

The Role of the Iglesia de Dios in the Processes of Religious and Social Change in the Mayo Valley, Sonora

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ABSTRACT

The economic situation in México has for many years been a produce of the country's position on the periphery of the modern world-system. Nowhere in this more obvious than in the Mayo Valley of Sonora. In the 1950s an economic development program brought about significant economic change in the valley, although growth was uneven and led to inequality. The policies of global financial entities imposed on Mexico since 1980 have erased most of the positive effects of economic growth in the valley. Within this larger context, the Iglesia de Dios, Evangelio Completo has been an instrument of social change. The church became a means of validating socio-economic mobility in the 1950s and 1960s, and a means of keeping members in the middle class since then. Having cut ties to traditional sources of social support, church members come to provide such support to each other. The ethnic aspects of these economic and religious changes vary according to the ecology, history and ethnic makeup of the communities where these processes are taking place.

RESUMEN

La situación económica de México ha sido durante muchos años producto de la posición periférica del país dentro del sistema mundial moderno. En ningún lugar es esto tan patente como en el valle mayo de Sonora. En los años cincuenta un programa de desarrollo económico provocó un significativo cambio económico en el valle, aunque el crecimiento fue disparado y a su vez provocó desigualdad. Las políticas de entidades financieras globales que se impusieron en México desde 1980 han borrado los efectos positivos del crecimiento económico del valle. Dentro de este contexto más amplio, la Iglesia de Dios, Evangelio Completo, ha sido un instrumento de cambio social. La Iglesia se convirtió en un medio de validación de la movilidad socioeconómica de los años cincuenta y los sesenta, y un medio para continuar manteniendo a sus miembros dentro de la clase media. Al cortar lazos con las fuentes tradicionales de apoyo, los miembros de la Iglesia se proporcionan mutuamente el apoyo necesario. Los aspectos étnicos de estos cambios económicos y religiosos varían de acuerdo a la ecología, la historia y la composición étnica de las comunidades donde se llevan a cabo estos procesos.

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Introduction

Latin America in general and Mexico in particular have for centuries been solidly Catholic. The efforts of Protestant missionaries for at least 100 years have until recently made few inroads into the ranks of the faithful (Deiros, 1991:146-147). In the last fifteen years, however, conversion to Protestantism has increased to such an extent as to be described as an "explosion" (Martin, 1990). The 1990 Mexican census shows that the percentage of Evangelical Protestants has increased from 2% to 5% of the general population (Coutigno 1995:12); although this is less of an increase than that reported by the Evangelicals themselves (Metz, 1994:61), it is nonetheless notable. The research which I am at present undertaking¹ focuses on the processes of conversion in the Mayo River valley of southern Sonora, and addresses the interplay of social, ethnic, and religious change. As my research is still in progress, the results reported here are necessarily preliminary. By limiting my discussion to the Iglesia de Dios, however, I am reasonably sure of the validity and reliability of the material here presented, as it is based on the part of the project which is the most complete.

Although there have been small populations of adherents of mainline, or historical Protestantism in Latin America since the early 19th century, the most prevalent form of Protestantism by far today is universally known as Evangelical Protestantism; in fact, the term *Evangelicos* is often used to refer to all Protestants. The belief systems of the disparate evangelical groups throughout the region all derive essentially from the Protestant movements of 18th- and 19th-century England and the United

States (Deiros 1991:149, 151). This complex of beliefs is remarkably stable across a wide range of denominational and national boundaries:

Evangelical Protestants are characterized by their emphasis on the authority of the Bible in all matters of faith and practice; on personal conversion as a distinct experience of faith in Christ as Lord and Savior,...and on the practice of evangelization as the fundamental dimension of the Christian faith (Deiros 1991:150).

A corollary to these elements is the ideal of an egalitarian relationship between leaders and followers, because all are seen as equally close to the Bible, and each person's faith is based on a personal relationship with Christ, rather than on the intercession of religious specialists (cf. Coleman *et al.*, 1993:113). Evangelical groups, whose home congregations are usually smaller than 40 members, also emphasize the importance of frequent gatherings for prayers, singing, giving witness and other activities in the church or in the homes of church members; in addition, their evangelization activities are for the most part carried out in groups or pairs. The combination of shared religious beliefs, small group size and frequency of interaction establishes the basis of social predictability and the conditions of commitment demonstrated by Erasmus (1977: 43-71; 135-143) as essential to community life in any human context. Also characteristic among the Evangelicals is an emphasis on the active participation by members of the congregation during the services; these activities range from reciting prayers and singing hymns to miraculous healing, giving testimony and speaking in tongues (Deiros 1991:161). Furthermore, the mem-

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bers of Evangelical groups, be they in urban or rural settings, are generally from the lower classes (Deiros 1991:161; Stoll 1994:101).

In their participatory nature, Protestant services are similar to the traditional folk-Catholic rituals of the Mayo Indians of Sonora (see O'Connor 1989a:56-66). Like the Protestants, the Mayos² are all from the lowest class; in fact, participation in the Mayo ritual system is an important indicator of both ethnicity and class. In contrast, the orthodox Catholic system is characterized by much less participation by the congregation in its ceremonies, and features hierarchical relationships between participants and religious leaders. This hierarchy is an extension of the socioeconomic class hierarchy to which orthodox Catholics generally adhere. In the Mayo area, participation in the orthodox system is an indicator of Mestizo ethnicity, but not any particular class status.

I must point out, however, that affiliation with orthodox Catholicism in the Mayo region, as in most of Latin America, and particularly the rural areas, is characterized by a very low level of actual participation on a regular basis in religious activities. Most orthodox Catholics are baptized, married and buried in the church without attending any other ceremonies except the baptisms, weddings and funerals of relatives and fictive kin, and the annual fiesta of the community's patron saint. An understanding of Church doctrine, regular attendance at Mass, and participation in the other sacraments of the Church are limited to a small number of Catholics, most of them in urban areas. Thus, the bulk of the nominally orthodox Catholic population in the Mayo area, as in Latin America as a whole, does not

participate in religious life even to the extent allowed by orthodox Catholicism.

My previous *work* in the Mayo valley, from 1976 to 1979, dealt with ethnic identity as expressed in religious and other cultural terms. I focused on how the economic, social, and political changes brought about by a large-scale economic development project were affecting ethnic identity in the area. The ethnicity of most people was tied in large part to their participation in one of two religious traditions: the folk-Catholic system of the Mayo Indians, and the orthodox Catholic system embraced by the non-Indians or Mestizos. Even then, however, about 2% of the region's population was Protestant (O'Connor 1979:26). As in most of Latin America in the late 1970s (Martin 1990:95), these were for the most part Mestizos, having converted from the orthodox Catholic system or having been born into existing, stable populations of Protestants.

In the predominantly Indian village of Buaysiacobe, however, people had been converting to Protestantism since the early 1950s, when major economic and political changes began in the valley. The three Protestant churches in Buaysiacobe were Evangelical, featuring rituals in which the members actively participated. Among the communities that I studied, Buaysiacobe had also experienced the greatest positive impact from the area-wide economic development program. The Mayo Protestants tended to credit their religious conversion for their comparative wealth. The case of Buaysiacobe intrigued me, because the economic experiences, ethnic behavior, and religious affiliation there differed so much from those of the other villages in the region.

² Ethnic labeling in the Mayo area varies according to the point of view of the person doing the labeling (O'Connor 1989).

For the sake of simplicity, I use here the least value-laden terms, Mayo and Mestizo.

Socioeconomic Change in the Mayo Valley

In general, the development program, which began in the 1950s, led, at least at first, to major economic growth and upward social mobility in the region. In ethnic terms, this mobility translated into an opening up of the ethnic landscape and a move from two strictly defined ethnic groups to a cultural continuum from "most Mayo" to "most Mestizo," with situational factors contributing to the expression and interpretation of ethnicity (see O'Connor 1989a:66-67). The economic growth that led to these changes was, unfortunately, short-lived, due largely to the effects of Mexico's position as a periphery in the modern world-system.

The economic growth and corresponding social changes that were affecting the Mayo valley in the 1970s have been eclipsed by the changes that have gripped all of Mexico in the intervening years. Since 1980, a series of economic crises has reversed the gains of the previous 30 years. The international debt crisis of 1982 took a heavy toll on all of the economies of Latin America and much of the Third World. The banking institutions of the core countries imposed strict conditions on the debtor nations of the periphery, Mexico, one of the most heavily debt-laden countries on Earth, accepted conditions designed to stop inflation, such as eliminating many social programs aimed at helping the poor, and also began privatizing some government-owned companies. After the inauguration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari as President of Mexico in 1988, many more government enterprises were privatized or eliminated. Foreign investment was once again welcomed in Mexico, where foreign ownership of productive capital had been outlawed since the Revolution.

The result of these policies has been, in many ways, a re-creation of the conditions that characterized Mexico a hundred years ago, and that gave rise to the Revolution. The gap between the rich and poor is growing, as real wages have been reduced (Barkin 1990:102). The unemployment rate has increased since the imposition of austerity measures; officially listed as 23% in 1994, it is almost certainly higher (Los Angeles Times 1994).

Despite the realities of the Mexican economy, President Salinas created, on paper, the image of a "Mexican Miracle," a country so changed by the introduction of free market forces that it was about to become a First World nation. The illusory nature of this image became clear when the new President, Ernesto Zedillo, found it necessary in January of 1995 to devalue the peso and let it float. The immediate result was that the peso lost about 30% of its value; by the end of the year it had lost more than half. As one observer ruefully commented, the peso, rather than "floating," is sinking, and the economy is undergoing "the worst of the economic crises of the modern era" (Castillo 1995:50). In February of 1996, the government announced that the country's Gross Domestic Product fell by 6.9% in 1995 (F.I Imparcial 1996). If the 1980s were the "lost decade" in Mexico, one wonders what name will be given to the 1990s, the first half of which has made the 1980s seem rosy by comparison.

In the Mayo valley, the economic situation today is grim. In the once prosperous towns businesses are going under at a rapid rate, and "for sale" and "for rent" signs are found on an increasing number of stores in the downtown areas. Beggars and people scavenging in garbage cans, unheard of in the 1970s, are now common sights on the streets of Huatabampo. The end of government credit support of the *ejido* system has created a situation where

all ejido land in the valley is rented out, and ejidatarios find themselves earning day wages as farm workers on their own parcels. The vaunted benefits of the free market in agricultural production have yet to materialize, and the economic reality for most of the residents of the valley is one of reduced income as well as reduced prospects for future economic growth.

Such is the case for most of the people in Latin America today. Some writers (e.g. Gill 1993:186; Stoll 1993:5) link this economic disaster with the emergence of Protestantism as an important religious force, implying that the one explains the other. The relationship between economic and religious change is, of course, a subject that has been argued over since at least Weber's 1904 classic (Weber 1958). Indeed, there seems little doubt that there is a relationship, but its nature is the subject of contention. The fact that the growth of Protestantism and the economic decline in Latin America began at approximately the same time tends to encourage a search for a causal relationship between the two. Such an explanation would have to be contrary to Weber's view of the matter, of course.

I am certainly willing to argue that the economic debacle is related to the growth of the number of Protestants in the Mayo valley, but I must point out that, in the case of the Iglesia de Dios at any rate, there does not seem to be a clear connection between the two processes. The increase in church membership began in the 1940s and has continued through both the period of greatest economic progress and the subsequent economic decline.

The Iglesia de Dios, Evangelio Completo

Existing literature on Protestants in Latin America has tended to group the Evange-

lical congregations together because of the many traits they share. In addition to those cited above, all the Evangelical churches in the Mayo area also ban alcohol, tobacco, popular secular music and dancing, and going to movie theaters. These churches also have similar patterns to their services, which feature alternating prayers, hymns, and opportunities for individuals to request prayers for specific reasons or to report events in their lives for which they call on the congregations to give thanks to God. These services, which are all approximately two hours in length, also include at least one sermon by the Pastor of the congregation, or a visiting minister, or both. The members of the congregations all refer to each other and to the ministers as "brother" or "sister," thereby implying egalitarian, kin-like relationships among people who conceivably might be unequal in social or economic status.

While acknowledging these similarities among the denominations, the members of each cite clear distinctions between themselves and other Evangelicals. Some of these are details of belief, practice and dress, some derive from the denominations' different histories in the area, and some are based at least in part on levels of relative wealth and poverty. Of course, poverty and wealth are themselves defined differently in different contexts; wealth in the rural communities of Sonora would be considered poverty by the elites of the cities. Still, there are easily discernible economic distinctions among the Evangelical congregations in the communities in my study, and I believe that these congregations are self-selecting on the basis of socioeconomic status.

The Iglesia de Dios, Evangelio Completo is by far the oldest, largest, wealthiest and best-organized of all of the Evangelical churches in the Mayo valley. The initial inspiration for the church came from Mrs.

Maria Atkinson, de Rivera, who was born in Alamos, Sonora, in 1879. She came from a wealthy family whose prosperity was based on silver mining. During the Revolution she moved to Douglas, Arizona, where she married Mark Atkinson, a U.S. citizen. She was converted to Protestantism in 1924, after experiencing what she believed to be a miraculous cure of her cancer. She originally attended the Assembly of God church in Douglas, and in 1926 returned to Mexico as a missionary. She established groups of converts in Nogales, Santa Ana, Hermosillo and Ciudad Obregon, Sonora. J.H. Ingram, a minister of the Church of God from the U.S., formalized the Obregon congregation as the first Church of God in Mexico in 1932. The Obregon church became a center for the Iglesia de Dios in Sonora.

Mrs. Atkinson established the patterns for the services, the process of missionizing, and vocational training for ministers. She also stressed the importance of the respectability of church members:

Much of her activity was... a socialization in middle-class standards of conduct, dress, personal care, and similar norms of general deportment (Elliott, 1971:107).

She taught members to read, for reading of the Bible is an essential aspect of conversion and of church life. She insisted that all members be missionaries, and taught them the communication skills necessary to the evangelization process. She helped to establish a training institute for ministers in Obregon in 1948. Students traveled from Obregon to the Mayo villages of Chucarit and Etchojoa, their expenses being paid by church members in these communities. The school was eventually moved to Hermosillo, the capital of Sonora (Elliott 1971:105-109). Though the Iglesia de Dios is clearly the creation of Mexicans, and is

administratively independent of the Church of God, it is still affiliated with the U.S. church, whose members visit Mayo valley churches regularly.

From its inception, the Iglesia de Dios stressed the importance of middle-class standards, and this emphasis continues today. The church is also tightly organized, with Pastors being assigned to congregations by central authorities. Pastors are frequently moved from one area to another, which helps to maintain allegiance to the hierarchy over allegiances to local congregations. The methods of recruitment of new members, the process of fissioning of growing congregations, and the organization of state-wide conferences are also determined by the church hierarchy. The Pastors live in church-owned houses and receive salaries.

This level of organization, and the middle-class lifestyles encouraged for members, are made possible by the fact that members tithe—that is, they donate 10% of their income to the church. This practice allows for the support of Pastors and members of the hierarchy. It also selects for members who are already relatively wealthy; the very poor cannot afford to donate 10% of their incomes to support a church, and even if they could be persuaded to do so, 10% of very small incomes would not sustain the Iglesia de Dios in the style it enjoys in Sonora today. The tithe is strictly enforced, with accounts kept for the amount of money donated each week by each member. The responsibility for these accounts is delegated to church members, who urge the hermanos to give to God “what is His,” i.e. the donations required to maintain an individual’s membership in the church. Beyond paying for full-time Pastors, these funds make possible the building of new churches, purchases of Bibles to distribute to new recruits, and other expenses associated with missionary activity.

Like all the Evangelical churches in the valley, the Iglesia de Dios has grown since the beginning of the economic crises in 1980. However, it was already growing in the 1950s, when the region was undergoing economic growth as well. In fact, the church has grown steadily since 1940 (Elliott 1971:151). This would seem to cast doubt on the validity of economic decline as an explanation for the increase in numbers, at least of the membership of the Iglesia de Dios.

In the communities in my study, members of the Iglesia de Dios are among the wealthier residents, even today. The emphasis on progress, which is at the foundation of the ideology of the church, is evident in every aspect of the lives of church members. In comparison to others in their rural communities, they dress well, they maintain their houses well, they look for ways to increase their well-being and that of their children, always within the limits of worldliness set by the church. The sermons at the church services encourage such behavior. In general, sermons contain instructions on how to maintain a close relationship with God and the church, and on the importance of living a life free of the sins that come from the world—e.g., dancing, drinking alcohol, and engaging in extra-marital affairs. The Pastors base all their sermons on the Bible, but they show a clear preference for Biblical texts that encourage individual members to live *in* the world while not being of it. A sermon at one service emphasized the importance of maintaining faith even when other people are hostile. The example was of a man who owns a company, and his employees make fun of him because he is an “aleluia.” He ignores his employees because his faith is strong. It is fair to say that no one in the church that day owned a company, but the implication that they were in a church whose members

might own companies placed them in a group apart from other residents of the community who would never even aspire to such a social status. In yet another sermon, the minister said that without faith in the true, invisible God, there is idolatry (*a* reference to the cult of the saints basic to Mayo folk-Catholicism); that without faith there is backwardness, while faith leads to progress. Idolatry is backwardness, while faith in God leads to progress.

Equating participation in the folk-Catholic system with poverty helps to emphasize the economic distinctions between Iglesia de Dios members and others in their communities and in the region as a whole. The opposition between church members and Catholics frequently extends to people in the hermanos' families and fictive kin networks. Although in some cases converts maintain friendly relationships with kin and compadres, often the Catholics themselves reject the new hermanos by ridiculing them and ostracizing them. At the very least, Protestants are absent from the Catholic religious occasions where interactions with kin take place. Meanwhile, members of the Iglesia de Dios are urged to contribute labor to the church and to donate money because God will repay them with a mansion in heaven. Traditional sources of social support for the hermanos are thus replaced by their church hermanos. However, the potential support from the relatively wealthier church members is also transferred away from kin and community to other church members.

The cutting of social ties to traditional sources of support such as kinship networks can be beneficial, at least for those members who are better off, in a context of differential economic growth as well as one of pervasive economic decline. Iglesia de Dios members, like many other Protestant groups in Latin America, use their new identities to create small social

islands or cocoons (Stoll 1993:14), within which they find mutual support, and outside of which their social commitments become limited by their very membership in the Iglesia. In the Mayo valley, these factors are combined with those of ecology, history and ethnicity to produce diversity within the Iglesia de Dios congregations from one community to another.

The Ecology of the Mayo Valley

The agricultural development of the Mayo valley created three distinct ecological sub-regions (O'Connor 1989a:69-77). The irrigation system introduced by the Mexican government in the 1950s made possible, and ultimately necessary, "green revolution" agriculture in what has become one of the most productive rural areas in the nation. The development program in general favored large private farms, but as a part of the agrarian reform program the government also established ejidos in many existing rural communities, as well as setting up new ejidos in formerly unpopulated areas,

Along the Mayo River, the population is dense and most of the communities have long histories; some date from the 17th century. The modern history of many of these villages is one of ethnic conflict. Ethnicity is a heavily contested issue, and economic change has generally led to ethnic change. That is, people from the Mayo side of the cultural continuum who did well as a consequence of economic growth in the valley tended to become Mestizos. One of the most important methods of ethnic change was religious, and Mayos who wanted to be Mestizos openly rejected folk-Catholicism in favor of orthodox Catholicism (see O'Connor 1989b). During the first few decades of the development program, such ethnic change

was fairly common. However, since the end of the 1970s it has been rare for anyone to prosper in these villages, so that divisions based on ethnicity have had a chance to jell. During my original field work in the area, ethnic allegiance was most clearly established by religious behavior in these riverine villages: Mayos participated in the folk-Catholic system that dates from the time of Spanish contact, while Mestizos for the most part adhered to the orthodox Catholic system. Protestants, few in number, were all Mestizos. My current field project includes La Loma del Etchoropo and Los Hu'voves, two communities in this area which have registered growing Evangelical populations. Because La Loma has no Iglesia de Dios church building, my present discussion is limited to Los Hu'voves.

The communities to the north of the Mayo River were for the most part created by the advent of the irrigation system. Prior to 1950, the area was very sparsely settled because there was no resource base. With the development program, this region came under irrigation. Although much of the land was acquired by private farmers, ejidos were also established. Buaysiacobe, the Mayo ejido village with the high percentage of Protestants, is in this area. Most of the other villages here were originally populated by people from outside the valley, and these communities are overwhelmingly Mestizo. This is the case with Navolato, the other village where I am studying Protestantism in this area. Because of the relative newness and the ethnic homogeneity of the villages in this region, ethnicity has not generally been a factor in economic status or religious affiliation.

The remaining ecological zone is to the south of the river, where the irrigation system did not reach. Here are to be found several comunidades indigenas, sparsely settled and in general very poor. In the Masiaca comunidad, in 1979, most people

spoke Mayo, lived in the rancher's settlement pattern dating from the Spanish conquest, and adhered to the folk-Catholic religious system. In other words, they were Mayos. By contrast, Masiaca village, the largest community, was predominantly Mestizo. Its residents spoke only Spanish, were orthodox Catholics or Evangelical Protestants, and had contempt for the hamlet dwellers, whom they referred to with the derogatory term "indio." The incongruity of a Mestizo village in an Indian reserve was the basis of a great deal of contention, and ethnicity has been a major basis for conflict at the level of the comunidad as a whole. However, for the most part the Mayos and Mestizos have lived in self-segregated areas and have not interacted frequently. The Mayos had no economic opportunities that would lead to a prospect of ethnic change, remained marginalized in their rancher'as, and adhered closely to the cultural symbols which informed their identity.

One exception to this pattern was Jopopaco, a hamlet with comparatively greater economic opportunities. In 1979, Jopopaco was already showing signs of economic and ethnic change not found in other Masiaca rancher'as. Proximity to the international highway, availability of some pasture land and even some marginal productive agricultural land made for relatively greater economic opportunities in Jopopaco. Simultaneously, the question of ethnicity was no longer as clear as in other hamlets, or as it had been even a few years earlier in Jopopaco. In fact, I predicted that Jopopaco would eventually become Mestizo, as the residents already were culturally more like Mestizos than Mayos (O'Connor 1989a: 109-110). Today, there is an Iglesia de Dios church building in Jopopaco.

The other community where I am working in the Masiaca comunidad is Tea-

chive, which in 1979 was a rancher's populated entirely by people on the Mayo side of the cultural continuum. Most spoke Mayo, and indeed most speak Mayo today. There is now an Iglesia de Dios congregation in Teachive, which is currently building a new church in the hamlet.

Thus, the interplay of social, ethnic and religious change varies considerably from one region of the Mayo to another. Within these regions, specific ecological, economic and historical factors have tended to influence ethnic and religious behavior. As I discovered on my return to the valley, the recent economic turmoil in the nation has not seriously changed these regional variations. Like all of Mexico, however, the valley as a whole has suffered economic setbacks; it has also gained a substantial number of Evangelical Protestant churches and a concomitant number of Protestants.

Ethnicity and Religious Change

In theory, there are three possible patterns of religious change in the Mayo valley as a whole. One is conversion from orthodox Catholicism to Protestantism; this does not involve ethnic change as orthodox Catholics are all Mestizos. Another conversion possibility is from Mayo folk-Catholicism to orthodox Catholicism. This involves ethnic change as well, and is usually accompanied by both cultural change and an increase in wealth. For a Mayo to become a Mestizo, it is not enough merely to stop participating in the traditional fiesta system. One must demonstrate a rise in social status as well (see O'Connor 1989b). This is the main pattern of change that took place during the economic boom of the 1950s and 1960s. The third possibility of social change is from Mayo folk-Catholicism to Protestantism. This is the most extreme form of change, for it includes

ethnic change as well as a fundamental rearrangement of religious beliefs and behavior that is much more difficult than the change from folk to orthodox Catholicism.

On the other hand, the participatory nature of Evangelical Protestantism, the egalitarian relationships among *hermanos*, the mutual aid available to them, and the importance of healing and emotional support in the Evangelical services bears a remarkable resemblance to the traditional folk-Catholic system. In the *Iglesia de Dios*, however, the emphasis on middle-class values and the necessity of tithing would appear to eliminate for all practical purposes the possibility of remaining Mayo and joining the church. In addition, Mayo identity itself has, at least in most cases and until recently, been closely tied to the very idolatrous, alcohol-consuming behavior condemned as backward by the *Iglesia de Dios*. In theory, then, to become a member of the *Iglesia de Dios* implies remaining or becoming Mestizo. In practice, however, the implications of identity, both religious and ethnic, are subject to local interpretation, and the outcome is diversity within the *Iglesia de Dios* congregations from one community to another.

Variations by Community

The communities where I am conducting research are small, with populations of 3000 or less. They are rural, with economies based on agriculture. Each has at least one *Iglesia de Dios* church. The congregations of these churches are also small: all have fewer than 40 official members, and most are much smaller. The towns of Huatabampo, Etchojoa and Navojoa have larger Evangelical congregations: they also have Mormon, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Seventh-Day Adventist churches. There are a few rural congregations of these churches,

but by far the bulk of the Protestant population in the outlying areas is Evangelical. Of the Evangelicals, the majority belong to the *Iglesia de Dios*.

Just as the basic ecology of the valley has not changed significantly in the last 15 years, members of the communities in the different regions continue to mold the interpretation of behavior in distinct ways. The population of the small riverine village of Los Hu'vres is mostly on the Mestizo side of the cultural continuum. In this, it is quite different from the larger villages such as Joepare and Etchoropo, where the number of Mayos and Mestizos is about even, with a very small ebb in the direction of the Mestizo side. Ethnic divisions are so clear in these villages that they feature residential segregation according to ethnic category.

The ethnic conflict seen in those villages is absent from Los Hu'vres. There is no Mayo folk-Catholic church around which to organize community fiestas, which reinforce Mayo ethnicity, and there are no other institutions in which ethnicity might become an issue. With a population of less than 500, the village is too small to be divided into residentially segregated areas as the larger villages are. At the same time, the surrounding area has a dense population of people on the Mayo side of the cultural continuum (INI 1994). Though the village itself provides few opportunities for the expression of interethnic antagonism, the Mestizos of Los Hu'vres retain their sense of superiority over the Mayos in the surrounding communities.

All of these factors, along with the presence of one of the oldest *Iglesia de Dios* churches, combine to create a community where Mestizo culture predominates. While some members of the *Iglesia de Dios* congregation, including the Pastor, claim to speak Mayo, in reality they know only a few words which can be brought out as

evidence that they are descended from locals rather than from the outsiders whose descendants inhabit the large towns and the rural communities to the north of the river. Those ancestors, some of whom participated in an ethnic war in the early part of this century, were proud to be from the region, and spoke some Mayo, but would never actually declare themselves to be indios. The same is the case with their descendants. Iglesia de Dios members, including the Pastor, pay lip service to the ideal of inclusivity within the brotherhood of the church. This inclusivity, however, operates only within the population able to tithe. In this region of the valley, such a limitation effectively excludes Mayos, who are by definition the poorest people in the community. Mestizo residents of other nearby communities also belong to the Los Hu'vares Iglesia de Dios, thereby providing the church with the economic base which would be absent if the congregation were made up exclusively by residents of Los Hu'vares. Thus, to be an hermano of the Iglesia de Dios in Los Hu'vares is to be Mestizo.

This is also true for the most part of Navolato, a village in the area north of the river. This community, like most in that zone, came into existence as a result of the expansion of arable land brought about by the economic development program. Like Los Hu'vares, this is a small village with a population under 500; also as in Los Hu'vares the population is overwhelmingly Mestizo. Navolato differs from the riverine village in that it is not in a zone where ethnic conflict has a long history. In addition, most of the original residents of Navolato came from outside the valley, in response to the economic opportunities provided by the development program. No one in Navolato tries to appear "Mayo" in the way that Mestizos in Los Hu'vares employ situational ethnicity. Ethnicity is

not an issue in Navolato. Most of the members of the Iglesia de Dios are residents of Navolato, and much of village life revolves around membership in the church. Of the daily religious services, five are held in private houses in the village. There are also study groups, children's indoctrination groups, and prayer meetings held regularly by members in their homes. This level of participation is decidedly higher than in other villages, perhaps because a large percentage of the villagers are church members. Such a high level of visibility makes for the rigorous maintenance of the middle-class values so important to the church's founder.

Buaysiacobe, which is in the same region as Navolato, presents a much different religious and ethnic picture; it might almost be described as a mirror image of Navolato in these terms. Like Navolato, Buaysiacobe came into existence as a result of the extension of the irrigation system. It is also ethnically homogeneous; however, the predominant ethnic category in Buaysiacobe is Mayo. In 1979, Buaysiacobe had the highest income level of the five communities in my study. It also had the largest percentage of Evangelical Protestants. Taken together, in the context of the other communities in the valley as well as existing theories of ethnic change, these factors pointed toward an expectation that people in the village would soon lose their minority ethnic identity and take on the Mestizo ethnicity which their income dictated. Buaysiacobe continues to surprise, however.

One expectation might be, for example, that people with relatively high incomes would elect to belong to the Evangelical church which most reinforces middle class lifestyles. Another logical prediction would be that Protestants would perforce give up Mayo identity, as this depends to a large extent on participation in the folk-Catholic

religious system, which includes a belief in the power of the images of the saints as well as the consumption of large quantities of alcohol. The Iglesia de Dios in Buaysiacobe, however, has the smallest congregation of all the communities under discussion here. Even these ten hermanos have split up, creating two congregations of five members each, in a village with a population of more than 2,000. By comparison, Los Hu'vores and Navolato each have memberships of over 30. The two other Protestant churches in Buaysiacobe, which do not require members to tithe and which have much stricter rules of behavior for members, also have much larger congregations than both the Iglesia de Dios congregations combined.

Even more surprising than these unexpected outcomes is the fact that members of the Iglesia de Dios in Buaysiacobe, rather than exhibiting middle-class values, adhere to Mayo ethnic identity. They continue to speak Mayo, and even support what they see as Mayo culture. These Protestant Mayos make a distinction between the religious and alcohol-consumption aspects of the fiestas, and support the "cultural" elements such as the symbolic and economic exchange among fiesteros and the traditional dancing of pascolas, deer dancers and matachines. One member of Buaysiacobe's Iglesia de Dios went so far as to help and advise the council of the folk-Catholic Mayo church

in the village when the tiny minority of Mestizo orthodox Catholics tried to take over the church and prevent the fiesteros from conducting their folk ceremonies. Such Protestant support for what most hermanos refer to as idolatry is rare indeed, and possibly unique.

Buaysiacobe, then, continues to inspire a wish that all economic development programs could have similar results: the villagers, though relatively poorer than they were 15 years ago, still enjoy a higher income than most Mayos, and they continue to exhibit Mayo ethnicity, even when this involves some very inventive strategies for the Protestants of the community.

In the Masiaca comunidad, in the extreme south of the valley, the economic situation is in general more dire than it was in 1980. Still, there are two communities which are slightly better off than the rest. This economic advantage has not resulted in a maintenance of ethnicity such as is found in Buaysiacobe, however. Jopopaco....

Today, there are the beginnings of segregation by ethnic category such as found in the villages along the river. In this case, however, the religious change that has accompanied economic advancement has been from folk-Catholic to Protestant. At the heart of the predominantly Mestizo residential area is a Protestant church, while there is a new Catholic chapel on the Mayo side of the hamlet.

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