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Blessed are the Peacemakers: Samuel Ruiz Garcia and the Zapatistas of Chiapas Mexico



A squad of Soldiers in the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Cova)

Ever since Christ's time, Christians have believed that working toward human rights for all people is important. This paper's title is derived from Jesus' words spoken during the Sermon on the Mount, as written in the Bible: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God" (beatitudes). The idea that Catholics are called to make peace among people is a long standing tradition, and has been reemphasized in recent times.

One of the people who has embraced God's desire for peace is Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia; he was the Catholic Church leader in Chiapas Mexico during a time of civil war and disenchantment with the Government, by the indigenous Mayan residents. The conflict between the Government and the indigenous population had festered for many years. It came to a head in the 1980s because Chiapas did not share in the prosperity that the other states of Mexico had encountered at that time. The civil war in Chiapas began with armed conflict, but soon was transformed into a non-violent information and persuasion campaign. (Samuel Ruiz). The illustration on the cover of this paper is a portrait of Garcia.

In addition to discussing Garcia, this paper will also examine the ways that other indigenous peoples have incorporated religion and peacemaking into their cultures. Many indigenous groups do not celebrate religion in the way that people in the US and Europe do. Indigenous cultures primarily believe that God is in all things and in all people. By respecting the environment and all people, Indigenous people believe that they are respecting God. Also in native cultures there is usually no formal religion, such as worshiping a big God in a big church. Often indigenous religious practices are conveyed through the oral teachings of the elders and the families.

Chiapas is an impoverished farming state in the southeastern part of Mexico. Chiapas is one of the most impoverished states in Mexico and the area is home to many indigenous people

of Mayan decent. In Chiapas the Mayas have retained their native language; while other parts of Mexico they speak Spanish.

A Catholic who has taken the command from God to be a peacemaker and to do justice is Samuel Ruiz Garcia of Mexico. In 1994 he was able to convince Zapatista revolutionaries and the Mexican Government to cease their violent conflict and work together to bring peace and human rights to the impoverished indigenous people of Chiapas. Garcia was a successful mediator because he had worked in the region for 30 years prior to the armed conflict. All of the people involved in the conflict: the residents, the Government and the Zapatistas, respected Garcia and knew that he would be a fair negotiator.

Garcia began his work in Chiapas in 1960 when he was 35 years old. Although he planned to work with the poor when he arrived there, his life underwent a “conversion” as he witnessed the oppression that the very poor indigenous people of Chiapas faced. Perhaps the most revolutionary way in which Garcia worked with the poor, was to place the Church hierarchy on an equal level with the people that it served. He viewed his role as an advocate to speak with the poor and their problems, rather than as an administrator who speaks for the poor in a leadership role.

Early in his career, Garcia changed the way that his church tried to help the poor. Previously, The Church believed that economic development and technical assistance could give the native people a chance to have a parallel culture to the mainstream in Mexico. By contrast, Ruiz discovered that instead of helping to create a separate culture, the best way to help the Mayans was to make them more like the mainstream, he sought to teach them Spanish, get them to wear shoes, and to teach them about Catholicism. All three things were common in Mexico, but things that the people of Chiapas did not do.

Garcia viewed the people involved in his early work as “objects” in need of salvation and change. But as he matured he came to know them as “subjects” who were under great poverty and oppression. Garcia's change in philosophy was brought about by several factors; first, the people themselves complained about economic oppression and asked him for direct help. The Catholic Church as a whole also changed the emphasis of its mission to the poor about that time as well. There was a worldwide meeting of church leaders, where the Pope instructed them to respond to the “signs of the times” and address the political, economic and social problems outside of the church, but within the communities in which they served. Because of this instruction, the Church began to emphasize direct action on behalf of the world's poor in the 1960's.

Later, at a Latin American Bishop's meeting, Garcia stated this new mission more concretely, he said: “We cannot evangelize the poor if we are the owners of large estates. The weak and the oppressed alienate themselves from Christ if we appear to be allies of the powerful; we cannot evangelize the illiterate if our religious institutions continue seeking the comforts of large cities and ignore the small towns and suburbs.”

Garcia discovered that help the Mayans of Chiapas was not an easy task. The Mayans lived in poverty for many years, and their culture was different from other parts of Mexico, the region also encountered an influx of refugees from Central America. The refugees made the scarce resources of Chiapas even more depleted. Winning favor with the National Government in Mexico City was also difficult because many Mexicans did not feel a kinship with the indigenous Mayan people or the immigrants because the populous in other regions felt that the residents of Chiapas did not have the same values in common.

The people of Chiapas first started feeling the effects of oppression in the 1930's when

their ancestral lands were beginning to be occupied by outsiders. After the land was taken from them to be used for farming, the natives were allowed to remain on the land but they had to work on the plantations or else they would be evicted. Also during that time a number of peasants were pushed from central Mexico into Chiapas searching for more fertile land to harvest. This migration began to cause overcrowding and the mixture of people also brought disease.

The Catholic Church saw a similarity to the situation in Chiapas with the scenario in the Biblical book of Exodus. So a number of different Catholic religious organizations began working with the people of Chiapas. Garcia helped organize the first meeting of indigenous people in Mexico in 1974, it was the first time in 400 years that the various indigenous peoples in the region had gotten together to discuss their common struggles. More than 1,000 native residents of Chiapas attended the meeting.

The main point of the meeting was that indigenous people from all over Mexico felt marginalized and that if they wanted to be fairly represented in Mexico they would need to unite in order to have the mass of people to make the Government listen to them and agree to address their complaints. Another consensus that was reached by the meeting was that the lack of land ownership among indigenous was a big problem. As long as there were large plantations owned by outsiders, the native people would not be able to end their economic oppression. To further aggravate this land ownership problem, they also discovered that some of the plantations were illegal under Mexican law.

In response to the scarcity of farmland for the natives, the Catholic Church began cooperative farms so that the peasants would have an alternative to working for non-indigenous landowners. The formation of these cooperatives gained popularity but with this new autonomy, the Government oppression against the Mayans also increased. The most vivid example of the

human rights abuse by the Government is The Massacre of Golochan. On June 15, 1980, a group of Mexican police violently evicted 723 families from land that the families had asked the Government to transfer to them under the indigenous-rights statutes. Twelve people were killed in the massacre. The government later offered to buy the land for the families, on the condition that the families pay the government back and join the political party that was in power. The families refused that offer.

After noticing the poor state of human rights, Samuel Ruiz Garcia formed the Fray Bartolome de las Casas Center for Human Rights in 1989. "The Center works to be loyal to the evangelical message of assisting, accompanying and moving forward all humans in the re-vindication of their just demands, recognizing in them the presence of the Savior," Garcia said at its opening. The center opened at a time of renewed pressure by the Government to curb anti-nationalist protests.

During this era, the Government also directly attacked Catholic priests who were sympathetic to the indigenous cause. They repressed the priests by arresting and prosecuting them under trumped-up charges. For example, Father Joel Padron was charged with robbery, conspiracy, property damage, and inciting peasants to take land in 1991.

In order to publicize Padron's mistreatment, Garcia mobilized many people to demonstrate against his unlawful imprisonment. 18,000 people participated in a march from Chiapas to Mexico City. That demonstration led to the release of the priest from prison. The protest also brought national attention to Padron's imprisonment and other indigenous-rights abuses by the Government. This attention inspired the national Church to form Pueblo Creyente, a nationwide group that works throughout Mexico to promote social justice in Chiapas.

Garcia's attempts to peacefully bring about change was altered suddenly on January 1,

1994 On that day, a secretive paramilitary group called the Zapatista Army of National Liberation emerged from the Jungle and invaded seven towns declaring that they were there to help the Mayans obtain freedom from the oppression that had come at the hands of the Mexican Government. The Zapatistas wanted land, housing, jobs, food, health care, democracy and justice. The Mexican Army responded with force, after 12 days a cease-fire was called.

Garcia and the other Catholic bishops denounced the violence but said that groups like the Zapatistas became popular because the majority of people in Chiapas felt cut-off from mainstream society and believed that revolution was the only way that they would be able to achieve fairness. In response, the Government accused the priests of being part of the Zapatista movement, even though the priests were not.

Later the Government asked Garcia to be the mediator between the Zapatistas and the Government. The first round of peace talks were held in 1994 at San Cristobel's Cathedral. It was the first time that a clergyman had participated in a political dialog. Normally the government does not include clergy as negotiators because Mexico has constitutional separation of church and state.

Because of the unprecedented use of a clergyman in Governmental relations, there were people who criticized both the Government and Garcia for assuming that role. Many of the critics of Garcia's role as mediator did not understand that he had worked with both the indigenous people and the Government for more than 30 years. He was one of few people whom both the Government and the peasants trusted. In those 30 years, Garcia learned to approach people, listen to them and get them to understand the viewpoint of the others. (Kovic 45-66)

Garcia's role as a mediator, peacemaker and humanitarian made him well-known in the world because he was successful at ending a violent civil war in a few days. Normally civil wars

last for years, many people in the world were inspired by Garcia and wanted to know more about his ways of relating to people and curtailing religious conflict.

Following the violent occupation by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation guerrillas of the Government building in Chiapas on January 1, 1994, which was quickly overcome by Mexican, there was a non-violent protest. The second protest happened on March sixth. This time Zapatista protesters dressed in traditional indigenous costume, and marched through San Cristobal spraying graffiti with revolutionary slogans and at the end of the March, entered the Government Building without resistance hanging banners and sleeping there overnight. The next day they marched out of town, and because it was more isolated there, the Mexican Army ejected them. The Government Building was restored in less than one day.

There is no consensus on what specifically caused the Zapatistas to begin protesting in 1994. There were several different things that contributed to disenchantment among the Zapatistas though. The occupation of the Government building was timed to coincide with the beginning of the North American Free Trade Agreement. That agreement was seen by many people in Mexico as a bad thing. There was even a common joke among Mexicans “When President Carlos Salinas went to sleep on the New Year's Eve before NAFTA took effect thinking he would wake up in the USA. Instead, he woke up in Guatemala.”

The person who organized the Mayan Indians of Chiapas into The Zapatista Army of National Revolution, was not well known. He identified himself as Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, and claimed that he was born on January 1, 1994. The Mexican Government has a different opinion about his identity. They feel that the leader is Rafael Guillen, a former Catholic university lecturer, who was a fan of communist philosophers and adopted the Chiapas human rights cause because he was bored with his urban life as a teacher.

At the time of the fighting in 1994, Marcos said that he did not come to Chiapas to start a revolution, specifically. It was his interactions with the Mayans that inspired Marcos and his followers to take up arms and fight on behalf of indigenous rights. He learned to interact with the Mayans using their style of oral history and was better able to relate to them by using poetry. Another aspect of his presence was that since he was mysterious, he was able to generate a lot of publicity for the cause. This publicity helped get the international media to understand the indigenous side of the conflict and to view the Mexican official accounts of things with skepticism.

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation was formed on November 17, 1983, with just six people. Their first challenge was with the environmental elements, because they were clandestine and in a very remote area. Marcos arrived a year later to lead the organization. Marcos and the Mayan rebels had an intellectual exchange. The Mayans were taught about the politics and history of Mexico, and Marcos was taught how to survive in the jungle. Each side needed the information that the other taught. All of their lives would depend on it.

Since the Mayans were not used to Western forms of government, Marcos had difficulty explaining the ideas behind revolution. The Mayans believed that the spirits around them would take care of them and they saw no reason to actively try and change things. Marcos learned about the Mayans' religion so that he could better relate to the people as a whole.

The Mayans believe that their history and folktales have importance in the present time. Someone could explain a plan of action to them, and a Mayan might respond that the plan is not a good idea because the plan failed in the past, but the past that they are referring to could be hundreds of years ago or just a few days ago. Both recollections would be equally vivid and discussed in the same terms.

One of the elders of Chiapas who influenced Marcos was a man named El Viejo Antonio (Old man Anthony). Marcos and Antonio visited each other often. They would begin their visits by smoking tobacco and Marcos would start a conversation. Antonio would respond with Mayan folktales like how carbon is black, but is the source of light, for example. Antonio had a way of continually reminding Marcos why he was there, for the people. It did not matter how the war had gone that day or what news had come over the short-wave radio. It was Antonio's stories that gave Marcos the peace-of-mind to continue fighting for that he believed

Another challenge that Marcos faced was that the people of Chiapas did not share the same heritage nor did they all speak the same language. Although the Mayans had inhabited the area for thousands of years, there were also immigrant refugees from neighboring Guatemala. They were drawn to Chiapas because of its almost uninhabited land. There are more than 100,000 non-native people living in Chiapas in 1994 (Higgins 153-171).

Because NAFTA allowed greater exports to the US, much of the rain forest in Chiapas, where the indigenous Maya lived was sold out from under them and turned into logging land. Another thing that contributed to Maya unrest was that many indigenous became refugees from the ethnic genocide in neighboring Guatemala, so the land that was reserved for the indigenous people became overcrowded and diseases like malaria and chorea spread rapidly, killing many people.

Garcia was one of the first to organize the settlement of the rain forest. in the 1970s. He sought to create a territory where the indigenous people could have self-rule more-or-less and since the rain forest was isolated, there would be little reason for the Government to disallow this.

Unfortunately there were other people with conflicting interests who wanted to settle the rain forest as well.

The Government also expanded logging and agricultural industries into Chiapas during that time as well. The Government saw Chiapas as the last undeveloped state in Mexico and wanted to increase its national production. They provided subsidies for companies to log and plant crops on the land that was formerly forested. There were some efforts by the Government to protect some of the rain forest though, for example in 1978 the President agreed to protect 331,200 hectares of land from development. International pressure also caused some conservation efforts; in 1991 a private group purchased some of Mexico's World Bank debt, and forgave it, with an agreement that Mexico would spend \$2.6 million on preservation programs.

The changing conditions also caused human rights to be curtailed. As the disenchantment among the people of Chiapas became more apparent, there was greater motivation by the Government to step in and neutralize the revolutionary sentiment. The government's methods were not always on the up and up. For example, in 1987 the national teachers union was divided into two factions, one was loyal to the "PRI" political party in power, and the other supported the opposition. The opposition union in Chiapas called a strike. The strike lasted 65 days and two strikers were shot by government forces.

Because Garcia sided with the poor in these disputes, he was often criticized in the state media. They portrayed him as a communist and referred to him as the "Red bishop." Garcia also noticed that the people of Chiapas were becoming more economically divided and that people in different economic classes differed in their views on the political situation; the poor believed that Garcia was doing good work for the poor and the refugees, the middle class were indifferent, but the upper class feared a revolution.

Garcia's advocacy for the poor also caused the Government to attempt to silence him from within the Catholic Church. In 1993, a papal nuncio was issued that accused Garcia of

serious doctrinal and pastoral mistakes. This accusation was recognized at the time as an attempt by the church to appease the ruling PRI party. This continual friction between Garcia and the Government is what caused many to realize that Garcia was the lone peacemaker who could relate to the Zapatistas. (Weinberg 97-106)

Garcia has also made other humanitarian contributions, including providing assistance to 40,000 people and helping to negotiate peaceful resolutions throughout Central America. For his efforts in peacemaking Garcia won a \$25,000 prize from UNESCO. (Samuel Ruiz)

Garcia explained his philosophy about religious conflict in a speech before the Parliament of World Religions. He pointed out that conflict is an instinctive tendency, because from the time we are born we are in conflict with our surroundings. The urge to do evil even though we know that it is wrong is written about in the bible "I do not the good that I wish, but the evil I do not wish, that I perform (Romans 7:19).

The expansion of the Catholic Church around the World was an indirect result of conflict. The Spaniards wanted a way to expedite the spice trade so they searched for a shorter route to India. Instead of going to India they discovered North America, after they made that discovery they realized that their new found land had much more than spices, there was lots of wealth to be harvested. In order to realize these resources the Spaniards needed to conquer the land and enslave the people who occupied it. All of this was done with the permission of the Spanish Government which was an adherent to the Catholic Church. Thus, religious violence was directly related to the situation between the indigenous of Mexico and the Spanish newcomers.

Another thing that occurred as the church spread was that it became more and more interested in changing the people with whom members of the church came into contact. This change was viewed as providing salvation to the pagans. This conversion also had the effect of

destroying the cultural identity of the people whom were subjected to it. Thousands of years of history and pride were suddenly discarded and the people were taught that their ways and customs were no good. This cultural reeducation created violence from within the people as they were unable to adjust to the forced changes. The changes also caused those who believed in their old ways to be subjected to outward violence, all in the name of God, who teaches that violence is evil.

The opinion of the Church on the reeducation of indigenous people began to change; culminating with the Second Vatican Council, held in the 1960's. At that meeting, African bishops demanded that the church address the social aspects of church doctrine. Those bishops also suggested that God manifests himself in all people and the manifestation of God in all permits the members of each culture to form their own particular beliefs but still be Christians because of God's universal plan of salvation. The church also realized that when societies were converted to Christianity, the indigenous religion did not disappear, but instead was repressed and often mixed with Christian teachings. The change in doctrine at the Second Vatican Council allowed the Church and its followers to publicly acknowledge what had been happening underground for hundreds of years.

The need for the Church to focus on the poor and marginalized in society was another point that emerged from the Second Vatican Council. It was discovered that previously the Church had primarily ministered to the well-connected, and the mainstream in society. At the Vatican Council meeting, the bishops realized that this type of institution was not what had Christ had in mind when he founded the Church. Pope John XXIII summarized this point during the meeting by saying: "The Church, in its relation with the developing nations, discovers what it is and what it should be: the church of the poor, which is the church of everyone."

Making the church for everyone was especially challenging for Garcia and the other Latin American bishops, because their problem was not convincing people to become Christians, because most people there already were Catholic. The challenge was to convince the people to do God's works by reaching out from their well-to-do parishes to the poor, those who were treated unjustly, and those left out of the cycle of economic development. It was also a challenge to convince the wealthy Catholics to accept those who had recently joined as equals and entitled to the same rights as everyone else.

Religion also finds itself in opposition to progress because progress usually ends up hurting the poor while helping the wealthy. For example in today's society 95% of the world's wealth is concentrated among 25% of the world's people. Thus the poorest 75% of the people have to survive on just 5% of the world's resources.

In biblical times, wealth was redistributed every fifty years. This was accomplished by having the king of Israel to declare a jubilee year, and all of the debt was forgiven and all of the land was returned to its original owners. Christ instructed his followers to make every year a jubilee year, but that has not happened, as illustrated by the lack of wealth distribution in the world today.

In Latin America specifically, the NAFTA has had a disproportional negative impact on the peasants. Since NAFTA was enacted the number of families in Mexico who receive at least 70% of the average income has fallen from 50% to 12%, thus many more families are in poverty now than before NAFTA was begun.

Conflict is the law of life. If there was not conflict we would not mature. In order to

survive we have to firmly believe that God sent Christ so that all of the things that we do not understand in the world can be understood in the afterlife. It is in the afterlife that we will discover the true nature of conflict and learn how we fall into God's plan (Garcia 88-103).

One of the ways that the church inspires all people to treat others fairly is through Papal speeches and published doctrine. In 1995, Pope John Paul addressed the General Assembly of the United Nations; he spoke about the importance of human rights saying: “It is a matter for serious concern that some people today deny the universality of human rights, just as they deny that there is a human nature shared by everyone. To be sure, there is no single model for organizing the politics and economics of human freedom; different cultures and different historical experiences give rise to different institutional forms of public life in a free and responsible society. But it is one thing to affirm a legitimate plurality of 'forms of freedom' and another to deny any universality or intelligibility to the nature of man or to the human experience.”

Sometimes Governments and the Church differ on what constitutes acceptable human rights. An extreme example of this difference occurred during the Nazi era. The Third Reich was a legally empowered government and was responsible for governing Germany during the 1930s and 1940s. In many ways it functioned like any morally correct government, doing such things as settling disputes between citizens, holding democratic elections and collecting taxes. However, the Nazi government also did many immoral things such as genocide and making war in order to expand its territory.

After the Nazis were defeated, the Nuremberg War Crime Trials were held to establish culpability for the atrocities. These trials were especially important in setting a precedent to establish the need for personal responsibility when it comes to non-violence. Many of the

bureaucrats within the Nazi Party gave as a defense that the crimes that were committed did not involve any moral judgment on their part, but they were instead acting on behalf of the government and the people higher in command had instructed them to commit the crimes. The point of this defense was to attempt to show that individuals bear no responsibility for immoral acts, as long as those acts are done in accordance with the laws, that the individuals were sworn to uphold.

The former Nazis' defense was rejected and most of the individuals were found guilty of their crimes. This judgment showed that individuals are responsible for a universal moral standard that forbids things like genocide and disregard for the sovereignty of nations.

After the Nuremberg Trials the Catholic Church and the world in general gave new emphasis on the need to monitor and improve human rights. In 1948, the United Nations issued the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, that proclamation has been followed by laws that help spread human rights to all citizens of many nations.

Throughout history the definition of what is just has been subject to change. It is this changing social situation that makes integrating what is morally correct to a Christian and what is legal in a Government a challenge. One particularly challenging situation that requires this delicate balance is when Catholics are called to serve as US Supreme Court Justices.

When Catholic US Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, was asked about passing judgment on the death penalty, he said that the US jurisprudence system dictates that capital punishment is legal and because of the legality, it would be better for a judge who disagrees with capital punishment to quit being a judge than to commit civil disobedience by failing to sentence someone to death just because his personal views or the Catholic Church forbade it. (Booth, 43-67)

Much has changed in Chiapas since the uprising in 1994. However much has also stayed the same. The rebellion changed attitudes throughout Mexico, for example in Mexico has elected its first opposition party president, Vincente Fox. Both Fox and US President Bush have agreed to make it easier for workers to enter the US from Mexico. Both actions are having the effect of equalizing the wealthy and the poor. Being elected from a populist platform, Fox is more committed to helping the poor. The US immigration reform will allow poor workers in Mexico to come to the US to earn money, and give those poor families income that is not available to them in Mexico.

Some things have not changed. It is impossible for someone to visit the regions where the Zapatistas still occupy without being subject to severe questioning. The area is still lacking much infrastructure and law and order is not even considered a priority. Government issued property titles are seen as worthless, people can do as they please, as long as the Zapatistas support it.

Although not given by the Mexican Government through legislation, Chiapas has become more independent in the ten years since the rebellion. The municipalities that are still controlled by the Zapatistas are calm and there is little crime. Also the leaders of those towns have taken responsibility for social services, so there is less drain on the state government.

There is much less publicity in Chiapas now then there was ten years ago. But the people who are working for change are still making things happen. It is just that planting crops and training teachers does not garner the same attention from the media that the armed conflict caused. (275-277)

The Mexican government's aspirations have also changed. When NAFTA was enacted there were visions that Mexico's agricultural exports would increase greatly and that Mexico would have a great deal more traffic from Central America. About all that remains of that

aspiration are the improved highways that cut through Chiapas heading toward the North. For a few years there was much coffee exporting to the US but that has all but dried up now.

Another thing that became apparent after the revolution was how the Zapatista way of helping was very different than traditional aid. Normally when a government or charity provides aid, they might drop off bags of rice or build a school and leave. How the Zapatistas are going about it is by actually working with the Mayans to help them plant and harvest crops and assisting them with building schools and after the schools are built staying around and helping the train teachers and after the teachers are trained helping to recruit students.

All has not been positive though, more than half of the members of the original Zapatista movement have left the organization. Some left because they lose the religious zeal that is needed to live in such an impoverished region, others left because they found the obeying the rules, such as not drinking, is too difficult.

Environmental problems have also become more apparent since the uprising. Now only about half of the rain forest in Chiapas still exists. Since living in the rain forest requires hunting and gathering, instead of farming, there are now too many people living there and the overcrowding will cause more of the forest to die and also make conditions harder for those who remain in the forest.

Chiapas is still the most impoverished state in Mexico, with the changing labor situation, less viable farming in that region, more and more people will have to go to other places in order to find work. This changing workforce may cause another exodus like the one the Catholic bishops noticed in the 1970s and 1980s, only this time it will cause the needy to be more dispersed, as they leave to find unskilled jobs in factories and cities. If the people leave, so will their culture. When people lose their culture they also lose a part of their identity, and once it is

gone it cannot be regained.

Some of Chiapas' problems do not even originate in Mexico. Because the United States provides subsidies to farmers, US farmers can sell produce at below the cost that a Mexican farmer can grow the same crop. Because of NAFTA Mexico cannot protect its farmers from being undercut by the subsidized farmers in the US. So other than urge the US to change its policies there is little Mexico can do to counter the unprofitability of its own farming operations. (Earle 275-289)

Indigenous people see religion as an inseparable blending of mankind, nature and the spirits. They believe that there is no way to divide the spirit from the people of the earth. Because of the belief that God is in everything, many native languages do not have a specific word for religion. The spirit is in everything and it enlightens everything. Because of this belief anthropologists call indigenous religions Animism because God is said to animate all matter.

The people of Chiapas are just one of many indigenous peoples. All of the groups of people have common challenges, such as maintaining their cultural identities in an increasingly crowded world. Each native people also has unique attributes that make their culture part of the diversity that makes our world what it is.

Indigenous religion relies on myths to explain many things that are unknown and to remind people of their history and relationship with the World around them. The myths differ among groups of people. Some are very simple stories, like parables and others are very complex involving many different Gods and the interactions among those Gods in almost a parallel universe to our own. Since indigenous groups do not have formal religion, such as in a big church, kneeling before a big God, they incorporate sacred things into their everyday life. They might believe that certain feathers have a connection to God, or God is especially aware during a

certain season.

Indigenous culture throughout the world is very diverse. Unfortunately because the native culture and religion often differs significantly from the practices of others in close proximity, it is subject to stereotyping and adherents to indigenous religions often endure prejudice. The stereotyping works in both directions, some people believe that indigenous religion is a cure-all for the world's problems, but others use it to discriminate and deny native people the economic benefits of integration. Both perceptions of indigenous religion are inaccurate, and the people suffer because of those inaccuracies.

An example of animism and an indigenous culture taking their religious beliefs and applying them to everyday life is illustrated by the following quote from a member of the Inuit culture "An Innu hunter's prestige comes not from the wealth he accumulates but from what he gives away. When a hunter kills caribou or other game he shares with everyone else in the camp." (Beverluis 42-44)

Another example of indigenous people applying their religion to everyday life is the native Hawaiian practice of building heiau or temples. The folklore says that in ancient times the people built a ten-acre sacred complex of stone buildings. There were 15,000 men and they completed the project between a single sunset and sunrise. This accomplishment causes people to respect the ancients' obedience to god and further inspires the modern people to as they are taught God would like. (Kanahele 31-32)

Samuel Ruiz Garcia inspired the indigenous people of Chiapas to peacefully stand up to oppression. He was able to use the common religion that existed between the natives and the Mexican government to cause both groups to work toward a peaceful solution. This application of Gods commandment to be a peacemaker was from Garcia, a way to apply his religion, in

much the same way that indigenous people throughout the world are inspired to see God in all things and to treat all things with respect.

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