, "Mexico began a process called '*indigenismo*' which was later adopted by other Latin American countries. Projects were planned and promoted to integrate and de-indianize our people ...."<sup>109</sup> This politics of "integration" was promoted by both the Mexican state and the Catholic Church until the 1970s. Mexico was aspiring, argues Fazio, to be a country without Indians. The *pastoral indigenista*, the pastoral approach of the Mexican church during that period, described the Indigenous peoples in terms of objects that need assistance, and pastoral work was paternalistic (which remains the case in many places in Mexico and other parts of the world). According to Don Samuel, notes Fazio in his biography, the Indigenous peoples

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<sup>109</sup>"A fines de los años 30 de este siglo México inició un camino de indigenismo que fue después secundado por los demás países latinoamericanos. Se idearon y pusieron en marcha proyectos integracionistas, que tenían como objetivo la desindianización de nuestros pueblos por la vía de la comunicación, la educación, los cambios en la producción y recientemente por el control natal" (Eleazar López Hernández, "Teologías Indias de Hoy," in Revista Electrónica Latinoamericana de Teología (RELaT), 153 (n.d.), on-line journal: <[www.uca.edu.ni/koinonia/relat/153.htm](http://www.uca.edu.ni/koinonia/relat/153.htm)>, accessed on October 7, 1998).

were defined during that period as a pastoral problem in the programs of the Mexican episcopate. The main focus of the *pastoral indigenista* was to help move forward the cultural assimilation of Native peoples.<sup>110</sup> Issues such as self-determination, dignity, and respect for culture were not considered to be significant. In López Hernández's words:

We were characterized as people without voice and without a capacity to express ourselves. We were the poorest among the poor, ... almost considered subhuman. That is why they were searching for non-Indigenous people to protect us, and to speak and act on our behalf .... The situation changed in the 1980s with the emergence of Indian protagonism in the process of evangelization. The 'Pastoral Indígena' was reconfigured and the church began to listen and add its voice to the voice of the Indigenous peoples--who are part of the church as a people.<sup>111</sup>

Don Samuel notes that the difference between *pastoral indigenista* and *pastoral indígena* concerns the ownership of the pastoral work. The pastoral work of the diocese "thus gradually changed from 'indigenist pastoral work' (in the hands of an outsider to the Indian communities) to indigenous pastoral work (in the hands of responsible members of their own communities)."<sup>112</sup> There were several

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<sup>110</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 99.

<sup>111</sup>"En la pastoral indigenista de los años 70s se nos había catalogado como personas carentes de voz o sin desarrollo de nuestra capacidad de comunicación. Éramos los más pobres entre los pobres, ... casi seres infrahumanos. Por eso lo que se buscaba era que gente no indígena nos protegiera, hablara por nosotros y actuara a favor nuestro. ... Pero en los años 80s, con el surgimiento del protagonismo indio en la promoción y evangelización, se fue configurando la Pastoral Indígena y la Iglesia se fue haciendo cada vez más capaz de oír y asumir la voz de los indígenas en cuanto que son pueblo y son Iglesia" (Eleazar López Hernández, "Los Indios Ante el Tercer Milenio," *Revista Electrónica Latinoamericana de Teología (RELaT)*, 194 (1988), on-line journal: <[www.uca.edu.ni/koinonia/relat/194.htm](http://www.uca.edu.ni/koinonia/relat/194.htm)>, accessed on October 6, 1998).

<sup>112</sup>*In this Hour of Grace*, 6.2.2.

important moments along the road of the pastoral journey of the diocese which strongly influenced its bishop, pastoral workers, and their plans. A review of some of these historic moments is necessary for understanding subsequent theological and social developments in the diocese.

### **The Early Stage**

Responding to a question on the stages of his pastoral work with the Indigenous communities, Don Samuel asserted: "It is always a bit arbitrary to think of such work in terms of stages, and when we identify some, it is hard to say that they were the only ones."<sup>113</sup> However, having made this comment, Bishop Ruiz goes on to suggest some significant turning points. I share the bishop's opinion concerning the arbitrary character of "stages," and I will keep his comment in mind as I explore the context and theological significance of these stages.

In 1964, the Diocese of Chiapas was divided into two dioceses: Tuxtla Gutiérrez, with a mainly *mestizo* (mixed race) population, and San Cristóbal de Las Casas, mainly Indigenous. In order to reach out to the Indigenous population, diocesan teams launched training programs Indigenous lay catechists and pastoral workers who speak Native languages and know the local cultures. That was the only way to communicate with the communities and enter to

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<sup>113</sup>Ruiz, *Seeking Freedom*, 9.

their cultural world. Bishop Ruiz admits that he and the pastoral workers of the diocese made serious mistakes in their pastoral action in the period before Vatican II. "We have committed many mistakes on our pastoral pilgrimage," but, "our attitude of compassion and love for the indigenous people and our having lived among them helped to make up for our deficiencies."<sup>114</sup>

Two schools for Native catechists were founded in San Cristóbal in the 1960s by two missionary groups with official diocesan support: one run by the Sisters of the Divine Pastor for training women, and the other run by the Marist Brothers for training men. Other missionary religious communities, such as the Jesuits, the Dominicans, the Franciscans, and Maryknollers, were also present in the diocese and were moving in the same direction. The pastoral vision and role of these two formation schools has evolved over time, but the work they began continues to the present day; there are now more than eight thousand active catechists in the diocese. The work of these catechists in their communities prepared the way for the future development of Indigenous pastoral workers, pre-deacons, and deacons who minister to their people in their Native languages and who understand their culture. This was the terrain where the seeds were planted for what later became more clearly articulated as "autochthonous churches."

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<sup>114</sup>*In this Hour of Grace*, 6.5.4.



The initial pastoral programs of the diocese in the 1960s, notes Bishop Ruiz, were like band-aid solutions responding to the situation of poverty and misery; they did not include any analyses of the structures which were causing the problems. The diocesan pastoral plan at that time consisted of three basic points to help educate and develop the communities: (1) teaching Native people Spanish; (2) providing clothing for them; and (3) improving their diet. These were basic human necessities that had to be taken care of before an evangelization program could be implemented, the Bishop of San Cristóbal then believed.<sup>115</sup>

#### **Pastoral Re-evaluation**

According to their self-evaluation, over time the diocesan teams and communities came to see pastoral deficiencies in areas such as understanding culture and popular religiosity, and the lack of analysis of the sociopolitical and economic systems which caused the poverty of the people and perpetuated their misery. In the cultural realm, Bishop Ruiz admits, the pastoral action undertaken during the first years of his work in the diocese was destructive of culture. "We had only our criterion with which to judge the traditional customs, shaping our judgment with ethnocentrism and moralism, attitudes that regrettably

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<sup>115</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 56-57; see also *In This Hour of Grace* 6.2.1-3.

were common at that time."<sup>116</sup> In the other areas, he notes in *In this Hour of Grace*, our diocesan church was late in discovering that through our theology and missiology we were endorsing the economic and political exploitation of the Indigenous people by the *mestizos*. "Without having understood, much less analyzed this situation," affirmed the pastoral document, "we were on the side of the oppressors, thinking that through them and their presumed good will we could bring about some changes."<sup>117</sup>

These deficiencies were not specific to the Diocese of San Cristóbal; they were expressions of missionary programs around the world. The topics of evangelization and culture were addressed at Vatican II (*Ad Gentes*). The issues of poverty and systemic violence were discussed at Medellín and at subsequent meetings of Latin American bishops' conferences and commissions. The 1971 Synod of Bishops, "Justice in the World" (which was held in Rome), gave an important place in Catholic social teaching for political action aimed at changing structures of injustice. Before these Church turning points, few dioceses around the world gave attention in their pastoral work to issues such as respect for culture and social transformation.

Clearly, Don Samuel's participation in the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), the second Latin American bishops' conference in Medellín (CELAM II-1968), and its

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<sup>116</sup>*In this Hour of Grace*, 6.5.4.

<sup>117</sup>*In this Hour of Grace*, 6.5.4.

preparatory meetings in Melgar profoundly shaped the development of his theology, pastoral vision, and practice.<sup>118</sup> These events during the early years of his episcopate left a deep and lasting influence on the diocesan pastoral process throughout the diocese.

### **The Influence of Vatican II and Medellín**

Bishop Ruiz's participation at Vatican II happened at a propitious moment in relation to the pastoral situation of his diocese. He attended all sessions of the council and became quite familiar with its documents, in particular the one related to the missionary work of the Church, *Ad Gentes*, which he has quoted frequently ever since. According to Fazio, at the preparatory meetings for the second assembly of the Latin American bishops in Melgar, a few years after Vatican II, Bishop Ruiz began to see the significance of *Ad Gentes* in a new light. The new understanding of the mission of the church, explains Bishop Ruiz, was deeply influenced by meetings held with anthropologists during the preparatory meetings for Medellín. His discussions with the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez were also significant in this regard, notes Fazio.<sup>119</sup> These discussions, recounts Ruiz to his biographer, "made me realize that evangelization, as it was practiced in the continent, was simply and fully

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<sup>118</sup>Ruiz, *Seeking Freedom*, 15.

<sup>119</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 88.

destroying cultures, and it was an act of domination."<sup>120</sup>

This new discovery of the relation between evangelization and culture, and the need to respect God's salvific work in other cultures, explained Don Samuel, demanded a radical rethinking of pastoral work with the Indigenous peoples, not only in Chiapas, but in all of Latin America. We had to rethink evangelization in light of *Ad Gentes*, noted Don Samuel.

Recognition of God's presence in other cultures shifts the emphasis to listening to the other and leads to recognizing the divine seed in these cultures, the *semilla del verbo divino*, *spermata logou*, or *semina verbi*. This recognition of and respect for specific peoples and their cultures became the basis for a new missiological approach adopted by the Diocese of San Cristóbal and the Department of Missions of the Mexican Conference of Bishops in the 1970s.<sup>121</sup>

The Bishop of San Cristóbal admitted to his biographer that before Medellín he did not know much about evangelization and culture. After that meeting he became known as an expert on ecclesiology and evangelization. But for him, Medellín was a key learning experience. Conference organizers asked Bishop Ruiz to prepare a paper on "Evangelization and Catechism in Latin America." Due to

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<sup>120</sup>"Me hizo ver que la evangelización tal como se estaba llevando a cabo en el continente, era simple y llanamente una destrucción de culturas y una acción dominadora" (Fazio, *El Caminante*, 86).

<sup>121</sup>Ruiz, *Seeking Freedom*, 11, 15.

organizational changes and lack of good communication, the presentation was later divided into two sub themes: catechism and evangelization. Ruiz was asked to address only evangelization. He confessed that this division confused him because at that time he did not know the difference between the two; in his mind, he said, catechism and evangelization were one and the same. He was not sure what to say in his paper.<sup>122</sup>

Don Samuel's presentation was well received by the Medellín assembly. "If the Church is a community of faith, hope and love," said Bishop Ruiz at Medellín, "this is not what has been realized in Latin America. ... The poor cannot be evangelized if we are big landowners; the weak and the oppressed will go away from Christ if we appear as allies of the powerful."<sup>123</sup> This quotation from his paper reflects what Don Samuel had been learning in Chiapas during the first years of his episcopal ministry. His experience provoked fundamental questions regarding the outlooks and priorities of the Church and its mission in Latin America.

Vatican II and Medellín were transformative experiences for the Bishop of San Cristóbal. The documents of both meetings--in particular *Gaudium et Spes*, *Lumen Gentium*, and *Ad Gentes*--became the constant points of reference in his

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<sup>122</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 89-91.

<sup>123</sup>"Si la Iglesia es una comunidad de fe, de esperanza, de amor, este concepto no se ha realizado en America Latina. ... Los pobres no pueden ser evangelizados si nosotros somos propietarios de latifundios; los débiles y los oprimidos se alejan de Cristo si nosotros aparecemos como aliados de los poderosos;" (Fazio, *El Caminante*, 93).

theological reflections. He had no illusions about the difficulties involved in transforming theology and pastoral priorities, and carrying forward the vision and mission forged in these two significant meetings. Already in the early 1970s, he spoke out strongly about the inadequate response of the Latin American hierarchy to Vatican II and Medellín; the social fatigue of the hierarchy, he pointed out, was becoming more and more obvious in its lack of denunciation of structural injustice and violence, and in its diminishing concern for social justice. In an address to the leadership of the Latin American Catholic students' movement at a meeting in Lima in 1973, Bishop Ruiz reiterated that

The Catholic hierarchies seem to be extinguishing the prophetic ardor of Medellín. ... In all countries the voice of Medellín is being silenced and the 1971 Synod [of Bishops in Rome] is not implemented. ... I am referring here to the danger of neutralizing prophecy and its social relevance, shying away from all kinds of confrontation, and collaborating to maintain the so-called "order" and misnamed "peace". ... The institutional Church opted for liberation in Medellín; but many Christians today are at a painful crossroads. They experience a crisis as they try to reconcile their fidelity to working for social justice and staying in communion with the church hierarchy.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>124</sup>"Del lado de las jerarquías católicas parece irse extinguendo el ardor profético de Medellín. ... En todos los países se silencia Medellín y no se actúa el Sínodo de 71. ... Me refiero al peligro de neutralización del profetismo, y aún de toda relevancia social, para rehuir toda clase de enfrentamientos y colaborar a la permanencia de un llamado "orden" y de una mal llamada "paz." ... La Iglesia jerárquica optó por la liberación en Medellín; pero los cristianos se debaten hoy en una encrucijada dolorosa en la cual hace crisis su fidelidad a la justicia y su comunión eclesial" (Ruiz, *Los Cristianos y la Justicia en América Latina*, 18-19).

Groups of Latin American bishops, including Don Samuel, continued to meet after Medellín in committees focused on their areas of pastoral responsibility. In 1969, fifty two bishops met for a whole month to revise the pastoral theology of the continent. Another follow-up meeting took place a few years later in August 1976 at Riobamba, Ecuador. At that meeting, during a session which Bishop Ruiz was coordinating, the assembly was attacked by the national security police of Ecuador and all fifty people present--bishops, priests, religious and lay people--were taken to jail. They were accused by the Ecuadorian government of planning a revolution in the continent.<sup>125</sup> Other follow-up meetings took place in Brazil and Mexico, including a meeting in San Cristóbal in 1978. Of particular significance were the meetings between Don Samuel and the Guatemalan bishops of the regions which, similar to Chiapas, have significant Mayan population, and with the bishops of the south-pacific Mexican region which also has a significant Indigenous population.<sup>126</sup>

Bishop Ruiz's participation in Medellín involved the Diocese of San Cristóbal in the broader theological reflection on evangelization and mission taking place in

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<sup>125</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 123-124.

<sup>126</sup>The bishops of the south-pacific Mexican region issued several pastoral letters together: *Nuestro Compromiso Cristiano con Los Indígenas y Campesinos de la Región Pacífico Sur* (1977), *Vivir Cristianamente el Compromiso Político* (1982), *Evangelio y Bienes Temporales* (1985), and *Reflexión Pastoral sobre Derechos y Cultura Indígena* (1996).

other parts of Latin America.<sup>127</sup> According to Michael Tangeman, Medellín had an impact on the diocese in two major areas: (1) analysis of systemic violence, and 2) inculturation.

[The] emphasis on prophetic denunciation of systemic injustice and insertion of the church in realities of the poor provided a 'liberating proclamation' for the diocese, promoting two fundamental changes in approach: first, the church began to focus on identifying structural mechanisms that kept indigenous people poor; second, it decided to try to 'humbly learn how the Spirit of God lives and acts in the values and the redeeming historical events of [Indigenous] culture.'<sup>128</sup>

In 1970 Bishop Ruiz was elected president of the *Departamento de Misiones Indígenas* (Department of Indigenous Missions) of the Latin American Episcopal Conference. In this context the *Centro Nacional de Pastoral Indígena* (National Pastoral Indigenous Centre) was founded by the Mexican bishops in Mexico to develop a pastoral strategy for dealing with Indigenous communities.

Despite the progress made in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the pastoral work of the diocese before the First Indigenous Congress of 1974, noted Don Samuel, was still inadequate; it did not respond fully to the real needs of the people. For that reason, Bishop Ruiz, along with other pastoral workers from the diocese, including some external observers, considered this congress to be a significant turning point for the diocesan pastoral action. Twenty three

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<sup>127</sup>Jiménez Ramírez, "Iglesia de San Cristóbal y Procesos Sociales," 99-100.

<sup>128</sup>Tangeman, *Mexico at the Crossroads*, 8.



years later, Bishop Ruiz remembered the significance of that event and its impact on the theological and pastoral diocesan process. He pointed out that

We did not have back then the perception, which we only became aware of later, that a pastoral plan has to be based on the specific needs of the Indigenous people and not so much on the requirement to proclaim certain evangelical principles, which might or might not have an impact on people's real life and history. We did not realize then that the gospel is not a set of transcendent ideas, and that it could offer some answers to people's real problems and touch upon their daily lives. In this sense, the Indigenous Congress made us think of a down to earth pastoral plan which was more concrete, and which eventually led us to the long journey of working tenaciously in support of the emergence of the autochthonous churches in the diocese.<sup>129</sup>

This quote from Don Samuel is of great importance; it is *fundamental* for understanding the pastoral work and theology of the diocese, which I will discuss in detail below. Ruiz emphasizes here the growing conviction that diocesan pastoral action has to take into consideration and emerge from the historical reality and process of the people, and not be imposed from above as a transcendental gospel, vision, and an ideology which does not speak to the people in their concrete historical situation. This vision is also fundamental for understanding the theology and ecclesiology of the diocesan autochthonous churches.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup>Ruiz, *Seeking Freedom*, 13.

<sup>130</sup>*In this Hour of Grace*, 6.4.1.

## A Diocesan Option for the Poor

Following the Indigenous Congress, Don Samuel and the pastoral teams of the diocese realized that their "pastoral plan had been developed without taking into account the aspirations, needs and hopes of the communities."<sup>131</sup>

Representatives from across the diocese made an option for the poor at the first diocesan assembly in 1975, a decision that Bishop Ruiz solemnly proclaimed at the closing session.<sup>132</sup>

The First Indigenous Congress helped the diocesan teams to better understand the reality of the Indigenous and campesino communities, their needs and their hopes. The pastoral letter *In this Hour of Grace* indicates that the diocesan option for the poor was a very significant moment in the history of the diocesan pastoral action. After listening to the Indigenous communities explain their situation during the congress, it became an evangelical imperative for the diocesan pastoral workers, affirms the pastoral letter, to accompany them--in a concrete way--in their struggle for a better life.

Knowing the grave reality of our brothers and sisters, who are the poorest among the poor, it was necessary to make a clearer option for the poor in light of a Gospel

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<sup>131</sup>*In this Hour of Grace*, 6.4.1.

<sup>132</sup>Elizabeth Pólito Barrios, "Don Samuel y la Mediación," in *El Caminante, Boletín Interno de la Diócesis de San Cristóbal de Las Casas*, 2ª Epoca, 1 (Dec. 1995), 47. See also Raquel Pastor E., "De Qué, Quiénes y Porqué Acusan al Obispo Samuel?," (unpublished document, Centro Antonio de Montesinos, Mexico City, 1995).

reflection. ... It was an urgent evangelical decision.<sup>133</sup>

This option, explains Don Samuel, was not ideologically motivated or made according to a premeditated theory; it was a simple, practical, and an obvious thing to do for us, he claimed. The God who heard the clamor of the oppressed people called us, and we, like Moses, responded in fidelity to God's call, commented Don Samuel. If the majority of the people in our diocese are poor, for whom shall we make an option, or whom are we here to serve, asked the bishop.<sup>134</sup> He further clarified the context of coming to this diocesan agreement in an interview with Jorge Santiago.

This is how we understood our option for the poor: a *de facto* practical option; the theological elaboration on this choice came later. When a broader theological explanation of the option for the poor became known, we in this diocese--although this might sound presumptuous--did not feel that we needed to root ourselves in it to be able to move ahead in our work. The new theological explanation simply affirmed an option that was obvious for us: here are the people among whom God has chosen to put us to proclaim the gospel; we either work with them or we had better say that we do not want to follow the gospel or proclaim it. It was that simple. There was no need for a great theological treatise to explain this position.<sup>135</sup>

However, as "natural" as it might appear to make such an option, this diocesan decision marked the beginning of a long and laborious journey with very serious implications in

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<sup>133</sup>Ruiz, *In this Hour of Grace*, 6.4.2.

<sup>134</sup>Ruiz, *In this Hour of Grace*, 6.4.2; see also Samuel Ruiz, "Recibimiento al Obispo Coadjutor Mons. Raul Vera, Homfía de Don Samuel en la Catedral de la Paz el Día 4 de Octubre" in *El Caminante, Boletín Interno de la Diócesis*, 1 (Dec. 1995), 88.

<sup>135</sup>Ruiz, *Seeking Freedom*, 14-15.

the years ahead; it meant taking a stand on the side of the church of the poor against the policies and agendas of dominant and powerful elites and transforming pastoral practice, church structures, and the public stance of the official church on key issues.

Shortly after the Indigenous Congress, the topic of culture and liberation of the poor was debated at a meeting of the diocesan pastoral teams in Ocosingo, a region inhabited mostly by Tzeltal-speaking communities. Questions arose as to how the Indigenous communities could make an option for the poor while maintaining their cultural practices--practices which might, or might not, promote this option. Members of the pastoral teams expressed fear that the new process of liberation, rooted in the option for the poor, might be diluted by the emphasis on culture and customs. The team agreed on a definition of their church as "autochthonous, liberating in itself, and which promotes the liberation of the people by the people--a Tzeltal Church which identifies with the poor, 'because the Tzeltal people are poor.'"<sup>136</sup> This was an important clarification about the nature of the emerging autochthonous churches in the diocese. However, the debate on the issues of culture and liberation within the framework of the ecclesiology of the autochthonous church continued among the communities and the

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<sup>136</sup>"Autóctona, liberadora en sí misma, y que impulse a la liberación del pueblo, desde el pueblo, una Iglesia tseltal que se identifica con los pobres, 'porque los tseltales son pobres'" (Pablo Iribarren, *Vino Nuevo*, 57-58).

pastoral workers; it is also an ongoing debate at the "teología India" (Indian theology) meetings.<sup>137</sup> Meanwhile, the autochthonous churches continue to be central to the diocesan pastoral project. They are considered by the diocesan teams, Don Samuel, and the Native communities to be a significant work of the Spirit in that local church. The following section will discuss this phenomenon in more detail.

### **"For the Church to Be Catholic, It Has to Be Tzeltal": The Emergence of Autochthonous Churches**

After the Indigenous Congress, representatives of the communities expressed their desire to have their own people trained to carry out ecclesial ministries in their communities. Bishop Ruiz agreed to ordain Indigenous ministers, or *tuhuneles* (servants), as the Tzeltal communities call them. The *tuhuneles* were in most cases chosen by the assemblies of their communities and approved by the bishop. Ordinations of the *tuhuneles*, first predeacons and then deacons, marked the beginning of a new form of incarnated local diocesan church among Indigenous peoples, after almost five centuries of domination by the Western forms of church organization. In his 1975 Christmas

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<sup>137</sup>Ricardo Robles O., SJ, "Teología India e Insurgencia en México," in *Sabiduría Indígena, Fuente de esperanza, Teología India, II Parte, III Encuentro-Taller Latinoamericano, Cochabamba, Bolivia, 24 al 30 de Agosto de 1997* (Peru: IPA, IDEA, 1998), 153-170.

message, Don Samuel announced with great joy the birth of autochthonous churches in his diocese. He said:

We want to share our joy. Christ has been born among us: he has a Tzeltal face, a Chol face, a Tzotzil face; he became Indigenous and lives in our midst. This is the good news of our Christmas: one hundred Indigenous predeacons are a sign of the birth of an autochthonous Church.<sup>138</sup>

Don Samuel's message highlights an important christological issue with ecclesiological implication: Christ has an Indigenous face, born in an Indigenous community, culture, and church. The *tuhunel* became in the diocese the symbol of the newly born Christ and church. *Tuhuneles* are usually chosen by their community, and they share the leadership of the community with its elders and council. Don Samuel sees in the Indigenous community tradition of choosing elders and ministers a practice similar to that of the early church. In this tradition, the decision of choosing elders usually has to be unanimous, agreed upon by all community members present at the assembly after a long deliberation, and not simply by a majority vote, "because all the community has to say its word," noted Don Samuel. Some communities did not request or feel ready to have *tuhuneles*, and some individuals who were chosen to be *tuhuneles* did not accept. Bishop Ruiz saw a significant

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<sup>138</sup>"Queremos compartir nuestro gozo. Cristo ha nacido entre nosotros: tiene rostro Tzeltal, rostro Chol, Rostro Tzotzil; se hizo indígena y vive en medio de nosotros. Esta es nuestra Buena Nueva navideña: Cien prediáconos indígenas señalan los inicios del nacimiento de una Iglesia Autóctona" (Samuel Ruiz, "La Iglesia no es Católica si no es Tzeltal," in *Signos de Lucha y Esperanza: Testimonios de la Iglesia en América Latina 1973-1978* [Lima: CEP, 1978], 316).

and unprecedented theological breakthrough in these processes which, he noted, reveal "a profound Indigenous theology, vibrant, incisive and challenging: 'the Church is not Catholic if it is not Tzeltal.'" <sup>139</sup> The Dominican friar Pablo Iribarren, commenting on this new experience of local churches among the Indigenous communities, notes that it was a radical re-birth of the church from the heart of the communities. This marked a significant ecclesiological shift in the diocese and in the communities. <sup>140</sup> In this new ecclesiology, he points out, the *community* becomes the centre of the church, not the diocesan clergy and hierarchy.

The incarnated Church, ... was reborn anew from the roots of the community, from the roots of a people where the gospel is incarnated. The Church was recreated from its foundations by the power of the Spirit of Jesus who lives in the bosom of the community. <sup>141</sup>

The demand of the communities at the 1974 congress to have their own ecclesial ministers was not completely new. Discussion on the autochthonous churches and the ordination of Indigenous deacons in the diocese had begun before the congress. As early as 1972, there were training courses

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<sup>139</sup>"Una profunda teología indígena, vibrante, incisiva, a veces agresiva: 'La Iglesia no es católica, si no es tzeltal'" (Ruiz, "La Iglesia no es Católica si no es Tzeltal," 317).

<sup>140</sup>Pablo Iribarren is a Dominican friar who witnessed first hand this pastoral process wrote about the theological and ecclesiological significance of the ministry of the *tuhunel* and its development in the diocese.

<sup>141</sup>"La Iglesia encarnada, ... se le ve nacer de nuevo desde las raíces de la comunidad; desde las raíces de un pueblo en el que está encarnado el Evangelio. Se recrea la Iglesia desde sus cimientos por la fuerza del Espíritu de Jesús que vive en el seno de la comunidad" (Iribarren, *Vino Nuevo*, 33).

offered at some mission centres to help prepare the elected predeacons and their wives for this new pastoral work. However, the congress advanced this debate and decision-making process. In the Bachajón-Yajalon area, for example, where the Jesuits had a mission before the coming of Don Samuel to Chiapas, the communities had already elaborated a pastoral process for promoting this ministry, and some predeacons had already been elected there. In September of 1975, the communities of that region, in the presence of Don Samuel, officially consecrated their *tuhuneles* or predeacons for an experimental period of three years. They defined the vocation of the *tuhunel* as someone called by God, chosen by the community, who freely accepted this service.<sup>142</sup> Similar consecrations took place in other communities and regions of the diocese around this time. These were events at which the traditional authorities of the communities were present and the ordinations were celebrated according to the communities' customs of electing new elders.

Iribarren describes one of these ordinations in a community in the jungle. It was quite an emotional experience for the community and its elders, he said. Under the heading, "El Espíritu Santo confirma a los *tuhuneles*" (the Holy Spirit confirms the *tuhuneles*), the author notes that in one community the '*principales*,' the highest moral authority, deposit of wisdom and guardians of the tradition of the community, were present at the ordination. The

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<sup>142</sup>Iribarren, *Vino Nuevo*, 23-24.



*principales*, recounts the author, were very happy and they cried during the ceremony of the ordination of their *tuhunel*. "The appointment of *tuhuneles* was seen by the communities as a gift from God to his people, to the Tzeltal people, who are walking in the desert," notes the Dominican missionary.<sup>143</sup> In many communities, the *principales* and the wife of the *tuhunel* accompanied him in his pastoral ministry and worked together with him as a team. The *tuhuneles* and the catechists were together responsible for the pastoral tasks in the community.<sup>144</sup>

The Tzeltal catechism, *Estamos Buscando la Libertad* (We are Searching for Freedom), which was already in circulation a few years before the Indigenous Congress, reflects a spirituality inspired by the Exodus narrative. The Tzeltal region includes the northern part of the Lacandon Jungle where many of the communities were composed of new internal migrants. These migrants occupied unused land in the jungle and built new communities striving for a better life. Their catechism reflected their journey of hope and the biblical narrative of the book of Exodus provided a framework for an articulation of their faith and hope, as I pointed out in chapter one.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>143</sup>"El nombramiento de *tuhuneles* lo vieron las comunidades, como un regalo de Dios a su pueblo, al pueblo tseltal, que va caminando en el desierto" (Iribarren, *Vino Nuevo*, 32-33).

<sup>144</sup>See Pablo Romo, "Por los Ojos de Zenaida," in VI Coloquio Teológico Dominicano: Desde Antiguas y Nuevas Sabidurías (Cusco, Peru: El Reto de la Modernidad, 1998), 11-20.

*We are Searching for Freedom* identifies the development of the autochthonous churches in the communities as a significant stage in the history of these communities. The language of this document is charged with significant theological claims. It describes the *tuhuneles* as a sign of the work of the Spirit among the people, and also as a sign of unity that brings joy to the communities.

The mercy of God our Lord is now among our people ... The elders are feeling well. That was not the case before; now we have our own predeacon; we have a new Father and his work will be made visible. As one we continue with our customs ... the Holy Spirit has come with the predeacon ... before we were far from each other, now we are one (Ep 2, 11-16) ... Our history is manifesting itself, we have our own work ....<sup>146</sup>

The *tuhuneles* played a significant role in the social life of their communities and regions. "Their presence in the process of evangelization and catechesis," noted Iribarren, "contributed to the consolidation of the growth of the autochthonous church and became one of its key components." They also played an important role in strengthening the cultural identity of their people because

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<sup>145</sup>"Estamos Buscando la Libertad: Los Tzeltales de la Selva Anuncian la Buena Nueva" (*We are Searching for Freedom: The Tzeltal People of the Jungle Announce the Good News*). For a translation of excerpts of this document see John Womack Jr., *Rebellion in Chiapas: an Historical Reader* (New York: New Press, 1999), 133-147. For a description of the development of the Tzeltal catechetical method, see Beto Velázquez, "Camino de Catequesis entre Tzeltales de Chiapas," in *Teología India, Primer Encuentro Taller Latinoamericano, Mexico*, 16-23 September, 1990, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: CENAMI, 1992), 242-258.

<sup>146</sup>"Ya está la misericordia de nuestro Señor Dios en nuestro pueblo ... Están bien felices los ancianos. No fue así antes, ahora tenemos nuestro prediácono, tenemos un Padre nuevo, ya aparecerá su trabajo. Como uno solo nos vamos con las costumbres ... Ya vino el Espíritu Santo con el prediácono ... Antes estábamos muy lejos unos de otros, ahora somos uno solo (Ef.2,11-16) ... Se manifiesta ya nuestra historia, tenemos ya nuestro trabajo ..." (Iribarren, *Vino Nuevo*, 33).

they began to use Native languages and customs in the communities' religious celebrations. These significant theological and ecclesiological evolutions in the diocese which began in the 1970s have continued to develop and flourish to the present moment.<sup>147</sup>

The demands of the Indigenous communities on the diocesan authorities to have their own ministers was not completely fulfilled by the ordinations of their own *tuhuneles*. According to the record of a meeting of catechists and *tuhuneles* in Ocosingo in November of 1975, notes Iribarren, the people conveyed to Don Samuel their desire to have Tzeltal priests. "'One has to know that, if the Church is catholic, it has to be Tzeltal. The priests should come from the same community, and be from the same

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<sup>147</sup>"Su aparición en el proceso de evangelización y catequesis contribuyó a consolidar el proceso de crecimiento de la Iglesia Autóctona, siendo en estos momentos una pieza clave en ella" (Iribarren, *Vino Nuevo*, 42). The ministry of the *tuhuneles* was evaluated in 1998 at the level of the whole diocese in a general meeting of the *tuhuneles* and representatives of all the pastoral zones. During my trip to Chiapas in the summer of 1998, I visited the community of San Isidro and talked to Don José, the *tuhunel* of the community who had been in this ministry for more than 20 years. He told me that this ministry is growing in the diocese and that the wives of the *tuhunels* are taking the same training courses with their husbands because they share this pastoral responsibility with them in their communities.

On March 4, 1999, the diocese of San Cristóbal issued a press bulletin announcing a meeting in Comitán, Chiapas, of 238 deacons and candidates from 40 parishes with Don Samuel. This was one of many other similar meetings which were prepared to celebrate Bishop Ruiz's 40th anniversary in the diocese. Representatives of the main Indigenous communities and of the pastoral workers, including the vicar for pastoral work and Don Samuel, affirmed that the presence of the Indigenous deacons is a significant milestone on the path to building autochthonous churches. Don Samuel said that there are more than 500 Indigenous brothers and sisters, ordained and in preparation for ordination, who are doing this ministry in the diocese. This prepares the way, hoped the Bishop Ruiz, so "that one day there will be priests and bishops among the Tzeltales, Tojolabales, Tzotsiles, Choles, and Zoques [the main Indigenous communities of the diocese]."

roots. Don Samuel, they said, the fathers [priests] speak Tzeltal, but they do not know us well...' For the Church to be Catholic, it has to be Tzeltal."<sup>148</sup>

The journey of hope to and in the jungle, the necessity of maintaining a strong community life to overcome the hardships of the new climate and the solitude of the jungle, and the presence of trained pastoral workers to accompany these new communities--all contributed to the re-birth of a strong church and a social movement with a profound spirituality.

Faith, politics, church, work, and community were interconnected in the daily life of the communities of the jungle. The following excerpt from their catechesis in the early 1970s reflects this reality:

The faith of the community is shown in its struggle for freedom. We cannot say that we have faith if we do not struggle to put an end to evil. The community that does not struggle for the freedom of all is scorning the presence of the Spirit. The community that in union looks for its freedom is a community that has faith and receives the Spirit.<sup>149</sup>

Diocesan teams worked together with the communities, their catechists, *tuhuneles* and social organizations. The communities began to organize to improve their lives; and in many communities, cooperatives and social organizations

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<sup>148</sup>"'Hay que oír, si la Iglesia es católica tiene que ser tseltal. Que los sacerdotes salgan de esa misma comunidad, sean de la misma raíz. Don Samuel, dijeron: los padres hablan el tseltal pero no nos conocen bien...' Para que sea católica tiene que ser tseltal" (Iribarren, *Vino Nuevo*, 50).

<sup>149</sup>"We are Searching for Freedom," in John Womack Jr., *Rebellion in Chiapas*, 142.

became spaces for reflection on the social, spiritual, political and economic common good. Some priests and pastoral workers saw in the new social organizations of the communities, and in the attempts to integrate economic, political, cultural and religious life, a "politicization" of religion. Not all diocesan priests and pastoral workers agreed with the new pastoral vision. These developments created tensions among pastoral workers; some wanted to focus only on "religious" tasks, and they saw social organization as a separate domain of action; others promoted the integration of sociopolitical dimensions with the religious and liturgical dimensions of life in their communities.<sup>150</sup> After 1975, according to Don Samuel, there was an agreement among the majority on a diocesan pastoral line which evolved around the preferential option for the poor, as indicated above. And in the 1980s, the new economic and political context challenged the communities and the diocesan pastoral teams to search for more concrete and effective expressions of the option for the poor. A new pastoral plan was elaborated.

#### **The Pastoral Plan of 1986: Economic, Social, and Political Reflection on the Reality, and Proposals for Pastoral Action**

The pastoral plan of 1986, noted Don Samuel in the introduction of this document, was the product of many years

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<sup>150</sup>Proceso, September 13, 1993.

of work and reflection. Since the First Indigenous Congress in 1974, the diocesan teams had regularly developed and reviewed their pastoral plans in light of their evolving understanding of the real needs of the people. In 1986, twelve years after the Congress, the diocesan assembly elaborated a pastoral plan which addressed the sociopolitical and economic context of Chiapas. The plan included an analysis and a critique of class struggle and social divisions, ownership and control of the means of production and natural resources. They sought deeper understanding which went beyond naming symptoms to identifying root causes. Based on their experience of working with the Indigenous and campesino communities, the diocesan teams had learned to see more clearly the root causes of the problems which these communities were facing, and of the obstacles which prevented them from achieving their demands.<sup>151</sup>

The new situation in the 1980s demanded a new pastoral response. Most of Chiapas' natural wealth, argued the pastoral document, was being taken away. For example, oil revenues from the state were used to pay the interest on the national foreign debt while people are impoverished; water

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<sup>151</sup>*Plan Diocesano*, Diócesis de San Cristóbal, San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas: 1986. G. MacEoin included a brief commentary on this plan in *The People's Church*, 37-41; John Womack Jr. translated some excerpts of this plan in *Rebellion in Chiapas*, 202-208; See also *Entraide et Fraternité*, ed., "L'Eglise chez les Indiens du Mexique: Plan Pastoral - Diocèse de Chiapas," in *Espérance des Pauvre, Revue de Presse, Périodique Mensuel* (Mons, Belgique), 26<sup>e</sup> Année, 302 (Juin 1990), 4-8.

resources were used to generate electricity for the rest of Mexico, while in Chiapas 64% of homes had no electricity, and 55% of homes had no running water, noted the plan.<sup>152</sup>

Following the "see-judge-act" method of social analysis, theological reflection, and action--a common method used by many Catholic groups around the world long before 1986--the document began with an analysis of the economic, political and ideological systems in Chiapas. "Reflection on the reality, listening to the salvific will of God, and making pastoral agreements," was the pastoral method of the plan.<sup>153</sup>

The diocesan assembly which met in 1986 made a commitment to support and promote popular independent organizations. The diocesan church of San Cristóbal, according to the pastoral plan, was perceived by many of its faithful as a space where campesinos, Indigenous groups, refugees, and people from the poor neighbourhoods of the cities could meet and find solidarity with their causes. This openness to popular social movements and solidarity with them made the diocesan church and its organizations important interlocutors for these movements and opened a space for them to develop an alternative vision, notes the plan.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup>*Plan Diocesano*, 6-7.

<sup>153</sup>"Reflexión sobre la realidad, escucha de la voluntad salvífica de Dios, y acuerdos pastorales." *Plan Diocesano*, 1.

<sup>154</sup>*Plan Diocesano*, 19.

At the conclusion of the first section on analysis of the reality, the authors of the document raised the question that had been at the centre of pastoral concern in the diocese since the 1960s (and continues to be so today): How do we construct a relevant pastoral response to extreme poverty, exploitation, social violence and repression?

One asks, how can we, the people of Chiapas, agree to a system that takes away so much wealth and leaves behind so much misery, and the little that is left is so unjustly distributed; a system that, in addition to stripping us of our most fundamental political rights, sets us against each other and causes confrontations between us on a daily basis; a system that covers its lies with 'modernity, freedom and progress'.<sup>155</sup>

This pastoral plan reflects the transition from the third to the fourth stages in the development of the diocesan pastoral process as described in *In this Hour of Grace*. This stage was characterized by a deeper awareness of the neoliberal socioeconomic processes of modernization and their impact on the life of the Indigenous and campesino poor communities.<sup>156</sup>

After presenting an overview of the painful daily reality of the majority of the people, the plan lists the pastoral 'acuerdos' (agreements) which were reached at the diocesan assembly. They covered a wide range of issues, such

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<sup>155</sup>"y uno se pregunta cómo podemos estar de acuerdo los chiapanecos con un sistema en el cual tanta riqueza se la llevan y tanta miseria se queda, en donde lo poco que dejan es tan injustamente repartido; con un sistema que, además de despojarnos de los derechos políticos más fundamentales nos enfrenta diariamente unos contra otros; con un sistema que encubre sus mentiras con 'modernidad, libertad y progreso'" (*Plan Diocesano*, 30).

<sup>156</sup>*In this Hour of Grace*, 6.2.3-4.



as evangelization, consciousness raising, education, empowerment and accompaniment of the people in their struggles for liberation, inculturation, communication, democratization of the diocese, and the role and formation of pastoral workers. The plan ended by calling on the diocesan church to become more incarnated in the people, to be a sign of the Reign of God, a prophetic voice, and a servant, defending peoples' rights and helping them in their liberation.<sup>157</sup>

### **The Late 1980s: Increasing Repression and Militarization**

The late 1980s and early 1990s was a period of increasing militarization, repression, and persecution of social movements and their supporters.<sup>158</sup> The diocesan teams also experienced their share of attacks. They concluded that this repression was the consequence of their option to support the Indigenous and campesino poor communities and their movements. Ruiz notes *In this Hour of Grace* that

This option has brought harassment and attacks by the authorities as well as by various groups or sectors of the economically, socially and culturally privileged. Thus it [the diocese] has had to endure calumny and lies propagated by the mass media, both official and privately owned, and to endure the imprisonment of its pastoral workers, the killing of catechists, the intimidation and even accusations within the church, manipulating and deceiving simple people.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup>*Plan Diocesano*, 35-36.

<sup>158</sup>See also "On the Anniversary of the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Human Rights Centre," CIEPAC, 149 (Mar 26, 1999), <[www.ciepac.org](http://www.ciepac.org)>.

Bishop Ruiz pointed out that in the late 1980s the Governor of Chiapas, Patrocinio González Garrido, who was in power from 1988-1993, had declared war against the diocese and its pastoral workers. He accused us, noted Don Samuel, of being enemies of the state because of our support for the Indigenous movements. Governor Garrido's term coincided with great oppression against the Indigenous communities while ranchers and the landowners acted with impunity. The diocese, noted Bishop Ruiz,

was supporting the Indigenous communities in denouncing human rights violations and injustices such as assassinations and other forms of violence, committed against them by some ranchers and landowners. These ranchers and landowners reacted by attacking the Diocese.<sup>160</sup>

Diocesan pastoral action continued despite these attacks, and new initiatives emerged in response to the crisis. In addition to the pastoral and strictly religious tasks, diocesan leaders organized efforts to support the communities in defending their human rights and promoting health care and socioeconomic community development programs. In particular, the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Human Rights Centre, over which Don Samuel presided, was founded in 1989. The tasks of the centre include documentation of human rights violations, education about human rights among the Indigenous communities, and advocacy work.<sup>161</sup> In the midst of the situation of violence in

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<sup>159</sup>*In this Hour of Grace*, 5.6.

<sup>160</sup>Ruiz, *Seeking Freedom*, 59-60.

Chiapas, defending the human rights of individuals and groups, an essential part of defending peoples' dignity, became an urgent pastoral priority for the diocesan teams.

### ***El Pueblo Creyente: The People of Faith Protest***

As repression against diocesan pastoral agents intensified in the early 1990s, a new lay peoples' community based movement emerged in the diocese, *El Pueblo Creyente* (The People of Faith). In September 1991, Joél Padrón, the parish priest of Simojovel, was detained by the Mexican authorities on the charges of inciting campesinos to occupy land owned by large landowners. His detention triggered widespread mobilization across the diocese; and thousands of people marched to Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the state capital, demanding his release. Forty-nine days later, Fr. Joél Padrón was released. This mobilization and gathering of forces gave an impulse to the newly formed lay movement, *El Pueblo Creyente*, which continued to meet and organize afterwards.

Bishop Ruiz commented that this movement of the faithful of the diocese was a spontaneous reaction during a moment of crisis. The pastoral workers did not know how to respond to the situation. Don Samuel notes that,

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<sup>161</sup>See the internet homepage of the centre at <[www.laneta.apc.org/cdhbcasas/](http://www.laneta.apc.org/cdhbcasas/)>; see also "On the Anniversary of the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Human Rights Centre," CIEPAC, bulletin no. 149 (Mar 26, 1999), <[www.ciepac.org](http://www.ciepac.org)>.

The ongoing aggression against the diocese brought people together and gave them courage to reflect and react in a quick and mature manner. It was the people themselves who created the process that in the final analysis was the decisive factor in liberating Father Joel. And the *Pueblo Creyente* emerged as a movement among the people of God whom we now accompany, sometimes with difficulty because they are often ahead of us.<sup>162</sup>

*El Pueblo Creyente* is a grass-roots, participatory, pluriethnic, and politically diverse diocesan movement. It is led entirely by lay people who are chosen by their communities and given the mandate to represent their community. The representatives of *El Pueblo Creyente* from across the diocese meet regularly in general assemblies (about every two months) to discuss the situation in their communities and regions, and to organize actions in light of their faith, and the Word of God. Between the general assemblies, there are other regional assemblies and meetings of the coordinating committee. At these meetings, they exchange information about the situations in their communities, analyze the moment, and make agreements for common actions. The movement also serves as a network of communication and sharing of information among the communities. *El Pueblo Creyente* has representatives with voting powers who attend the diocesan annual assemblies. This space for lay peoples' participation in the decision-making process in the Diocese of San Cristóbal is an indication of the participatory orientation of the diocesan pastoral process. Bishop Ruiz has often reiterated that the

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<sup>162</sup>Ruiz, *Seeking Freedom*, 31.

option for the poor also entails making structural changes in the church to make room for the participation of the poor in the decision-making process.<sup>163</sup>

As a lay movement, *El Pueblo Creyente* is considered to be a significant social force in the diocese. Movement leaders organized several big marches and pilgrimages protesting the injustices committed against their communities and the pastoral workers of the diocese. Since 1994, their efforts have been dedicated to supporting the process of peace in Chiapas and reconciliation among and inside Indigenous communities. *El Pueblo Creyente* is considered by many diocesan pastoral leaders to be an important social movement and the product of a long process of pastoral work and struggle. When members of the *El Pueblo Creyente* are asked "When did the movement begin?" a familiar answer is, "Long time ago, when we first began to reflect on our suffering as a people." Jorge Santiago, a long term member of the coordinating team of *El Pueblo Creyente*, notes that this lay movement is an expression of the peoples' faith and commitment to participate as actors in building a new society together as *pueblo creyente*, as people of faith.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup>See *Encuentros, Informativo de la Diócesis de San Cristóbal de Las Casas*, 16 (Sept.-Oct., 1993), 6; also see Andrés Aubry, "Para un Retrato del Mediador," in *Chiapas: El Evangelio de los Pobres, Iglesia, Justicia y Verdad* (Mexico City: Temas de Hoy, 1994), 166.

<sup>164</sup>For a brief history of *El Pueblo Creyente*, see *Una Iglesia en Camino: Diócesis de San Cristóbal de Las Casas 1964-1997* (Guadalajara, Mexico: ITESO, Universidad Jesuita en Guadalajara, 1997), videorecording documentary. This video recording contains interviews with several

According to Carlos Fazio, the Mexican journalist and Church historian, this movement is historically similar to, and as significant as, the First Indigenous Congress.<sup>165</sup> Fazio argues that there is a direct link between the formation of this movement and the attack on Don Samuel in the early 1990s.<sup>166</sup> These attacks intensified and became a public affair in October 1993 when the papal nuncio in Mexico, Monsenior Gerónimo Prigione, demanded the resignation of Bishop Ruiz--shortly after the diocese issued the pastoral letter *In this Hour of Grace* which was drafted at an assembly of *El Pueblo Creyente* in the spring of 1993, as mentioned above.

#### **Don Samuel and the Diocese under Attack from the Papal Nuncio**

The attacks on Don Samuel in 1993 focused on his alleged "doctrinal and pastoral errors."<sup>167</sup> The papal nuncio,

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members of *El Pueblo Creyente* as well as with Don Samuel, Jorge S. Santiago and Father Joél Padrón.

I was invited as an observer to several meetings and assemblies of *El Pueblo Creyente*. In June 1999, I was invited as part of a team of theologians by the Diocese of San Cristóbal and the Coordination of *El Pueblo Creyente* to assist at their Jubilee Assembly and study the archives of the movement.

<sup>165</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 168-185.

<sup>166</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 185.

<sup>167</sup>Pastor, "De Qué, Quiénes y Porqué Acusan al Obispo Samuel?," 1; See also, Reyes F. and Zebadúa Carboney, *Samuel Ruiz ...*, 24 ff.; "Todos Con Don Samuel Ruiz," in *CENCOS Iglesias*, Special Edition (Nov. 1993); On the point of view of the opponents of Bishop Ruiz, see Pazos, *¿Porque Chiapas?*. For the Mexican press coverage of this debate, see *Proceso*,

Monsenior Gerónimo Prigione, led the campaign. Monsenior Prigione had been representing the Vatican in Mexico since 1978. Before coming to Mexico he had served as papal nuncio since 1968 in El Salvador and Guatemala, respectively. In Mexico, Prigione systematically opposed the work of bishops who were publically accompanying the social movements promoting popular concerns. Many Mexican bishops have observed publicly that the Vatican diplomat worked hard to put the Mexican church at the service of the PRI government and its election campaigns. According to his critics, including some Mexican bishops, Prigione "implicó la cooptación de la Iglesia por el poder gubernamental, ... la Iglesia quedó 'corporativizada' por el gobierno."<sup>168</sup> In doing so, Monsenior Prigione acquired and wielded a great deal of political power within Mexico, in the church and in the PRI. He worked on reviving the relationship between Church and state in Mexico, regained official political recognition for the Church, and reestablished political representation between the Mexican state and the Vatican which had been interrupted since the Mexican revolution. During his mandate, he strongly influenced the appointments of new Mexican bishops (more than half of the roughly 90 Mexican

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897, January 10, 1994; 915, May 16, 1994; 916, May 23, 1994; and 926, August 1, 1994.

<sup>168</sup>"[Prigione] induced the cooptation of the church by the government, ... the church became 'corporatized' by the government." See Miguel Angel Granados, "Iglesia Mexicana Dependiente Amenaza Sobre Don Samuel," in *CENCOS Iglesias*, Special Edition (Nov. 1993), 4.

bishops) who largely favored his pro-government political line.<sup>169</sup>

On October 26, 1993, Prigione informed Bishop Ruiz that the Congregation of Bishops of the Vatican was asking for his resignation. The reasons given were that: Bishop Ruiz had committed "serious doctrinal, pastoral and governing errors;" he was using a "Marxist analysis of society;" he was "preaching an interpretation of the gospel that is not in conformity with the gospel of Jesus Christ;" and he was promoting a pastoral praxis that is "reductionist and exclusive."<sup>170</sup> But Bishop Ruiz never received anything directly from the Vatican Congregation of Bishops.

The news of these charges and demand for resignation generated widespread support for the Bishop of San Cristóbal from both church and civil society sectors, nationally and internationally, including many Indigenous organizations. The conflict, presented in such a way as to make it look like the matter was strictly "doctrinal and ecclesial," became a very public political affair in Mexico. Many commentators saw this attack by Prigione on Bishop Ruiz as a result of his pastoral letter, *In This Hour of Grace*, issued only a few months before, in the context of the long confrontation between Bishop Ruiz and diocesan leaders and organizations on the one hand, and the big landowners and

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<sup>169</sup>Emilio Alvarez Icaza, director of the Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social (CENCOS), interview with the author, Mexico City, August 1995.



the business elite, including the previous governor of Chiapas, Patrocinio González Garrido, who had become the federal Minister of the Interior in the beginning of 1993 on the other.<sup>171</sup>

Popular support for Bishop Ruiz and the lack of evidence supporting the charges against him forced the Apostolic nuncio to withdraw his demand for the resignation of Don Samuel.<sup>172</sup> Instead of weakening the work of the Bishop of San Cristóbal, this campaign against him actually contributed to the expansion of his influence and to making him more of a public figure than he already was. It also highlighted the connection between the nuncio and the PRI government. Monsenior Prigione was forced to change his politics. He failed to deliver his promise to the power elite of Mexico, commented the Mexican press. Shortly after

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<sup>170</sup>Reyes F. and Zebadúa Carboney, *Samuel Ruiz ...*, 24-25.

<sup>171</sup>Pastor, "De Qué, Quiénes y Porqué Acusan al Obispo Samuel?," 11-12. Don Samuel, in an interview with a delegation from the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace which visited Chiapas in the summer of 1989, said that during his conflict with the Apostolic Nuncio in 1993, international solidarity played an important role for keeping him in his position. See Ruiz, *Seeking Freedom*, 60-61.

<sup>172</sup>About 500 people marched to the Papal Nuncio's residence in Mexico city. They delivered a letter signed by 71 religious communities, 213 civil society organizations, 36 human rights organizations, and 38 international social and religious organizations. See Martín Giambroni, "Un obispo que se hace Indígena con los Indígenas," in De Lella, Cayetano and Ezcurra, Ana María, comps., *Chiapas Entre la Tormenta y la Profecía* (Buenos Aires: Ideas, Instituto de Estudios y Acción Social, 1994), 149.

Pedro Casaldáliga, the bishop of Sao Felix Do Araguaia, Brazil, amongst others, wrote an official letter to the Congregation of Bishops in support of bishop Ruiz. See *Proceso*, 900, January 31, 1994. Many Canadian church organizations such as the Inter-Church Committee for Human Rights in Latin America (ICCHRLA) and The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace (CCODP) also wrote letters in support of Bishop Ruiz and his work.

having signed a document accusing the pastoral work of the Diocese of San Cristóbal of being conflictive and offending the Pope, he actually denied having demanded the resignation of Bishop Ruiz.<sup>173</sup>

By the fall of 1993, Samuel Ruiz had become a central figure in Mexican public debates. Paradoxically, in less than three months, noted Casillas, the Bishop of San Cristóbal, who had been in a vulnerable position at the end of 1993, became in January 1994 the most trusted mediator for peace in all of Mexico. The opposite happened to Monsenior Prigione. The papal nuncio's behavior became questionable even by the bishops who had been loyal to him.<sup>174</sup>

As mentioned above, the attacks against Bishop Ruiz and the diocese were not new. However, these attacks intensified in the 1990s. A diocesan document issued in 1997 noted more than one hundred acts of violence against the diocese, its pastoral agents, organizations and activities between 1994 and 1997. Most of these documented attacks were committed by members of the Mexican Army, Public Security Police, members of the PRI, the official party, and by members from several other paramilitary and political organizations affiliated with the above groups. These acts of violence included killings, physical violence and death threats to pastoral

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<sup>173</sup>CENCOS *Iglesias* (Nov. 1993). Quoted in Pastor, "¿De Qué, Quiénes y Porqué Acusan al Obispo Samuel?," 12.

<sup>174</sup>Casillas, "La Participación Social de los Creyentes," 274.

workers, attacks on diocesan institutions and property, closing places of worship, defamation campaigns against pastoral workers, interruption of diocesan public events and public demonstrations against Bishop Ruiz and the diocese in general.<sup>175</sup>

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented a summary of the development of the pastoral process and highlighted significant turning points. As the previous pages testify, since the early 1970s there has been in the Diocese of San Cristóbal a clear commitment to a concrete line of pastoral praxis. The years around the First Indigenous Congress were significant for the formation of this pastoral vision and process. A desire for a new theological reflection and ecclesiology existed among the diocesan teams and the communities even before the Indigenous Congress in 1974. The hope for building autochthonous churches was also clear since the early 1970s. The pastoral plans and letters that followed grew out of reflection on what was already

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<sup>175</sup>A copy of the above mentioned diocesan document is available from the author. The diocese also issued a statement addressed to the Mexican Catholic community and public opinion on June 21, 1997, signed by both bishops of the diocese and by several other pastoral workers, protesting recent attacks against diocese and its work. See Apendix I for an English translation of this letter. Original Spanish version is also available from the author.

For a documenatation on similar violations which took place during 1998 and 1999 see the July 24, 1999, press bulletin by the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas Human Rights Centre.

happening, not simply abstract theories. The pastoral workers were in close dialogue with the people, not "ahead" of them, as Don Samuel has repeatedly said.

One of the main characteristics of this pastoral process is the accompaniment of the people, putting the people, their life and concerns, at the centre of the pastoral work of the diocesan church. This type of accompaniment led the diocesan pastoral workers, including the bishop, to assume the struggle of the people and to support their efforts for social change. This accompaniment has also nurtured the capacities of the people to strengthen their communities and organizations, and to claim their dignity. And when their sense for claiming their dignity is awakened, the poor and the oppressed become empowered, and oppressive social structures do not remain unchallenged.

In her thesis, Marina Jiménez, who has observed the diocesan pastoral work over many years, identifies three main dimensions of the pastoral praxis of accompaniment: (1) incarnation in culture, understanding the catholicity of the Church as meaning proclaiming salvation to all peoples from the concrete perspective of their cultures, animating and illuminating these cultures by faith and the hope of realizing an alternative vision and project that bring about justice; (2) promoting the liberation of the people by being present with them and realizing that their poverty is a motive for the church to announce the good news as part of a process of integral liberation in history, with the

participation of the people; and (3) insisting that the Church is not an end in itself; its *raison d'être* is the service of the people.<sup>176</sup> My study affirms Jiménez's observations and conclusions.

Ricardo Robles, a Jesuit theologian who worked and lived for several years with the Indigenous peoples of Mexico, has also characterized the pastoral approach of the diocese of San Cristóbal as a theology of accompaniment. For Robles, this theology respects the social process of the Indigenous communities, their way of life, social organization, religious expressions, and folklore. This respect, asserts Robles, nurtured the capacity of many Indigenous groups to proudly and confidently say in the 1990s "We are equal, therefore we have the right to be different."<sup>177</sup>

Robles suggests that the process that began in Chiapas since the 1960s gave an impulse to creative theological insights and profound inter-religious dialogue about God and history reaching far beyond Chiapas. A broad movement emerged from this pastoral process which has awakened the spirit of other Indigenous peoples in Mexico, won their support, and united their efforts.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>176</sup>Jiménez Ramírez, "Iglesia de San Cristóbal y Procesos Sociales," 107.

<sup>177</sup>Ricardo Robles, "Ultimas Etapas de los Diálogos de Paz EZLN-Gobierno Mexicano." See also idem, "El Obolo de los Pueblos Indios para el Tercer Milenio," in *Christus*, Mexico City, 712 (May-June, 1999), 18-28.

<sup>178</sup>Robles, "El Obolo de los Pueblos Indios ...," 26.

There remain many unanswered questions, and scholars have only begun to study this pastoral process. However, the movement of hope and faith which it generated--that the gospel message, the resurrection of Jesus, and the Reign of God which Jesus inaugurated can still inspire people to challenge and change the course of their history--is clear. Deeper understanding of this movement born in the bosom of these faith communities, its development in different contexts, and its fruits are questions that are beyond the scope of this thesis. Even theologians who have been observing this and similar processes, such as Robles, recognize their limits when it comes to fully understanding their origins and contours.<sup>179</sup> If anything, this calls us to theological and academic humility; the work of grace and the Spirit in our history is always ahead of theological scholarship.

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<sup>179</sup>Robles, "El Obolo de los Pueblos Indios . . .," 27.

## CHAPTER THREE

### BISHOP RUIZ'S KEY THEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

#### Introduction

In the early years following his episcopal ordination, Bishop Ruiz grew more aware of the hard reality of poverty in his diocese. During this period, the new bishop assisted at the sessions of Vatican II (1962-65). His experiences in Chiapas, and the new understanding of the Church and its mission in the world spurred by Vatican II, both profoundly influenced him. Together, they propelled him to reflect theologically on the situation of misery in his diocese and to imagine new ways of doing pastoral work that respond to the specific needs of the majority of the faithful in his diocese who are peasants, Indigenous and poor. In the paper which he presented at the second Latin American bishops' conference held at Medellín, Colombia, 1968, Bishop Ruiz critically questioned the missionary work of the Church in Latin America and its attitude toward Indigenous peoples and their cultures. If the situation of the Indigenous peoples of the continent is in many ways as bad as it was during the times of Bartolomé de Las Casas, what, then, has the Church been doing for all this time, he asked himself and the other Latin American bishops at the Medellín conference. After

Medellín, the theological, ecclesiological and pastoral questions articulated by Ruiz at that conference inspired reflection leading to a new pastoral praxis in the Diocese of San Cristóbal.

Gustavo Gutiérrez, in his study of the life and work of Bartolomé de Las Casas, identifies what he calls the "wellspring" or "basic intuitions" of Las Casas' theological insights. "Those intuitions," notes Gutiérrez, "constitute a whole that we may regard as the wellspring of the vital impulse of all his work . . . ." <sup>180</sup> Gutiérrez also notes that "a continuous interaction takes place, in Las Casas' work, between reflection and concrete commitment--theory and practice. His thinking not only refers to practice, but is developed by someone engaged in practice." <sup>181</sup> My study of Bishop Ruiz's theology leads to the same conclusion. This chapter explores the wellspring of theological insights underlying Bishop Ruiz's pastoral praxis.

Studying Bishop Ruiz's theology and spirituality cannot be done separately from studying the pastoral process and praxis of the Diocese of San Cristóbal. Building on the previous chapter which examined the diocesan pastoral process, this chapter is a more abstract reflection on Ruiz's theology, keeping in mind that his theology is the product of a collective process of pastoral praxis. Most of the written materials on Bishop Ruiz's theology are articles

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<sup>180</sup>Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ*, trans. Robert R. Barr (New York: Orbis Books, 1993), 17.

<sup>181</sup>Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 6.



and papers presented at national and continental meetings and conferences, including some at secular academic institutions. There are also several published interviews which he gave. In studying Bishop Ruiz's theology, it is not enough to read his writings, homilies, pastoral letters and interviews; one also has to observe and study his praxis. His written works and his praxis are each equally significant sources for a systematic understanding of his theology. The term *praxis*, as indicated in the introduction of this thesis, has special significance for understanding the wellspring of Bishop Ruiz's theology.

In the first part of this chapter, I present a survey of Bishop Ruiz's early theological reflections. In the second part, I explore his theology on the themes of violence, mediation, and peacemaking. In the last part of this chapter, I examine Ruiz's theological contribution to the development of a pastoral praxis of peace in his diocese in the present context of Chiapas, which I believe is relevant to the broader context of Latin America, and to the universal Church.

### **The Beginnings of Bishop Ruiz's Conversion**

Bishop Ruiz's parents were both poor farm workers who left poverty-stricken Mexico in the years right after the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917) to go to work in the United States. They met at a parish in California where many

Mexican workers went to church, close to the place where they worked. They were married shortly after and returned to live in Irapuato, Guanajuato, their native province in Mexico. Samuel, the first of their five children, was born on November 3, 1924.<sup>182</sup> He entered the seminary at León, Guanajuato, as a young boy and was sent later to Rome to study theology and Sacred Scriptures at the Gregorian University (1947-49) and the Pontifical Biblical Institute (1949-52). He was ordained a priest in Rome on April 2, 1949. On his return to Mexico in 1952, he began teaching in León at the seminary where he had studied. Two years later he became its rector.<sup>183</sup>

At the age of 35 Samuel Ruiz was appointed the thirty-ninth bishop of Chiapas by Pope John XXIII, on November 14, 1959. His ordination took place at the Cathedral of San Cristóbal de Las Casas on January 25, 1960, the feast of the conversion of St. Paul. It was the first time since its creation in 1539 that a bishop of Chiapas was ordained in the diocese itself.<sup>184</sup>

In the early 1960s, Fernando Benítez, author of *Los Indios de Mexico*, concluded, after an interview with Don Samuel, that the main preoccupations of the bishop of San Cristóbal--like most "good bishops" of that era--concerned

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<sup>182</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 9-10.

<sup>183</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 34-55.

<sup>184</sup>See biography of Bishop Ruiz, an on-line document from the homepage of the Diocese of San Cristóbal <[www.laneta.apc.org/curiasc](http://www.laneta.apc.org/curiasc)>, accessed on March 30, 1998.

how to stem the tide of Communism in Latin America. "We live in a period of conflicts and crisis ...; Communism represents a force that we should take into account," noted the new bishop. In a pastoral exhortation, shortly after arriving in Chiapas, Bishop Ruiz insisted that "behind a doctrine that raises the banner of social justice, Communism has infiltrated spreading falsehood, hypocrisy, deceit and slander."<sup>185</sup> It is worth noting that Don Samuel arrived in Chiapas shortly after the Cuban revolution, a significant event and a source of great concern for many Catholic thinkers and church officials in Latin America in the 1960s. Ruiz's preoccupation with the progress of Communism and socialism was typical of Mexican and other Catholic bishops worldwide. But, contact with the poor, campesino and Indigenous communities in Chiapas was to radically change the framework and priorities of the new bishop. Bishop Ruiz has often recounted a story about his early experience, the challenges of the social reality in Chiapas, and his "conversion."

Visiting a Native community one day, recounted Don Samuel, he noticed that all the people appeared devastated. Inquiring about what had happened, they told him that all the children of the community had died from measles and

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<sup>185</sup>"Vivimos en una época de conflictos y de crisis ... el comunismo representa una fuerza real que debe tenerse muy en cuenta." "Detras de una doctrina que toma como bandera la justicia social, el comunismo se ha ido infiltrando al esgrimir la arma de la falsedad, la hipocresía, el engaño y la calumnia." Arturo Reyes F. and Miguel Angel Zebadúa Carboney, *Samuel Ruiz*, 20; Also see Fazio, *El Caminante*, 59 ff.

diarrhea. Some people from the community had gone to the nearest clinic looking for a doctor or a nurse to give them some medicine. There was no one there and they were told that the doctor would come tomorrow. They went again on the next day and waited all day. They were told that the doctor had been given another assignment; he would come the day after tomorrow. They came back and waited again and the doctor never came. This time they were told that a nurse would come and attend to them. But no one ever came. By then they did not need anyone any more, because all the children had already died. The representative of the community said after telling this story to Don Samuel: "What can we do? This is the will of God." "No my brother," cried out the bishop; "this is not the will of God. God is not a killer of children. God's will is that these children have life, and have it in abundance."<sup>186</sup> This direct contact with the world of poverty of the campesino and Indigenous communities opened the eyes of the new bishop to the harsh social, economic and political realities in Chiapas.

"When I came [to Chiapas]," recounted Don Samuel, "I saw the churches full of Indians, but it was only later that I realized the sad reality of these people which provoked my conversion."<sup>187</sup> On another occasion, he described himself by using the image of a fish which sleeps while its eyes stay

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<sup>186</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 56-57.

<sup>187</sup>Díaz, *La Rebelión de las Cañadas*, 58-59.

open. "My eyes were open," he said, "but I was sleeping;" he did not see what was happening around him.

I travelled through villages where bosses were scourging debt-slaves who did not want to work more than eight hours a day, but all I saw were old churches and old women praying. 'Such good people,' I said to myself, not noticing that these good people were victims of cruel oppression.<sup>188</sup>

This blindness to social realities did not last long. The new bishop began to ask himself a fundamental question: What has the Church been doing during all these years of evengalization, if the Indigenous communities continue to be marginalized in the same way as in the colonial times?<sup>189</sup> This fundamental question continues to weigh on the conscience of the churches today, in Chiapas and elsewhere.

After visiting most of the communities in his diocese during his first years, the South-eastern region of Chiapas, which had appeared on the map as an uninhabited "desert of solitude," took on a new meaning. Bishop Ruiz walked through the mountains and the jungle of the vast Diocese of San Cristóbal and learned to know them and their people intimately. For this reason, the faithful of the diocese came to call him "el caminante" (the walker).

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<sup>188</sup>MacEoin, *The People's Church*, 26; also see Fazio, *El Caminante*, 105-106.

<sup>189</sup>Fazio, *El Caminante*, 101.

## Early Theological Reflections

One of the earliest available theological works by Bishop Ruiz is the paper that he presented at CELAM II in Medellín. This paper comprises a critique of the missionary work of the Catholic Church in Latin America and the Church's pastoral approach to Indigenous peoples and their cultures. It also poses some questions and offers some suggestions. Reviewing the main ideas in this paper is useful for understanding Ruiz's shifting framework and concerns, and for recognizing the seeds of future developments in his theology and pastoral ministry.

On the topic of the presence of the Catholic Church in Latin America, Don Samuel pointed out that "we must put an end to the myth that Latin America is a Catholic continent. If the Church is a 'community of faith, hope and charity,' this vision is not carried out in Latin America." He emphasized that "no one can accuse us of exaggerating when we conclude that generally speaking, evangelization in Latin America was incomplete."<sup>190</sup> He pointed to five areas where he saw a juxtaposition of two opposing social realities: religion, geography, economy, society, and culture.

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<sup>190</sup>Samuel Ruiz, "Evangelization in Latin America," in *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, I, Position Papers* (Bogotá: General Secretariat of CELAM, 1970), 155, 158.

Bishop Ruiz commented in the same vein in an address to a group of university students in Mexico City in 1995. "I often wondered," he said, "what has the church done here in 500 years?" Samuel Ruiz, *Reflexiones Pastorales ante Universitarios* (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 1995), 12.

In terms of religion, Bishop Ruiz observed two versions of Christianity: a version of Western Christianity for the educated elite, and a popular version for the illiterate majority. Geographically, the coast and the interior are at different stages in their development; economically, there is a strong affluent minority alongside a poor majority; socially, there is division along racial lines of elites and masses, Indian or Mestizo and white; and culturally, there is a minority with access to culture and instruction, and a vast majority which is highly illiterate.<sup>191</sup> In subsequent work, Bishop Ruiz refined and concretized these insights which remained central in his later pastoral practice.

One aspect of Bishop Ruiz's paper is particularly pertinent to my study: his analysis of the "Indian situation." Indigenous peoples, he argued, are marginalized at all levels. Their right to receive the Christian message in their language, mentality and cultural terms is not respected. Generally, churches in their pastoral work either support the total integration of the Indigenous, which is assumed to mean the death of their culture, or they go to the other extreme, that is,

[to] promote a charitable and welfare-type assistance which does not take into consideration marginality and underdevelopment, and which does not see the necessity of basing this help on Indian values, cultures, and ways of thinking.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>191</sup>Ruiz, "Evangelization in Latin America," 160.

<sup>192</sup>Ruiz, "Evangelization in Latin America," 166.

Don Samuel described the situation of Indigenous communities in Latin America as an "anti-sign as well as a task and a hope."<sup>193</sup> These early perceptions and ways of formulating his responses to the Indigenous communities, their faith and culture evolved in the following years. He continued to see Indigenous communities and their cultures as a *sign of hope* and a *challenge*, but in different terms. The Medellín paper offered a general theological reflection on the situation of Indigenous Christians in Latin America, but it did not offer concrete proposals or alternatives. Don Samuel pointed out that the present ways of evangelization were destroying Indigenous cultures, but he was not clear yet about the relationship between cultures within the Church. There was no mention of the religious and spiritual values of Indigenous cultures and their potential contribution to Christian faith and the Church, or of the necessity of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue.

Concluding his reflections, Bishop Ruiz asked a set of questions which indicated the new orientation in his ecclesiology. "Is the solution to be found in basic communities or sub-communities, with decentralized worship? Could this arrangement turn the parish into a far-reaching, centrifugal entity which will develop its own leaders?"<sup>194</sup> We see in these questions the seeds of what a few years later

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<sup>193</sup>Ruiz, "Evangelization in Latin America," 176.

<sup>194</sup>Ruiz, "Evangelization in Latin America," 175.



became clearly articulated in the Diocese of San Cristóbal as "autochthonous churches."

Ruiz's paper demonstrates a clear shift in his theological reflections and pastoral concerns between 1960, the year of his Episcopal ordination, and 1968, when he presented his paper at Medellín. His early homilies focused on defending the Church in Latin American from the dangers of communism and secularization. By the time of Medellín, his concern had shifted to the renewal of the internal structure of the Church; the new times demand a transformation of the structure of the Church to make space for lay people so that the Church as the people of God can become an actor in history, he argued.<sup>195</sup>

We must determine the place of laity, women religious, deacons, and priests within an organic pastoral plan. ... Only from our point of view of the Church as leaven and as committed in history, can the different ministries collaborate organically according to the character of their vocation within the complex living organism which is the Church.<sup>196</sup>

### **The Lessons Learned at Medellín**

The Medellín meetings were a learning experience for Don Samuel. Among the themes addressed at this conference, two had a particular relevance for Bishop Ruiz and his diocese: structural violence, and peace. Theological reflections on structural violence developed at Medellín

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<sup>195</sup>Ruiz, "Evangelization in Latin America," 167.

<sup>196</sup>Ruiz, "Evangelization in Latin America," 173-174.

quickly influenced Ruiz's understanding and approach to the social reality of Chiapas.<sup>197</sup> And they influenced the development of pastoral practice in the Diocese of San Cristóbal. Moreover, they influenced the development of a method for theological reflection on social and systemic violence, a problem not only in Chiapas, but throughout Latin America. This pastoral approach to the analysis of "institutionalized" or "systemic violence" was new to Catholic social teaching. I will discuss Ruiz's reflections on this topic in detail below.

Another insightful contribution at Medellín, according to Bishop Ruiz, was the naming of the alliance that existed between the Church and the powers which practiced systemic violence and marginalized the poor. We realized at Medellín, noted Don Samuel, that

the Church has been united with the dominating economic elites; ... At Medellín, we, the bishops, came face to face with the fact of marginalization of the people which the social studies pointed out to us at that moment. We began to realize that the causes of marginalization are not the people who want to be in that situation; it is rather the system that marginalizes them.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup>"Peace," in *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, II, Conclusions* (Bogotá: General Secretariat of CELAM, 1970), 71-82.

<sup>198</sup>"Hasta entonces, la Iglesia había estado unida a las élites económicas y de dominación; se partía de aquel concepto de que los desarrollados debían ayudar a los subdesarrollados. Pero en Medellín los obispos nos tapamos con el análisis sociológico de la época: el de la marginación. Y empezamos a descubrir que los marginados no están así porque quieren serlo, sino que es el sistema el que los margina." Fazio, *El Caminante*, 95.

Analysis of systemic violence and making an option for those made poor and marginalized by the system, instead of supporting the system and the power elites, have since become key dimensions of the approach associated with Latin American liberation theology, and have informed the pastoral work of the churches in Latin America (and elsewhere in the world) in their efforts to build justice and peace in society. In the context of the social conflict in Chiapas, the above insights were particularly crucial in developing the pastoral program of the Diocese of San Cristóbal.

The bishops at Medellín also addressed the issue of peace. Peace, they pointed out, is a long term social process which must be organically linked to social justice.<sup>199</sup> However, subsequent theological reflections on the Medellín documents focused mostly on the analysis of violence rather than on peacemaking in society, or on a pastoral praxis for building peace. Social peacemaking, as a response to structural violence, and the development of a pastoral praxis to advance peacemaking, were not addressed.

The 1960s were a time of great learning for Don Samuel. Vatican II and Medellín both indelibly shaped his theological and pastoral vision. These marks have been visible throughout his ministry ever since; from his first papers in the early 1970s to his latest pastoral letters in the 1990s, references to Vatican II, in particular to *Ad*

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<sup>199</sup>Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Densidad del Presente: Selección de Artículos* (Lima: Instituto Bartolomé de Las Casas-Rímac, 1996), 145-47.

*Gentes* and *Gaudium et Spes*, and to the Medellín documents are always present. He has sought to be a faithful disciple of Vatican II and Medellín, two major events in the history of the universal Catholic Church. As I will demonstrate below, these two events provided him with theological horizon, insights and support. His life and work have reflected a continuing belief in the presence of the Spirit at these two meetings.

### **Disciple in the 1960s, Master in the 1970s**

From the early 1970s onwards the Bishop of San Cristóbal exercised leadership on some critical and delicate issues in the Latin American Church, namely Indigenous pastoral work, inculturation, social justice, and the internal renewal of the structures of the Church. These were central themes in Vatican II, and continue to be in the life of the Church. The development of Ruiz's thinking is evident from his participation in several international events during the 1970s where he presented papers. In 1971, he was the keynote speaker at a meeting of more than 500 Canadian missionaries in Montreal who gathered to address the issues of evangelization in America;<sup>200</sup> in 1972, he presented a theological paper at the "Centro Universitario Cultural" of the Dominicans in Mexico City which provides an important

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<sup>200</sup>See Samuel Ruiz et Edgard Beltran, *L'Utopie Chrétienne. Libérer l'Homme* (Québec: Edition Départ, Entraide Missionnaire, 1971).

source for learning about his early reflections on faith and cultural dialogue with Indigenous communities;<sup>201</sup> in 1973, he addressed the participants at the Catholic Conference of Interamerican Cooperation meeting in Lima to discuss the issues of social justice and social change in the continent;<sup>202</sup> in 1975, he addressed Latin American liberation theologians who met in Mexico City on the topic of the renewal of the Church;<sup>203</sup> also in 1975, he spoke about the liberation of culture at a meeting of Latin American liberation theologians in Brazil.<sup>204</sup> During the same years, important pastoral activities were taking place in the Diocese of San Cristóbal: the First Indigenous Congress, in 1974, and the diocesan option for the poor, in 1975, discussed in the previous chapter. These demonstrate Ruiz's wide-ranging continental commitments and responsibilities, as well as his emerging leadership role in the Latin American Church.

In his pastoral work and theological reflections, Don Samuel gave special attention to the areas of faith, evangelization, and cultures. In the early 1970s, he became convinced that divine salvific work is present in other

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<sup>201</sup>Ruiz and Vargas, "Pasión y Resurrección del Indio," 35-48.

<sup>202</sup>See Ruiz, *Los Cristianos y la Justicia en America Latina*.

<sup>203</sup>See Ruiz, "Condicionamientos Eclesiales de la Reflexión Teológica en America Latina," 83-89.

<sup>204</sup>Miguel Concha, the provincial of the Dominicans in Mexico, who was present with Don Samuel in Brazil at that meeting, shared this information with the author in an interview conducted in San Cristóbal de Las Casas in January 2000. Audiorecording available from the author.

cultures, and that it is necessary for the Church to enter into honest dialogue with other peoples and their cultures in order to discover and learn about this divine presence. Bishop Ruiz began, then, to consider this dialogue as an essential part of the missionary work of the Church. In his view, this was the important contribution of the Vatican II document *Ad Gentes*.<sup>205</sup> He had no illusions concerning the difficulty of this task. "L'Eglise missionnaire," he argued,

a devant elle un travail délicat et difficile: l'étude et la connaissance exacte, positive et sympathique des religions non-chrétiennes, dans lesquelles elle doit voir un élément divin et une présence secrète de Dieu (Vatican II, *Ad Gentes*, 9 b et 11 b); d'autant plus qu'elle sait que le Verbe de Dieu, avant de se faire chair pour tout sauver et récapituler en Lui, était déjà dans le monde, comme la 'vraie lumière qui éclaire tout homme' (Jn 1,9 cité dans *Gaudium et Spes*, 57 d).<sup>206</sup>

The following central theological and pastoral concerns emerged clearly in his writing and speaking in the early 1970s, and, as I will demonstrate below, they have remained central to the present. These are: the Church's service to the world; the Church's incarnation in Indigenous cultures; the importance of analysis of structural violence and the search for concrete alternatives for social change and building peace; the Church's mission to proclaim and build the Reign of God in history; and internal renewal of the

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<sup>205</sup>See a recent commentary by Bishop Ruiz on this topic in Felipe J. Ali Modad Aguilar, S.J., *Engrandecer el Corazón de la Comunidad: el Sacerdocio Ministerial en una Iglesia Inculturada* (Mexico City: Centro de Reflexión Teológica, 1999), 5.

<sup>206</sup>Samuel Ruiz, "Le Monde d'Aujourd'hui Interpelle la Théologie," in Ruiz and Beltran, *L'Utopie Chrétienne*, 24.

structures of the Church to make the above possible. In the following section, I will discuss each of these areas.

### **Service to the World and Incarnated Pastoral Work**

According to Bishop Ruiz, there are not two parallel histories in the world, one sacred and one profane. He learned from his work with Indigenous communities that God's work is revealed in the history of all peoples and that God's Spirit is present in all cultures--the Spirit was at work in the world before Christ.<sup>207</sup> In Ruiz's view, this is an important theological foundation for inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue. Making reference to *Ad Gentes*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and to the first letter to the Ephesians, Don Samuel asserted that:

S'il y a seulement une histoire du salut et si elle s'adresse à tous les hommes de tous les temps, Dieu a déjà agi et agit encore aujourd'hui au sein des cultures. La présence secrète de Dieu, la présence du Verbe ("Semences du Verbe") apparaissent dans les multiples richesses et valeurs qui sont des lueurs de la suprême Vérité (*Ad Gentes*, 9 b, 11 b; *Nostra Ætate*, 2 b; *Gaudium et Spes*, 38). Ces valeurs, qui introduisent à l'Évangile, sont soit implicitement salvifiques, soit ascétiques, mystiques, antérieures à toute prédication de l'Évangile (*Ad Gentes*, 3 a; 18 b; *Gaudium et Spes*, 92 d)."<sup>208</sup>

Vatican II, notes Don Samuel, affirmed these theological principles and opened the way for a genuine religious and cultural dialogue. The Church is called to act

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<sup>207</sup>Ruiz and Vargas, "Pasión y Resurrección del Indio."

<sup>208</sup>Samuel Ruiz, "Ecclésiologie et Engagement Pastoral," in Ruiz and Beltran, *L'Utopie Chrétienne*, 63-64.

on this by engaging in dialogue with other cultures to discover their religious and spiritual richness. Part of the Church's work of evangelization, then, insisted Don Samuel, is to dialogue with cultures and learn about God's salvific presence in them. In this sense, the Church is called to be a servant to the world, and not to act as its master by imposing its culture on other peoples. In his writings, Ruiz regularly refers to *Gaudium et Spes* and *Ad Gentes* to support these theological views.<sup>209</sup> These aspects of a theology of history and a theology of inculturation have been clear in Ruiz's mind since the early 1970s. They provided theological foundations which guided and supported his pastoral practice and the future development of Indigenous theology and "iglesias autoctonas" in the diocese.

Communicating the Christian message to indigenous peoples, according to Bishop Ruiz, does not consist of merely translating the liturgical celebrations into native languages; rather, it consists of a total incarnation of the gospel message and the Church in their cultures. It means expressing Christian truths through Indigenous peoples' philosophy, worldview and values, and allowing liturgical celebrations to be incarnated or born again through the peoples' cultural symbols. From this, noted Bishop Ruiz, "naïtra un enrichissement merveilleux pour un pluralisme

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<sup>209</sup>As an example on the frequent reference to Vatican II, see Samuel Ruiz, "Ecclésiologie et Engagement Pastoral," 63-67; see also Ruiz, *Los Cristianos y la Justicia en America Latina*, 12-13.



dans les 'vécus culturels' de la foi (*Lumen Gentium*, 23; *Ad Gentes*, 6 c; 21; 15 c, d; 19)."<sup>210</sup>

It is important to clarify what Don Samuel means by 'culture' in order to understand the significance of the above claims. Culture, according to Bishop Ruiz, is the totality of expressions that members of a determined ethnic group formulate in their relationship to the transcendent, to each other, and to their physical environment. He compares culture to the dignity of the human person: culture should be respected in the same way the individual human dignity should be respected. In other words, cultural symbols represent the collective dignity of a people. Following from this, Don Samuel asserts that culture is sacred and that its destruction can never be justified. Cultural elements should never be changed by external agents (e.g., missionaries) without the consensus of the community—even if the changes are minor. Learning to understand and respect another culture is the cross of the missionary, he added.<sup>211</sup>

"What does it mean, then, to evangelize?" asked Don Samuel. "If there is only one history," he asserted, "it is logical to conclude that God's work of salvation has been always active in the bosom of each culture." To evangelize,

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<sup>210</sup>Ruiz, "Ecclesiologie et Engagement Pastoral," 65.

<sup>211</sup>Ruiz and Vargas, "Pasión y Resurrección del Indio," 37; also see Samuel Ruiz, "Testimonio de Mons. Samuel Ruiz: 25 Años Caminando con los Pueblos Indígenas," in Carmen Lora et al., eds., *Signos de Nueva Evangelización: Testimonios de la Iglesia en América Latina 1983-1987* (Lima: Centro de Estudios y Publicaciones, 1988), 114.

then, is to discover and affirm this reality. Bishop Ruiz identifies three stages of evangelization: (1) to understand and believe in this salvific presence of God in history; (2) to be personally incarnated in a culture through an authentic sharing of peoples' experience; and (3) to affirm through internal proper cultural expressions with the community the salvific work of God in its history.<sup>212</sup>

The question of evangelization continues to be one of the fundamental preoccupations of Indigenous theology (teología India) and autochthonous ecclesiology today. But in the early 1970s, Bishop Ruiz, among many others, concluded that the missionary work of the Church among Indigenous communities was destroying their cultures in the name of the gospel. Destroying a people's culture is treading on their dignity and pride, and humiliating them as a people. This kind of missionary work is not acceptable according to the gospel message and to Christian tradition as emphasized by Vatican II and Medellín.<sup>213</sup> "The missionary may only stay," asserted Don Samuel, "on the condition of developing pastoral action which promotes the liberation of the people. But that will be something totally different

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<sup>212</sup>"Si existe una sola historia, se sigue claramente que Dios ha estado presente y actuante salvíficamente en el seno de cada cultura, en cualquier tiempo, en cualquier época." Ruiz and Vargas, "Pasión y Resurrección del Indio," 42-43; also see Ruiz, "Testimonio de Mons. Samuel Ruiz: 25 Años Caminando con los Pueblos Indígenas," 114.

<sup>213</sup>See Vatican II, "Church in the Modern World," No. 53-62.

from what is understood as missionary work now."<sup>214</sup> A new accent emerged in the development of Bishop Ruiz's theology: liberation of the people is integral and it includes the liberation of their culture.

A second key theme that developed in Bishop Ruiz's theology in the 1970s is the salvific work of God in concrete history. This theme is linked to the social role of the Church, inculturation and incarnation of the gospel message. The incarnation of the Church in a specific culture, affirms Don Samuel, is also an incarnation in a specific historic process here and now. The purpose of this incarnation is to transform history and make it a history of salvation. "Mais l'Eglise," he notes, "n'a pas comme fin la création d'une monoculture universelle. Son message n'est pas seulement une morale, une cosmo-vision ou un ensemble de dogmes, mais une histoire du Salut."<sup>215</sup> This means for the Church, explains Bishop Ruiz, a concrete historic contextual commitment in an alternative process to transform social reality. The Church, he asserts, should not be behind history, but rather moving it ahead.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>214</sup>"El misionero solamente podrá quedarse con la condición de que desarrolle una acción en la línea de la liberación. Pero esto no tendrá que ver nada con lo que actualmente se concibe como acción misionera." Ruiz and Vargas, "Pasión y Resurrección del Indio," 37-38; see also Ruiz, "Ecclésiologie et Engagement Pastoral," 66.

<sup>215</sup>Ruiz, "Ecclésiologie et Engagement Pastoral," 67.

<sup>216</sup>Samuel Ruiz and Edgard Beltran, "Les Grandes Options Pastorales du Missionnaire d'Aujourd'hui," in Ruiz and Beltran, *L'Utopie Chrétienne*, 95-97; see als Ruiz, *Los Cristianos y la Justicia*, 12-13.

In his paper "La Pasión y la Resurrección del Indio," Don Samuel makes a key theological statement. He asserts that in the experience of the Indigenous communities and peoples, there is hope for a new Church and a new society for all.

The resurrection, not only of the Indigenous but of all our society, depends on the Indigenous. More than talking about the resurrection of Indigenous people, I would talk about the resurrection of all of our society through the richness of Indigenous cultures. ... Deep down, therefore, the Indigenous situation is strongly calling us to the liberation of all.<sup>217</sup>

This claim, which is the fruit of Don Samuel's experience of the Indigenous people's reality, their integrated spirituality and community spirit, is in my opinion the cornerstone of his new theological development and an expression of a mutual mystical interaction with the Indigenous communities. Indigenous cultures are necessary to the resurrection of society, its transformation and liberation, he said. This topic of the Indigenous peoples as the new evangelizers of the continent becomes more clearly articulated in Ruiz's later statements in the 1990s. Bishop Ruiz's life and work continue to witness to his deep faith in and commitment to the evangelizing mission of Indigenous peoples.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>217</sup>"La resurrección, no del indígena sino de nuestra sociedad, está en el indígena. Más que hablar de la resurrección del indígena, hablaría yo de la resurrección de nuestra sociedad a través de la riqueza de las situaciones indígenas. ... En el fondo, entonces, la problemática indígena es la voz que nos está llamando fuertemente a la liberación de todos nosotros." Ruiz and Vargas, "Pasión y Resurrección del Indio," 47; see also Ruiz, *Los Cristianos y la Justicia*, 13.

<sup>218</sup>See *Seeking Freedom*, 23-24, and 67-68.

## **A New Theology of Social Justice**

In 1972, Don Samuel presented a paper at the Catholic Conference for Inter American Cooperation, held in Lima, Peru. This paper reflected a vision for social transformation and a theology of social justice. In Bishop Ruiz's view, Latin American bishops understood justice after Medellín as a social process meant to promote life and the integral development of the people. In pursuit of these goals, many Latin Americans have rejected the false hopes generated by a vision of development which was based on repeating the same historical trajectory of industrialized societies. A developmentalist framework was replaced by various versions of "dependency theory" and a new discourse of liberation. Now in the 1970s, added Don Samuel, many Christians in Latin America were finding this new theoretical reference inadequate for understanding their social reality, and they were searching for a new vision.<sup>219</sup>

In this changed context, argued Don Samuel, there are some new theological developments in Latin America which promote the work for social justice. There is a shift from an abstract theology focused on pre-established theoretical categories to a theology that is more concrete. This theology primarily seeks a critical analysis of the social reality on which it reflects. It is also a critical

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<sup>219</sup>Ruiz, *Los Cristianos y la Justicia*, 3-8.

reflection on faith understood as *praxis* of liberation, not as affirmation of abstract truths. In Bishop Ruiz's words:

Praxis is not just any action, but an efficient strategic action of those who are structurally dependent in Latin America and who are searching for political and economic liberation from the established sociopolitical system (understood as "structural injustice," "institutional violence"). Praxis embraces liberation which is a permanent and progressive process toward new stages in "becoming more human" and realizing the full human capacity and potential; ... [Praxis] is about a liberation which is not only "spiritual," and not only "political," but a true integral liberation.<sup>220</sup>

When some Latin American churches began to assume their role of service to the world, argued Bishop Ruiz, they found themselves in a situation of institutionalized violence and generalized conflict. His notion of "praxis" proposes a method and strategy for changing the situation of structural violence. The methods of popular education, organizing and movement building which emerged in Latin America, pointed out Don Samuel, reflected various *praxes* of liberation. They included different versions of "*concientización, movilización y organización del pueblo*" (conscientization, mobilization and organization of the people), and were implemented by popular social movements in Latin America and around the world. It would be simplistic to think, he

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<sup>220</sup>"La praxis no es cualquier acción, sino la acción estratégica y tácticamente eficaz de la dependencia estructural de América Latina, como liberación política y económica del sistema sociopolítico establecido (captado como 'injusticia estructural', 'violencia institucional') pero abarca también la liberación como proceso permanente y ascendente hacia nuevas formas de 'ser más' actualizando la capacidad y potencialidad humanas; ... Se trata por lo tanto, de una liberación ni solo 'espiritual', ni solamente 'política', sino de una verdadera liberación INTEGRAL" (Ruiz, *Los Cristianos y la Justicia*, 9-10).

argued, that all these popular groups for social change were following Marxist schemes, or that they were literally following the method of Paulo Freire (as described in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*). However, "they were certainly seeking to mobilize people through a liberating education of the people and by the people," commented Don Samuel. Similar processes were simultaneously beginning among some of the Indigenous peoples of the continent, including in Chiapas.<sup>221</sup>

Yet, in the midst of these promising and hopeful processes of social change, Bishop Ruiz also observed that some elements of the Catholic hierarchy were trying to extinguish the "prophetic ardor" of Medellín.

In all countries the voice of Medellín is being silenced and the 1971 Synod [of Bishops in Rome] is not implemented. ... I am referring here to the danger of neutralizing prophecy and its social relevance, shying away from all kinds of confrontations, and collaborating in maintaining the status quo, the so called "order" and misnamed "peace."<sup>222</sup>

Although many Latin American bishops opted for liberation in Medellín, Don Samuel observed, others did not; and many Christians were finding it difficult to maintain their commitment to their option for social justice while staying in communion with the institutional Church.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup>Ruiz, *Los Cristianos y la Justicia*, 16-17.

<sup>222</sup>"En todos los países se silencia Medellín y no se actúa el Sínodo de 71. ... Me refiero al peligro de neutralización del profetismo, y aún de toda relevancia social, para rehuir toda clase de enfrentamientos y colaborar a la permanencia de un llamado 'orden' y de una llamada 'paz'" (Ruiz, *Los Cristianos y la Justicia*, 18-19).

<sup>223</sup>Ruiz, *Los Cristianos y la Justicia*, 18-19.

Already in the early 1970s, Bishop Ruiz was worried that in many places Christians committed to social justice were not getting institutional support from the Church hierarchy and that there were conflicts on this issue, including within the hierarchy and CELAM. It was clear to him, then, that the vocation of martyrdom was waiting for those who committed themselves to struggling for a more just society. In his words:

The cross is awaiting the true revolutionaries every day with less 'glamour' and more active repression by the hired assassins of the empire. For the few who will continue to follow the path of liberation, they will become with every day more faithful to the Sermon on the Mount, and when they are lifted up (persecuted, tortured, despised), they will bring about justice in favour of their little brothers.<sup>224</sup>

After Medellín, Ruiz was already clear on the issue of the Church's prophetic responsibility to denounce structural injustice and contribute to transforming society. However, he noted in a presentation at the Encuentro Latinoamericano de Teología (Mexico City, 1975), it is not clear yet to the Church hierarchy how to fulfill this mission. The Church hierarchy, he pointed out, is apprehensive about how to deal with the "political" implications of Christian charity, with the requirement of its involvement in the world to transform its unjust structures, and with the realization that peace

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<sup>224</sup>"Pero a estos verdaderos revolucionarios los seguirá acechando la cruz cada día con menos "glamour" para ellos y con más eficacia represiva en los sicarios del imperio. Eso hará que los pocos que sigan en la brecha de la liberación sean cada día más fieles al sermón de la Montaña; y cuando sean levantados (perseguidos, torturados, despreciados) entonces atraerán la justicia en favor de los pequeños hermanos" (Ruiz, *Los Cristianos y la Justicia*, 20).



cannot be achieved without assuming concrete social conflicts in history and working to transform them. These issues, asserted Bishop Ruiz, "are not only themes that preoccupy the Church; rather they provoke a reflection on the role and the place of the Church in history."<sup>225</sup>

Ruiz echoed other Latin American theologians in affirming that the Church's official institutions have very often been on the side of the dominant classes and have controlled people through religion. The Church is called to reposition itself in history on the side of the oppressed, he argued. It also needs to change its attitude and become a servant of the people. This reflection on the Church's role in history took place in 1975, the same year the diocesan assembly in San Cristóbal made an "option for the poor." This option continues to be the focal point of Bishop Ruiz's pastoral theology and praxis to the present day.<sup>226</sup> Don Samuel was already aware in 1975 that this option, accompanied by praxis, will lead the Church away from abstract "orthodoxy," to an "orthopraxis" which will set it on an uncertain course in the historic process of social change. But he also realized that being in service to the world and accompanying the people--sharing their anguish and suffering as well as their hopes and joy--is Vatican II's

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<sup>225</sup>"No solamente son temas que preocupan sino que provocan una reflexión sobre la ubicación misma de la Iglesia en la historia" (Ruiz, "Condicionamientos Eclesiales de la Reflexión Teológica en América Latina," 85).

<sup>226</sup>See *Seeking Freedom*, 13-18.

vision of the vocation and mission of the Church in the world.

### **Transforming Structural Violence**

In order to understand Don Samuel's praxis of social transformation and peacemaking, it is important to understand his analysis of systemic violence. Bishop Ruiz, along with other Latin American bishops, began to use the approach to structural violence adopted at Medellín.<sup>227</sup> At the above mentioned Montreal conference, Bishop Ruiz said the following:

Nous voulons parler des injustices qui n'existent pas de façon transitoire, mais qui, en réalité, sont permanentes et forment une véritable structure, de telle sorte que le problème n'est plus superficiel, mais profond, complexe et permanent. On appelle cette structure la violence institutionnalisée, c'est-à-dire la violence d'un groupe contre un autre, violence tellement ancrée qu'elle s'est transformée en structure permanente. Cette violence est beaucoup plus grave que celle de la rue, ou celle de certains groupes, et on pourrait dire qu'elle en est précisément une de ses causes. La violence engendre la violence; une violence qui vient d'en haut produit une violence dans la masse. La violence institutionnelle engendre dans la masse le désespoir, car elle conduit la masse à croire qu'on ne pourra la faire disparaître que par l'emploi d'une autre violence.<sup>228</sup>

Structural violence, argued Bishop Ruiz in 1971, is a form of permanent social violence embedded in the system. It is worse than the transitory and accidental forms of

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<sup>227</sup>See for example the classical work on this topic by Don Helder Camara, *Spiral of Violence* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1971).

<sup>228</sup>Edgard Beltran, "La Dépendance," in Ruiz and Beltran, *L'Utopie Chrétienne*, 44.

violence which we sometimes encounter in the streets; in fact, structural violence is the root cause of other manifestations of violence. If this institutionalized violence is not dealt with in a structural manner, it generates despair among the people and leads to other forms of wide spread reactionary violence.

Shortly after the January 1994 Indigenous rebellion in Chiapas, Bishop Ruiz, in an interview with his biographer Carlos Fazio, recalled the Medellín lessons of social analysis concerning structural violence. What was happening in Chiapas during that year (and what continues to happen today) is precisely what the Latin American churches were hoping they could avoid after Medellín. Chiapas, unfortunately, is not the only example; it is instead typical in Latin America and globally. Analyzing the situation of structural violence in Chiapas, Don Samuel noted:

First there is the institutionalized violence of the system that generates death. Then comes the violence of repression to the organized efforts of the Indigenous or marginalized, communities of workers and campesinos. And then after that, when there is no longer a way out for survival, comes the counter-violence. The third violence, after the violence of the system and the repressive violence, is the violence of those who are at the bottom of the social strata, and who take to arms because they reach an unbearable situation. ... The Medellín documents explained that prior to the last level of violence, the "third level of violence," there are two other forms of violence which are rarely mentioned.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>229</sup>"Primero la violencia institucionalizada, de un sistema que genera muerte. Después la violencia de la represión al caminar organizado de las comunidades indígenas o marginadas, obreras y campesinas. Y por último, cuando ya no hay puerta de salida para sobrevivir, viene la contraviolencia. La violencia tercera, después de

Medellín provided a framework for an analysis and understanding of the root causes in Latin America of structural violence. It also offered some theological and pastoral reflections on peacemaking.<sup>230</sup> For the Bishop of San Cristóbal, it was not difficult to make the link between what was happening in Chiapas and the analysis of structural violence discussed at Medellín. Chiapas is a good example of

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la violencia del sistema y la violencia represiva. Hasta lo último viene la violencia de los que están abajo en el piso social y que toman las armas porque llegan a una situación insufrible. ... Esa "tercera violencia" apareció mencionada en los documentos de Medellín, reivindicándose el hecho de que hay otras dos violencias anteriores de las cuales a menudo nunca se habla" (Fazio, *El Caminante*, 95, 314-15).

On another occasion, and in connection to the situation in Chiapas, Bishop Ruiz said the following: "I think that the potential for violence exists from the moment that a dominating society exists. In Chiapas, there is already a systemic violence. In Medellín, we spoke of three types of violence: the violence of the social system, which generated 15,000 deaths [in Chiapas] last year--deaths, not from sickness, but from hunger alone. It is a criminal violence, a violence of death. When the people began to organize themselves, after having taken individual measures to find a solution to these problems, they found a second violence: repression, torture, unjust incarceration and death. Then comes a third form of violence which is a response to the first two. When this arises we say 'there is violence,' but we forget the other two prior forms of violence which we do not speak about. There is a potential for the unleashing of an accumulated violence; by using war to remove the walls, all the repressed water behind them rushes forth with tremendous force. In other words, all that has been accumulated from beforehand, the unresolved problems now simultaneously rise up--as for example the invasions of land holdings and demands for land. So, the work for peace is very difficult because it requires not only momentary solutions, but rather the profound reformulation of the causes of injustice. In this sense, you are looking at the whole system right there. The Zapatistas declared war not only on the nearby large landholders, but also on the Mexican Army who they see as protector of the system. There is also the question of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) which is part of the system. The better NAFTA functions, the more EZLNs there will be in the world." Bishop Samuel Ruiz, unpublished interview conducted by a group of students from St. Michael's Faculty of Theology, Toronto, during the Globalization of Theology Program in Mexico, July, 1994. Excerpts from this interview were published in *Catholic New Times*, Toronto, September 25, 1994, and an audiorecording is available from the author.

<sup>230</sup>See Medellín document on Peace, No. 14-19, in Joseph Gremillion, presentation, *The Gospel of Peace and Justice. Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John [XXIII]* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976), 458-461.

the relevance of the Medellín teaching. But, even though this teaching helped in the development of a pastoral praxis of peace that contributed to a reversal of structural violence in the Diocese of San Cristóbal since the mid 1970s, as I indicated in more detail in chapter two, the work is far from being accomplished.<sup>231</sup> The bishops at Medellín also realized that the process of social transformation is a long term process.

Bishop Ruiz is very clear about the question of justification of violence in relation to the Indigenous uprising in Chiapas. The statements and communiqués of the Diocese of San Cristóbal during the early days of January 1994, along with the joint statements of the bishops of Chiapas and the Mexican Conference of Bishops, all critically questioned armed violence as a hopeful strategy.<sup>232</sup> "Neither now, nor before, nor at any other moment has the Diocese of San Cristóbal promoted among the Indigenous and campesinos the use of violence as the means of finding solutions to their social and historic demands," affirmed a press release from the Diocese of San Cristóbal on January 2, 1994.<sup>233</sup> However, in the context of Chiapas,

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<sup>231</sup>Fray Gonzalo Ituarte, Vicar for Justice and Peace of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, affirmed that the work of the diocese for peacemaking is not recent. Building peace was the focus of the diocesan pastoral process long before the Indigenous uprising in 1994. Gonzalo Ituarte, "Option for the Poor, Option for Peace," presentation at the Encuentro Teológico-Pastoral, "Del Concilio Vaticano II al Tercer Milenio," Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas, January 22-25, 2000.

<sup>232</sup>See CONAI, *Archivo Histórico*, Serie: "Senderos de Paz," cuaderno no. 1 (Mexico City: CONAI, 1999), 1-19.

Bishop Ruiz has repeatedly affirmed that he understands the reason for what he calls--paraphrasing the Medellín documents--the "third violence." When a project of death, argues Don Samuel, becomes institutionalized within the socioeconomic and political system, and when this system increases its exploitation and oppression, an awareness of this situation grows in an organic manner among the suffering people, and they begin to organize themselves and claim their rights. When the dominant system responds by increasing its repression against such generalized movements of awareness and the authorities begin to imprison, torture and kill the leaders of these movements, a second level of violence--violence number two--is generated. The oppressed society reaches a certain limit where it loses its fear and declares war against the dominant system. This violence of protest is the third level of violence--violence number three. This structural violence, denounced by the Latin American bishops in Medellín, is the cause of the violence which we are experiencing in Chiapas, affirmed Bishop Ruiz in a diocesan declaration during the early days of January 1994 when the conflict in Chiapas reached a new level of confrontation.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup>"Ni ahora, ni antes, ni en ningún momento la Diócesis de San Cristóbal de Las Casas ha promovido entre los campesinos indígenas el uso de la violencia como medio para solucionar sus demandas sociales y humanas ancestrales" (see "Comunicado de la Diócesis de San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, ante las afirmaciones del segundo comunicado del Gobierno del Estado de Chiapas, dado a conocer la noche del Sábado 1° de enero de 1994," in *CONAI, Archivo Histórico*, 5).

<sup>234</sup>*CONAI, Archivo Histórico*, 9.

## Mediation and Peacemaking

On January 21, 1994, twelve days after the cease-fire between the EZLN and the Mexican government, a statement from the Diocese of San Cristóbal declared that Bishop Ruiz had accepted the role of mediator in the peace process between these two parties.<sup>235</sup> Don Samuel, noted the statement, would carry out this service as bishop, not as judge, and without renouncing his prophetic responsibility. The diocesan statement proposed a framework for the dialogue and an explanation of the meaning of mediation and peace that Don Samuel had hoped the process would nurture.<sup>236</sup> In the following pages, I will examine Bishop Ruiz's theology of mediation and peace.

In a message delivered on a day of reconciliation and peace held in the Cathedral of San Cristóbal on January 23, 1994, Don Samuel declared that he and the diocese had accepted the task of mediation. He explained his understanding of this task saying

Our particular church, and particularly I as its pastor, want to assume the calling from God who calls us to be ministers of reconciliation. Supported by all of you, I have agreed to take on the task of mediation which the Mexican government and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation asked of me. Above all, and in ecclesial communion, I feel called by God to do this work. ... But I want to make it very clear that I participate in these negotiations not as a judge but as

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<sup>235</sup>CONAI, *Archivo Histórico*, 14-15.

<sup>236</sup>CONAI, *Archivo Histórico*, 16-19.

a bishop who does not renounce his prophetic vocation which has its basis in the ultimate commitment with the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and his cause, which is the fullness of life for all his children, particularly for the people who have lived deprived of it.<sup>237</sup>

The desired peace, asserts Don Samuel, cannot be imposed; nor can it be a return to the pre-war status quo which was a bitter nightmare for the majority of the people in Chiapas. This is not the kind of peace that God desires. Don Samuel rejects the idea of having a pre-existing elaborate theoretical definition of peace which serves as an ideal for the diocesan praxis.<sup>238</sup> In fact, his early theological reflections do not include a distinct discourse on peace. Rather, the theme of peace penetrates the other aspects of his theology and the formulations of a diocesan pastoral practice. The theme of peace as such became central in the diocesan pastoral documents, homilies and interviews with Don Samuel only after January 1994. However, this discourse on peace is well rooted in the long history of diocesan pastoral process, its social vision, spirituality, programs of educating, organizing and leadership development.

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<sup>237</sup>"Nuestra Iglesia particular, concretamente yo como su pastor, quiere asumir con lucidez el llamado de Dios que nos convoca a ser ministros de la reconciliación. Apoyado por todos ustedes he asumido la tarea de mediador que se me ha solicitado por parte del Gobierno, por parte del Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional y, sobre todo, viendo en ello un llamamiento de Dios mismo en la comunión eclesial. ... Pero quiero dejar también igualmente claro que participo en estas negociaciones como obispo que, no siendo juez, no renuncia a ser también profeta, desde el compromiso último con el Padre de nuestro Señor Jesucristo y con su causa, que es la vida en plenitud para todos sus hijos, particularmente para un pueblo que ha vivido marginado de ella" (CONAI, *Archivo Histórico*, 16).

<sup>238</sup>Samuel Ruiz, interview with the author, in *Seeking Freedom*, 51.



Don Samuel argued that the root causes of a conflict are: structural injustices, lack of democracy, and violation of human rights. Conflicts, he pointed out, "create irreversible processes which generate deep change and necessitate new situations. ... Peace can only be built by confronting the causes [of a conflict]." <sup>239</sup> Working for peace demands an analysis of the conflict which is generally related to an existing structural injustice, lack of democracy, and violation of human rights. When conflicts arise, argued Bishop Ruiz, it is a sign that there are "structural deficiencies as well as deficiencies on the part of social and political actors. ... Creating peace is impossible without political and social forces who work for the common good." <sup>240</sup> He asserts that "what we want is a peace that ... is built on the great human values of fraternity, democracy, true freedom, and respect for all the human rights of all." <sup>241</sup>

According to Don Samuel, another significant component of building a lasting peace is reconciliation. Reconciliation, he argues, has a personal spiritual dimension and a social dimension. There is no reconciliation without restitution in concrete social, political, economic

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<sup>239</sup>Appendix II, 7.1.

<sup>240</sup>Appendix II, 7.2-3.

<sup>241</sup>"Lo que queremos es una paz ... estructurada por los grandes valores humanos de la fraternidad, de la democracia, de la verdadera libertad, del respeto de todos los derechos humanos para todos" (CONAI, *Archivo Histórico*, 17).

and cultural terms. Peacemaking and reconciliation which include establishing social justice, building democracy, and protecting peoples' human rights are fundamental to proclaiming the Reign of God in history. In Ruiz's words:

Reconciliation assumes a concrete change in our relationship with God and the people; it is not just a mere change of feelings; it consists of the transformation of an objective situation. Peace with God is intimately related to inner peace and social peace; it cannot be separated from these two aspects. Where social, political, economic, and cultural inequalities exist, there is a rejection of the God of history."<sup>242</sup>

In Don Samuel's view, churches are called to be prophetic. Part of their prophetic ministry and mission of service (*diakonia*) to the world is their contribution to reconciliation, social transformation, and peacemaking. Churches can contribute to creating the conditions and the space for civil, political and social forces to come together and become co-participants in building peace.<sup>243</sup> This pastoral ministry of the Church is deeply rooted in the ecclesiology of Vatican II and of the Latin American Bishops' teachings of the last three decades, argues Don Samuel. The activities of the Church such as liturgy,

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<sup>242</sup>"La reconciliación supone un cambio real en la relación con Dios y con los demás. No consiste en un mero cambio de sentimientos sino en la transformación de una situación objetiva. La paz con Dios está en íntima relación con la paz interior y la paz social y no puede desligarse de ellas, porque donde existen las desigualdades sociales, políticas, económicas y culturales, hay un rechazo [d]el Señor de la historia" (CONAI, *Archivo Histórico*, 17-18).

<sup>243</sup>Appendix II, 7.5.

evangelization, service and catechesis ought to be directed to accomplish this goal.<sup>244</sup>

Bishop Ruiz argues that "the work of peace and mediation is profoundly ecclesiastical and profoundly episcopal." It is rooted in following the model of Jesus, the Mediator *par excellence*. Peace building and reconciliation are realized through mediation which is an ecclesial service to the community. Mediation strives to unite and reconcile the community through actions aimed at strengthening just social structures and promoting justice and peace. According to Bishop Ruiz, the Church and its bishops, by providing this service of mediation, help to create social actors and situations which promote the emergence of new alternatives to the situations which generated armed conflict. Churches must take upon themselves the tasks of mediation and embrace this service to society, argues Don Samuel. By not doing this, churches are neglectful of one of their most vital tasks, defending life, added Bishop Ruiz.<sup>245</sup>

A recent pastoral letter from the Diocese of San Cristóbal, *Del Dolor a la Esperanza*, affirmed the awareness of this local church of its mission to build peace.<sup>246</sup> Peace, notes the letter, is an essential component of building the

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<sup>244</sup>Appendix II, 8.1.

<sup>245</sup>Appendix II, 8.2-9.1.

<sup>246</sup>Samuel Ruiz and Raúl Vera, *Del Dolor a la Esperanza*, pastoral letter from the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas (December, 1998).

Reign of God founded on justice, equality, love and peace.

For this reason, adds the document,

Faithful to the word of God and to the values of the Reign of God, as bishop and Church we prophetically assume the difficult task of mediation in the Dialogue for the purpose of achieving peace with justice and dignity. ... This task is full of misunderstandings, accusations, and calumnies, but is also seen as necessary by some. ... The building of the Reign of God requires a transformation of the present social, political, economic and cultural conditions. And more than anything else, it also requires a transformation of the hearts of each person, family, community and of all our country.<sup>247</sup>

This citation from *Del Dolor a la Esperanza* summarizes the theology and praxis of peace of Bishop Ruiz and the Diocese of San Cristóbal. Peacemaking takes place in a concrete historic context. Peace is an essential component of proclaiming the good news of the Reign of God--the good news of peace to the poor.

## Conclusion

In chapter one, I discussed the historical context of the contemporary pastoral process of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, and in chapter two, I identified the key stages

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<sup>247</sup>"Por eso, fieles a la palabra de Dios y a los valores del Reino asumimos proféticamente como Obispo y como Iglesia, la difícil tarea de la mediación en el Diálogo para llegar a una paz con justicia y dignidad. ... Esta tarea está llena de malentendidos, acusaciones y calumnias, pero también es vista como necesaria por muchos otros. ... La construcción del Reino implica una transformación de las actuales condiciones sociales, políticas, económicas y culturales. Pero también, y sobre todo, exige la transformación del corazón de cada persona, de cada familia, de cada pueblo y de todo nuestro país" (excerpts from *Del Dolor a la Esperanza*, no. 4, in *El Caminante*, electronic bulletin, Diocese of San Cristobal de Las Casas homepage, <[www.laneta.apc.org/curiasc/camina6.html](http://www.laneta.apc.org/curiasc/camina6.html)>, downloaded March 13, 1999.

in the development of this diocesan process. In this chapter, I explored the origins of Bishop Ruiz's theology, central concerns and insights, and their development over time. Bishop Ruiz's theological reflections and the praxis of the diocese are responses to the situation in Chiapas at different historic conjunctures. Don Samuel and the pastoral workers of the diocese did not come to Chiapas with a ready-made theology, agenda, and form of a pastoral process which they implemented in the diocese; their praxis developed in the shifting contexts of the diocese. Bishop Ruiz's role was key to the continuity of the diocesan process; however, he was not its only mover. His theology is the expression of the diocesan pastoral accompaniment of the campesino, Indigenous and poor communities of the diocese.

In his work on *Las Casas*, Gustavo Gutiérrez notes that "Bartolomé welds faith to what we today would call social analysis. This enabled him to unmask the 'social sin' of his time."<sup>248</sup> I believe the same can be said of Bishop Ruiz and his theology. In Ruiz's theology we find a harmonious symbiosis of faith and action, social analysis and pastoral vision, and culture, spirituality and politics. This symbiosis is also reflected in the praxis of key diocesan organizations, like *El Pueblo Creyente* and the Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas human rights centre (see chapter two).

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<sup>248</sup>Gutiérrez, *Las Casas*, 6-7.

Don Samuel's pastoral praxis is coherent and consistent, and his theological reflections on the diocesan process are systematic and deeply rooted in Catholic tradition. He is not a "systematic theologian" in the conventional academic sense; however, the theological insights and reflections that underlie his pastoral praxis are systematic and consistent. Miguel Concha, commenting on *Mi Trabajo Pastoral*, a recent book by Don Samuel which was launched in Mexico City in January 2000, noted that Ruiz's main contribution to theology and to the Church is not to introduce new theological thought, but rather to sustain a pastoral praxis that gave life and perspective to the already-existing theology.<sup>249</sup>

In Jaume Botey's view, Don Samuel's praxis has contributed not only to theology, but also to other fields of social sciences. Botey points out that Bishop Ruiz's praxis and theological reflections are well informed by and in dialogue with the social sciences. His work, maintains Botey, has contributed at the theoretical level to fields such as: (1) education, through the diocesan programs of popular education in the Indigenous communities; (2) cultural dialogue, through the inter-cultural work of the diocese with the various Indigenous ethnic groups and through creating spaces for dialogue between these groups and the broader Mexican and international civil society; (3)

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<sup>249</sup>Miguel Concha, "Principios Teológicos," in *La Jornada*, January 22, 2000, 17.

political science, through the work of mediation in the conflict in Chiapas before and after the Indigenous uprising; and (4) to the study and understanding of religion and culture in Chiapas and in other regions of Latin America through the various committees which he presided over the Mexican Bishops' Conference and CELAM.<sup>250</sup>

It is impossible to do justice to Bishop Ruiz's theology and spirituality in this brief chapter. This is only an introduction to the rich theological journey and deep spiritual and mystical experience of Don Samuel Ruiz. Each of the theological insights mentioned above deserves deeper research and study.

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<sup>250</sup>Jaume Botey is the dean of the Faculty of Science of Education of the Universidad Aut3noma de Barcelona which granted Bishop Ruiz an honorary doctorate on March 11, 1997 from the faculties of Science of Education, Sociology and Political Science in honor of the contribution of his work to these three disciplines. See *Doctor Honoris Causa* (Bellaterra, Barcelona: Universitat Aut3noma de Barcelona, 1997), 7-21.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE PRAXIS OF THE DIOCESE OF SAN CRISTOBAL IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CHURCH'S TEACHINGS ON SOCIAL VIOLENCE AND PEACE

#### Introduction

Peace has been a central theme in the Bible and in Christian theology across the centuries. Theological writings on peace cover a wide range of topics which include exegesis of biblical texts on peace, theological and ethical reflections on just war, the arms race, nuclear deterrence, along with reflections on global economic, political and ecological justice, and human rights. Since the 1960s, Christian churches (and other world religions) have issued volumes of pastoral letters and held numerous theological meetings to discuss and promote peace. In Europe and North America, where most of this literature has been published, the focus has been mainly on the cold war, the arms race, and the threat of nuclear war. This corpus of Christian teaching and theology, however, offers little help in terms of developing concrete pastoral praxes of peace in response to situations of systemic social violence and repression. In papal social teaching on peace in the 1960s (e.g., *Pacem in Terris*, *Populorum Progressio*) and through the 1970s, we notice a growing attention to issues such as social



development, economic justice, human rights, democracy and human dignity. And in the 1980s, we observe an increasing awareness among Christian churches and theologians of the ways in which ecological destruction threatens peace on earth. However, most of the issues addressed in these teachings and theological reflections--though they affect the whole global community and the earth--were articulated from the perspective of the First World countries, and they addressed problems produced primarily by the First World (and Second World, i.e., Eastern Block countries, China, etc.).

In contrast, in Latin America, the focus of the theological reflections on peace since the late 1960s has been on finding ways to deal with issues like massive poverty, oppressive political systems, structural economic injustice and systemic violence. Latin American theologians and Church teachings paid more attention to social peacemaking than to the nuclear deterrence.

Nevertheless, so far there has been little systemic theological reflection on social peacemaking--understood as a long term contextual pastoral praxis that responds to structural social violence in concrete situations. As Yoder and Swartley note, biblical and theological works on pacifism, systemic violence, revolutionary violence and nonviolent resistance have not paid enough attention to developing concrete praxes of peace.<sup>251</sup> Such pastoral praxes

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<sup>251</sup>Yoder and Swartley, eds. *The Meaning of Peace*, preface.

exist (and have always existed) in many parts of the world, but so far there has been little systematic theological reflection on these processes in the churches. My task in this chapter is to show how the pastoral praxis of peacemaking of the Diocese of San Cristóbal contributes to such a theological reflection. This praxis, as I will show, is expanding the horizons of both Catholic social teaching and Latin American liberation theology on social peacemaking.

The first part of this chapter presents key aspects of the theology of peace as articulated in Catholic social teaching--"universally" and in Latin America--and examines the pastoral practice dimensions of this teaching. Then I discuss the positions of some Latin American theologians on the Church's teaching on systemic violence and social peacemaking. These presentations set the context for appreciating the contribution of the peacemaking praxis of the Diocese of San Cristóbal to the universal Church. In the last part of this chapter, I examine the new perspectives of peacemaking which are emerging from the diocesan pastoral process and the faith and experience of the Indigenous communities in Chiapas. This chapter claims that the theological vision and long term pastoral praxis of the

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The biblical scholar William Klassen argues that the most important quest of humankind is: "How do we live together in harmony with nature, with the God who created us, and with each other?" In all religions, he notes, "lie some answers on how to receive the gift of peace." However, "theoretical studies of peace from a theological point of view in all religions have been inadequate." See Klassen, *Religion and the Gift of Peace*, 2-3, 20-21.

Diocese of San Cristóbal contribute to advancing the theological and pastoral reflection on social peacemaking in Latin America and globally.

### **Catholic Social Teaching on Peace**

Catholic social teaching addresses the theological, philosophical, ethical and anthropological foundations of peace, as well as its nature and meaning in general. In various ways, it also discusses the general causes of conflicts and violence. And it exhorts states, international organizations, Christians and people of good will to act on behalf of peace.

Many popes of this century have issued letters, messages, prayers and encyclicals on peace: from Pius XI's encyclical in December 1922 to John Paul II's last message on the World Day of Peace in December 1999 (for the January 1, 2000 World Day of Peace). The message of the first World Day of Peace, which Pope Paul VI initiated on January 1, 1968, points to the centrality of peace in the gospel of Jesus: proclaiming peace is announcing Jesus Christ. In the Pope's words:

Nous le faisons parce que la paix est dans le génie de la religion chrétienne, puisque, pour le chrétien, proclamer la paix, c'est annoncer Jésus Christ; "Il est notre paix" (Ep 2, 14); son Évangile est "Évangile de paix" (Ep 6, 15).<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>252</sup>*L'Église et la Paix: 25 Ans des Messages Pontificaux pour la Paix*, ed., François Mabilie (Paris: Centurion, 1993), 21.

The annual messages of the World Day of Peace since 1968 are on-going reminders of the priority of peace in the mission of the Church. These messages reiterate the theological, philosophical, anthropological and social foundations and meaning of peace which have become commonplace. Themes such as human rights, reconciliation, forgiveness, economic justice, world poverty, consumerism, armaments, war and ethnic conflicts, are frequently mentioned in these documents. There is a clear continuity of language, method, style and scope in these annual messages. The January 1, 2000 message delivered by Pope John Paul II asserts that building peace is essential to the mission of the Church, just as Pope Paul VI did on the first World Day of Peace in 1968. "For the Catholic faithful," notes Pope John Paul II,

the commitment to build peace and justice is not secondary but essential. ... During this Jubilee Year, the Church vividly remembers her Lord and intends to confirm her vocation and mission to be in Christ a "sacrament" or sign and instrument of peace in the world and for the world. For the Church, to carry out her evangelizing mission means to work for peace.<sup>253</sup>

The most significant official Catholic teachings on peace are the encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (1963) by Pope John XXIII, Vatican II's Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), and the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967) by Pope Paul VI.<sup>254</sup> Discussing in

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<sup>253</sup>Message of Pope John Paul II for the celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2000, 20.

<sup>254</sup>*L'Église et la Paix*, 11.

detail each of these documents is outside the scope of this chapter. However, some general observations are in order.

World peace and non-violence were main preoccupations of Pope John XXIII. His encyclical *Pacem in Terris*, promulgated shortly before his death, was written in the interest of "establishing universal peace in truth, justice, charity and liberty." Cardinal Roy, in a 10th anniversary reflection on *Pacem in Terris*, said that it was the testament of Pope John.<sup>255</sup> The encyclical, according to Cardinal Roy, is not only a teaching on peace but also a method for reflecting on peacemaking based on "reading the signs of the times" and on personal experience, in this case Pope John's.<sup>256</sup> *Pacem in Terris* reflected Pope John's grand vision, and commitment to tackle world problems, and strong desire to promote peace. However, maintained Cardinal Roy, *Pacem in Terris* is also an "unfinished symphony" because the situation of peace in the world has not improved much since its publication, and building peace is a complex and on-going task.<sup>257</sup>

The bishops at Vatican II reflected the same orientation as *Pacem in Terris*. The conciliar document, "Constitution on the Church in the Modern World," includes a

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<sup>255</sup>"Reflections by Cardinal Maurice Roy on the Occasion of the Tenth Anniversary of the Encyclical 'Pacem in Terris' of Pope John XXIII (April 11, 1973)," in Joseph Gremillion, ed., *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John [XXIII]* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1976), 533.

<sup>256</sup>"Reflections by Cardinal Maurice Roy," 542; see also 556-566.

<sup>257</sup>"Reflections by Cardinal Maurice Roy," 550.

chapter on the theme of peace that focuses mainly on explaining the nature of peace.<sup>258</sup> Catholic bishops name issues, such as economic injustice and uneven development that cause conflicts, condemn the arms race and violence, and call for respect for divine, natural and international laws. They also call on states and international organizations to foster cooperation and promote economic justice as means of building peace among nations, and they summon Christians to commit themselves to advancing these efforts. In the conclusion, the bishops acknowledge that the analyses and proposals they offer are deliberately of a general nature because of the diversity of situations and cultures in the world. They express the hope that the suggestions made will be adapted "to different nations and mentalities and put into practice by the faithful under the direction of their pastors."<sup>259</sup>

In *Populorum Progressio*, Pope Paul VI emphasized the link between integral development and building peace. The widely repeated quotation from this document, "development is the new name for peace," reflects the essence of this Pontifical pastoral letter and its hope regarding "development," peace, and the future of the world. The encyclical promotes integral social and human development and warns that "excessive economic, social and cultural inequalities among peoples arouse tensions and conflicts,

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<sup>258</sup>*Gaudium et Spes*, 77-93.

<sup>259</sup>*Gaudium et Spes*, 91.

and are a danger to peace."<sup>260</sup> Structural economic, social and cultural injustices create tensions which accumulate over time and can lead people to resort to violence, alerts the encyclical. In Pope Paul VI's words:

There are certainly situations whose injustice cries to heaven. When whole populations destitute of necessities live in a state of dependence barring them from all initiative and responsibility, and all opportunity to advance culturally and share in social and political life, recourse to violence, as a means to right these wrongs to human dignity, is a grave temptation.<sup>261</sup>

Pope Paul's teaching marked a new perspective in the approach to violence in modern Catholic social teaching. This perspective included the experience of the Latin American Church, namely that structural violence and popular violence of protest are intertwined. The Latin American bishops developed this teaching further at their meeting in Medellín in 1968, as I will show below. This new perspective, which takes into consideration the analysis of structural violence as the root cause of popular violence of protest, has informed subsequent theological and pastoral reflections on violence and social peacemaking in many places in Latin America and around the world. In the Diocese of San Cristóbal, where the kind of structural violence described in *Populorum Progressio* is very obvious, the new perspective had special relevance and became central in the process of developing a pastoral praxis of peace.

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<sup>260</sup>*Populorum Progressio*, 76.

<sup>261</sup>*Populorum Progressio*, 30.

Pope John Paul II has reiterated Paul VI's warning about systemic violence. "At times, brutal and systematic violence, aimed at the very extermination or enslavement of entire peoples and regions, has had to be countered by armed resistance," said Pope John Paul.<sup>262</sup>

In general, Catholic social teaching on peace takes the form of exhortations that "people of good will" will be inspired to organize and orientate their actions toward building peace.<sup>263</sup> The complexity, diversity of different countries around the world, and of the Church within them, argues this teaching, make the Pope and the leaders of the Church refrain from coming up with a single solution to the challenge of peacemaking.

Nevertheless, the task is far from accomplished. The multiple conflicts in the present global context challenge the churches worldwide to reflect in new and more creative ways about social peacemaking. Many commentators point to the gap between the abstract affirmation of Catholic social teachings on peace and concrete steps to respond to social violence. Stephen Lammers, for example, notes that though the theme of peace is strongly present in Catholic social teaching and in the discourse of popes, church leaders, theologians and pastoral leaders have not yet thought through

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<sup>262</sup>World Day of Peace, January 1, 2000, 3.

<sup>263</sup>*L'Église et la Paix*, 18-19.



how the church's conversation on peace, if and when it reaches a consensus on a particular issue, leads to action for peace at the local level. ... The issue here is how little reflection there has been on how the Catholic community might display its beliefs about peace.<sup>264</sup>

### **Social Teaching on Peace in the Latin American Church**

In the Latin American Church, the social teaching on peace since the late 1960s, as mentioned above, has dealt more with issues such as massive poverty, structural economic injustice, and systemic violence than with the struggle against the nuclear threat to humanity and the earth. The Medellín chapter on "peace" marked a milestone on the path of doing a contextual theological reflection on social violence and peacemaking.

The section in the Medellín documents which specifically addresses the theme of peace, "Christian View of Peace," is relatively brief; however, it is central.<sup>265</sup> It draws on *Pacem in Terris*, Vatican II (*Gaudium et Spes*, 78), *Populorum Progressio*, and Paul VI's first World Day of Peace message of January 1, 1968. The focus of the document is on justice; there is no peace without justice. Building peace in Latin America is a struggle and a process which consists

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<sup>264</sup>Stephen E. Lammers, "Peace," in *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Thought*, ed. Judith A. Dwyer (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1994), 721.

<sup>265</sup>Medellín Documents, *Peace*, par. 14, in *The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in the Light of the Council, Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops, II, Conclusions* (Bogotá: General Secretariat of CELAM, 1970), 71-82.

of social transformation and personal conversion, asserted the Latin American bishops. In their words:

Peace in Latin America, therefore, is not the simple absence of violence and bloodshed. Oppression by the power groups may give the impression of maintaining peace and order, but in truth it is nothing but the 'continuous and invisible seed of rebellion and war.' ... Peace is a permanent task ... that implies constant change in structures, transformation of attitudes, and conversion of hearts. ... An authentic peace implies struggle, creative abilities and permanent conquest.<sup>266</sup>

The emphasis of this teaching is that peace has to be built; it is an active on-going process, a "permanent conquest," not something that can be taken for granted. Gustavo Gutiérrez, commenting on this document, noted that Medellín's proposal of peace is a call to building true peace based on justice. It alerts us to the prevailing false peace which is a social lie deceiving the poor in Latin America and hiding their inhuman situation, noted the Peruvian theologian.<sup>267</sup>

Another important aspect of building peace, according to the Medellín documents, is the denunciation of structural violence, the most brutal form of violence against the poor people of Latin America. "Latin America finds itself faced with a situation of injustice that can be called institutionalized violence," noted the bishops. This form of violence can lead to armed revolutions. Quoting *Populorum Progressio*, the Latin American bishops asserted that "'armed

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<sup>266</sup>Medellín Documents, *Peace*, par. 14.

<sup>267</sup>Gustavo Gutiérrez, *Densidad del Presente* (Lima: Instituto Bartolomé de Las Casas-Rímac, 1996), 145-147.

revolution' generally 'generates new injustices, introduces new imbalances and causes new disasters.'"<sup>268</sup> They warned that armed revolutions could erupt as a response to structural violence and injustice. They also indicated that armed revolutions are not the path for finding a solution to structural injustice. The document ends with a set of brief and general pastoral recommendations covering topics from human rights and education to the arms race.

The bishops at Medellín made great progress in terms of understanding the structures of violence and oppression of the poor.<sup>269</sup> So far, though, little has been done to advance the theological and pastoral contribution to building structures of peace. In the two subsequent Latin American bishops' conferences, Puebla (1979) and Santo Domingo (1992), there is no specific section dedicated to a systematic reflection on social peacemaking. However, dealing with the areas which were identified at the Medellín conference as being root causes of violence--poverty, economic injustice and cultural oppression--occupied a central place at these meetings.

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<sup>268</sup>Medellín Documents, *Peace*, par. 15-19.

<sup>269</sup>Medellín Documents, *Peace*, par. 1.

**Social Teaching of the Latin American Church and Liberation  
Theology on Violence and Peace**

Since the 1970s, every time there is social protest involving popular movements accompanied by their pastoral agents, Church officials or organizations, accusations from opponents and critics are made against liberation theology and its alleged support of violence. The case of the Indigenous uprising in Chiapas has been no exception. Mexican government sources continue to publicly accuse the Catholic pastoral workers of the Diocese of San Cristóbal of being promoters of violence and the main movers behind the uprising.<sup>270</sup> Bishop Ruiz and the pastoral workers, according to these sources, motivated by liberation theology have promoted a "theology of violence." They have abandoned their "spiritual" pastoral work and have preached a Marxist interpretation of the gospel instead of proclaiming "the true doctrine of Christ." Don Samuel, maintain the above sources, has become an activist allied with political groups which have used him and the diocesan "option for the poor" to prepare for a rebellion. Therefore, conclude the proponents of this analysis, the pastoral workers of the Diocese of San Cristóbal are promoters of violence.

For example, this is the thesis which Carlos Tello Díaz develops in his book *La Rebelión de las Cañadas*. Díaz argues that radical left wing political groups have infiltrated the

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<sup>270</sup>Pazos, *¿Porque Chiapas?*, 34-46.

Indigenous communities and their movements with the help of liberation theology, Catholic priests, and the pastoral workers of the diocese. To this day, Mexican government officials continue to promote this thesis and this is how they explain the origins of the Indigenous uprising.<sup>271</sup>

Ernesto Zedillo, the President of Mexico, made similar statements. During his visit to Chiapas in May 1998, Zedillo stated that there are "theologians of violence" among the Catholic hierarchy who are promoting violence in Chiapas. In the President's words:

Let the theologians of violence straighten their ways, ... let them abandon their political projects and join with the reconciliation project [of the Mexican government] in order to find peace and social justice. No theology can be good and support violence. There are persons in the hierarchy who, while pretending to have humanistic and religious motivations, have for many years been contributing to the conditions which led to confrontation and division in the State of Chiapas.<sup>272</sup>

Many analysts saw the President's speech as a direct attack against Bishop Ruiz and the diocesan pastoral

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<sup>271</sup>Díaz, *La Rebelión de las Cañadas*, 24; see chapters 2 and 3 of the same work for a full explanation of the author's thesis and the Mexican government's position.

The Mexican government's appointed coordinator of the dialogue of peace in Chiapas, Emilio Rabasa, repeated the same thesis in May 1999; see *La Jornada*, May 6, 1999, 19.

<sup>272</sup>"Los teólogos de la violencia que rectifiquen ... que abandonen sus proyectos políticos y se sumen también al proyecto de reconciliación, reencuentro de paz y de justicia social. No hay teología que pueda ser buena y que apoye la violencia. Existen personas que escudándose en su jerarquía y abogando motivaciones humanísticas y religiosas, desde hace muchos años han contribuido a las condiciones de enfrentamiento y de división en el Estado de Chiapas ..." (*Expreso* [Mexico City], May 30, 1998, cited in CIEPAC, 120 [July 17, 1998], <www.ciepac.org>).

President Zedillo has so far visited Chiapas 33 times since the beginning of his mandate in December of 1994.

workers. Several Mexican Church leaders responded to President Zedillo's attacks.<sup>273</sup>

Various Mexican and Latin American theologians responded to the claims that the Indigenous uprising in Chiapas was orchestrated by political groups from outside of Chiapas with the help of some diocesan pastoral workers inspired by liberation theology.<sup>274</sup> These accusations, asserted the Mexican theologian Armando Lampe, reflect the historic racism of the Mexican system. Their promoters portray the Indigenous people as politically naive, unable to decide for themselves, and therefore, manipulated, misled and used by political groups and the Diocese of San Cristóbal. This is not surprising, argued Lampe, because this attitude has been for a long time the common approach of Mexican governments towards the Indigenous.<sup>275</sup>

The position of Bishop Ruiz and the diocese on the uprising has been clear from the very beginning. Bishop Ruiz

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<sup>273</sup>The Mexican Church historian and journalist Carlos Fazio, quoted Felipe Arizmendi, bishop of the neighbouring diocese of Tapachula, who was appointed on March 31, 2000, to succeed Bishop Ruiz, sarcastically responding to President Zedillo by saying that "there are some small kings who believe they are gods" ("había reyecitos que se creían dioses"). See Carlos Fazio, *La Jornada*, April 1, 2000, <www.jornada.unam.mx>.

<sup>274</sup>Emilio Álvarez Icaza, "Chiapas: los 'Medios' en la Guerra," *Chiapas: El Evangelio de los Pobres*, 65-78; Carlos Bravo, "El Laberinto de las Interpretaciones," *ibidem*, 79-91; *idem*, "Desinformación Como Deformación," *ibidem*, 93-102; and Jesús Vergara Aceves, "La Teología de la Liberación en Chiapas," *ibidem*, 129-134.

<sup>275</sup>Conversation with Armando Lampe during the theology summer course organized by the Centro Antonio de Montesinos in Mexico City, August 1996, that prof. Lampe was teaching. See also, Armando Lampe, *¿Guerra Justa O Paz Justa?, Reflexiones Teológicas sobre la Lucha Armada en Chiapas* (Mexico City: Centro Antonio Montesinos, 1996).

and the diocesan pastoral workers have never denied that they accompanied the Indigenous communities and their movements in their struggle. The public diocesan pastoral documents since the mid 1970s demonstrate a clear commitment to the Indigenous people of the diocese and their social movements. And Bishop Ruiz has never apologized for this support. On the contrary, at a meeting with the Mexican Congressional committee on January 13, 1994 he said: "I would have been the most unhappy of the bishops of the world if, after 30 years of work, there were no awareness raising and political participation of lay people."<sup>276</sup> Yet, Don Samuel also emphasized that the diocesan pastoral workers have never at any time promoted violence as a means for political protest and social change.<sup>277</sup> On the first day of the EZLN uprising, Bishop Ruiz, along with the bishops of the two other dioceses of Chiapas, declared that they did not support the use of violence; but they also said that they understood the causes which led some people to believe that there was no other peaceful way of achieving their legitimate demands.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>276</sup>"Hubiera sido yo el más infeliz de todos los obispos del mundo, si después de 30 años de trabajo no se hubiera dado una toma de conciencia y una participación política de los laicos" (Fazio, *El Caminante*, 327).

<sup>277</sup>"Ni ahora, ni antes, ni en ningún momento la diócesis de San Cristóbal de Las Casas ha promovido entre los campesinos indígenas el uso de la violencia como medio para solucionar sus demandas sociales y humanas ancestrales" (Díaz, *La Rebelión de las Cañadas*, 25).

<sup>278</sup>CONAI, *Archivo Historico*, 3-4.

Ignacio Ellacuría, a Jesuit theologian, clearly explained in an article published one year before his assassination (in El Salvador in 1989) what it means to understand the cause of revolutionary violence without necessarily supporting it. On this question, noted Ellacuría, the approach of liberation theology is the same as that of the social teaching of the Church. In his words:

The Medellín Conference of 1968, following the traditional teaching of the Church, most recently expressed by Paul VI in *Populorum progressio* (31), did not justify armed violence, but began to approach the problem of violence in a different manner. It pointed the way to the differentiation between levels and types of violence that was to be followed by liberation theology.<sup>279</sup>

The supporters of the *status quo*, argued Ellacuría, misinterpreted the Medellín teaching by saying that it supported revolutionary violence. However, writing from a post armed struggle perspective in El Salvador, the author did not believe that revolutionary violence could offer a solution to the problems which were the cause of its existence. Revolutionary, liberating violence in a situation of structural injustice and repressive violence, he explained,

is an attempt to affirm the life that is being denied, to survive in the face of the rule of death, .... Nevertheless, whatever moral idealism inspires the revolutionary struggle, historical realism shows it to be an evil--though a lesser evil than the one it seeks to replace--and to bring major risks.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>279</sup>Ignacio Ellacuría, "Violence and Non-violence in the Struggle for Peace and Liberation," in *Concilium*, 195 (Feb. 1988), 70.

<sup>280</sup>Ellacuría, "Violence and Non-violence," 71-72.



Jon Sobrino, another noted Salvadoran theologian, has also addressed the question of liberation theology and the promotion of violence in the case of Chiapas. Sobrino believes that those who accuse liberation theology of promoting violence do not understand liberation theology; their position reflects ignorance. Liberation theologians, notes the author, quoting Ignacio Ellacuría, are most opposed to violence and they promote peace. Their theology, maintains Sobrino,

denounces the first and foremost cause of all violence: structural injustice. Twenty-five years ago in Medellín, the Latin American bishops called this 'institutionalized violence.' ... Liberation theology is against this violence above all, for being the most serious form of violence. ... It denounces it and combats repression and torture committed by the armies, security forces and death squads which are used to maintain the structural injustice.<sup>281</sup>

In a similar spirit, the Spanish Association of Theologians John XXIII has denounced with indignation the accusation that liberation theology is the cause of violence in Chiapas. "Those who make these accusations," assert the Spanish theologians, "are themselves culpable. They are the ones who maintain, without solution, a situation of injustice, spoliation and marginalization, a situation of true institutionalized violence."<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>281</sup>Jon Sobrino, "Liberation Theology Confronts Violence," in *Latinamerica Press*, July 7, 1994, 5.

<sup>282</sup>"La Teología de la Liberación y el Levantamiento Indígena en Chiapas," a paper published by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (CRT), Mexico City, 1994.

A theological reflection paper on the Chiapas uprising, published in Mexico City by the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, reflects a similar approach to understanding the cause of violence in Chiapas. The authors argue that accusing liberation theology of being the promoter of violence is a form of defending illegitimate interests.<sup>283</sup> They note that during Pope John Paul's first visit to Mexico in 1979 to inaugurate the third Latin American bishops' conference in Puebla, the financial elite of Mexico protested against liberation theology and the "option for the poor" because, they said, "it is bad for business." Business, maintain the authors, means profit without limits and without any attention to the injustices that result in making this profit. This is what happened in Chiapas. Liberation theology, argues the paper, does not promote violence; rather, it helps people to analyze and understand the cause of injustice and change their situation. A situation of injustice rarely changes without legitimate resistance, resistance which can generate a conflict. In most cases, reaching a stage of dialogue to deal with a situation of injustice is not possible without such resistance, adds the authors. The conflict in Chiapas, they maintain, calls for conversion and commitment to justice to avoid future violence.

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<sup>283</sup>"La Teología de la Liberación y el Levantamiento Indígena en Chiapas," n.p.

In a similar vein, Pedro Casaldáliga, the bishop of Sao Félix do Araguaia, Brazil, notes that the governments of Latin America and many proponents of the centralist Church have been silencing the voices of protest against the structural violence of the system, pretending that they do not exist. This was exactly the situation in Chiapas until January 1, 1994. The Chiapas conflict, argues the Brazilian bishop, "is a big warning to the centralist Latin American Church and to the neoliberal governments of the area: the irruption of the Indigenous presence that they wanted to deny."<sup>284</sup> The neoliberal economic policies which are applied in the region are causing death and misery. This is the root cause of the conflict in Chiapas, maintains Casaldáliga.<sup>285</sup> In his words:

The violence of capitalism, and its present most savage form, neoliberalism, ... has economic roots, .... Structural violence grows out of the forms and relations of production, distribution and consumption in a society. ... This is the cause of the Indigenous insurrection in Chiapas: a prolonged and steady situation of misery, economic exploitation, lack of access to the means of production, migration, lack of work opportunities and slow death.<sup>286</sup>

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<sup>284</sup>Sobrino, "Liberation Theology Confronts Violence," 5.

<sup>285</sup>"Me sorprendía que los gobernantes de México, producto de una dictadura partidista que ya lleva muchos años, no vieran que ese neoliberalismo concertado con Estados Unidos fuera a afectar a ese pueblo pobre. La raíz del estallido está ahí. En una reforma agraria que ha quedado solo en papel; en miles de niños chiapanecos muertos por enfermedades curables, en la decapitación de liderazgos regionales; en tantas y tantas detenciones arbitrarias" (*Proceso*, 900, January 31, 1994, 35).

<sup>286</sup>"la violencia del capitalismo, actualmente en su versión más salvaje, la neoliberal .... tiene raíces económicas, .... La violencia de las estructuras surge de las formas y relaciones de producción, circulación y consumo de una sociedad. ... Y esto ha estado a la base de

According to Casaldáliga, revolutionary violence becomes justifiable in situations of unbearable permanent violence which is "unmoved by protest, and deaf to moral appeal."

In terms of revolutionary violence, theologians such as Ellacuría, Fernández, and McDonagh have outlined ethical and theological frameworks. Their arguments use the criteria of "just war" theology to develop a "just revolution" theology.<sup>287</sup> These theologians agree that the debate is not only as to whether certain revolutionary counter-violence can be ethically and theologically justified; it is also on the effectiveness of such means to bring concrete and lasting change to the root causes of systemic violence. Further discussion of the theological arguments about "just revolution," or "just counter-violence," is outside the scope of this work. It suffices here to say that neither the teaching of the Latin American Church nor liberation theologians affirm armed revolution as a solution. And the dilemma of dealing with structural and repressive violence remains unresolved. In the midst of this dilemma, many long term observers of the pastoral praxis of the Diocese of San Cristóbal argue that this process has opened new horizons

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la insurrección indígena chiapaneca: una prolongada y estable situación de miseria, de explotación económica, de privación de medios de producción, de migración y carencia de fuentes de empleo, de muerte lenta" (David Fernández, "El Recurso a la Violencia Armada," in *Chiapas: El Evangelio de los Pobres*, 138-9, 142).

<sup>287</sup>Fernández, "El Recurso a la Violencia Armada," 151-156; Edna McDonagh, "Liberating Resistance and Kingdom Values," in *Concilium*, 195 (Feb. 1988), 78-86; Ignacio Ellacuría, "Violence and Non-violence," 69-77.

for theological and pastoral reflections on peacemaking. This pastoral process includes new dimensions, which I will name below, that nurture the establishment of social peace, and expand the visions of Catholic social teaching, Medellín and liberation theology concerning peacemaking.

### **The Position of the Mexican Catholic Church**

In the early days of the conflict in Chiapas, the Mexican Bishops' Conference (CEM) formed the Episcopal Commission for Peace and Reconciliation in Chiapas, a special commission to follow up on the situation in Chiapas. The commission included, among others, the bishops of the three dioceses of Chiapas and CEM's president. This Episcopal commission has visited Chiapas nine times since the beginning of the conflict, and has issued many statements regarding the pastoral work of mediation and reconciliation of the Diocese of San Cristóbal and Bishop Ruiz. Based on this commission's recommendations, the Mexican Conference of Bishops has issued several statements in support of Bishop Ruiz and the diocesan pastoral work. The quotation below from a letter signed by the president of CEM and sent to Bishop Ruiz in the name of the Mexican bishops on February 1, 1996, reflects clearly the position which the Mexican Episcopate has taken regarding the conflict in Chiapas, the work of Bishop Ruiz, and the diocesan pastoral work. The Mexican bishops said:

We congratulate you sincerely, Don Samuel, and the many people who are making possible the important service of mediation between the parties in conflict. ... We are in agreement, not only with the EZLN, but with all society that Mexico needs changes, .... It is urgent to continue to work for the Indigenous peoples so that they acquire their full rights which all human persons deserve, as children of God .... We repeat what we said on other occasions ... that we support the just causes of the Indigenous peoples, but we reject the way of arms."<sup>288</sup>

In another document issued after the commission's visit to Chiapas in April of 1997, "Ways Toward Peace and Reconciliation: Message to the People of Mexico," the Mexican bishops called upon all Mexicans to participate in building peace. The message echoed the position of Bishop Ruiz and the diocese in saying that peace is not a passive acceptance of the status quo; rather it is achieved through building together a new and more just society. The desired peace, noted the statement, is a peace established in recognition of the dignity and rights of each person, the profound aspirations of the Indigenous peoples and their communities and cultures, and their increasing capacity for self-determination. The Episcopal message expressed a renewed solidarity with the Diocese of San Cristóbal which the bishops described as a diocesan community mediating

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<sup>288</sup>"Felicitamos sinceramente a Usted, Don Samuel, y a tantas personas que hacen posible el importante servicio de la mediación entre las partes en conflicto. ... Estamos de acuerdo, no solo con el EZLN, sino con toda la sociedad, en que México requiere cambios, .... Es urgente seguir trabajando por que los pueblos indígenas adquieran la plenitud de los derechos que les competen a las personas humanas, como hijos de Dios, .... Reiteramos lo que en otras ocasiones hemos manifestado. Es decir, que apoyamos las causas justas de los indígenas, pero rechazamos el camino de la armas" (Letter from the President of the Conference of Mexican Bishops, February 1, 1996. Copy available from the writer).

peace and reconciliation. The members of the commission noted that they witnessed neither hatred nor a desire for vengeance in the communities they visited. Instead, they witnessed a determination and a commitment among the people to nonviolent means and to resist peacefully for the purpose of achieving their just and noble demands.<sup>289</sup>

These quotes from two documents of the Mexican bishops express CEM's general solidarity and support for the diocesan pastoral process. Asked about the Mexican bishops' support for the pastoral work of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, Bishop Ruiz noted that

as in a choir, there are always one or two voices that are out of tune with the rest of the group. This also happens with a Bishops' Conference: there are from time to time one or two voices that are not in full agreement with the rest, and they criticize us."<sup>290</sup>

But CEM has in general been very supportive.

### **The Indigenous Peoples' Perspective on Peace**

For the Indigenous peoples of Chiapas, observed the Jesuit missionary Jerónimo Hernández, peace has a spiritual dimension rooted in their culture and worldview. Peace is not based only on economic development; economic development which means migration, cultural and spiritual uprootedness

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<sup>289</sup>"Caminos Hacia la Paz y la Reconciliación: Mensaje al Pueblo de México," Message from the Episcopal Commission for Reconciliation and Peace in Chiapas, Conference of Mexican Bishops, April 17, 1997, paragraphs 16, 17 and 18. Copy available from the writer.

<sup>290</sup>Ruiz, *Seeking Freedom*, 64.

is not the peace they desire. Their cultural strengths are rooted in their community experience as a people, in their interaction with land and nature, and in their relations to the divine. In his view, these are the elements which have sustained their cultural resistance through many centuries of oppression and the violent destruction of their cultures. Therefore, maintains Hernández, peace for the Indigenous people has to include these elements: living on their land, sharing life with their community, and maintaining a good relationship with the divine. Peace for them involves the freedom to nurture and enjoy these relations. Traditional community authorities, customs and social organizations exist to foster and protect this peace. Finally, for the Indigenous peoples, added Hernández,

Peace means simply peace; it means life; it means respect for their life, their rights, their traditions, their forms of social organization, their worldview and way of participation in the world. It means accepting and respecting the fact that the Indigenous are part of the Earth.<sup>291</sup>

On the other hand, the peace of the *ladinos* (people of white European origin), the colonizers and large landowners, has not changed from the time of the European conquest to the present moment, noted the Mexican Jesuit missionary. The *ladinos* believe that they own the land and the people who

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<sup>291</sup>"La Paz, para los indios significa, sencillamente PAZ; significa VIDA; significa RESPETO a su vida, a sus derechos, a sus tradiciones, a sus formas de organización social, a su manera de concebir el mundo y ser parte activa de él. Significa aceptar y respetar el hecho de que LOS INDIOS SON PARTE DE LA TIERRA" (Jerónimo Hernández López, "Chiapas: la Interminable Guerra por la Paz," in *Xipe-Totek*, Centro de Reflexión y Acción Social, A.C. de los Jesuitas [Guadalajara, Mexico], III, 3 [July-Sept, 1994], 246-247).



live on it: the "Indians." For them, land is not Mother Nature; it is a commodity to be traded and converted to money. The people who live on it are to be treated like slaves, bought and sold with the land; they are cheap labour to work the land, a work force that can also at times become an obstacle when the large landowners decide to use the land for other "development projects."<sup>292</sup> The author calls this historic conflict between the two worldviews the endless war for peace--"peace of the Indigenous for the Indigenous, versus pacification of the Indigenous for the ladinos."<sup>293</sup>

At a meeting of the pastoral workers of the Diocese of San Cristóbal shortly after the 1994 uprising, the Indigenous coordinators of "teología India" shared theological reflections on the peace that their people desire. They said:

We are aware that peace is not only the result of the end of war; rather, peace is the joy of the community, of men, women, young people and children, and especially of the elderly men and women, because they animate us with their wisdom, prayers and experience. In this family, which is the community, all share life together in a humane way and no one takes advantage of life for their own personal interest.

Our ancestors had peace because they lived in harmony together with the whole universe, with nature and with God. Now, it is time to build and reclaim our joy, the harmony of our communal life and our relationship with God. This is making peace.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>292</sup>Hernández, "Chiapas: la Interminable Guerra por la Paz," 247.

<sup>293</sup>"Es la interminable guerra por la paz. La PAZ de los Indios, para los indios, o la pacificación de los indios, para los ladinos" (Hernández, "Chiapas: la Interminable Guerra por la Paz," 248).

<sup>294</sup>"Somos conscientes de que la paz no se da únicamente cuando se termina la guerra, sino que la paz es la alegría de la comunidad, de hombres, mujeres, jóvenes y niños, especialmente los ancianos y

According to Gustavo Gutiérrez, we find a similar image of a life in peace in community in the book of Zechariah (8: 4-6). This text, like the above citation from the Indigenous communities of Chiapas, reflects the eschatological hope of the people and the life that God desires for them here and now: a life in peace where elderly people live in dignity and are happy, and where children are also happy and safe. This life in peace is a sign of God's presence among people and of God's promise: the fullness of life in peace. This divine promise, which might seem unrealistic to some, is not impossible for God to realize, according to Gutiérrez. This is not an illusion,

it is rather a utopia which mobilizes history. The powerful, those who do not desire that things change because their privileges are protected in the existing order, are skeptical towards any project which proposes to establish a different social order. ... [but] the Lord declares that his promise of life for all can become incarnated in history.<sup>295</sup>

The analysis of structural violence and the above vision of peace of the Indigenous communities are essential

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ancianas, porque nos animan con su sabiduría, oraciones y experiencias. En esta familia que es la comunidad, todos juntos compartimos una vida humanitaria y nadie lo toma como interés personal. ... Nuestros antepasados tenían la paz, porque vivían juntos y en armonía con ellos, con todo el universo, con la naturaleza y con Dios. Ahora, es el tiempo de reconstruir y rescatar nuestra alegría, la armonía de nuestra vida comunitaria y nuestra relación con Dios, esto es hacer la paz" ("En Búsqueda de la Paz," in *Chiapas: El Evangelio de los Pobres*, 42). The quotation is taken from the presentation of the Indigenous coordinators of "teología India" of the Diocese of San Cristóbal at a diocesan meeting on March 9, 1994;

<sup>295</sup>No es ilusión, es más bien una utopía movilizadora de la historia. Los poderosos, aquellos que no desean que las cosas cambien porque sus privilegios se basan en lo actualmente existente, son escépticos frente a todo proyecto que se proponga establecer un orden social distinto. ... El Señor declara que su voluntad de vida para todos puede hacerse carne en la historia" (Gustavo Gutiérrez, "El Shalom de Dios", in *Paz*, Lima, 2ª Epoca, 2/29 [April-June 1994], 34-35).

dimensions of the diocesan praxis of peace. The following section will discuss further the dimensions of this praxis.

### **The Peacemaking Praxis of the Diocese**

The pastoral process of the Diocese of San Cristóbal has evolved in response to the prolonged, structural and historic violence that the Indigenous people of Chiapas have endured, argues the Dominican Mexican theologian and human rights activist, Miguel Concha. Peace in Chiapas cannot be restored by a military solution to the conflict; a military solution can only aggravate the vicious spiral of violence. We all want peace, but not peace at any price, he asserts. We want

true peace which is born of justice for all and the recognition and respect of all the human rights for all. A peace that requires the end of violence, and the end of the causes of violence."<sup>296</sup>

According to Concha, ending the causes of violence requires urgent social change to eradicate the causes of poverty, not only in Chiapas, but in all of Mexico.<sup>297</sup> However, the diocesan pastoral process and the Indigenous peoples' perspective on peace are not the only peacemaking visions in Chiapas.

Many observers note that in Chiapas at the moment, there are different perspectives and processes of "building

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<sup>296</sup>Miguel Concha, O.P., "Paz Verdadera y Vida Digna para Todos," in *CENCOS Iglesias* (Jan. 1994), 4.

<sup>297</sup>Concha, "Paz Verdadera . . .," 6.

peace." The conflict is complex and it involves many actors and levels. On the one hand, the Mexican government (local and federal), supported by the economic elite, large landowners, the Mexican armed forces and police want to re-establish and impose the "peace" of yesterday. They want a return to the *status quo*, based on the old social relations of power with the campesino and Indigenous communities and their organizations without making any significant structural changes to the economic, political and social order. On the other hand, civil society organizations and movements are struggling for economic, political and social transformation in which all participate in building a new society based on true democracy, justice and peace, which takes into consideration the interest of those at the bottom of the social and economic order.<sup>298</sup> The work of mediation, reconciliation and peace which the Diocese of San Cristóbal and Bishop Ruiz have been promoting represents the interests of and supports the civil society social movements.<sup>299</sup> As discussed in chapter two, the accompaniment of Indigenous communities and civil society organizations has been a focal

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<sup>298</sup>See Pablo Latapí, "La Paz de Don Samuel," in *Chiapas: El Evangelio de los Pobres*, 159-161; Andrés Aubry, "Para un Retrato del Mediador," *ibidem*, 163-167; Samuel Ruiz, "Mensaje para la Reconciliación y la Paz," *ibidem*, 169-174; Jorge Santiago, "El momento Actual de Chiapas: La Construcción de la Sociedad Civil," in *CONAI, Comisión Nacional de Intermediación, Archivo Histórico. San Andrés: Marco Jurídico y Normativo del Diálogo y Negociación. Serie: "Senderos de Paz," Cuaderno no. 2* (Mexico City: Servicios y Asesoría para la Paz, 1999), 193-204.

<sup>299</sup>Samuel Ruiz, "Mensaje para la Reconciliación y la Paz," in *CONAI, Comisión Nacional de Intermediación, Archivo Histórico, Serie: "Senderos de Paz," Cuaderno no. 1* (Mexico City, 1999), II, 16.

point of the diocesan pastoral process and its vision of mediation and peacemaking. Aubry notes that these new civil society movements and organizations in Chiapas, or "the new Chiapas," as he calls them, are now questioning the whole Mexican social system.<sup>300</sup>

The pastoral and theological dimensions of the diocesan pastoral process over the past three decades, discussed in detail in the previous chapters, include: the "conversion" of Bishop Ruiz and many pastoral workers and missionaries who worked among the campesino and Indigenous communities in the late 1960s; the support of the diocesan teams for the Indigenous communities in organizing the First Indigenous Congress in 1974; the option for the poor made by the diocesan assembly in 1975 and the rethinking of pastoral priorities and plans; the re-discovery by Bishop Ruiz and many pastoral workers of God's salvific presence and the seed of the divine Word in Indigenous cultures; the new respect for Indigenous peoples, their social organizations and cultures; the support for the Indigenous autochthonous churches which embody these beliefs; the decision, expressed in the pastoral plan of 1986, to open the doors of the diocesan church to civil society organizations that are searching for alternatives; the democratization of the diocese by modifying the diocesan decision-making structures so that the lay representatives of the communities can participate and share in decision-making; the foundation of

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<sup>300</sup>Aubry, "Para un Retrato del Mediador," 165.

a diocesan human rights centre in the late 1980s to document the violation of human rights of the poor and to defend and educate them about their rights; the on-going social analyses of the political and socioeconomic reality of Chiapas and theological reflection on these analyses for over three decades as reflected in the various diocesan pastoral letters, particularly *In This Hour of Grace*; the work of mediation in the conflict between the EZLN and the Mexican government. These are all elements of a long pastoral praxis of the diocese aimed at transforming the systemic structures of violence and building justice and peace. Among these multiple dimensions, the diocesan option for the poor, respect for Indigenous cultures and religions, and the accompaniment of the people in their struggles are identified by both diocesan sources and outside observers as defining theological and pastoral principles of this pastoral praxis. They are not only theoretical principles; they have been the foundation of a long pastoral process over many decades.

Marina Jiménez, who studied the pastoral work of the Diocese of San Cristóbal among the Indigenous communities in the region of Pantelhó in the late 1980s, contends that this diocesan process took into consideration the social, economic and political reality of these communities and has stimulated among them new social processes which helped them to become active social and political actors and subjects of the transformation of their history--including their

church.<sup>301</sup> The emergence of the autochthonous churches is an expression of this process of transformation.

This long pastoral process prepared Bishop Ruiz and the diocesan teams for the work of mediation in the conflict between the EZLN and the Mexican government after January 1, 1994. By accepting the service of mediation from the very early days of the conflict, they helped reduce the level of violence. Reaching a cease-fire after only 11 days of fighting and engaging national and international civil societies as actors in the process of peace building were remarkable achievements. As a result of this mediation, several peace agreements were reached between the government and the EZLN, the most important being the San Andrés agreement on Indigenous Rights and Culture signed in February of 1996. However, the Mexican government did not fulfill these agreements. Instead, in response to the Indigenous, popular, community-based uprising, the government launched a low intensity war.<sup>302</sup> The Indigenous communities have declared "war" against the Mexican army and

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<sup>301</sup>"Es importante señalar que la iglesia ha sido un actor relevante del proceso social de las comunidades indígenas del municipio de Pantelhó, dado que la acción de la Diócesis ha conllevado un enmarcar su acción pastoral, desde la constatación de la realidad social, económica, política y social de las comunidades indígenas, impulsando acciones importantes en logros por alcanzar un mejor nivel de vida. ...

Es decir ha habido una identidad colectiva que ha conllevado a conformar espacios de la lucha, de reflexión, de apoyo, convirtiéndose los indígenas en uno de los actores políticos más activos a nivel nacional y un importante interlocutor de las políticas gubernamentales" (Jiménez, "Iglesia de San Cristóbal y Procesos Sociales," 199-200).

<sup>302</sup>See *Militarization and Violence in Chiapas; Ni Paz Ni Justicia* (San Cristóbal; and *Chiapas: La Guerra en Curso* (Mexico City: Centro de Derechos Humanos "Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez," 1998).

system, but their main demand has been dialogue.<sup>303</sup> In this extreme conflict, involving "people of deep ethical commitment" and moral credibility such as Bishop Ruiz and the other members of the CONAI, has helped reduce the violence and opened possibilities for dialogue and a new strategy for building peace.<sup>304</sup>

A key aspect of this diocesan pastoral process is that it developed a praxis--a concrete historic, strategic and transformative pastoral work and an on-going theological reflection--carried out by thousands of trained Indigenous catechists and several hundred Indigenous deacons, supported by a diocesan structure of lay pastoral leaders from the communities who perform pastoral, social and educational functions and services in their communities. This concrete, historic, multi-dimensional pastoral process has continued over four decades, unwavering in denouncing the structures of violence, educating the people and supporting the social movements in their efforts to build an alternative new society. It offers an inspiring example to the Church and expands the horizon of the theology and praxis of peace.

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<sup>303</sup>Jorge Santiago, "Reconciliación en Chiapas," a presentation given in Toronto on February 10, 1998. An audio cassette with English translation and a Spanish transcript are available from the Toronto office of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace.

<sup>304</sup>Wells, "The Case for Armed Revolution," 5.



## Conclusion

This chapter examined key aspects of the Catholic teaching and theology of peace, in particular the position of some Latin American theologians on peace and violence. The purpose of this examination was to situate the pastoral praxis of peace of the Diocese of San Cristóbal in the broader context of Catholic theology. The above examination demonstrates that Catholic teaching and theology of peace, universally and in Latin America, have not yet sufficiently developed the pastoral and ecclesial dimensions of their theology of peace. However, they do provide a framework that supports the praxis of local churches engaged in peacemaking in concrete situations of social conflict.

The arguments presented in this chapter clarify the position of official Church teachings, many theologians and pastoral leaders on violence and peacemaking and demonstrate that there are different interpretations of violence and peace. It is not news that the power elites are often dissatisfied when the pastoral work of local churches supports popular movements and their vision of peacemaking-- the diocese of San Cristóbal is only one example among many. In the case of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, liberation theology has been misrepresented by the power elite in Mexico as a scapegoat diverting attention from the real causes of injustice and systemic violence which led to the generalized resistance to social violence. But avoidance of

the real issues does not bring true peace. The peace of the few which is imposed by the military is not God's desired peace.

The theological and pastoral aspects of the diocesan process in San Cristóbal, as explained above, contribute to developing the praxis dimension of the Catholic theology and social teaching on peace. This chapter also demonstrated that the main axes of the pastoral praxis of the Diocese of San Cristóbal have been the option for the poor and the accompaniment of the campesino and Indigenous communities and their popular movements in their efforts to reverse the situation of structural violence and "social sin," which I examined in chapter one. The main goals of this pastoral praxis have been to promote the building of structural peace and a new society based on justice and democracy. This diocesan role of peacemaking, affirmed Bishop Ruiz on several occasions, is a pastoral task for all the Church.

## CONCLUSION

Chapter one of this thesis presented the context and background of the present conflict in Chiapas. It set the context in the terms used by many local actors as reflected in diocesan documents and by several other commentators. These documents demonstrate that the Indigenous, campesino and poor communities of Chiapas have been historically exploited and marginalized. The economic, political and social policies the Mexican government began to implement in the 1980s, in accordance with the demands of international financial institutions and in adherence to the principles of the allegedly free market economy, intensified the already existing social violence in Chiapas. Those who led, participated in and supported the EZLN rebellion on January 1, 1994, were mostly Indigenous, peasants and poor, among the poorest people of Mexico and the world. Since then, massive military presence and repression have been added. Now, not only are most of the people of Chiapas poor, but a large number of the federal Mexican army troops are deployed there to maintain "peace." The Indigenous movements of resistance, supported by many civil society organizations and the Diocese of San Cristóbal, are demanding a radical change of the structures of social violence, the elimination of military repression and the fulfillment of the peace agreements signed by the government. Without true democracy,

respect of all the human rights of all, and a fair economy that puts people before profit, there will be no peace, they affirm.

Leaders and officials of the Diocese of San Cristóbal committed the diocese and its organizations to an option for the poor. This option included, among other aspects, a diocesan decision to accompany the poor in their struggle to change the system that is causing their misery. In the mid 1970s, the diocesan pastoral teams began to conclude that people are poor because the system is making them so. The diocesan pastoral teams and organizations have since maintained their support and accompaniment of the people in their efforts to build a new society and establish social peace. "Option for the poor, option for peace," has become a key theological guiding principle of the diocesan pastoral praxis. The option for the poor has shaped the theological vision and pastoral praxis of this particular church over the past decades.

In chapter two, I discussed key aspects of the diocesan pastoral praxis which challenged the political, economic and cultural structures of oppression. The winds of change which blew through the universal Catholic Church after Vatican II, and particularly after Medellín in Latin America, encouraged local churches to open their doors to the work of the Spirit in the world. In this context, Bishop Ruiz and some of the pastoral teams in the Diocese of San Cristóbal became aware of the challenges of oppression and misery of the people in

their diocese, particularly among the Indigenous peoples. In response, they expanded their theological and pastoral horizons and revised their understanding of the identity and mission of their local church in this situation. A new pastoral praxis of integral liberation and social peacemaking emerged. The new pastoral praxis took the context and needs of the people into consideration; it was based on respect for the cultures and human rights of the Indigenous peoples in the diocese. A new faith and understanding of the Reign of God in history came forth. This new faith helped renew the theological and ecclesiological experience of the campesino and Indigenous communities and provided a framework for participating in transforming their history and society.

In dialogue with others in similar processes which were emerging all over the American continent, the diocesan pastoral teams encouraged a contextual theological reflection on the Indigenous situation by the Indigenous people themselves. This reflection led the Indigenous communities to articulate their own new theology, *teología India* (Indigenous theology). The *teología India* takes seriously the Indigenous situation in its religious, cultural, social, economic and political dimensions. Gradually these communities settled on the notion of Indigenous "autochthonous churches," a new ecclesiological experience within their particular local church. Supporting the development of autochthonous churches and nurturing

theological reflection on these new Christian communities have been the main theological and pastoral priorities of the Diocese of San Cristóbal. As the Mexican theologian Miguel Concha has observed, the pastoral goals of the Diocese of San Cristóbal have been building an "autochthonous and liberating church, and building a just and dignified peace in the circumstances of the diocese."<sup>305</sup>

Chapter three traced the theological development of Bishop Samuel Ruiz. Bishop Ruiz has played a key role in the creation and continuity of the diocesan pastoral process. His personal disposition, his experience among the Indigenous communities in his diocese, and the new theological experiences during the early years of his episcopate have strongly influenced his theological vision and shaped his pastoral praxis. Over time, his thinking evolved and produced clear and articulate theological insights on pressing questions concerning the Reign of God in history, the presence of the divine salvific work in cultures, on mediation and peacemaking, and particularly on new structures for inculturated Indigenous autochthonous churches. Many of these topics deserve further study. My chapter offers an introduction and a modest contribution in this regard.

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<sup>305</sup>"Iglesia Autóctona y Liberadora por construir una paz justa y digna en las circunstancias de la Diócesis, ..." (Miguel Concha, "Bienaventurados Los que Procuran la Paz," in *El Caminante, Boletín Interno de la Diócesis de San Cristóbal de Las Casas*, 2ª Epoca, 1 (Dec. 1995), 41).

Chapter four demonstrated that Catholic social teaching on peace urges local churches to engage in contextual processes of peacemaking that address specific situations of structural social violence. The Latin American bishops and theologians, building on this teaching, provided useful contextual theological frameworks for the analysis of systemic violence, an important step toward developing pastoral praxes of peace. Leaders and officials of the Diocese of San Cristóbal used these theological frameworks to challenge structural violence and to develop a contextual praxis of social peacemaking. Peacemaking, in a context of structural violence such as in Chiapas, is a long process of personal and social transformation which includes, among other things, working for social, political and economic justice, and reconciliation--understood as establishing right social relations. The praxis of peace and the new theology emerging from this diocesan experience present a challenge and inspiration to Christian theology in general, and to the theology and praxis of peace in particular. There is an urgency in the new global context for Christians to reflect in creative ways on peacemaking in situations of conflict such as in Chiapas, which is only one among many regions in the world where churches are involved in conflict resolution.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>306</sup>Robert Herr and Judy Zimmerman Herr, "Introduction: Crisis and Opportunity," in idem, eds., *Transforming Violence: Linking Local and Global Peacemaking*, forward by Konrad Raiser (Waterloo, Ontario: Herald Press, 1998), 13-19.

While we do not yet know the historical verdict regarding the long term effects of the diocesan pastoral work on peacemaking in Chiapas, this diocesan praxis already offers many lessons. The examination of this praxis shows that a contextual theology, accompanied by consistent long term pastoral work which is committed to the poor in their historic concrete situation, inspires the people and pastoral workers, and contributes to challenging and transforming structures of injustice and social violence. The Latin American bishops' concluded after Medellín that peacemaking in circumstances of structural violence demands long term pastoral praxis which must be organically linked to social justice. This conclusion is borne out in the case of Chiapas.

The pastoral work of the Diocese of San Cristóbal has patiently supported a long process of social transformation which gradually unmasked the historic "social sin," in which the Church has taken part. Such a long term struggle demands strong spirituality that helps the Church carry out its divine mission. Jürgen Moltmann calls this kind of spirituality "mysticism of liberation." "The more effectively a church acknowledges its social, political and cultural environment, the more faithfully it can carry out its divine commission, and the more effective an instrument of divine peace it can become," argues Moltmann.<sup>307</sup> The

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<sup>307</sup>Jürgen Moltmann, "Peace the Fruit of Justice," in *Concilium*, 195 (Feb. 1988), 118, 110.

On the mysticism of liberation in the context of the Diocese of San Cristóbal, see the diocesan pastoral letter, "Sobre la Situación del



diocesan pastoral network became over time an important moral and social force supporting the integral liberation of the oppressed peasant, Indigenous, and poor communities of Chiapas. These communities are now calling for a radical transformation of political, economic and social structures, including the diocesan church itself. They are calling for a peace with justice and dignity for all, not only for themselves. When a diocesan church makes an option for the poor, the poor become the new evangelizers of the Church and the world and the announcers of the good news of God's Reign of justice and peace to all peoples.

Pablo Richard, a noted Latin American theologian, concluded after a visit to the Diocese of San Cristóbal in 1995 that the present moment in Chiapas is a moment of *kairos*--an opportune time of grace and salvation. During his visit, Richard discerned in the work of mediation, reconciliation and peacemaking of this diocesan church, and in its long term insertion among civil society organizations, a sign of the work of the Spirit--"a sign of the times." He observed that

The history of salvation is passing at this time through the church of San Cristóbal--through all the people and the Bishop; the Spirit is blowing here at this moment. This is very important. ... There are today many tragic places in the world, .... Will Chiapas be one of them? No, this will not happen, because having here a prophetic church ... Chiapas

could also become a little light for all Latin America.<sup>308</sup>

The bishops of Chiapas share this perception of the special moment of *kairos* in their diocesan church which they see as a sign of universal hope. They said:

Chiapas, the forgotten, marginalized and despised is becoming a universal call to justice. This is not happening because of its own merit but because of its painful path and the accompaniment of solidarity of the whole world. Hope in a new strategy which brings justice to the Indigenous and transforms society is being woven.<sup>309</sup>

In their pastoral work in the diocese of San Cristóbal they are pointing in a new direction, toward a new light of hope in the universal Church and society. Many theologians, non-Indigenous as well as Indigenous, are discerning in this process hope for a new evangelization. In his last words as bishop of San Cristóbal, as he was handing over the diocese to Bishop Arizmendi on May 1, 2000, Don Samuel reiterated

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Pueblo que Lucha por la Justicia" (On the Situation of the People who Struggle for Justice), Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, 1985, 7; also *Seeking Freedom*, 35-36.

<sup>308</sup>"Por aquí, por esta Iglesia de San Cristóbal está pasando la historia de la Salvación, en medio de todos, del Obispo y de tanta gente; por aquí está soplando el Espíritu. Es muy importante. Ahora tenemos en el mundo una serie de lugares trágicos, ... ¿Chiapas estará ahí? No va a estar, porque si aquí hay una Iglesia profética Chiapas ..., lo que puede ser también un poco de luz para toda América Latina" (Pablo Richard, "Iglesia, Sociedad Civil y Esperanza del Pueblo," in *El Caminante, Boletín Interno de la Diócesis de San Cristóbal de Las Casas*, 2<sup>a</sup> Epoca, 1 [Dec. 1995], 39).

<sup>309</sup>"Chiapas, el olvidado, el marginado y despreciado se convierte, inmerecidamente, en un signo universal de llamamiento a la justicia; pues a la luz de sus hechos dolorosos y bajo la mirada y acompañamiento solidario del mundo entero, se teje la esperanza de una nueva estrategia que lleve justicia al indio y transforme a la sociedad" (Bishops Samuel Ruiz and Raúl Vera, homily at the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico City, January 21, 1998. Quoted in Ana Gispert-Sauch, "Chiapas: signo universal de llamado a la justicia," *Paginas*, 152 [Lima: CEP, Aug. 1998], 111).

that this diocesan church is a sign to the universal Church, and to the world.

This diocese has a providential future within the universal Church; it is a testimony to the whole world, inside as well as outside the Church. It has a vocation to unity. It began an ecumenical and inter-religious journey that is progressing and that needs to be cultivated. This path is leading us to a yet greater unity which is not yet defined in the universal Church. We humbly consider this a contribution to the life of the whole Church.<sup>310</sup>

Statements from the Department of Missions of the Latin American Bishops' Conference (CELAM) have repeatedly affirmed these hopes.

We are convinced that the Indigenous peoples of the Americas represent a hope for the whole Church and for the future of humanity. Even though the present moment, because of the external pressure of the globalizing macro-schemes which we are facing, is challenging and extremely risky, it is also a moment of great opportunity, of dreaming and building. Beginning with the small things of daily life, we can imagine societies and churches that are effectively multi-ethnic and multicultural where we can all live together in harmony and true peace, accepting and valuing our legitimate differences.<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>310</sup>"Esta Diócesis tiene un futuro providencial en medio de la Iglesia Universal, como testimonio que debe dar hacia el mundo, tanto dentro como fuera de la Iglesia. Tiene una vocación a la unidad. Tiene un caminar ecuménico e interreligioso que va en avance, que tiene que ser cultivado, en un crecimiento y que nos llevará a una unidad mucho mayor todavía no definida en la Iglesia Universal. Y consideramos esto, humildemente, un aporte para este caminar de toda la Iglesia" (The words of Don Samuel Ruiz to Bishop Felipe Arizmendi during the ceremony of handing over to him the Diocese on May 1, 2000, message from the communications's office of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas <comunica@laneta.apc.org> sent on May 2, 2000, available from <www.laneta.apc.org/curiasc>).

<sup>311</sup>"Estamos convencidos que los pueblos indígenas de América representan una esperanza para toda la Iglesia y para el futuro de la humanidad. Por eso aunque la hora actual es desafiante y riesgosa en extremo pues tenemos la presión externa de macroesquemas globalizadores, también es una magnífica oportunidad para soñar y construir, desde lo micro y lo cotidiano, nuevos esquemas de sociedades y de iglesias que sean efectivamente pluriétnicas y pluriculturales, donde vivamos en armonía y en paz verdadera, aceptando y valorando nuestras legítimas

Ricardo Robles, the Mexican Jesuit missionary who spent most of his life working among Indigenous communities across Mexico, strongly affirms that a new ecumenical theology with universal relevance is emerging from within the experience of faith of the Indigenous communities of Chiapas. This hope, according to Robles, resides primarily in the mature and radical call of this theology for pluralism and diversity, aspects which have been nurtured by the diocesan pastoral process and which have been fundamental to its praxis of peace.

I have to confess that I see clearly, very clearly, an ecumenical theology, born from their [the Indigenous] pluralistic, inter-religious, inter-cultural and trans-historical dialogue. ... Their theology was born of openness to the other and is continuing to develop in a way open to the other. This welcoming and fascinating wisdom, born of the past and of pain, matured in the Lacandon jungle with an open heart, is destined for the future and to hope.<sup>312</sup>

The strongest expressions of these affirmations of hope are coming from Indigenous theologians themselves. The writings of the Mexican Indigenous theologian Eleazar López Hernández, among others, reflect this new awareness of

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diferencias" (From a document on the Indigenous peoples published by the Department of Missions of CELAM, 52, DEMIS-CELAM, Bogotá, 1985; quoted in Eleazar López Hernández, "Los Indios ante el Tercer Milenio," in *Revista Latino Americana de Teología*, [on-line journal], available from <[www.uca.edu.ni/koinonia/relat/194.htm](http://www.uca.edu.ni/koinonia/relat/194.htm)>, n.p.).

<sup>312</sup>"Debo confesar que me resulta evidente, transparente, una teología ecuménica, nacida de su diálogo plural, interreligioso, intercultural, transhistórico. ... Su teología nació de la apertura al otro y crece abierta también al diferente. Acogedora y fascinante resulta ser esta sabiduría nacida del pasado y del dolor, madurada en la selva Lacandona a corazón abierto, destinada al futuro y la esperanza" (Ricardo Robles O., "El Obolo de los Pueblos Indios para el Tercer Milenio," in *Christus*, Mexico City, 712 [May-June, 1999], 28).

universal hope among the Indigenous communities and in their relationships with the broader society.

The new Indigenous presence in societies and in the churches is like an oasis of faith and spirituality that moistens the world in the midst of the prevailing structural drought. We, the Indigenous, are people of hope--a hope that is drying inside many people and systems of society. In many ways we have demonstrated to the world that we, the Indigenous, are not the problem, but the basis for finding a solution to the present problems. In their historical and spiritual experience, our people find today, as they always did, answers that are worth collecting and making available to other peoples.<sup>313</sup>

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<sup>313</sup>"La nueva presencia indígena en las sociedades y en las iglesias es como un oasis de fe y espiritualidad que puede dar humedad al mundo en la sequía estructural que prevalece. Los indígenas somos pueblos de esperanza. Esperanza que se ha ido agotando en el interior de las personas y de los sistemas de sociedad. De muchas maneras hemos mostrado al mundo que los indios no somos el problema, sino la base para la solución de los problemas actuales. Nuestros pueblos hallan hoy, como siempre, en su experiencia histórica y espiritual, respuestas humanas que vale la pena cosechar y poner al alcance de otros pueblos" (Eleazar López Hernández, "Los Indios ante el Tercer Milenio," [on-line journal], n.p.).

During his visits to Latin America, Pope John II has also affirmed this hope that is overflowing from the faith and struggle of the Indigenous communities of the Americas. The following excerpts from his speech delivered at the Fourth Latin American Bishops' Conference in Santo Domingo (1992) reflect his position on the Indigenous peoples, their cultures and their place in the Church. "Indeed, the 'seeds of the Word' were already present and enlightening the hearts of your ancestors that they might discover the imprint of God the Creator in all his creatures: sun, moon, mother earth, volcanoes and forests, lakes and rivers.

"The Church encourages indigenous peoples to maintain and promote with legitimate pride the culture of their peoples: their healthy traditions and customs, their own language and values. In defending your identity, you are not only exercising your right; you are also fulfilling your duty to hand on your culture to future generations, thus enriching the whole of society." In "John Paul II's Message to the Indigenous Peoples," in Alfred T. Hennelly, ed., *Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano, Santo Domingo and Beyond: Documents and Commentaries from the Fourth General Conference of Latin American Bishops* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1993), 156 and 158.

These affirmations about hope and the contribution of Indigenous peoples to society at this global conjuncture also find echoes within the academic community. Martin Edwin Andersen observes the power of social change coming from the Indigenous peoples of the world, which he calls the "Fourth World Revolution." People below the Third World on the global scale of "development" are, argues the author, challenging the present processes of globalization and offering new hope. Andersen notes: "The agenda of indigenous peoples is challenging many cherished concepts and assumptions. Native concerns cut across the Cold War divide

Don Samuel and the pastoral teams have been affirming these hopes for more than three decades. In addition to experiencing poverty and misery among the Indigenous communities of the diocese in the 1960s, many pastoral workers have also discerned their deep and strong hope. In my opinion, this discovery involved for many, including Don Samuel, a profound mystical experience nurturing a firm faith which guided and motivated their praxis and hope. Bishop Ruiz described this hope by using the Christian metaphor par excellence, the resurrection.

The resurrection, not of the Indigenous, but of our society, is in the Indigenous. More than talking about the resurrection of the Indigenous, I would talk about the resurrection of our society through the richness of the Indigenous cultures.<sup>314</sup>

As I write the conclusion of this thesis, Bishop Ruiz has just been handed over the diocese to its new bishop, Felipe Arizmendi Esquivel, previously bishop of the neighbouring diocese of Tapachula, Chiapas, since 1991. Bishop Arizmendi has been a member of the Episcopal Commission for Peace and Reconciliation in Chiapas since its inception in 1994. He is also the current General Secretary

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of ideologies and regions and tend to afflict the comfortable and offer comfort to the afflicted in ways only dimly perceived by policymakers in Washington. ... At the end of the "American Century," the response to the challenges posed by the least represented and most imperiled 10 percent of our planet's population will determine the quality and indeed the viability of tomorrow's world." In Martin Edwin Andersen, "Chiapas, Indigenous Rights, and the Coming Fourth World Revolution," in *SAIS Review*, 14 (Summer/Fall 1994), 150, 157.

<sup>314</sup>"La resurrección, no del indígena sino de nuestra sociedad, está en el indígena. Más que hablar de la resurrección del indígena, hablaría yo de la resurrección de nuestra sociedad a través de la riqueza de las situaciones indígenas" (Ruiz y Vargas, "Pasión y Resurrección del Indio," 47).

of CELAM. Andrés Aubry, who has written extensively on the bishops of Chiapas since Bartolomé de Las Casas, notes that with one exception, all the bishops of Chiapas were under 45 years of age when they were appointed. They were usually young, sent to Chiapas for training while waiting for re-appointment. Now, this diocese has become a challenge that requires one of the most experienced bishops of Mexico. The Diocese of San Cristóbal, adds Aubry, has become a significant social actor at national and international levels.<sup>315</sup> It is not anymore the isolated "desert of solitude" that Bishop Ruiz experienced when he first arrived in Chiapas; it is at the centre of the Church in Mexico and supported by large national and international solidarity networks. It has also become a meeting place for Church leaders, theologians and activists from around the world, a space for reflection on the mission of the Church and on peacemaking in the twenty-first century.<sup>316</sup>

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<sup>315</sup>Andrés Aubry, "Indicadores para el Nuevo Obispo de San Cristóbal," in *La Jornada*, April 1, 2000, available from <[www.jornada.unam.mx/](http://www.jornada.unam.mx/)>.

<sup>316</sup>On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Bishop Ruiz, the Diocese of San Cristóbal organized a theologico-pastoral conference on the theme "From Vatican II to the Third Millennium," January 22-25, 2000. The conference was attended by more than 800 participants from across Mexico, including many Catholic and non-Catholic Church leaders, theologians and international delegates. The main focus of the conference was to discuss the diocesan pastoral process over the past four decades and to celebrate its achievements. The conference ended with a Eucharistic celebration which lasted more than six hours. More than 15 thousand people, mostly Indigenous, who marched from their communities to the city of San Cristóbal, participated. I was present at this conference as the representative of the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace.

Congruent with the founding hope and initial message of peace in the Church, a new hope and message of peace are being born again out of the experience and suffering of the poor. A new light of hope to the Church and a call for peace to humanity at this significant, historic, global conjuncture are rising out, once again, from among the poorest and most forgotten people of the earth--the peasant, Indigenous and poor communities of Chiapas.



**APPENDIX I\***

San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas  
June 21, 1997

TO THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF MEXICO  
TO THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF THE OTHER CHRISTIAN CHURCHES  
TO THE PUBLIC OPINION  
TO THE MEDIA

Moved by the urgency for Peace and Unity the situation of our country demands, we are sharing with you the conditions in which we are living here in Chiapas, and that other dioceses in Mexico are also experiencing.

**1. THE FACTS**

After the visit of the President of the Mexican Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Episcopal Commission for Peace to Chiapas, the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas is experiencing a new wave of attacks against our pastoral work.

The above mentioned visit has demonstrated the bishops' unity and their concern for the situation of Low Intensity War in the state of Chiapas, especially in the Los Altos, El Norte and La Selva regions.

These attacks are not new. What is surprising are the repeated false accusations directed against our bishop, Don Samuel Ruiz, which single him out as being the cause of violence as well as political and social instability in the State of Chiapas. He is being accused of distributing arms, leading the insurrection, and of being the cause of all other de-stabilizing actions.

Similar false accusations have also appeared in the media against our adjunct bishop, Fray Raúl Vera López, the pastoral workers, who are proclaiming the gospel in remote communities and missions, as well as against the catechists, predeacons, and deacons who are subjected to aggressions, death threats, and unjust judicial processes that led to the restriction of their civil rights (such was the case of the two Jesuit brothers and the two catechists in Palenque last March).

We are seriously concerned about various Non-Governmental Organizations that are particularly known for their work in

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\*A copy of the original Spanish version is available from the author.

favour of peace and in service of the poor. They also are victims of harassment and slanderous accusations.

Facing this situation of persecution, the following is a brief account of the many grievances received since January of 1994:

In the so called zone of conflict (Ocosingo, Margaritas, Altamirano), our parish centres and homes have been violated; pastoral workers have suffered harassment and threats; likewise the workers of the hospital of Altamirano have been intimidated. The same actions have also happened in many communities that we visited. The army searched, filmed and recorded many community events to intimidate the people.

In many of the municipal centres, the supposed "marches for peace" led by municipal presidents, official party representatives and landowners were transformed into demonstrations of verbal aggression and threats against the Bishop and the pastoral workers. Another lamentable action was the attempt to rape a nun.

The diocese suffered from massive defamation campaigns in the media (press, radio and television) in the early days of the conflict. False testimonies were broadcasted of weeping people accusing the Bishop and the priests of committing actions of violence against them.

A critical moment of this defamation campaign was represented by the physical acts of aggression and the attack on the Bishop's residence in San Cristóbal by groups adhering to the ruling party, PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) who called themselves "true Catholics."

The persecution got to a point where the foreign missionaries were constantly living under the threat of being expelled; the authorities were putting pressure on them by always watching their movements, calling them frequently to the immigration police offices, confiscating their personal documents and limiting their rights as residents. These acts did not remain at the level of threats: they materialized in unjust deportations and the denial of permits to return to the diocese. At this moment, there are seven priests (12 percent of the total number of priests in the diocese) who have been arbitrarily deported. They were charged and expelled because they were participating in actions outside their ministerial responsibilities. The most recent one is the case of the Scottish priest Henry McLaughlin. Father Henry was charged with celebrating mass without the government's permission. These priests' true crime was that they were, like Christ, serving the poor.

The Northern Zone--Tila, Sabanilla, Tumbala, Palenque, Salto de Agua, Bachajon and Chilon--is the laboratory for practicing the Low Intensity War with attacks at the parish homes and the churches with molotov bombs; with the creation of internal conflicts within the communities and among organizations; with the intimidation of communities through the presence of the military and of the police force; with aggressions by paramilitary groups who call themselves "Chinchulines" or "Peace and Justice" who then went unpunished: the punishment for their crimes has been only rumors and threats.

These groups want to transform political conflicts into religious confrontations, associating Catholics with the Zapatistas or the PRD (the Democratic Revolutionary Party), creating tension with other groups who identify themselves as "White Guards" (who are related to the PRI). They arbitrarily assault and attack Catholics, displacing them from their communities, closing, burning and destroying their chapels, images, and their other religious symbols--even profaning the Blessed Sacrament. The displaced people are witnesses to how these paramilitary groups were protected by the Public Security Police and the Army during their attacks. These militant groups have occupied churches and buildings that belong to the Catholic Church. Some of them are still in power at this moment.

Many catechists were subjected to summary executions and assassinations. They were tortured and imprisoned because they did not want to sign documents that accuse the Bishop and the priests of being the providers of arms to the rebels.

Many people in the communities were forced to join the paramilitary groups. Those who refused were fined up to two thousand pesos and were subject to constant threat.

When the civil society tried to denounce these acts and protest against these attacks on the communities, the bishop and the priests were immediately accused of being responsible for the violence. Some Army officials were at times behind these accusations. They went as far as to slanderously assure people that we blessed the Zapatistas' arms.

The judicial complaints of the Diocese against these aggressions went unheard.

Some pastoral workers had to seek legal help to prove their innocence. Even then they continued to be irresponsibly accused and charged with various crimes they did not commit.

Recent information released in some newspapers' articles lead us to suspect that our phone lines were being intercepted and that our activities were being spied on.

We only have alluded here to some of the attacks that were directed against the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas; it is impossible to name them all. The suffering of our brothers and sisters who are searching for a life with justice and dignity in faithfulness to their Catholic tradition, and who are living in constant threat, exposed to all kinds of aggressions, is always present in our heart. There are many Evangelical brothers and sisters who are experiencing a similar situation. We feel very close to them, too.

Some of these attacks did not come directly from government employees, they came from other actors. But the impunity they enjoy make government authorities accomplices of the crimes and thus responsible for them.

All this has generated an environment that puts our lives at continuous risk and obstructs our work of evangelization, reconciliation and human promotion. For these reasons, we interpret this situation as a real persecution of the church, not only our diocese, but also the whole Catholic Church in Mexico.

## 2. INTERPRETATION

The interpretation of these acts in the context of the government's actions against the diocese in the last few years gives us confidence to state the following:

- It is not a question of isolated acts, there is a well planned campaign against our diocese.
- All means are used to make the diocese appear as if it is the cause of the conflict in Chiapas and that it is also the obstacle to finding a solution.
- The objective of this campaign is to discredit the Diocese and to undermine its moral authority and credibility. The purpose is to silence a critical voice that makes the established and powerful uncomfortable, and that brings into evidence the contradictions between the official discourse of the government and its real actions.
- An attempt is also made to undermine the mediation work of Don Samuel Ruiz and the CONAI, whom the attackers cannot forgive for their independent and critical work.

This has been the general tone of the campaign. But we have also noticed that, after the visit of the Episcopal

Commission to Tila and its clear declarations in favour of peace, the government agents have radicalized their discourse and actions against our diocesan church.

- **We are concerned about the fact that on other occasions, the increase of such attacks was the prelude to a strong blow against the poor, the Indigenous, and the campesinos.**
- The logic of these actions on the part of the civil and military authorities unfortunately shows us that they are not looking for a political solution, as they claim. Rather, they are acting with force and impunity, hoping that this will lead to a situation that is irreversibly uncontrollable, which would justify and legitimize a military solution.

**In conclusion, we believe that they are trying to undermine a possibility and take away an opportunity that could put an end to the massacre and genocide against the Chiapanecan people.**

We continue to believe with certitude that a solution to the generalized crisis that our country is presently experiencing cannot be reached without a solution to the crisis in Chiapas. Without a real solution to Chiapas, there will be no real solution for Mexico.

Through these attacks our Diocese is sharing the lot of the poor whom we want to serve, and whose rights we want to defend.

### 3. INVITATION

We call upon Catholics and the brothers and sisters of other Christian denominations to take notice that these aggressions against the Diocese of San Cristóbal go against the peace process, and are contrary to the legitimate hopes for a life with dignity and justice for the poorest.

Likewise, in face of this campaign of silence towards the grave actions committed against the people of Chiapas and the distortion of facts, we invite the civil society to take initiatives and spread true information denouncing this project of death that wants to preserve its privileges at all cost.

We exhort you to creatively demonstrate an efficient support and solidarity to the Diocese of San Cristóbal and its pastoral project which is rooted in an evangelical and ecclesial option.

We invite the federal and state authorities to revise their present politics and to orient their actions towards the

solution of the true root causes of the conflicts our country is experiencing. In this way reconciliation will become possible together with the cooperation of all social actors to make a true peace achievable.

As for us, we are ready to join our actions with all those who are working to defend the dignity of the person, and build a society of brotherhood and sisterhood, where we can all sit at the same table, to share the bread of Truth, Love and Justice, and where He who presides is our older brother Jesus Christ.

Affirming our on-going commitment for Truth and Peace, we trust our efforts and limitations to the generous protection of our Lady of Guadalupe, who is interceding on behalf of our people to God, for whom we all live.

In Christ,

For the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas

Samuel Ruiz García  
Bishop of the Diocese of San Cristóbal

Raúl Vera López, O.P.  
Adjunct Bishop of the Diocese of San Cristóbal

Fr. Felipe de Jesús Toussaint Loera  
For the Priests' Council

Oscar Salinas Nájera, S.M.  
For the Pastoral Council

Sr. Margarita Sánchez Díaz, M.F.  
For the Vicary

Fr. Gonzalo Ituarte Verduzco, O.P.  
For the Council of the Vicars

Fr. Eugenio Alvarez Figueroa

Fr. Heriberto Cruz Vera

Fr. Joél Padrón González

Fr. José Luis Chanfón, S.M.

## APPENDIX II\*

## MEDIATING HIGH INTENSITY CONFLICTS

## One Bishop's Perspective on Mediating High Intensity Social Conflicts

By Msgr. Samuel Ruiz García, Bishop of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico

## I. INTRODUCTION

[1] In Chiapas, ecclesiastical and social challenges are at stake, challenges which can be validly extended to all Mexico, as well as to Latin America and the world. It is not easy, however, to extract all the keys and lessons that emanate from the Chiapas experience and illuminate new stages of mediation.

[2] Beginning in January, 1994, Chiapas and Mexico burst upon the world stage in a way that was different from that which we expected: the eruption of an indigenous movement that rose up in arms, faced with the impossibility of finding responses to basic demands which had been set forth for many years through legal means.

[3] We cannot comprehend Chiapas as isolated from national and world problems. The deeds experienced at the beginning of 1994 are a product of the neoliberal political and economic system, which has proven unworkable in practice. The advances this system boasts about have taken place at the cost of impoverishing the majority of citizens, as reflected in the countries of the so-called Third World.

[4] Currently, there are 48 armed conflicts throughout the world. One area of political and social research which specializes in armed conflicts and the peace process has demonstrated that in all such conflicts, the religious factor, far from being part of the problem, is part of the solution. Furthermore, in the majority of these 48 conflicts, churches are undertaking a role of mediation. A

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\*I am grateful to Miguel Alvarez for giving me a copy of the English version of this text in electronic format during his visit to Toronto in February of 1997. Miguel Alvarez, then executive secretary of the National Mediation Commission (CONAI), was invited as a solidarity guest by The Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace. For the original Spanish version, see Samuel Ruiz, "Mediación de Conflictos de Alta Intensidad," in *CENCOS-Iglesias* (December 1995), 3-5. The paragraph numbers in [ ] are my addition.

good part of these ecclesiastical mediation actions are implemented by Catholic bishops and institutions.

[5] The worrisome and alarming reality of war is spreading throughout the world, a result of political-economic models which have shown their inability to generate integral development for the peoples of the world. These concerns have led many organizations to share in the search for alternatives which help to build peace, expressed in international and continental forums.

[6] The following reflections on the part of the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico, were shared and enriched in some of these international and continental forums, in which we reflected upon the role of churches in pacification and mediation.

## II. CONFLICTS AND MEDIATION

[7] Through profound reflection upon our own experience, as well as our awareness of distinct aspects of various world conflicts, we have found certain common characteristics, to wit:

[7.1] In some ways, world conflicts create irreversible processes which generate deep change and necessitate new situations. Therefore, there is no turning back to the previous state of affairs which accounts for the violence. Peace can only be built by confronting the causes [of conflict].

[7.2] Where conflicts have arisen, political and social representative institutions, as well as means of conflict resolution, have failed. The conflicts have revealed structural deficiencies as well as deficiencies on the part of social and political actors. Armed conflicts cannot be resolved unless social and political actors are engendered and strengthened. Stopping war is very different than building peace. Creating peace is impossible without political and social forces who work for the common good. Many times, the lack of such forces explains the explosion of armed conflicts.

[7.3] The causes of conflict are generally related to injustice, lack of democracy and human rights violations. Therefore, when we state that it is not possible to establish peace without addressing the underlying causes of conflict, our reflections lead us to believe that peace cannot be reached in Third World conflicts unless we generate a new stage of development and a new social model.

[7.4] In several armed conflicts, the services of churches have been required to support mediation efforts. The trustworthiness of the churches in these conflicts is due



not only to the fact that they fill the vacuum left by political and social actors, or to the absence of strong parties or to the inability of the forces to commence dialogue. All these elements help explain the presence of the churches, but the constant throughout the world is the churches' own specific identity in the mediation role they play. There exists an awareness concerning the distinct character that churches have [which is] prophetic, not political. Their trustworthiness has a lot to do with their ability to provide disinterested service. The church is not an actor which seeks to capitalize upon its capacity for mediation, nor to strengthen its own projects. The church understands that its only project is peace, and therefore can contribute to peace through its role of mediation objectively and neutrally, and with greater commitment.

[7.5] Mediation doesn't end with achieving a political agreement between the parties or with stopping the war. The most difficult part is building peace. In this drawn-out stage of reconciliation, reconstruction and change, the role of the churches is especially fundamental. Mediation, then, doesn't cease with the dialog between the actors of the armed conflict in their attempt to halt the war, but must rather work toward creating conditions so that all civil, political and social forces are co-participants, and co-responsible for, building peace.

### **III. MEDIATION ON THE PART OF THE CHURCH IN SAN CRISTOBAL DE LAS CASAS, CHIAPAS, MEXICO**

[8.1.1] First, we must remember that, in the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, following the guidance of the Second Vatican Council and the Conferences of the Latin American Episcopate in the last three decades, we have developed an ecclesiastical process which has given rise to greater participation by members of the church, not only clerics and others in the ministry, but in all church actions: liturgy, evangelization, service and catechizing. This participation has always taken place within the framework of service to our community of brothers and sisters.

[8.1.2] In this context, we understand "community" as a whole, aware of events that occur in their political and social surroundings, as well as of necessities in the entire world. Understood in this way, social realities shape the ecclesiastical community's actions. The church must respond according to its own nature, in direct relation to its founder and inspiration.

[8.2] In our diocese, we have prioritized the community, emphasizing service to our neighbors (proclaiming the Word of God, in search of religious experiences, in search of economic alternatives, discovering new social, even political, expressions). Communal experience is the critical

element, and the point of departure, for everything the members of our diocese are attempting to do. In our church in particular, we have understood mediation as a service to the community, as our own task and that which we carry out jointly.

[8.3.1] Our understanding of the bishop's pastoral labor as a service which unites, reconciles and shapes the community of the church which the bishop heads is founded in ecclesiastical tradition and current practice. Therefore, any action aimed at strengthening social structures, or at cultivating a life of brotherhood, justice and peace, is not at all contrary to the church's work.

[8.3.2] As explained in the preceding paragraphs, the causes of political and social conflicts which breed armed conflict are poverty and injustice. Here, we have discovered structures that make a social harmony and majority participation impossible, especially participation of the poorest. Therefore, the bishop's true work, given the nature of his office, impels him to strive toward creating social actors and situations which lead to new situations, toward alternatives to the situations which generated armed conflict.

[8.4] Secondly, we have seen that this dimension of ecclesiastical life hasn't been understood by everyone, including several bishops. The opinion that mediation is incompatible with the tasks proper to a bishop incurs in the sin of reductionism. The work of peace and mediation is profoundly ecclesiastical and profoundly episcopal. In Christian thought, Jesus Christ is the Mediator par excellence. This is why his disciples have assumed the mission of making brothers out of enemies.

[8.5] It is important to recognize the accompaniment that the Episcopal Conference of Mexico (CEM, in Spanish) has provided to the Diocese of San Cristóbal de Las Casas and to its bishop. Since the Conference established the Episcopal Commission for Peace in January, 1994, it has written three pastoral letters supporting the process for peace with justice and dignity. In this way, the support and cover the CEM has given the peace process has become part of the ecclesiastical tradition of mediation.

[8.6] Thirdly, we affirm that all churches must take it upon themselves to assume the tasks of mediation, that the churches embrace the goal of service to society and to the world. It is not enough to support the mediation work of one Catholic bishop. Peace must be reconstructed and reconciled at the national level. It must lead to change which allows us to build peace not only in Chiapas, but also to prevent violence and establish the justice necessary in other parts of the country.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

[9.1] The lesson is that if we don't begin now to accept the national necessity for a new stage of change, necessary not only in Chiapas but in other places where conditions exist to generate new forms of violence, and if the churches don't shoulder their role as promoters of this new stage, we are remiss in looking after one of our most vital tasks, defending life.

[9.2] Therefore, taking this perspective into account, the mediation of the bishop and his particular church doesn't fall outside of this territory. On the contrary, it is in this domain, as well as that of many countries, that ecclesiastical work itself becomes broader. Profound pastoral, ecclesiastical and episcopal dimensions make it possible for the church to offer mediation services for armed conflicts which arise from conditions of poverty, lack of democracy, and non-functioning institutions of democratic representation and justice.

[9.3] One of our most important conclusions is that mediation derives its content from and is founded upon ecclesiastical ministry. Mediation is not political, or foreign to ecclesiastical work for peace and unity. Rather, mediation is justified and explained by the actions of the church and its bishops, by the depth of their episcopal and pastoral ministry, which allows them to offer reliable services. The necessity of the prophetic call to conversion makes peace and mediation an opportunity and challenge to proclaim the word which will create new life for all.

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