

Shifting Religious Currents in Mesoamerica: Navigating Globalization, Transnationalism, and the Negotiation of Identity

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In the context of a presentation dealing with evangelicals and politics in Guatemala at the Latin American Studies Association meeting in Las Vegas in October of 2004, someone in the session in which I presented suggested that an important step in understanding religion in the Guatemalan context would be to map the evangelical or Protestant presence. A friend commented to me later that in a sense I had already been doing that kind of work. I had not thought of my work that way, and I am not quite ready to frame my work in those terms, but in this setting, with the emphasis on transnational religion and globalization, perhaps it is a helpful framework. Mapping implies situating religion in place, even as we take into account the movements and flows of people, resources, and ideas across boundaries–national and otherwise. Moreover, as an anthropologist the tendency is most often to take the local context as primary and situate local practices within larger frames of reference such as globalization or transnationalization.

I will not abandon that approach here. As well, my approach contrasts somewhat with the focus of others on “transnational migrants” who, in the words of Peggy Levitt, “are individuals who live aspects of their social lives in at least two settings.”¹ Instead, I take as my point of departure the perspective of Manuel Vásquez and Marie Marquardt and their emphasis on “pluralism and hybridity” as aspects of the “model” of religious change arising from within contemporary Latin America.² Their intent is to move beyond the older paradigm in the study of religion based on secularization and the newer paradigm based on rational choice theory to a model that shows how “many ordinary believers and institutions find in religion resources to bridge the multiple identities and functions that they must perform in an increasingly complex world.”³

Because they are reading the story largely from the perspective of migrants in the United States, I suggest that the Guatemalan context offers different nuances on the

¹Peggy Levitt, 2003, “You Know, Abraham Was Really the First Immigrant”: Religion and Transnational Migration, *International Migration Review* 37(3): 850. This article is one in a special issue of the journal on “Transnational Migration: International Perspectives.”

²Manuel A. Vásquez and Marie Friedmann Marquardt, 2003, *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion across the Americas*, New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 27-33.

³Vásquez and Marquardt, 29.

“analytical tools” Vásquez and Marquardt delineate as useful for understanding the intersections of religion and globalization today: de-territorialization and re-territorialization, transnational religious networks, glocalization, hybridity, and a concept of borders and borderlands.⁴ While I will not address most of those terms directly today, I do have in mind a basic definition of transnationalism, cited by Ruth Marshall-Fratani in an article on Nigerian Pentecostalism, as “any relation which, deliberately or by its nature, constructs itself within a global space beyond the context of the nation-state, and which escapes, at least partially, the control or mediating action of States.”⁵ Even so, much of what passes for transnational is worked out at least partially in reaction to or in negotiation with the state.⁶

Transnationalism at Work: The Advent of Protestantism and the Move Toward Peace

From the standpoint of Protestantism or evangelicalism, the Guatemalan case itself is framed by transnational networks in terms of religious pluralism and current events in a post-conflict society.⁷ It is helpful to begin with that framing before looking at a couple of contemporary instances of the flow of religion within the country. As a relatively small nation of some 13 million people, Guatemala continues to command attention largely because it has the largest Protestant population in the continental Latin America (approximately 25 percent), as well as because of its status as the only country with a majority population from a single indigenous ethnic group, the Maya, who speak some 21 related languages in Guatemala. To keep a comparative viewpoint in play, across the border in Mexico, another eight Maya groups reside primarily in Chiapas and the states of Campeche, Yucatan, and Quintana Roo, in the Yucatan Peninsula.⁸ Cultural and religious pluralism is profound in this borderlands culture region of Mesoamerica.

The earliest formal history of Protestantism in Guatemala begins in 1882 with the arrival of the Presbyterian missionary John Clark Hill, who went to Guatemala at the behest of the Liberal dictator Justo Rufino Barrios. And one can argue that this act alone reveals

⁴Vásquez and Marquardt, 49-64.

⁵From B. Badie and M.-C. Smouts, 1992, *Le retournement du monde: Sociologie de la scène internationale*, Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques/Dalloz, 70. Cited in Ruth Marshall-Fratani, 2001, Mediating the global and local in Nigerian Pentecostalism, In *Between Babel and Pentecost: Transnational Pentecostalism in Africa and Latin America*, André Corten and Ruth Marshall-Fratani, eds., Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 80-81.

⁶In our discussion following my presentation, Philip Williams reiterated that the nation-state was in fact crucial to the earlier discussions of transnationalism.

⁷While most Mesoamerican Protestants refer to themselves as *evangélicos*, I am using the terms interchangeably here in order to preserve a sense of the historical trajectory of the Presbyterians and other so-called “historical” denominations.

⁸This is not including the Huasteco who live in San Luís Potosí, Veracruz, and Hidalgo states.

some of the ambiguous aspects of the transnational flow of religion from the beginning. If Hill represented the missionary impetus among 19th century North American Protestants, it is quite clear from the historiography that Barrios' motives were not religious. Rather the Protestant presence served the political purpose of contributing to modernization as interpreted in the positivist philosophy of progress common to the times in Latin America. It was also a way to cut into the power of the Catholic Church. Like colonial Catholicism and its arrival with the cross and the sword, the very advent of Protestantism in Guatemala involved flows across boundaries, and religion was only a small part of the equation in the minds of many who promoted opening the doors.

Beyond our concern with religion, In the present moment, now nine full years away from the signing of the final peace accord between the guerrilla forces of the URNG and the Guatemalan government, in last August I heard for the first time a reference to the *acuerdos de paz* as the *recuerdos de paz* (the remembrances of peace instead of the agreements for peace). The process of implementing the accords and continuing struggle for the consolidation of a truly democratic political and social system, what the pan-Maya movement hopes will be a "multiethnic, pluricultural, and multilingual" nation, has in many ways stagnated in the face of corruption and governmental ineptitude. Still, the democratic form holds, and Alejandro Portes affirms how transnational networks cut across boundaries in pushing for the accords and in helping to provide space for political and social activism during the process leading up to the end of the war in December of 1996:

To a large extent, the peace accords were achieved through the pressure and guidance of external actors and their implementation has been monitored by missions from the United Nations and other international organizations. Simultaneously, external revulsion at the peasant massacres and urban death squads sponsored by the Guatemalan regime in the past led to increasing support of local human rights groups and of refugees abroad. The consolidation of large refugee communities in the United States then played back into the country in the form of economic support for democratic and peace initiatives and massive family remittances.⁹

In terms of the direct confrontation with the Guatemalan state, Portes continues by saying that "[t]he presence of transnational actors in alliance with human rights and other

⁹Alejandro Portes, 2001, Theories of Development and Their Application to Small Countries, In *Globalization on the Ground: Postbellum Guatemalan Democracy and Development*, Christopher Chase-Dunn, Susanne Jonas, and Nelson Amaro, eds., Lanham, Maryland and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 237.

domestic groups succeeded in turning the country inside out, 'externalizing' the Guatemalan conflict, and taking it out of the protected space of nation-state sovereignty."¹⁰

These are the kinds of transnational commitments, extending out to the religious arena, with which we are concerned in this gathering. I can only add that one of the understudied areas in the literature on the Guatemalan conflict has been the role of transnational religious actors such as the Lutheran World Federation in facilitating the process of the negotiations beginning in the early 1990s.¹¹

Transnationalism and Maya Evangelicals from Historical Denominations

With that background, I should note that the work I have been involved with for several years primarily engages two groups of Maya Protestants associated with the National Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Guatemala, the denomination with the longest formal mission history in the country, beginning with the aforementioned John Clark Hill. In the contemporary context, I have been more preoccupied with the questions of identity and the interplay between ethnicity and an imposed religious tradition on the local level, specifically among the Mam and Kaqchikel Maya. Most directly, the question engaged is that of what it means to be both Maya and Protestant in Guatemala. In that frame, the first transnational move is toward urban Guatemalan mestizos, and after a delay in the early mission history, eventually toward the rural Maya. This is the rather traditional missionary framework with the movement originating in the U.S. or the North as the sender and the South as the receiver of the supposed benefits of progress. More recently this flow has continued, not only with Presbyterians but also with many other groups who send not only missionaries but innumerable groups who go to Guatemala to sponsor health clinics, work on constructing schools and churches, evangelistic missions, cultural immersion programs, and participate in a host other activities. Some connections are sponsored by denominations or other groups, and others tend to be established on the basis of personal contact although religion is frequently a key component in establishing the connections. Regardless of the connection, such groups can be seen on almost any flight between Houston, Atlanta, or Miami and Guatemala City.

I will leave that image in the air for the moment and shift the discussion back to the Guatemalan viewpoint and ask how Guatemalans themselves are participating in and contributing to the shifting religious landscape. In my some of my more recent research, I have been involved in a project on evangelicals and democracy in global perspective and I

¹⁰Portes, 2001, 238.

¹¹See the video production "Precarious Peace: God and Guatemala" for that story and a look at religious pluralism in Guatemala. The project received funding from the United States Institute for Peace and is distributed by Orbis Books. It was produced by Rudy and Shirley Nelson, now of Amherst, Massachusetts.

Latin America in which I looked at Protestant participation in political processes from the standpoint of evangelicals involved in politics.¹² The objective there has been to link the local level with the national level and see how evangelical commitments articulate with political and social processes. This was done by analyzing evangelical participation and interviewing some electoral winners in the national and municipal elections of 1999 and by looking at the debate early in the present decade over a United Nations sponsored children and youth code and the manner in which evangelicals made ecumenical connections with other groups opposing the code. Interviews with winning *alcaldes* were with Maya Presbyterians, as was an interview with one of the vice-presidential candidates.

The threads in my own work, then, have been on indigenous Protestantism with a rather sustained focus on a historical denomination. Since such denominations are not in the numerical vanguard anywhere in Latin America, perhaps the most important observation is that the historical denominations have at times exercised an influence out of proportion to their numbers, at least in Guatemala where they have contributed to Bible translation in the Maya languages and, more recently, to the nascent development of a Maya theology. In a comparative vein, we at least want to peer over the border from Guatemala into Mexico, where one can also argue that Protestantism's influence has been substantial. Interestingly, Presbyterianism has also been influential among Maya on the Mexican side in areas such as ethnicity and Bible translation.¹³ The borders are sometimes rigid and how far this moves us down the road to transnationalism as such is unclear. To be sure we are in a situation where we need to take into account the pluralism of Protestantisms in Mesoamerica and look at their influence not only in place—or in local context—but also at their potential impact in broader frames of reference.¹⁴

¹²The research was sponsored by the Pew Foundation, and the larger project consisted of 18 researchers working in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Summary volumes from the research are scheduled for publication by Oxford University Press in the summer of 2006. The Latin America volume, tentatively titled *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Latin America*, is edited by Paul Freston.

¹³See R. Aída Hernández Castillo, 2001, *Histories and Stories from Chiapas: Border Identities in Southern Mexico*, Martha Pou, trans., Austin: University of Texas Press, 42-48; Christine A. Kray, 2004, *The Summer Institute of Linguistics and the Politics of Bible Translation in Mexico: Convergence, Appropriation, and Consequence*, In *Pluralizing Ethnography: Comparison and Presentation in Maya Cultures, Histories, and Identities*, Santa Fe and Oxford: School of American Research Press and James Currey, 95-125. Another important source for contemporary pluralism among Maya in the Yucatán is Nancy A. Forand, 2001, *Mayas in the Age of Apocalypse: Folk Evangelicals and Catholics in Quintana Roo*, Ph.D. dissertation, University at Albany, State University of New York.

¹⁴A number of issues merit attention at this point, in Mexico and in Guatemala. On the Mexican side, one can point to Christine Kovic's mention of the manner in which the *Ejercito Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (EZLN) brought people from a number of competing different religious affiliations together in its struggle (*Mayan Voice for Human Rights: Displaced Catholics in Highland Chiapas*, 2005, Austin: University of Texas Press, 163). Other studies indicate that in different places the *evangélicos* did not affiliate with the Zapatistas. We can also

Protestantism in a Neo-Neo-Pentecostal Key

Taking as my point of departure the description of this conference and the framework that “church institutions react to and against the twin elemental forces of transnationalism and globalization,” the case the neo-pentecostal El Verbo ministries demonstrates one of the clearest and most obvious transnational tendencies in the context of religion, particularly Guatemalan Protestantism—a move in which a former receiving church has now become a sender in terms of religious and social capital. The group has some degree of notoriety, since it is usually referenced in conjunction with the person of Efraín Ríos Montt and the neo-pentecostal discourse of dominion theology focused on a gospel of wealth and success that frequently feeds into elite justification for seeing their social status as ordained by God. If this at times borders on a caricature, it is useful to make distinctions between the various neo-pentecostal groups and to look at internal change in the discourse and practices over time.

El Verbo has been infamous for many academics and activists for over a generation now. Often referred to as a single congregation (now in zone 16 of the capital), the story usually begins the group’s founding in the wake of the 1976 earthquake by a group called Gospel Outreach from California. Shortly thereafter, came the damning association with Ríos Montt’s 16 months in the president’s office during the most bloody part of the civil conflict. Two “counselors” from the Guatemala City based congregation accompanied him to the presidential palace as advisors, although they were apparently obliged to formally resign their formal positions in El Verbo’s leadership at that juncture. There were also efforts to connect with and raise money on the coattails of people like Pat Robertson and others in the midst of political turmoil over U.S. policy to the entire Central American region during the 1980s.¹⁵

The ties between El Verbo and segments of the Guatemalan elite have continued, but some of the changing personages indicate the need for a more nuanced perspective in regard to groups like El Verbo. As recently as the aftermath of the 1999 presidential elections, some 4 people with close connections to El Verbo were either forming political

look at solidarity/advocacy networks and traffic going both directions in Chiapas and Guatemala. Building on the work of Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink (*Advocacy Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*), Timothy Steigenga, uses the term “transnational advocacy network.” See Steigenga, 2004, Conclusion: Listening to Resurgent Voices, In *Resurgent Voices in Latin America: Indigenous Peoples, Political Mobilization, and Religious Change*, Edward L. Cleary and Timothy J. Steigenga, eds., New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 239. The actual cross-border conversations taking place seem to be more limited. From the Guatemala side, one might want to look at the development of Maya theology. On the latter issue, see Virginia Garrard-Burnett, 2004, “God Was Already Here When Columbus Arrived”: Inculturation Theology and the Mayan Movement in Guatemala, *ibid.*, 125-153.

¹⁵One source of information here is David Stoll, 1990, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

parties or in the process of disbanding parties for lack of electoral support. Francisco Bianchi, who had been one of the El Verbo counselors during the latter's months in the presidency, and who had garnered less than 2% of the vote running on a platform of "biblical principles," made the following remark in an interview: "In one single denomination, there is a democracy."¹⁶ Bianchi later joined the El Shaddai church, known for its charismatic minister, Harold Caballeros, a strong proponent of the doctrine of spiritual warfare. Ríos Montt himself, along with a few associates, left the congregation at some point within the last three or four years. The description I have of the precipitating events indicates that it had to do less with any kind of policy at El Verbo than with dissatisfaction among some members with him and the activities of the Frente Republicano Guatemalteco (FRG) at that time. Barred from running for president by the legal system in 1999, he had, nevertheless, been elected to the national congress and was serving as the president of that body.

Understanding El Verbo today requires an acknowledgment that it functions like a denomination with a rather clearly defined mission of making disciples based on the injunction in the Christian scriptures to make disciples of the whole world, "baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit."¹⁷ While noting some of its North American characteristics, no less an observer than David Martin commented fifteen years ago on how "[t]he material assistance and training provided by Verbo is apparently not restricted to members, and whatever may be said about the politics of Verbo, it seems difficult to deny the extent of the social first-aid work in which its members and leaders are engaged."¹⁸ Martin's statement is indeed reflective of the discourse I heard in a brief interview with the then ruling elder (*anciano gobernante*) of El Verbo in 2001. The gist was a neo-pentecostal vision with a slight twist. The elements of dominion theology were there: God has called neo-pentecostals to be prosperous; to be successful; to have abundant life; and to govern—for all His children. Yet, when he elaborated on the notion of governance, it included the notion of a government of service, not in order to be the ones who order others about (*mandar*). Here the discourse seems to be other-directed. And perhaps it was the tension with aspects of this vision and those who had political power and worked to keep it in the midst of the massive corruption of the FRG administration of Alfonso Portillo that led to internal tension within the congregation.

¹⁶Bianchi's party was ARDE, *Acción Reconciliadora Democrática*. In the same interview, he drew a firm distinction between the focus on biblical principles and the notion some had that it was an evangelical political party.

¹⁷As far as I can tell, the center of gravity and possibly the administrative center of the association is in Guatemala City. Their somewhat dated web site, however, gives an address in Kenner, Louisiana, outside of New Orleans.

¹⁸David Martin, 1990, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*, Oxford and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 220.

From the standpoint of transnationalism, and however one continues to interpret the beliefs and practices of El Verbo (both of which deserve more study), it is clear that the outward focus on making disciples has turned the ministries into an outward-looking organization. The current web site of Verbo New Orleans documents some 14 congregations in 6 states in the United States, 5 congregations in Canada, and 8 in Mexico. The site calls those congregations “*Verbo Norte*.” Guatemala has some 21 congregations, and others are present in El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Perú, Colombia, Brazil, and Argentina—a total of approximately 75 congregations with work proceeding to establish churches in Spain and Israel.¹⁹ Their own website records this success: “What began as a seed planted in the hearts of a few young believers over twenty years ago has now grown to take its place among the most effective missionary outreaches in Latin America.”²⁰

A final piece to this current, if cursory, picture of El Verbo has been the establishment of the Universidad Panamericana on property next to the congregation in zone 16. It currently offers degrees and graduate study in a number of areas including communications, law, administration, and theology. One faculty member (not a member of the Verbo congregation) I have spoken with is adamant that the elders do not interfere in university operations or try to shape the ideology of the school. Of course, the impact of Verbo missionary activity, always with a heavy dose of social involvement, can be seen as shaping this educational endeavor; this is part of what we need to continue to map. Nevertheless, we are dealing at this juncture with a different perspective than the media and personality driven Universal Church of the Kingdom of God in Brazil or the spiritual warfare stance taken by Harold Caballeros in the El Shaddai congregation. Whether this is the advent of some neo-neo-pentecostalism or not, it is clear that all neo-pentecostals are not created equal. One might add that this scenario is somewhat ripe for providing a glimpse into the larger issues of reconciliation in Guatemalan society.

Some of these same transnational issues or tensions can be observed in dealing with the typically smaller and less visible (on an individual basis) pentecostal congregations that are the focus of so much attention today because they are everywhere the majority expression of Protestantism—65 to 80 percent of *evangélicos* in countries throughout the continent. A brief example here that comes from my involvement with a film project several years ago is the *Misión Cristiana Samaria* (Samaria Christian Mission), a small denomination that originated in Guatemala, probably since the 1960s. Its transnational reach is limited at this juncture, but it has 40 congregations, including three in Costa Rica and one in El Salvador. Besides expansion as such, another crucial concern here the minister’s discourse

¹⁹“Comienzo de Verbo New Orleans,” <http://www.verbo.org/neworleans/index_017.htm>, accessed, 24 January 2006.

²⁰“Small Beginnings,” <<http://www.verbo.org/site/history.htm>>, accessed, 24 January 2006.

about working and serving in a poor and marginal community (his words) both in El Salvador and now in his present congregation since returning to Guatemala. The congregation is situated in an *asentamiento* as a result of a land invasion only a year or so before his arrival. In charting the flows of globalized pentecostalism with doctrine and social involvement, social doctrine, there is work to be done. The offer stereotyped view of other-worldly and apolitical pentecostals is challenged by both discourse and practice.

Beyond Protestant Growth and the Pluralism of Protestantisms

If mapping religious practice requires so effort to deal with borders, so, too, does it require an accounting of the diverse religious pluralism extant in Guatemala. This is particularly the case in light of the persisting ethnic tension that continues to shape so much of social life in the post-conflict situation. Identity and the flows related to it are in play. In fact, the religious field in Guatemala has many guises in addition to the multiplicity of Protestantisms. Catholicism comes in at least four guises—indigenous, orthodox, charismatic, and activist. Maya spirituality and views of the cosmos, coexists in various ways within both Catholicism and Protestantism, even as some activists seek to bring the community back to the religion of the ancestors, true *costumbre*. Like so many other fields of human endeavor, the field is a contested one, especially when ethnicity is intimately linked with evangelical identity rooted in place. Anthropologist Richard Wilson who worked with Q'eqchi' Maya and focused particularly on the catechist movement makes a telling argument about the effect of conversion on community linkages beyond place.

For the new evangelical convert, abandoning the relationship with the mountain spirits is one of the main symbols of self-indentification. To be an evangelical is not to stop being a Q'eqchi', but it does entail shunning certain traditional signs of community and creating new parameters for identity. Community identity is still defined primarily through religion, but the new religion is more universal and linked to assemblies outside the geographic community. . . . Ultimately, conversion to an evangelical sect does seem to have a culturally homogenizing effect, rendering the Q'eqchi' more like their nonindigenous brethren in matters of faith.²¹

Here we see religion interacting with identity and changing the frame of reference to a larger horizon clearly linked with personal conversion and a translocal network of people who share a particular religious tradition, a network that is simultaneously rooted and less rooted in place. The description is one from the ground, perhaps even a description of the fruits of the missionary endeavor, where those who have converted are joined together in a new, translocal family of *hermanos* and *hermanas*.

²¹Richard Wilson, 1995, *Maya Resurgence in Guatemala: Q'eqchi' Experiences*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, p. 170.

The process of negotiating identity in the face of global and transnational involvements will make for a complex map indeed. Returning to the Maya context, I close with two examples demonstrating the shifting contours of transnational religion. I have situated these examples differently in another presentation, but they do bring out some of the complex issues surrounding religion and border crossing in Mesoamerica today.²²

One day on a quick field trip to Guatemala several years I go, I was approached by a man following a service in a Mam Maya congregation. After greeting me in the usual way following a service, he opened his Bible and took out a postcard-like picture of two North Americans. The woman in the picture was attired in the local indigenous dress—a woven huipil and skirt common to one of the larger communities in the area. I quickly realized that the picture was of Dudley and Dorothy Peck who had gone to the area in 1922 and not left until the early 1970s. I was beginning to think about where the picture had come from, and the man pointed to Dorothy and said, “She taught me how to read in my language.”

All one can do in such a situation is listen and perhaps try to fit the story in some other framework. On one level, the story is about the contours of the interplay between ethnic particularity and evangelical identity in Guatemala. On another level, my encounter with missionaries long gone from the field, and from the earth, that afternoon, while evoking an image of missionaries past, draws attention to the way in which both the man’s obvious affection for the woman and the power for personal and group identity emanating from language, reading, and religious change (we were in a church, after all) continue to have an impact long after the fact. And one can imagine that while the work was being done, the future scope of the impact was perceived not even in a mirror dimly. Where the flow ends is unclear, but the man’s home had been recently reconstructed by money sent from children who were then working in Nebraska. Globalization and transnationalization cut in many directions, even across generations.

Returning again to the realm of Protestantism sometimes in tension with indigenous culture, I was privileged to be able to participate in Segundo Conferencia sobre el Popol Wuj, held in Quetzaltenango in May of 1999. Following the conference a group of participants from numerous Maya communities struggled with putting together a *memorial* or summary of the events of the week-long conference featuring academic presentations (by both Maya and scholars from North American and Europe) and numerous workshops led by Maya from local communities themselves concerning such diverse issues such as youth, the role of women in society, and the impact of “fundamentalist” churches on the local level. During the discussion of the memorial, moves were made by a group of Maya priests and

²²See C. Mathews Samson, 2005, *Ethnic Particularity, Evangelical Identity, and Religious Pluralism in Post-War Guatemala*, paper presented at the annual meeting of the Yale-Edinburgh Group on the History of the Missionary Movement and Non-Western Christianity, New Haven, Connecticut.

others to insert language encouraging a *decrisianización* (de-Christianization) of Maya religion because Christianity has so *satanizado* (satanized or demonized) Maya religious practices. After much discussion, a woman in indigenous *traje* was recognized to speak. Speaking against this notion, she bluntly said, "*Pertenezco a una iglesia Maya*" (I belong to a Maya church). For that moment, her words carried the day; *decrisianizar* did not appear in the memorial. Yet, the conference had begun in the courtyard of a Catholic retreat center when participants bowed in the four cardinal directions and kissed Mother Earth at the behest of a Maya priest.

I later learned that the woman who spoke was a Presbyterian. And I wonder where the currents of such a conference will take all of us who participate in such events.