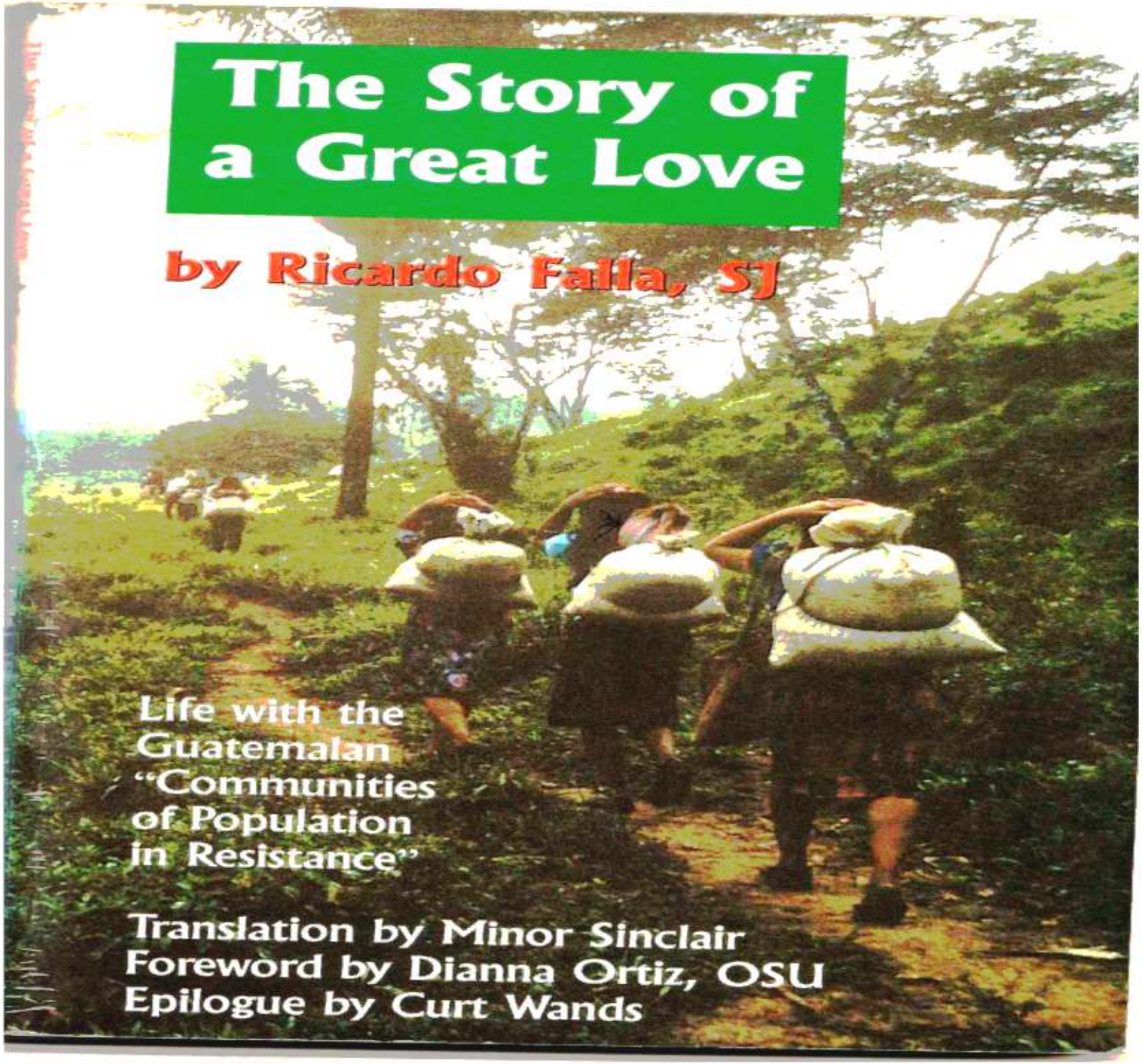
The Story of a Great Love
by Ricardo Falla, SJ
Life with the Guatemalan "Communities of Population in Resistance"
Translation by Minor Sinclair
Foreword by Dianna Ortiz, OSU
Epilogue by Curt Wands

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A Spiritual Journal

Ricardo Falla, SJ

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Foreword

The wanderer walks the beach, searching for whole shells, but finds only those fragments brought to ruin by wild storms, ravenous sea creatures and the mindless steps of human beings. Too weak, unable to protect themselves, the shells perish. Still, there are those which do manage to survive, neither crushed nor fatally fractured, waiting to be found—by accident or design? How do these few stand against the forces of annihilation? The wanderer finds an oyster, perhaps. What is the history of its survival? It can no more tell us than the wanderer can explain how their paths came to cross.

There are other storms, other rapacious beings, other steps that fracture and crush. People from every point on the compass, from nearly all of life's stations are confronted by these ravenous beings, with their insatiable compulsion to control not only individuals but villages, cities and entire peoples. Yet even in the poisonous moral desert they would impose, there arise those who will not be consumed, who place their own collective spirit against this evil and do not yield. Watching this are some who intend to stand above the struggle, but who are caught up in it and emerge reborn with new humility, to tell us what they have learned about resistance and love. In the pages of this deceptively simple little book, you will meet one of these.

The Story of a Great Love is a story of conversion, of healing, of reconciliation, of love—and of the impact of Latin America's great theological contribution to feet-on-the-ground* liberation. It is about the humbling education of Ricardo Falla. And it may be about our own, as well, if we have the courage to synchronize our senses and walk, talk, see, feel, smell and touch the world, accompanied each step of the way by the words of this priest-pilgrim.

No one faces conversion alone. There is a voice, a burning bush,

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**The term comes from Clodovis Boff.*

something to point the way. Ricardo Falla finds the instrument of his conversion in a whole people. This convert-in-the-making set out to perform a task, to shepherd those who, he believed, needed him. He stayed to learn that he needed them more, these indigenous people of Guatemala's Communities of Populations in Resistance (CPRs). And in their company, he learned that just as we do not always know we search, neither do we always know what is missing, what it is that would make us whole. Gradually, Falla does learn, as he is compelled to emerge from the comforting confines of his own culture to confront, and marvel at, the core strength of another culture. No longer wishing to return to his own, yet not fully a part of theirs, Falla stands on the margins of two cultures and interprets what his new eyes see.

Who was it then who instructed this emergent witness? What are these Communities of Population in Resistance? They are the indigenous, the Maya, those who have been deprived of everything possessions, homes, food, the lives of relatives and friends and land that integral part of their culture. Forced to struggle for survival by an Army bent on their annihilation, they recapitulated, in their own lifetimes, the five-hundred-year history of the Mayan people as it intersects with the European invaders and unwanted settlers. In their own struggle, the CPRs added a chapter to the legacy that is passed from generation to generation and will continue to be so as long as the Maya walk this earth. Unwilling to yield to others' demand to control, they refuse to trade their cultural identity for comfort or for life itself.

Read well the coming pages as they introduce the wandering witness of Ricardo Falla. The search he begins, without even knowing it has begun, will culminate in conversion to a love he did not even know existed. Thus the priest who came to lead, to instruct, to tell, will stay to learn from them. Few know better than Falla this people's greatness. Few know better the magnitude of their grief, that ancient grief of an ancient people bludgeoned into landlessness and economic submission. But, as Falla learns, that grief has a companion in the equally ancient knowledge that, for five centuries, what defines them as a people has been neither captured nor surrendered. The culture will survive, and their tradition is as old as grief itself.

Read the very best of the intricacies of feet-on-the-ground theology, master its challenges and its demands. And when you have, then listen to Falla as he learns to live it. Through it and through the Maya, Falla has found his life in the lives of history's anonymous, liberation theology's nonpersons. And in that discovery, he can say at last, "Stop. I need go no farther. With these people, finally I am home."

And then read Falla one final time so you will not forget the children. Remember how afraid of him they were, at first? How fragile they seemed? Yet, if fragile only, then from where comes their strength to risk trusting him? Perhaps it is the strength of fragile children which finally seduces him, opens him to begin reading from that different text written out of five hundred years of grief, love, resistance and survival. Perhaps it was these children who were his first teachers and who began the process of his conversion.

But there is more, another chapter, not in this little book, but a chapter to be mastered, nonetheless. It is the cost of reading this love story. From its pages comes a call to you from those who have been tortured, disappeared and murdered. It is a cry from those alone in dark cells; it is a scream of those brutalized; it is a whisper from unmarked graves scattered throughout the country. But surely this must be history. What of that treaty signed in December 1996? Why must we resurrect the past? Peace has come, has it not? Not so, for still they call, their agony as witness, their dead bodies mute testimony to a peace that is no peace. The poor, the powerless and those who stand with them, those sacred remnants of four decades of war, know no peace. Instead, their continuing suffering testifies to a document that, no matter what its intent, brings but a continuation of that violence. They call to you from the cross that is Guatemala. What will you answer? Falla has taken you this far. Now you must go on without him.

When you have finished this small book, ask, for yourself, the questions that remain. How could genocide take place in our neighbor country and neither our government nor its media take public note of it for four decades? How did two hundred thousand come to be tortured, disappeared and murdered and not be worthy of some

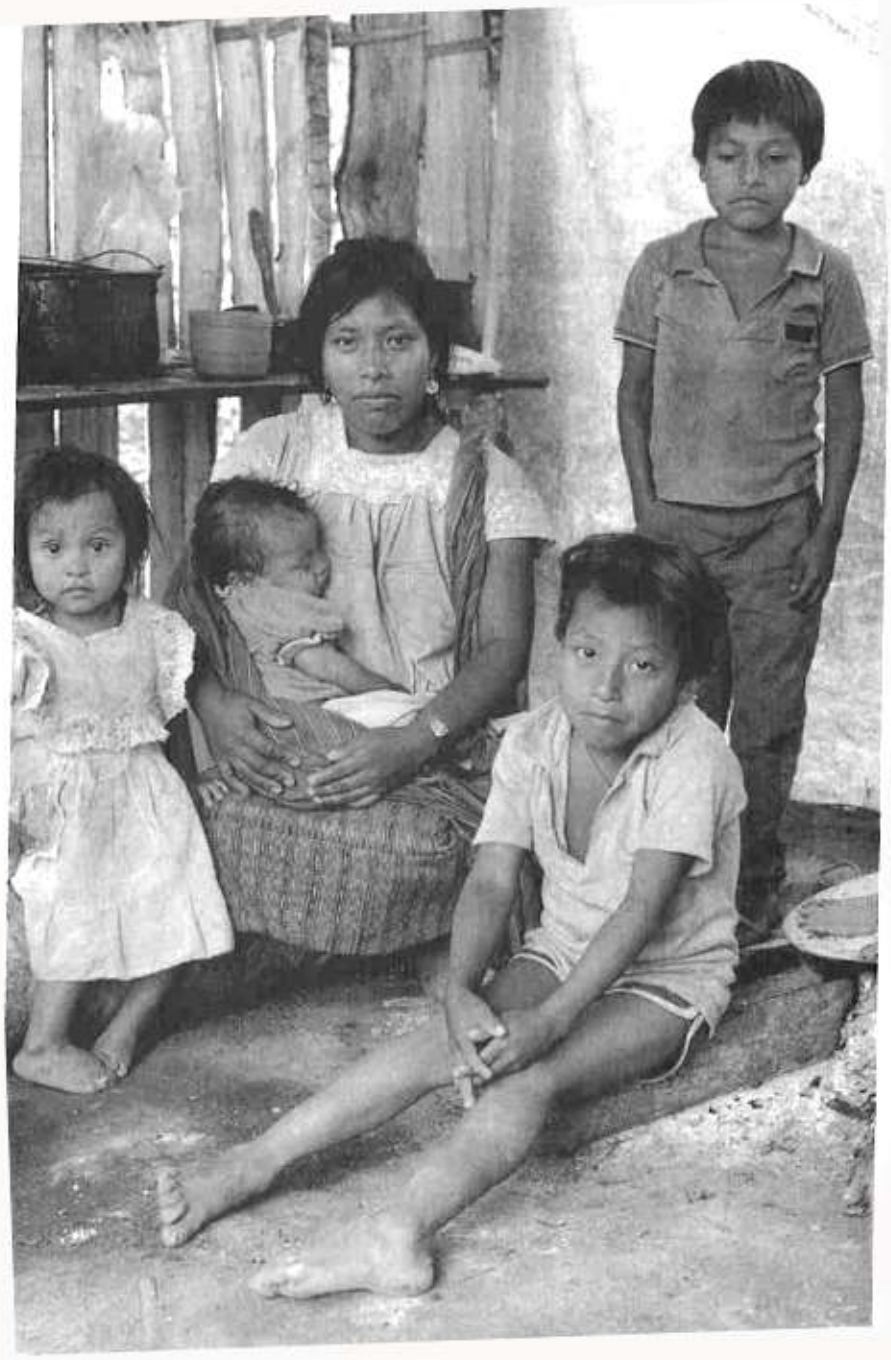
comment? And the question that should haunt us all: Why did our government, yours and mine, join with that of Guatemala and its oligarchy and its bloodthirsty military in this decades-long campaign of mass destruction and annihilation?

Still there is more to understand, one last unwritten page to grasp. All that proceeds it is, in a sense, but prologue, for this is not only about the Maya of Guatemala. It is as much about the resistance in East Timor and Burma, about the mothers and grandmothers of the plazas, about Native Americans and others in the United States and about all peoples everywhere who demand an end to all government oppression. It is about those everywhere who say "No" to oppression and "Yes" to liberation and stand by that declaration even if it costs them their lives.

Synchronize your senses. Even now, you are being invited to join this community in resistance. What will you answer?

On the beach, one finds pieces of shell, fractured and crushed, but there are some that have not been broken, that remain whole and, on occasion, one of these is found by a wanderer who can read its meaning....

Sister Dianna Ortiz, OSU
Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA



Introduction

How beautiful you are, my love,
how beautiful you are!
Your eyes are two doves!
—Song of Songs 1:15

Many people have asked me to write about the experience of pastoral work in the Communities of Population in Resistance (CPRs) in the Ixcán. I, too, sense there is a thirst in Guatemala and in other countries to understand the experience of the CPRs more deeply. By offering my experience in the form of a testimony, I hope to transmit the experience of the CPRs with more life. I decided to use an allegorical framework that unites two currents, the personal and the social. Although allegory runs the risk of seeming affected, I am taking that risk and relating my experience to a story from the Bible. From this story comes the focus of this little book: *The Story of a Great Love*.

The focus for the book occurred to me while talking about my separation from the CPRs. After my departure on Christmas Day, 1992, and after the outburst of the accusations against me, the only thing I could do was send the CPRs a letter with the heading "Crying, because I cannot return." The letter was read in the communities and the people also cried and wrote me back. The separation was painful, and in writing again I reminded them, "You have been my beloved spouse. You know how one suffers when separated from a companion. I am thinking only of you and talking about you everywhere I go."

In this little book I will continue talking about my beloved spouse. Like one in love who cannot be silenced, I will proclaim her beauty.

I will tell how her eyes are like two doves. I will do my part to satisfy the interest of those who wish to know more about the CPRs, but I will also tell my story of how this great love developed. Some will be more interested in this personal aspect of the experience, yet I will try to convey the idea that they are not two separate rivers, but rather a single one.

Some may object to my treatment of the communities. It is not objective, they may say. But I love her; I will show her as beautiful. I will tell her, "You are the most precious of precious," and others, even she, may answer me, "For you I am, Marcos,[1] but not for others."

I could respond that it is frequently said that love is blind—and it's true—but true love is also illuminating and transforming. It is illuminating because one sees in one's lover the beauty that others do not see. Even more so, love is transforming because one not only discovers beauty, one also helps to create and evoke that beauty in the loved one.

True love is not possessive. It is diffusive. That is why I tell her, "You are the most precious," not in the exclusive sense that others may feel offended, but in the sense of sharing so that others, too, may fall in love with her and so that others may also discover their own distinct beauty.

So, in accordance with the allegory, I will divide this story into five stages: how I met her, the first love, the first separation, mature love, and finally, presence in the absence.

HOW I MET HER

The first thing that many ask me is how I met the CPRs. If I am to recall the story of our love, it is necessary to remember the first encounter: Where did I see her, maybe from a distance, without much interest in her? How did I begin to look at her and think about her? What were the things that I told her? How did she answer me? And everything else that goes with falling in love.

I will try to pull up memories from my well in order to express the dialectic between such deep sentiments (which are difficult to objectify) and the actual events in the communities; between such unique beauty and the denial of transcendent beauty; about a succession of events that become clearer only when one distances oneself from their unfolding.

~ 1 ~
Her Look and the Threads of Her Necklace

You stole my heart
with just a single one of your looks,
with just one of the threads of your necklace.
—Song of Songs 4:9

To uncover the origins of this love, I have to return to my days studying theology in Innsbruck, Austria, from 1961 to 1965. At that time, there were no CPR communities, but there were indigenous Guatemalans whom I began to know from a distance when I started studying the marvelous book, *Popul Vuh* (or *Pop Vuh* as it is now known). Such a potent yet overwhelming attraction! A literature professor told us that books deemed immortal are characterized by the devastating effect they have on the reader. This sacred book of the Quichés[2] had such an effect on me and led me to study anthropology.

In those years I turned my life completely around toward the poor. This grace did not happen to me in Central America but in Europe, although it was always in relation to the poor of the Central American countries. My attitude changed dramatically. I spent my vacations living with Spanish laborers, sharing their hard life and working with a pickax and a shovel on road construction. I not only stopped skiing out of solidarity with the poor, but I also began to see things from their point of view. I had been accustomed to pass by in a car and watch the men cleaning the ditches and filling the potholes. Now I was one of them. And when tourists gave us cigarettes through their car windows, I could imagine perfectly well how those on the

outside saw us. It was a change of vision, one that I did not want to let go of. It was a new option that took me to the poorest of the poor and the forsaken of Guatemala, the indigenous people.

Later I came to know in flesh and blood the Quichés of San Antonio Ilotenango when i went ot Guatemala in 1969 and 1970. They were *los jateados*[3] who were hauled in a truck like animals to the southern coast to pick cotton. They still guarded in their heart the culture of their ancestors, which revealed itself when they talked about the names given for the different relationships in the family, names that while studying in Innsbruck I was not able to recognize. The resistance of this marvelous culture became more evident to me as time passed, but I still did not know anything about the CPRs, which were only in the mind of our eternal Father.

Up until this point, the beautiful character of the Guatemalan people radiated absolute love. I called it the look of love. But there came a moment, paralleling my own personal evolution, when that look of love became painfully intense. With the help of Sacred Heart Missionaries, I learned up close about the blood that was being spilled in Nebaj, Cotzal and Chajul, and of the struggle that had begun in this rough mountain terrain. I felt that this look left me naked inside, that the death and pain demanded things from me, and that this look coincided with God's call to empty myself completely. The look no longer gave me aesthetic feelings of beauty, but rather the opposite. It was the absence of all beauty, which is death. It was the power of blood that "objectified" the situation and brought me closer to knowing the truth in a purer form.

The spirit of these people rose in the night and sometimes came to visit me in my dreams. I said it was the *nahual*,[4] which is nothing like a ghost because it did not scare me. The *nahual* showed me symbolic scenes in which I could see my own life. Once I dreamed of the priest of Cotzal whom I had recently visited in the hospital. From his sick bed, he had begun to cry because that year (1979) as many as fifty people had been killed or disappeared. This great man, crying! When I dreamed about him, I understood instinctively that the *nahual* of Cotzal rose from the blood and came to me to demand that I renounce everything. This powerful *nahual* etched in my heart—not

with ink but with spirit (2 Corinthians 3:3)—the eyes of the loved one. But the loved one was not yet the CPRs.

Later, because of a series of circumstances not related to the repression, I left Guatemala and, with a group of brother Jesuits, went to help with the reconstruction process in *Nicaragua, Nicaragüita.*[5] It never occurred to me that the loved one might be jealous, and I threw myself into the work, walking from village to village in Jinotega, absorbed in the cause of our sister country. I dove into the *campesino*[6] life in Nicaragua's mountains and immersed myself in the countryside where anti-Sandinista sentiment was beginning to be brewed by the counterrevolutionaries known as the *Contras*. This was in 1980.

Here comes the story of the threads of the necklace, which is radically different from the experience of the look of love. The look was already etched too deeply in my heart. Circumstances were taking hold of me, compelling me to return once again to Guatemala. One of the circumstances, one of these threads, was our Jesuit brother, Fernando Hoyos, who took up arms. In his September 9, 1980, letter, he told to us that he was joining the uprising in a place in the Guatemalan mountains (which he could not name) and, though he was not asking permission to leave the Society of Jesus,[7] he recognized that he could no longer fulfill his responsibilities to his congregation. He said, "As always, I am taking this step filled with hope and based on the principle that my primary loyalty is to the people in whom God is present and for whom we are instruments." Fernando, too, had fallen in love with the people. It was a love that called him to the armed struggle, and ultimately to sacrifice his own life.

We could tell that in the dialectic between his two loyalties, Fernando's sense of belonging to the Jesuits was eroding. We tried to keep links with him in the hopes that he would return to where he first learned to love the poor, but his guerrilla life, in which he quickly rose to the National Directorate, involved him in a way that was exclusive of other commitments. In March 1981, Fernando asked that we no longer consider him a member of our family and profession, a request we respected, though it pained us deeply.

His example presented a powerful challenge to me—not to aban-

don the priesthood and leave the Jesuits—but to attempt something similar, if not so heroic, based on my own religious and priestly identity. If Fernando did it, why couldn't I? The lesson we learned, as his friends, was that dual loyalties were practically impossible to maintain on the battlegrounds or in times of war. Even in other circumstances or times, such duality is a rare charisma. This was the first thread of the necklace, the first circumstance, that began to pull me back to Guatemala.

A second thread was the invitation to return either as a priest or as an anthropologist to work in the Guatemalan countryside. One of these invitations came to me in December 1980 while I was in Nicaragua, through a brother Jesuit, Luís Eduardo Pellecer.[8] It seemed that the war was expanding to eastern Guatemala, and the invitation proposed, in a vague way, that I attend to pastoral work in that area. Other invitations came to me from brothers, now in Nicaragua, who had been forced to leave Guatemala because of the repression. Each one still desired to continue serving pastorally in the Guatemalan war zones, although each one had a remarkably different idea in mind.

This second thread pulled tighter when Fr. Pellecer was kidnapped in June 1981, and the Jesuit presence in Guatemala became weaker. I felt the call to return even more strongly. In mid-July 1981, I proposed an outline of a pastoral plan to a group of fellow Jesuits who felt the idea was inspired by God, but they emphasized, nevertheless, a few aspects of the proposal, such as keeping a religious identity. "If we value our vocation as Jesuits," they said, "we have to act with consistency and use all our means to maintain our religious commitment." They mentioned the experience of Fr. Rogelio Ponseele in the Department of Morazán in El Salvador, who was serving as a priest in the war zones.[9] Ignacio Ellacuría was enthusiastic about the idea of accompanying civilians in conflictive areas and, even though he was not at this meeting, he had great influence on our plans.[10]

In time, we presented our deliberations to César Jérez who was the Jesuit provincial for Central America and, with his characteristic clarity and common sense, Jérez gave the green light, but only after warning me "not to get involved in anything having to do with arms."

This was the beginning of 1982.

I was the only Jesuit to be part of the pastoral team proposed in this plan, and though I describe the channels that I went through, the initiative for this work was not primarily the Jesuits'. With time, the others involved will take their turn and tell the story from their point of view.

The basic outline of the plan, as I perceived it then, was:

Justification of my presence: Civilians, even those who have chosen a revolutionary option, have the right to be accompanied by the pastoral service of the church they have chosen;

Nature of the work: pastoral (priestly); self-defense of the civilian population; research and denunciation of injustices (possible for me);

Selection of people:

a. Prior requirements: good health; physical capability; psychological maturity; knowledge of Guatemala; clear religious identity; clear sense of the struggle; the formal or informal sponsorship of a Christian group or family;

b. Motivational requirements (in the negative sense): people should not be motivated by escapism, nor seek to instrumentalize either Christianity or revolution, nor make this a last minute decision, nor be pushed into this by other circumstances;

c. Motivational requirements (in the positive sense): signs of good motivation such as clarity, coherence, simplicity, sincerity, happiness and internal peace;

d. Should have the support of one's religious community which helps strengthen one's internal resistance;

Coordination: approval of the bishop; coordination with the guerrillas;

Possible areas of work: Chimaltenango or El Quiché (the Ixcán was not mentioned);

Beginning date: February 1982.

As possible areas of assignment, the highlands of Chimaltenango and El Quiché were mentioned. In 1981, these areas were in a state of quasi-insurrection, since government troops had abandoned the zones almost entirely and the guerrillas moved about without fear,

often even in vehicles. It was thought that the initial pastoral work would strengthen the self-defense capabilities of the civilian population in light of the expected military offensives by the government. But no one knew then that the offensives would turn into scorched-earth[11] massacres.

It was in this way that the look of love took hold of my heart, first as aesthetic feelings and then as a demand that forced me to empty myself, to die an inner death. Shaped by circumstances that had a big impact on all of us, the threads of the necklace were pulling me to a very specific kind of pastoral work.

~ 2 ~
The Dark Night

They beat me and they wounded me.
Those that guard the entrance to the city
violently tore off my veil!
—Song of Songs 5:7

The plan for me to go to the war zones was halted before it began. At first, with the military not present, the predominantly indigenous population was practically triumphant. Then, "those that guard[ed] the entrance to the city" decided that the indigenous peoples, in their eagerness for liberty, had dangerously crossed over the line. The indigenous were stripped, raped and killed in a scorched-earth policy that started in the rural areas just outside of the capital and extended to the corners of the country. The zones of southern El Quiché and Chimaltenango, and later the areas of Baja Verapaz and Alta Verapaz, and still later the Ixcán jungle and finally Huehuetenango were swept away as a woman sweeps a broom and meticulously leaves no dirt behind. The violence reached the northern and northwestern borders with Mexico. Under these conditions, initiating a pastoral accompaniment turned out to be impossible.

Rivers of refugees began to cross the border. They were like an abused wife fleeing the country so that the abuse will not take the life of her children. I chose then, after my first commitment to the war zones of Guatemala was aborted, to visit the refugee camps in Mexico during the first weeks of September 1982.

During my visit, the refugees told me of the terrible massacre at San Francisco, Nentón, which took place July 17, 1982. After the

massacre, a mass movement of nearly ten thousand people crossed the border to save their lives. In going from camp to camp, I heard third- or fourth-hand accounts of the massacre before I started to get closer to the actual eyewitnesses. I felt such a powerful attraction to the plight of the victim! Sociologists call it a convergence, the desire to experience the site of the disaster. At last I heard from the mouth of the crucial witness. His story proceeded deliberately, almost ceremoniously. Yet it brimmed with contained rage and grief, as he told this firsthand account of the massacre. He spoke of how six hundred soldiers arrived one Saturday morning and stayed until all the men were killed. He told of how only he had survived, without a scratch, in the midst of the pile of dead bodies, drenched in the blood of his brothers. Their blood was the blood of his salvation, because when the soldiers looked at him during the night, they mistook him for dead.[12]

A priest who accompanied me and I listened to this testimony in the school of the Mexican village of La Gloria, where survivors of San Francisco had arrived in order to attend mass the following day. Gathered around the eyewitness, a man over fifty years old, were twenty other survivors who had escaped the net of the military. They listened to him, since he was the *Principal*,[13] and only interrupted him to add a detail or two. The man struggled with his broken Spanish but managed to express everything he wanted to say. At the end of his declaration, the people treated me as if I were a judge who could bring justice by conveying their testimony. I asked them to produce a list of the dead, and they agreed. The list was intended to be read during mass the following day.

When I read the names out loud the next day, the worshippers did not break out crying. Their pain was very intense because some, like the key eyewitness, had lost as many as thirty family members and were without their wives, their children, their brothers and sisters, their grandchildren; they were alone without family. But the mass, a place of respect in their culture, was not the place to cry. I heard only a contained murmuring.

After hearing of this bloodbath, I left incredibly moved. Never in my life had I heard anything comparable from a direct witness. I

felt the responsibility to tell others what I had heard. This was the inception of what later I would call the gospel, because this mystery, where evil coexisted with God, should be told to the world. In the midst of an experience of such crushing evil, this man attributed his salvation to the power of his dead brothers to whom he offered the following prayer before escaping:

> Brothers, let me go!
> I'm going to the fields!
> Maybe I'll have luck.
> Ah, you already have your freedom.
> Let me go!
> I'm going to the fields!

And the man pulled off his boots, so as not to make noise, and jumped through the window of the room which was later burned down by the soldiers. He pulled himself on the ground like a snake and escaped under the cover of night to Mexico. He arrived in Mexico in the daylight, but darkness enveloped him on the inside. He told me in his simple Spanish:

> Around 11 o'clock I came to Santa Marta.
> But I came like a drunkard.
> I couldn't see the light of day.
> I didn't even feel sad.
> I didn't think anything.

As soon as I left the Mexican border, I communicated with a reporter from the *New York Times*, Alan Riding, and I gave him the written testimony and instructions on how he could interview this exceptional man, the man of the dark night. Alan Riding moved mountains and, attracted by the same strong force, journeyed to meet the survivors of San Francisco. On October 12, he published the report in his newspaper. Three months had passed since this horrible massacre! The massacres in Palestine, on the other hand, those of Sabra and Shatila[14] which took place in mid-September of the same

year, were published in newspapers all over the world the day aft they occurred. It was clear that we needed to break the blockade of information. The Army denied entry to anyone attempting to visit the northwestern zones where its sweeps of towns and villages were occurring, so little information on what was happening leaked out Only as time passed did the reality of those horrors begin to penetrate into the consciousness of the urban population in the capital Not only was there a clampdown on the media, but generally people did not believe that this could have happened. It was not transmitted in a way to shake them and make them believe it was the truth.

The responsibility of communicating the testimony I had heard moved me to attend the Association of American Anthropologists conference in December 1982, in Washington, D.C., where the denunciation of the horrors in Guatemala was given primary attention. In early 1983, I also participated in the Tribunal of the Peoples in Madrid, where the government of Guatemala was judged and condemned for crimes against humanity. In the Tribunal, I gave a lengthy presentation in which I offered an organized summary of my experience, and I shared the testimonies of others that recounted the terrible repression of 1981 and 1982. Unfortunately, I made mistakes in my talk because of a lack of information. I realized that there was an inexplicable vacuum of information about the Ixcán and that the testimonies themselves were unclear. For example, there was little trustworthy information about the massacre of Cuarto Pueblo where three hundred fifty people were killed, a scale of magnitude comparable to the San Francisco Nentón massacre.

While in the camps in Mexico, I also became aware of the need for pastoral attention for a group of people who had not joined the wave of refugees and were still resisting in the jungle. After a planning period, we began the work in 1983.

All of us who formed this small pastoral team—with the exception of an indigenous ex-seminarian who later was killed—could tell our own story. In my case, I received the approval of my superior to enter the Ixcán jungle for three months, with the purpose of gathering more complete testimonies from the people there. I was to focus

not just on the repressive act of a massacre, like the San Francisco massacre, but to analyze the process and system of massacres. My understanding needed to be historical, because the crimes occurred one after another. And it needed to be synthesizing, because all of the massacres were linked in a single plan. This analysis, then, was the primary objective of my visit to the Ixcán.

My second objective was the animation of faith.

And this is how I came to know "little sister, my girlfriend." As the Song of Songs (4:9) implies, my heart was stolen by a small but important group of Guatemalan indigenous people (although other *ladinos*,[15] including myself, were also present in the Ixcán). The earlier large-scale massacres had prevented our team from working in the central highlands, but the refugees of these same massacres encouraged us and acted as the bridge for us to connect with what later would be called the Communities of Population in Resistance, or CPRs.

FIRST LOVE

At last we entered the Ixcán jungle in 1983. This first contact with the people who resisted in the jungle was like a first love, a somewhat furtive and superficial first love, but an indelible experience. The impression was especially strong since the Army patrolled the area with a ruthless violence, breaking up civilian camps, persecuting the people and destroying their crops. We suffered a great deal. This first love was like a honeymoon without food or a home, always travelling, in the midst of bullet strafings and panic. It was a first love in which the poor wife became frayed and torn as groups of refugees continued to flee the zone. But, in the midst of everything, it was a firsthand love, not based on what one hears about her, but based on contact and keeping company. Although my time there with her was not long, it left a mark of commitment on me, like a baptism.

~ 3 ~
My Love Is Like a Deer

Here comes my love!
I can hear his voice!
He comes leaping over the brush
jumping from hill to hill.
My love is like a deer.
—Song of Songs 2:8

When at last we entered the jungle in September 1983, I could have compared myself to anything but a deer. In my first foray in the jungle, I tripped over tree roots. To keep from falling, I grabbed the first branch in reach, without realizing that it had thorns. Later, I made progress by looking at the ground—so as not to get my feet caught up again in roots. Then, the blow to my forehead by a low branch! Only my cap saved my bald head from a worse fate. I retrieved my glasses and then fell down into the slippery mud. At the next stream, I waded in up to my waist in order to wash off the mud without thinking how heavy the wet pants would be. And the backpack, it weighed so much! I was carrying supplies that were supposed to last three months. Sweat streamed off me. I was hungry and exhausted. And when I could finally rest, an army of mosquitoes attacked. That night, when I hoped for relief at last, those little devils buzzed around my face. And rainwater ran from a poorly erected awning down the rope that held my hammock and soaked my feet. In sum, I felt a sense of desperation and discomfort that I thought would never end.

The desperation made me retreat into myself: Why did I come here? What was my motive? Then I realized that if faith could move

mountains, maybe love could turn me into a deer, or a little deer as the Song says later (2:9). But I kept my head down close to the ground, humiliated, without titles or privileges, like an infant learning to walk.

Looking over my diary right now, I find the phrase that gave me love and consolation. "Why did I come here?" I had asked myself since that first night on the Lacantún River when the rain had drenched me to the bones. My answer was: "I have come here to witness to God and to the Church." I did not exactly know what this phrase meant. I had learned it from an elderly Jesuit who visited prisoners while I was still a novice. He had talked to the prisoners about the Trinity and other things, and the prisoners had not listened to him. "Why do you go to the jail, Father Lasquívar?" I asked him once. And he cited Psalm 50, verse 6: "So that your justice appears when you talk and your victory when you judge."

I am beginning to realize that this verse meant that my visit to a zone of resistance was God's way to show creation that He loved this persecuted and struggling people and that His church loved them too, despite the fact that too often the church was not faithful to the poor. So this little deer that jumped along (and often was tripped up by the tree roots) was not just me alone, but was also God, the true lover of this people, who continually renewed His eternal love for them.

But I did not enter the jungle alone. With me was an indigenous ex-seminarian, a man who would be kidnapped in Guatemala City years later in 1985. He was a robust young man, accustomed to life in the country. He could light a fire during a torrential downpour. He had a very attuned religious sense and a deep concern for his fellow indigenous. The two of us were greeted by another priest who had already been in the resistance movement for nine months. He was enormously happy to see us, particularly since our letters led him to believe that we would never come. The three of us had not arrived as a team at the same time because I had travelled to Spain to the Tribunal of the People in January 1983, and the young ex-seminarian had gone to Guatemala City—just as his sister became another victim of the repression against the people.

So there were now three little deer, two much younger than I

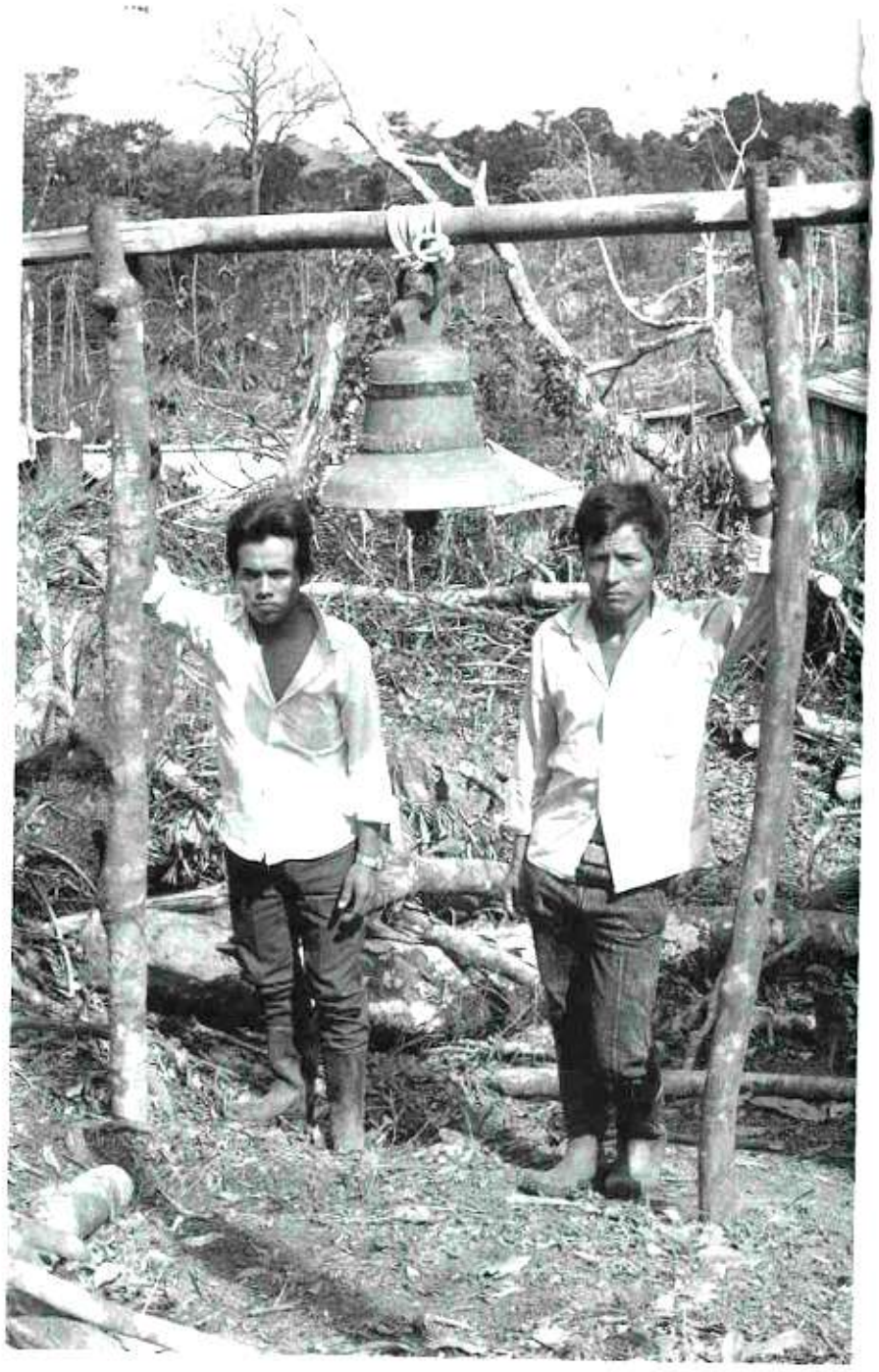
and more accustomed to the jungle. The coordinator of the team was the person who had been there the longest. He informed us of everything he had done and everything he had suffered. His boots were torn and he was covered with bites and sores. With him we developed our workplan.

After several days of meeting with the young coordinator of our pastoral team, we began our trip, leaving the communities that were in the center of the area. We headed south toward Xalbal, crossing the famous northern highway which never was completed. There we were told that the area did not offer much cover. Although the entire area was a war zone, we preferred to work in areas that were more calm. We planned to be two or three days in each community, celebrating mass, meeting with people and trying to encourage them, asking about their needs, and in my case, interviewing them about their past experiences (which later would be published in the book *Massacres in the Jungle*). Two young women who were health promoters accompanied us and were able to respond in a small way to the needs of the people. They were both Mam,[16] and their parents were refugees in Mexico. So now our team had grown to five: two health promoters and three pastoral workers.

We began our journey. These were times of dreams. Everyone dreamed. It was understandable because everyone, including me, found themselves out-of-bounds, in no-man's land, "on the threshold," as anthropologists would say. We came across the camp of one of the communities where a woman, whose nickname was Odilia, told me, "My *compañero* dreamed that tonight a priest would come—tall and fair, wearing black clothes just like yours. I didn't believe him. His dream was no good, I thought." Romeo was her husband's name. He would later become a close friend of mine and would name his son Marcos after me. Romeo's prophetic dreams told that the Loved One was coming closer. I knew that the Loved One, more than I, was the true spouse of the people. And I wondered if Romeo had heard that the "little deer" was jumping closer and closer, and falling into the thorns of the *huiscoyol* bush. In those days, the social structure and communication within the CPRs were not what they are now. Rumors circulated only with difficulty, but people were aware

that a special presence had "invaded" the area, through our humble visit. Sending apostles, as weak as we were, was a sign of God's faithfulness to the poor.

But, interestingly, Romeo had dreamed of me as "fair and tall" and I am neither one nor the other, though I was dressed in black. Why fair and tall? Soon I was able to conjure an image of the person hidden in Romeo's dream. It was that of the "gringo" who was deeply loved by those hidden in the jungle, one who had given up his life for those struggling for land in the Ixcán, for the people of Huehuetenango to have a place to live and land to cultivate. While crossing the clear blue peaks of the Cuchumatán mountains, his plane had been downed by the Army. His name was Father Bill Woods, and he was blond and of considerable stature. All of us who were involved in pastoral work in the CPRs benefited from the respect that the people had for him He, too, was the husband, married forever in a matrimony of blood to these struggling people who were hidden by the leaves of the trees, and who lived in such destitution.



~ 4 ~
A Seal on the Heart

Record me like a seal on your heart
like a tattoo on your arm,
because love is as strong as death
and passion as tenacious as hell.
—Song of Songs 8:6

We headed south towards the twelve civilian camps, each named for the person responsible for that group. They were communities, but also camps, because they were movable and temporary like survey camps.

We started our trip at the end of September and began to return from the south in mid-October when the patrolling by the Army became too much for us. We became caught in their pincers as they attacked from the east and from the west, evidently so that we would try to escape toward Mexico and fall into their clutches, to be captured or killed. My memories of those days were ones of fear, running, gunfire, tragic news, hunger, death, disappearances and the loss of the most basic elements of life. We fell into this hell and were swept along by the offensive, not knowing what else we could do except to follow the people and be present to them, letting them tattoo our hearts.

It is difficult to explain how I felt this seal. As a tattoo, it was etched with fire and blood, but as a seal on the heart, it yielded love. The fire was the suffering, the hell of persecution, that we felt along with the people. The love was a feeling, without an object, something born out of the pain—not directly from the pain, but from the deprivation produced by the pain that took away our daily life and normal way of relating. This feeling, a little like air, found expres-

sion in certain things or certain scenes, often unconnected, that occurred even in my dreams. The feeling was very strong, as strong as death, and gave me the air to breathe that allowed me to accompany the people without any doubts. It was a feeling without merit, because the feeling was a gift from the lover and a gift from God.

We found ourselves in hell. The Army camped in the jungle and could attack the camps of the civilian communities with impunity. Their infantry felt confident. They would divide into small groups of about fifteen soldiers to locate our camps. And then groups of fifty to two hundred soldiers would attack the communities—yelling and cursing as if they were storming a guerrilla fort.

We fell under one of these surprise assaults at the end of five days of constant persecution. Maybe my memory of these five days and the feelings I had then could help explain what I want to say. The first day was October 19, 1983, when our team was heading to a camp called Bonifacio. We had thought that the people at Bonifacio were safe, but when we arrived we found only smoke and ashes of campfires because the people had fled that very morning. We followed close to their tracks and caught up with a group of seventy people who were hiding in the high bush, afraid and full of doubt because they felt the soldiers in hot pursuit. This was one of the communities in resistance, in flesh and blood, not a mannequin without feelings. They were overjoyed to see us when they realized that it was us and not the soldiers who pursued them. The women offered us some food that they carried in their pots and gave us some tortillas.

We were starving and appreciated the generosity of people who fed us in the midst of their own deprivation. For us, these people were the expression of the Providence of God. We did not have to think about food or drink or even our own security. The people were all of this for us, without us bargaining or negotiating. They made our accompaniment possible. I was not aware then how abstract love started to be nurtured, but I began to feel it as we were immersed in these people, like fish in water. Now I see how that sense of abstract love started to fill my emptiness.

Within a few hours of reaching the people of Bonifacio, our scouts sent word that the Army had taken over the camp the people had abandoned that morning and where we ourselves had passed. It was now 4:00 P.M., and we left by spreading ourselves out through a cornfield so we would not leave tracks, trying to run so the soldiers would not catch up to us. To further cover our tracks, we waded up a stream, but it was hard to believe that the Army could miss a trail made by so many people. Thanks be to God, the soldiers halted their pursuit and set up their camp where the Bonafacio camp had been that morning.

During our flight, there were very touching moments. For example, an old woman, nearly blind and barefoot, could not climb out of the streambed because she kept slipping on the banks. She must have felt as though she were in a nightmare—I'd gotten stuck like that before—trying to run but not making progress. She was desperate by her impotence to the point of crying out. Her husband, also quite old, was helpless and could not pull her from the soupy mess. Because he was deaf, he thought the soldiers were closer than they actually were.

At nightfall of this first day, we camped and felt protected by the darkness. We had earned one more day of life as the soldiers, who did not like to risk movements at night, fell back. The women lit fires, the men cleared spaces in the brush, and the children looked for leaves to carpet the ground where they would sleep. The men, after raising their plastic-sheeting huts, screwed the indispensable corn grinders to branches. Nightfall was a time to rest.

Then, still nurtured by a sense of abstract love, I began to discover the significance of manna for the Israelites. At 9:00 P.M. (actually very late according to the culture of these people) we were called and given *tortillas* and greens cooked in a hot soup. The food brought us back to life and tasted like a delicious treat. "What makes this food so good?" I asked myself many times. "What is it?" "Manna," the Israelites said in their own language (Exodus 16:15). Why does it taste so good? The answer is evident: We were starving to death. But

there was something else—the love of the people gave the food a special sweetness.

That night it was my turn to dream and discover in unconsciousness this same abstract love that was struggling to express itself at every moment. I dreamed that Monsignor Casariego[17] was offering a solemn mass, but instead of standing, he was reclining in a throne layered with gold ornaments, and I was sitting at his side in a seat lower than his. In real life, Casariego had died a few months ago, but while he was still alive we had engaged in an altercation which ended when he told me that my stubborn behavior was going to give my father a heart attack. In the dream, Casariego returned to me from the dead and offered me his hand as a sign of reconciliation. I still am unsure who had changed—he, because he was purging himself of his sins and cherishing the presence of God in the heavens, or I, because I was experiencing a sense of universal love in the midst of persecution. When I woke up I felt that the old hierarch, even though he was conservative and a friend of the different military governments, approved of my witness to the church in the jungle.

The second day, October 20, broke, and we could breathe in the air a sense of security among the people. We stayed in our camp waiting for news, and nothing happened until midday when a messenger came with disturbing information. A nearby settlement had been captured by surprise under a rain of bullets from the Army. Bonifacio attempted to calm the people—and calm the team as well—with a few words I still remember: "God would not allow for everyone to get captured by the *pintos*.[18] Maybe only five have been killed." Bonifacio spoke from his experience that many people escape during surprise attacks, and he recounted his experience of faith in God, who does not forget His people even though He may appear absent. Bonifacio, a man from Ixtahuacán, showed the faith of a prophet when he repeated the words of Yahweh to his community: "Look! In the palm of my hand is your tattoo; your walls are before me perpetually." (Isaiah 49:16) He believed that God would not abandon the people. Later we learned that only one woman of the entire community had been killed in the attack.

On the third day, October 21, Bonifacio's group changed its lo-

cation because our scouts said that the cries of the children could be heard from the cornfields from which we had fled two days earlier. That afternoon we celebrated a mass reflecting on the book of Judith, a woman who was the model of resistance. But the people were tired. Many slept in their seats, and a few trembled with malarial chills (there was not a single chloroquine tablet in the area).

On this day, and on previous occasions, I took advantage of unoccupied times by interviewing the people about their history. The interviews were a time of intense communication. The people shared their lives with me, and in return I gave them my attention. One person however, at the end of our interview, challenged me with the following question: "Are you prepared to die here with us?" Of course I answered immediately, "Yes." But later I stayed and meditated on whether my word was truthful, and I searched inside of myself for the reasons that moved me to accept death with them here in the jungle. I felt that for me it would be a gift to die with them because with them lies salvation. However, the challenge of the people stung me and left its mark on me.

On the fourth day, Saturday October 22, the pastoral team packed up, bid our good-byes to Bonifacio and his group and left for a nearby camp. Our intention was to visit all of the camps that we could. We arrived quickly at Benito's group, which was close by and had encamped in the same place now for six days (which in those days was a record). For that reason, perhaps, I could sense a more jovial air. We spent all day Saturday visiting from hut to hut and preparing the mass for the following day which would focus again on the story of Judith.

In fact, on the fifth day, Sunday, October 23, we did celebrate the mass and even sing. Benito, who was from Ixtahuacán, translated the story of Judith into Mam. Everything seemed normal, but we knew the Army was still occupying the abandoned camp of Bonifacio and was probably sending out exploratory patrols to catch the people by surprise.

That is exactly what happened. At 4:30 P.M. we heard the loud explosions of gunfire over our heads. Our camp was located in a depression between two small hills. We heard the shots on the edge

of camp as if the Army were invading and shooting at us. We all thought that the soldiers were going to kill us, so we grabbed what was at hand and fled. I had my knapsack ready, and only a sock was hanging outside to dry. I grabbed it, put the knapsack on my back, and grabbed a few tortillas, a couple of ears of corn and a gourd filled with corn drink from the hut where we had lunched. When the shooting began, I felt as if my heart were going to come out of my throat, but as we began to move my fright subsided, and we fled down the hill.

These were save-yourself-if-you-can flights and were full of scenes that tore one's heart, such as the barefoot woman in the ravine as I mentioned before. There I began to understand another experience: what it is like to feel powerless. One woman who wore a colorful *huipil*[19] cried from her impotence. She was unable to carry her load because a few days earlier she had caught her foot on a sharp stake of a homemade trap.[20] A little later a grown man cried from beneath his load, on top of which perched his sick wife, who he was afraid would die. And what could we do? What could I do? The best anyone could do was help carry a blanket or something that otherwise would be left behind. But nothing else. We were all fleeing. We felt impotent to help others and we contented ourselves with offering a word of encouragement.

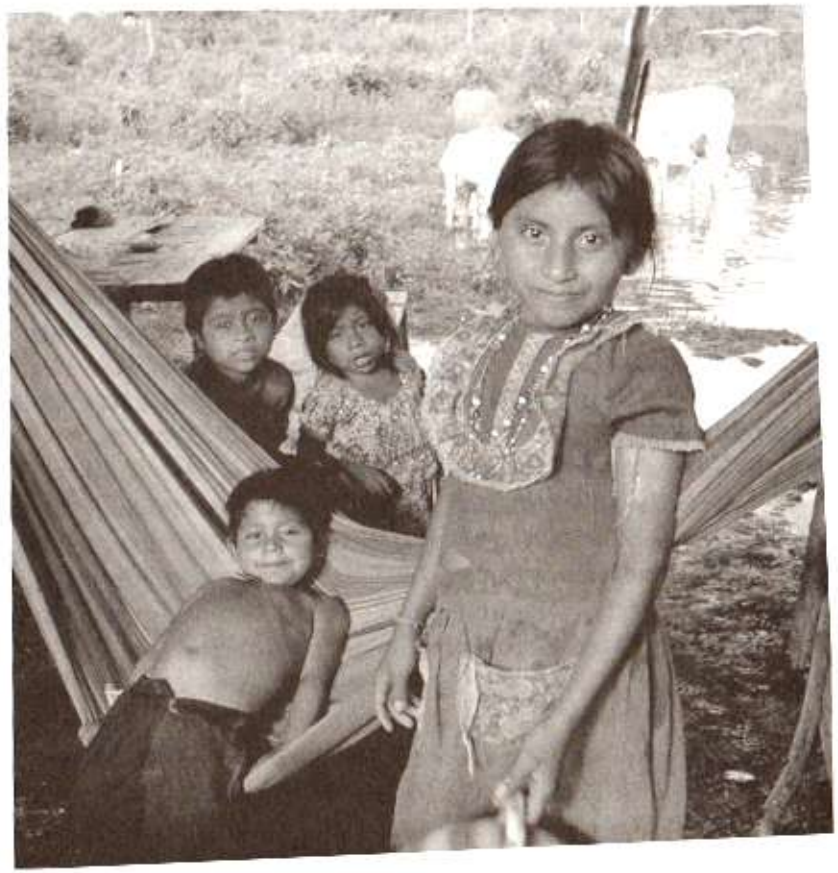
In spite of all of this, I felt love present. I asked myself: "How can impotence be related with the presence of love? If love consists of giving and receiving, in communicating, how can impotence communicate love? What could I communicate?" Here we were not the Church that helped the poor with food, clinics, housing, land or denunciation. We were the diminutive church that did nothing for them but be with them and follow them, receiving from them food and protection, and offering nothing in return except our presence, if this was valued.

That afternoon we walked until the sky darkened and groups from different encampments began to gather in one place, including Bonifacio's people, until we had formed a community of two hundred starving and frightened people. There we learned exactly what had happened. The Army had not caught Benito's group off-guard

where we had just been, but rather, it had caught Bonifacio's group, where we had been earlier. But since the two communities were close to each other, we had heard the attack as if it were on top of us. Bonifacio counted his people and many were missing. A sense of great uncertainty spread because it was not known how many had been killed and how many had been trapped. Now Bonifacio hesitated and could not say, "It is not possible for God to let all of us get caught by the *pintos*," because he was overwhelmed, without words and without information.

Days later we learned that two women had been killed—the first from a bullet that struck her in the face as she fled, and the second, wounded from a shot in the hip and later raped (judging from the signs of her pulled skirt, her open legs and her swollen stomach). The second woman had also been knifed in the neck. Her ears had been cut off and she was scalped, since soldiers often took trophies to the officers to show off. Also, three children were lost. They were probably captured by the Army since their parents never found them in the jungle despite their loss-crazed combing of the area for several weeks.

During the course of twenty days, the Ixcán communities had lost four people to death and three children to disappearances. I did not see the dead with my own eyes because they were left behind. Very few relatives had the courage to return to bury them even after the Army had moved its position.



~ 5 ~
Out of the Darkness of Night

I am dark, yet lovely,
my skin darkened by the sun.
I am like the tents of the Bedouin
and the tent awnings of Solomon.
—Song of Songs 1:5

Because of the persecution of the communities by the Army, the guerrillas decided that I should leave the territory of Guatemala in order to protect my life. They were responsible for my security, according to the agreement made before my arrival. I argued and argued, but finally I obeyed. I had been dragged along by events, and I joined the march of refugees who were abandoning the country in large numbers. And on the march, the concealed beauty of my love revealed herself to me, hidden behind her skin darkened by suffering.

On Wednesday, November 9, I was led to a group of one hundred forty persons who were hiding in a hollow preparing themselves for their departure to Mexico. It was difficult to find them because they were so quiet, afraid of the Army which was patrolling the areas around Cuarto Pueblo. The group was made up of twenty-one families who had belonged to six different camps. Those from farthest away had been walking for two days, and along the march, other communities had joined in like small streams that formed a river.

Around 10:00 A.M., the slow march to Mexico began, quiet and orderly toward the border. Each group that came from a different camp had its own coordinator in case of attack or gunfire. The whole column also had a coordinator, whose name was Ezequiel, who would

present the list of everyone's name to the Mexican immigration authorities. The march was arduous. Most men carried on their backs a sack filled with their things and a plastic water jug hanging from the sack. A child might sit on top of the sack and hold on dearly to the neck of his or her father. A woman might carry another sack and jug but instead of strapping the child on her back, she would carry him or her near her breast. We made our way by either picking through the jungle or cutting a trail. The parents had to be careful to duck down low so that the child would not be struck by the branches, cut by the sharp leaves of the *navajuela,*[21] pricked by thorns or snared by vines. Inevitably, the sacks would get tangled in the branches and the empty water jugs would sound like drums as the branches struck them.

As we began the march, I felt so profoundly fortunate, undeservingly full of joy, in being able to go with these poor and persecuted people. The face of the little girl being carried right in front of me seemed so lovely against the red *huipil* cloth from Todos Santos. The face of the woman who was sweating so heavily carrying her sack on the uphill march, her lips as thick as those of Indians in the museums, mesmerized me. She possessed the beauty of centuries, and her facial features were marked by courage. As we advanced, the infant who was being carried on her back gave off the smell of urine, which I was not so successfully able to transform, as did Quixote, into a delicious perfume. But it was the smell of a people who suffer. My fortune was to be in a small way identified with my lover, whom I admired and loved more every day.

These are not thoughts that I invented later. Rather, I felt them all in the moments as they occurred and recorded them in my diary. Seeing these faces, the words of Fernando Hoyos came to me: that, in the people, one feels the presence of God. Fernando gave great importance to these very real faces, so much so that the famous passage from the Puebla document[22] had its origin indirectly in his words.

We took several short breaks during the march, and one long one to eat lunch. I was making contact with the people, most of whom I did not know. I followed Ezequiel, as he worked his way down the column from the head to the rear. There I offered him food I was carrying and his immediate reflex was to offer me *pinol*,[23] which had

a slight taste of kerosene, and a bag of raw, ground rice.

At last, after several hours of walking, we arrived close to the border. Instead of crossing, we waited for Bonifacio's group, which we expected to reach us a bit later. We walked down to a growth of cardamom bushes, which we hoped would dampen the noise we were making in the ravine. We stayed there even though our scouts had found a small stream nearby. After resting a little, I went to visit people and I discovered that each family had already cleared a place where they would sleep that night. They had cut big leaves to carpet the damp earth and had gathered firewood. It seems they had made so much noise that they had been reprimanded by our watchmen who, from the high part of our encampment, could hear the roosters from the Guatemalan refugee camp, known as Puerto Rico. The watchmen feared that our noise could be heard in Mexico.

Later that night, a man from San Ildefonso Ixtahuacán, who now is a member of the Permanent Commissions,[24] invited me for supper. Sitting very comfortably on the leaves of his area, we ate a meal I will never forget. It was the "supper that re-creates and loves," as St. John of the Cross says. The area was illuminated by a kerosene wick, and we ate next to the fire. The women—I don't know how and when—had gathered some greens called *quilete dulce* and had prepared a hot soup that was so good it would raise the dead. We had the soup with tortillas as always. This would be the last time they would eat greens because in the overcrowded conditions of the refugee camps, greens could not be found. In the faces lit by the fire of this supper, there were no tears, only a tremendous peace, which was incredible because it was as if they were not being expelled from their land by force.

The night was serene. It did not rain.

The next day, Friday, November 11, we consumed a tremendous breakfast of heart of palm. This was the reason the watchmen had protested the day before—people had been cutting the high palm trees. The heart of the trunk of the palm trees is edible and is sometimes called "dove," for its likeness to the white meat of these birds.

Later, before leaving us, our guides (who would be returning to Guatemala) called a long meeting and left us with words of advice:

The people should not abandon the struggle, and we should not be too trusting about our new place. I, too, offered a few words, comparing our departure to that of Joseph, Mary and Jesus, who abandoned their country for a period in order to save their lives. I related how the angel had entrusted Joseph to keep watch for the signal marking the day they could return. But the people were very nervous, thinking about their identification papers left behind in Guatemala and about the instructions they had given for the objects left behind hidden in the mountains—things like salt, clothing, hoes and other items. Later, Ezequiel made a list of all present. There were one hundred forty people. Still, Bonifacio and his group had not appeared.

We left our temporary camp behind and walked to the Mexican border. There our guides, who had accompanied the people, stopped and prepared to turn back. The good-byes began. Since I was leaving Guatemala too, I started my good-byes to our guides and felt the surge of emotion that was forming in my chest. It was not so much because I would never see them again—I hoped to appeal to levels higher than the guerrillas in the field in order to return to the CPRs—but because I felt the depth of the good-byes for the one hundred forty people leaving Guatemala.

Seeing a father say good-bye to his daughter and watching her face as she cried, I felt that my own tears would burst out, but I managed to contain myself. I could picture the father walking back to Guatemala, alone with the memory of the face of his daughter, and it reminded me of the memories of so many faces that I had left behind in my life because of wrenching separations. Faces and more faces came to me. Then, memories of my whole life—full of ruptures that began in my childhood, such as the early death of my mother—overwhelmed me.

We crossed the border from Guatemala into Mexico at landmarker fifty-six and kept walking five more minutes along a stream. We were now refugees. Everything was calm. We had left behind the persecution and the war. We were leaving behind the darkness of night. Then we all sat down as Ezequiel proceeded farther into this foreign country to present himself to the watchmen of the refugee camp. An hour later he returned saying he was sure that they

were reactionaries and *pura lata*[25] because they didn't believe him and wanted to see the people for themselves. Ezequiel told me to retreat into the bushes so that the refugee watchmen wouldn't see me.

So it was time for me now to say good-bye to the refugees. There were two sets of farewells, first to our guides in Guatemala and now to the refugees here in Mexico. I was to stay here at the border, solitary and alone, because I could not enter the camp with the refugees. Ezequiel promised to show me a house where I could sleep and then to return for me the next day.

I said my good-byes, one by one. I kissed the hand of an old woman. Who knows what she would think? The ball of tears welled up inside me again, but I didn't cry until later when I lay hidden on the other side of the stream. There, I cried, then sobbed, for more than half an hour in a cry that seemed to represent the anguish of my whole life. Later I sat on a stone and started to write like crazy because the tears had left me feeling clean and composed inside. It was a very precious gift, like a grace from God. It was an old cry from a few years earlier, during the most painful rupture of my life, which led me to become His adopted son by the power of the Spirit. It was the cry St. Paul declared in Romans 8:15—the one all of the children were crying, "*Abba!* Father!" Some may believe that crying is not manly, but I found in this cry the secret of my life, which is the mystery of the Trinity—the mystery of why God, with the irrepressible force of the Spirit, asks for the sacrifice of his beloved Son, his most loved treasure.

Only later did I understand how this grace of the indescribable groans of the spirit[26] could join with a penetrating look to discover beauty in suffering faces.

I wrote and wrote about everything I felt and everything that had happened. Soon I was covered by a cloud of mosquitoes. I set up my portable tent and my hammock because a torrential rain was approaching. Mosquitoes were a sign of a coming downpour, but they did not keep me from scrawling down my experiences onto the little sheet of paper I always carried in my shirt pocket.

I was not hungry. All I had consumed was a little bit of milk

mixed with the *pinol* that smelled of kerosene. When night fell, I rested. I thought that maybe a real tiger would come, as opposed to a metaphorical tiger, but the night was tranquil even though it rained, and I felt a deep peace. I was in complete solitude, on the brink of the two countries, not in Mexico and not in Guatemala, but on the border. I was on the threshold of the world. The verse of St. John of the Cross came to me, the one with four *f*'s:

Ni cogeré las flores,
ni temeré las fiernas.
Y pasaré los fuertes y fronteras.

I will not pick the flowers,
nor will I fear the wild beasts;
and I will go past forts and borders.

Despite feeling peaceful, I woke several times during the night, each time because of a different dream, but each dream meant something for that moment. Among other things, I dreamed that I entered a theater where there were many people dressed in black, all very elegant. My father seemed to be there, though he was dead. At the entrance to the theater I asked what this was all about, what play was being presented? *Philoctetes* by Sophocles, I was told, a Greek tragedy in which I had acted as a Jesuit student. Curiosity got to me, and so I asked who was playing Philoctetes, and I saw that it was Juan Ramón Moreno, who had played Ulysses many years ago. All of a sudden, I began to feel that I too was part of the tragedy even though I wasn't in that scene. Then another picture of the dream came to me. Leaving the theater I suddenly saw in the distance a man dressed in rags sitting on the sidewalk. He was an actor. I saw his dishevelled face and his open mouth crying out in pain. He was yelling, reciting the verses from *Philoctetes*, verses I thought I recognized. I broke down crying, still in my dream, and then knelt crying at a railing.

It occurred to me that in all my study of the classics, I had never imagined that Philoctetes represented the image of the poor and was

the prefiguration of Jesus Christ. Philoctetes, the good-for-nothing, was me, as I was then and am now. Philoctetes, according to the Greeks, was a seaman whom Ulysses had left abandoned on a deserted island because he had contracted a foul-smelling gangrene infection on his foot. But Philoctetes did not die on the island, thanks to Hercules' bow. What I could not imagine at the time was that Juan Ramón Moreno would be one of the six Jesuit martyrs of the Central American University (UCA) in El Salvador.

During this luminous night in one of my frequent wakings, I discerned that the bliss I had felt the day earlier while walking with the refugees was the response of the Father to a petition I had been making for a long time. The petition was that He would put me with his Son. In this naked bliss I understood that the Father had placed me with His Son for all time.[27]

Now I see that this was the same experience of the seal on the heart, except now I could detect three more things. First, the generalized love, which I discovered last month, forced me to see the beauty of my beloved in the faces of the people. The beloved was the people. Second, if the people were the beloved of the Beloved, I could see in them the face of the Beloved, the most beloved Son of the Father. And lastly, since I had been placed with the Son, I could see my own self in the beloved and the Beloved. I could be in touch with the most wrenching pain of my life and recognize in it, as well as in the march of the refugees, a strong identification with the suffering people and with the Son. I understood that the Father had placed me with His Son for good.

FIRST SEPARATION

After the first short and intense experience of love came the separation, which lasted three years, from 1984 until 1987. During this time of absence, I yearned for the face of my lover and I began to work on behalf of these people, by making sure that their story was heard, by serving as the interpreter of their voice, and in a certain way, by being a prophet who denounces persecution and announces a new way.

In the following chapter, I will talk about my experience as an anthropologist doing social investigation that later culminated in the book *Massacres in the Jungle*. In order to describe both the collecting of material and the remembering of the experience, part of the chapter covers the time I was still in the Ixcán before the separation. This was the time I was trying to describe on paper the face and the history of my beloved. In the second part I will try to reexperience, with the strength of the love that left a seal on my heart, what I had written earlier, although reliving the experience is not without difficulties.

~ 6 ~
The Trilogy

This is the Song of Songs.
The time of the songs has arrived.
—Song of Songs 1:1-2, 12

To sing the song of songs of a struggling people in resistance, inspiration and the spirit of love are not sufficient. One needs a serious collection of facts and events of the time period encompassed by the narrative of the song. I had to dedicate nearly five months to collecting information. I obtained all of it in the jungle as I accompanied the people while they fled the soldiers in the Ixcán and while they rested in Mexico at the refugee camp called Puerto Rico, a place on the banks of the Lacantún River. These were the same people in resistance—the same beloved—whether hiding underneath the cover of trees or sunning on the banks of this river of jade. These were the same people whose story needed to be told, the story of how their sisters and brothers had been killed and how the people had survived and built a new life.

During the months from the end of 1983 until early 1984, I collected six hundred fifty pages of information, handwritten in my cramped writing style, and interviewed more than two hundred people from all walks of life. When I travelled in the area of the resistance, I carried a folded piece of paper, wrapped in plastic, in my shirt pocket, where I would note my immediate observations and reflections, which often were the richest material. The folded paper meant that I didn't have to take off my knapsack to take out a notebook. While walking, I would make notes of things so I didn't lose the freshness. The collection of my rough notes formed what I called my field diary, which

was the source of my personal inspiration for the canticle I wished to compose.

I also carried a notebook in my backpack in which I recorded my interviews with the people (instead of my personal or fleeting thoughts jotted on the folded papers). The notebook was also loaded with inspiration—not mine, the people's. It was a precious treasure, wrapped in a plastic bag for protection against the heavy rains, and written in hieroglyphics for protection against the Army. During the marches and in the days of persecution, we had a lot of downtime to talk with people about their history, from the time they left the highlands to colonize the Ixcán jungle to the last *campesino* movements in the jungle. I never used a cassette recorder because it would have required batteries and tapes which would be too heavy to carry.

During the course of the interviews, the three parts of a trilogy were being drawn: the birth and development of the organization of the people from 1966 to 1981; the large-scale massacres of 1982; and the resurgence of the resistance from 1982 on.

In the refugee camp, conversation was easier than during the flights through the jungle. The owner of the house, the group representative or another person would bring the person to be interviewed. For example, if the topic was about the massacre in Cuarto Pueblo, they would bring survivors from this cooperative. The person transformed into a witness. Then, like links in a chain, that person would offer names of other witnesses and bring them to me. These witnesses also compiled the lists of the people who were massacred and who had belonged to the centers of this sadly famous cooperative. Resting in the refugee camps gave the people time to assimilate the experience of the repression and restructure it in their minds. For those resisting in the Ixcán, the repression was still all too present. For the refugees, their history was already in the first steps of conversion into myth, but with the abundance of witnesses we came close to objectivity, even though the full truth is unreachable.

The second step in the reconstruction of this history, which would make an epic poem, was to analyze all of the material and edit the trilogy. It was a difficult period for me because of the complete absence of the lover—I was first in Mexico and then in El Salvador

from February 1984 until mid-1986. Those were two years of intense and lonely work as I tried to integrate inspiration and the spirit of love on one hand with dry analysis and patient synthesis on the other.

The first thing I did upon arriving in Mexico was to reread all of the material from my field diary and notebooks. I was like someone in love pouring over the letters of the woman he loves, trying to make her present. I wrote subtitles in the margins with a red pencil, underlined the relevant parts, and set up a reference for each item. A slow but fruitful method, because the information fell into place, and little by little the figure of the hidden face appeared, as did the inner rhythm enclosed in the entrails of the people.

I was realizing that material from the field was not enough even though it ran with blood and tears. In order to penetrate more deeply into the interior music of the beloved, theory was needed. I used a study about *campesino* organization in El Salvador and fixed on the question that was used to develop its hypothesis, the key idea in the study: "Why do *campesinos* organize themselves?"

In addition to oral tradition and theory, written sources are indispensable, especially to situate the exact time of the narrated events. The primary sources are the newspapers and magazines of Guatemala, the communiques of the revolutionary organizations, and the denunciations of human rights organizations such as Amnesty International (which permitted me to review their archives in London). I also reread with great care the book by a U.S. anthropologist who lived in the Ixcán in the 1960s and wrote a long thesis about the organization and problems of the cooperatives.

Within the process of writing and editing, the most arduous task is synthesizing. Each chapter had its own conclusions, but the whole needed to be crowned with a synthesis of the processes from 1966 until 1981. It cannot be done from memory or done impressionistically. I had to rewrite everything so that all of the stages fit within a single work. Then I had to reflect on the passage of these fifteen agitated years, contrasting the processes with my hypothesis.

The first volume of the trilogy filled almost seven hundred pages, leaving me debilitated and with the inspiration for the song somewhat diminished. Maybe the lover was too far from me, or maybe the

abstraction of the work destroyed the object.

I should emphasize that this work did not result in *Massacres in the Jungle*, rather it led to unpublished manuscripts out of which *Massacres in the Jungle* was born, albeit with a different focus. These manuscripts are what my interviewer in *Crónica*[28] (February 19-25, 1993) called "the books of war." The books were not about the war, although they had much to do with the war; rather, they were about the organizing strategies of the *campesinos* in the Ixcán.

Undertaking the second volume, specifically about the massacres in 1982, I changed the method and adopted a literary genre that was more testimonial than academic.

Meanwhile, I asked a few friends to read the first of the trilogy, and their judgements were very favorable, although they advised me not to publish the work because the events were still too recent. I joked with Ignacio Martín-Baró, who later would become one of the six martyrs of the UCA. "Look, Nacho," I told him, "did you know that in the U.S. they say 'publish or perish'? Here one should say, 'Perish, then publish' because what I am writing will not see the light of day except after many years, long after I am dead." Ignacio responded that in El Salvador the relationship between publishing and dying was different. "Here with us," he said, "it is exactly the opposite; we would say, 'Publish, then perish.'" It seems he was right.[29]

With my efforts lagging and results declining, I managed to finish the second volume of the trilogy and told myself, "Okay up to now, but no more. I am not writing just for the sake of history." I did not rush into the third volume. At that time, in 1986, a new plan for pastoral accompaniment was being formed by the Committee of Parcel-Owners of the Ixcán (CPI), the leaders of the CPRs and a church group. I signed myself up in the hope that my superiors, who had showed tolerance and an infinite patience toward me over the past two years while I closed myself into a room as a professional writer, would allow me to return.

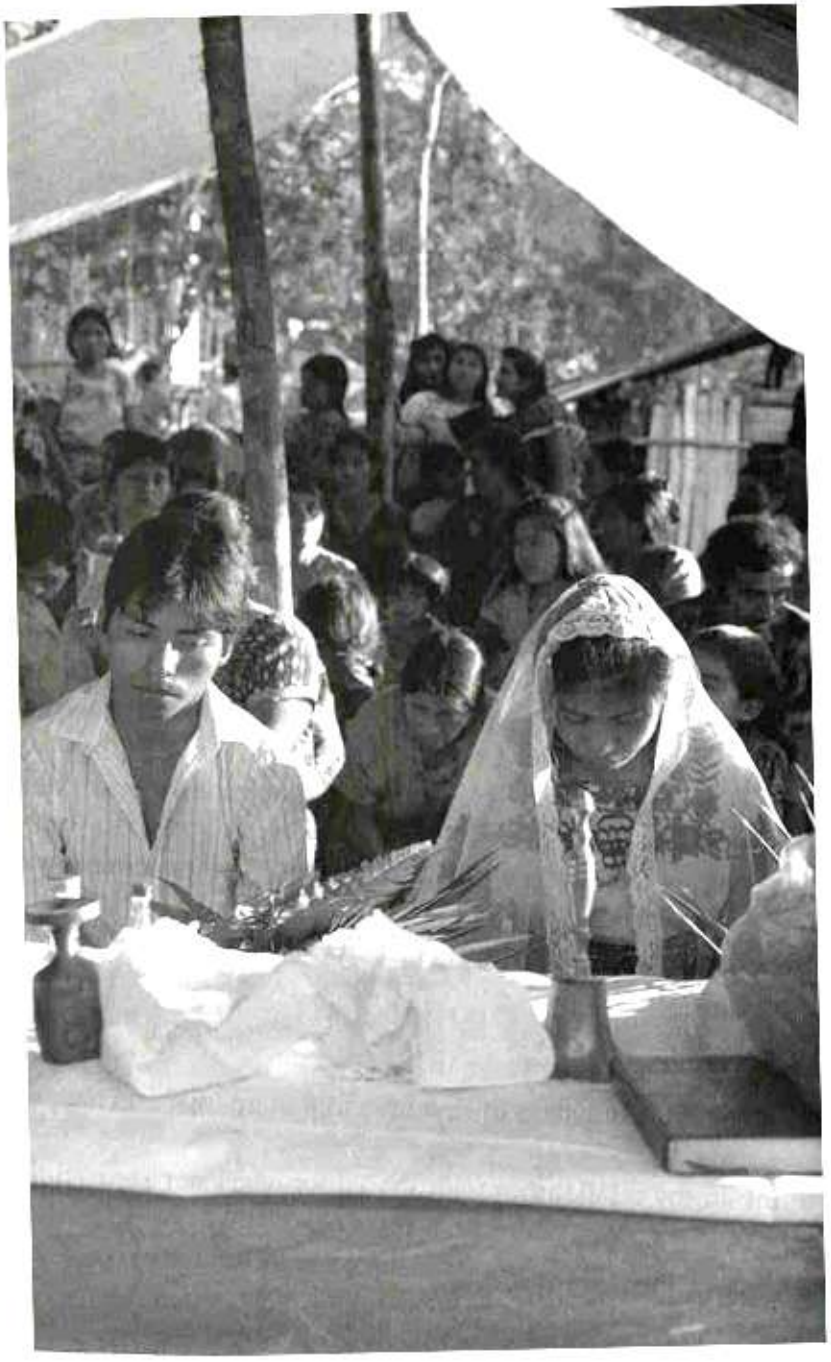
But it was not to be. I was sent to Honduras for a year where I tried to keep the flame of love alive, through a time of doubt, by visiting my fraying beloved who had been driven from Chiapas to

the border with Belize. Every three months I flew there to reunite myself with her and serve her by helping the refugees, some of whom I had met in 1983 alongside the river of jade. My song had been left inconclusive and my failing inspiration was the proof that I needed the presence of my beloved. But time took its toll and the proposal to return to the CPRs did not materialize. It was in this moment of vacillation that a Jesuit friend, who knew of my love, kept me going and reminded me that God sometimes required us to wait patiently in hope.

MATURE LOVE

Mature love is stronger than first love. It does not disappear with the first storm. It is not so romantic, but mature love knows how to romance. Mature love becomes a project of life. It is not clandestine; it grows under the watch of others. It is patient and helpful. It deepens during the crisis of separation. It is not possessive and is not jealous even when it sees the beloved with another. Mature love is sincere, and speaks out loud instead of keeping silent about the things it feels. Amid the frankness, it grows and becomes robust. Mature love does not idealize one's beloved, rather it knows her deeply and loves her for who she is, accepting her without being blind to her defects.

The transformation of first love to mature love was happening to me in my relationship with the CPRs when our separation occurred, but later the prospects arose for a more definitive permanence.



~ 7 ~
I Find Her Married

My beloved is golden brown,
unmistakable among thousands of men.
—Song of Songs 5:10

Julio went back in November 1986. We should have gone together, but a series of circumstances made it impossible for me. So while he reinitiated the pastoral work of resistance in the Ixcán, I went to Honduras. If it had not been for a few sustaining "getaways" to visit the Guatemalan refugees, I might have forgotten my beloved. The refugees were in Quintana Roo, Mexico, near the border with Belize, as I have said before.

After a long period of waiting, I was able to return in July 1987 and I found Julio there, pipe in his hand, "unmistakable among thousands of men." He was in love, terribly in love, with the CPRs. He had grown accustomed to life in the jungle, in part because of previous experiences of preparation. He would eat five *tortillas* at a time, a sign that he was no longer lonely according to the women from Todos Santos. Many people would come to talk with him and he said that he would never leave, that he would die there and wanted to be buried there.

I, on the other hand, was still under the agreement of a year's commitment that I made with my congregation. At the end of the year, I would have to leave and then evaluate the possibility of renewal.

The CPRs had made a lot of progress since 1983. They now had a name: the Communities of Population in Resistance. The people

had a centralized leadership: the Committee of Parcel-owners of the Ixcán (CPI). The population had grown. The forced relocation of the refugee camps from the Mexican jungle in Marqués de Comilla had provoked many people to return to Guatemala rather than move to Campeche or Quintana Roo. People began to talk about five thousand to six thousand inhabitants in the CPRs. People were no longer hungry. The setback in 1985, when the return of so many refugees meant more mouths to feed than the harvest could provide, was behind them. The crops were growing well. Even though the Army had just recently launched an incursion in June 1987, the area now enjoyed more calm. An education team provided instruction and guidance to the community teachers, creating an education system that had not existed before. Similarly, there was a network of health promoters that was organized throughout the CPRs. And there was a little more medicine available. One of the functions of the CPI, among others, was to handle the aid given by solidarity groups and to buy goods such as medicine, boots, clothes, machetes, corn mills—everything that helped improve the conditions in the communities. Other changes were evident, too. There were soccer games on fields that had been cleared of jungle growth, and there were social functions like evening dances, with music from tape recorders or *marimbas*.[30]

Julio had also organized the church structures in the communities, using a process that continued relatively unchanged until 1992. He had vast experience in pastoral work and knew how to apply his knowledge, though sometimes he felt exasperated by the advice from those outside the area who offered their pastoral theory from armchairs.

Among the advances in the church work, I felt the most important was the development of a network of catechists. When we were there in 1983, the catechists were dispersed and did not communicate with each other. Julio had organized a Pastoral Work Team (PWT), consisting of himself and two other catechists working nearly full time, that coordinated the work of the rest of the catechists. The catechists, in turn, were organized into zones. A zone was made up of five neighboring communities (out of the nearly thirty communities that existed), and each zone had a coordinator that gathered his or her group of catechists for meetings. The coordinator was given the faculty of distributing the Eucharist in his or her zone. In the community of each coordinator, there was a chapel that was decorated and protected where the Blessed Sacrament[31] was kept. In addition, each community had its own little chapel with a roof made of *pox*[32] or old tin sheets. In 1983, the instability had not allowed us to build chapels even though we could have done so with the work of fifteen or twenty men. The catechists had the responsibility of celebrating the Word of God weekly; this meant that preparing for Christian education courses, strengthening the network, and encouraging the confidence of the catechists were very important.

Julio would make long trips walking to all thirty communities. At the end of the round of visits, he would stay in one community to rest. There he would produce educational materials using a typewriter and carbon paper or using a rustic mimeograph machine that he himself would crank. None of this had been possible in 1983. Since then he had built a minimal infrastructure. He had an underground storeroom that was used only for church goods, and for storing his things while he was on a trip. He had an "office" in one community where he could produce materials such as liturgical guides, song sheets and evaluations—all done very cleanly and thoroughly. In this community, the people had built a little hut for him out of *pox* branches. In these austere surroundings, he tried to make himself as comfortable as possible by hanging a mosquito net above the foam mattress that lay on his rustic cane bed.[32] He did not even have a hammock. I admired him for his adaptation to this environment and praised the little comforts he had installed, because these were signs that he really did desire to die in this area. He was preparing himself for a prolonged resistance.

Another sign of progress was that the Committee of the Ixcán, in the name of the CPRs, could facilitate contact outside of the communities. This allowed us to receive provisions such as the hosts and wine we used for masses, as well as paper, ink and everything needed in this minimal infrastructure. The Committee also received and sent

our mail, which was necessary to keep our link with the church groups supporting the communities. It was a channel without which the experience of "first love" would not have lasted.

When I returned, it was hard for me to pick up the thread, not because things were more structured, but because I still carried "the trilogy" in my head. I had a habit of doing spontaneous field research, a habit that could make other actions more difficult. Many people remembered me, but since my time with them had been so fleeting in 1983, most people did not know me. This contrasted with my experience of studying for more than two-and-a-half years every word I had written about the communities. It is curious how research, rich as it may be, tends to focus on events and idealize persons, for good and for bad. Using my tendency for research, I proceeded to catch myself up with everything that had happened from 1984 until the present, using community meetings as the forum. I soon learned that this method gave poor results because, while one or two people threw themselves into relating their stories, others who had not shared that experience began to disperse.

As I explained earlier, I had explicitly decided to not do research anymore and, instead, planned to dedicate myself strictly to pastoral work. I was tired of writing for no other reason than to record history. So, little by little I became involved in the dynamic of action, trying to learn from Julio and suggesting to him possible changes, which he accepted because he was very open.

We decided in early September to split up for the walks to the communities. He would travel to the communities in the north and I to those in the south. Then we would come together a centrally-located community in order to evaluate. Each visit would be well planned, and we would send a message ahead to each community indicating the day on which we would arrive.

In spite of our intentions, however, we never got the chance to meet because the military offensive at the end of the year undid all of our plans. In addition, Julio's desire to stay and even die at the side of his beloved would not be realized.

~ 8 ~
Faithful Under Fire

Come, my love, my promised one
beneath the peaks of Hermon
where the lions' caves and
the mountains of the leopards are.
—Song of Songs 4:8

At the end of September 1987, a concentration of all kinds of lions, tigers and leopards began to form in the area of the CPRs. The Army initiated what they called the End-of-the-Year Offensive which lasted until the end of March, when the soldiers finally withdrew from the area and returned to their barracks. The Army had dispatched two thousand soldiers to eliminate the guerrillas and clear out all of the civilians from the area. The offensive was a major campaign by the civilian government of Vinicio Cerezo[34] to break the URNG (the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity).[35] Behind the blue and white flag of civility, the gunfire thundered.

For months we suffered hunger and deprivation because the Army burned down many camps, bombed others, chopped down the crops, and pursued different communities in the attempt, I suppose, to capture us alive or even to kill us.

At the same time, the Army faced off with the guerrillas. We heard the gunfire and the combat, as well as the bombing of areas where the Army suspected the guerrillas to be. During the whole offensive the Army suffered more than five hundred casualties among its troops. Meanwhile, the guerrillas suffered only thirty, a disproportion that showed the failure of this immense operation. In the CPRs, only two people died and two were injured, all by an aerial bombing.

In comparison with the persecution and the Army maneuvers we suffered in 1983, this offensive was more powerful in terms of ground troops and weaponry. In 1983 we were not bombed, and now the bombing was nearly daily; the military planes would drop up to thirty bombs weighing five hundred pounds each. However, the Army also faced a stronger guerrilla force that was better armed and better trained. This facilitated our resistance and confirmed the community's decision, as well as my own, to remain in the area. This darling love, my promised one, started to become something more than a girlfriend, because I was beginning to make an option to stay permanently, a point I had not reached in 1983.

Besides the consolidation of the resistance, several other events led to my decision to stay. One was the guerrillas' acceptance of the fundamental principle of my pastoral work which was accompaniment. In 1983, the guerrillas had pulled me out in order to protect me from the continual Army sweeps. This time, the same thing nearly happened.

The offensive took me and Julio by surprise. We had divided the area in order to visit all of the communities. He was in the north and I in the south. The surprise attack by the infantry troops hit the northern communities, forcing the people—including Julio—to cross the border to hide in the Mexican jungle for one or two nights. For many good reasons Julio really didn't want to stay in Mexico, even if he was among the CPR communities. He preferred, rather, to return to the center of the hurricane. With the help of an expert *campesino* guide, he was led past the noses of the tigers and lions to where he wanted to be.

Julio wrote all this to me, since in those days we were able to maintain frequent correspondence, thanks to the civilian messengers who provided communication from community to community, something very necessary for our self-defense. When the Army was set to attack us in the south, I was planning to stay with these communities and resist the Army's blows, like the others. But it was no surprise to me when the guerrillas advised me to move to the north, far from where the Army intended to invade.

Nearly two weeks passed while we awaited the attack of the ground troops, and during this time I deepened my friendship with the community with whom I was living. So when the guerrillas told me to leave behind this community and the other four communities in the zone because the Army was getting closer, I felt it was contrary to the principle of wartime pastoral work. If the shepherd fled when the wolf came, what kind of shepherd was he? How could he face the people and preach about resistance as a concrete example of the kind of justice demanded by faith?

I lay down in my hammock that night and could not sleep. In these places one goes to bed early, before 8:00 P.M. The thought of why I had come to work with the people went around and around in my head. It seemed to me that the ministry of accompaniment was worthless if I could not remain with the people when they most needed spiritual support. At last, I decided to appeal the decision, and unlike in 1983, the guerrillas conceded to me what I asked.

This was the first event that began to make my relationship with the CPRs more permanent. The CPRs were no longer a girlfriend who I have today and tomorrow I may replace. I now had a more committed relationship with her. Talking with the guerrillas was an event outside of our relationship, but influenced it nonetheless. With their consent and favor our love grew and became more exciting.

Another influential event, or perhaps I should say, a series of cascading crises, pushed me to identify more and more with the CPRs. These were events intrinsic to the love itself without which the guerrillas' authorizations to stay would have felt empty. One crisis was the long period of wait—days and then weeks—in which we waited for the Army to pounce on our community in the south. During this time, I had very little work. I asked the committees in the community if they would allow me to work in the fields picking corn, but they dissuaded me. They said the Army could attack at any moment and in any place, and I could be in danger. So I stayed in the community camp like a freeloader, which at least allowed me to get to know everyone, especially with the women and children since they were the ones who did not go to work in the fields.

I also set out to visit every straw hut in the community and in the four neighboring communities. I began playing with the children in groups of two or three. Some children cried when they saw me. I was bearded with eyeglasses, white and different, very different from them. They got scared. Their little hearts started to go "pum, pum," an Ixil[36] woman told me. The most skittish children became my objects for spiritual conquest. My pastoral work in those moments, and always, was focused on the little ones. I would invent a little song with their names, repeating it many times, and little by little they would calm down until they became my best friends.

The children were the bridge to the mothers, who as Kekchí[37] women, remained distant and closed to me, with a monolingualism that threw me for a loop. Soon, however, their faces grew softer, and it turned out they were not completely monolingual but could speak some Spanish, even if they stumbled a little. This time of waiting and talking with the people made me think of a colleague in Honduras who was assigned to one hundred villages and complained that he had no time just to make friends with the people. I went over and over in my mind that verse of St. John of the Cross:

Y todos cuantos vagan,
de ti me van mil gracias refiriendo;

All those who wander,
of you a thousand compliments are given;

with emphasis on the word on "wander," which not only means walking like a visitor from one place to another, but also connotes wasting time, something very difficult for me since I am used to taking advantage of every minute as if it were a gold coin.

I began, rebelliously because I did not want to waste time, to take advantage of this atmosphere of waiting in two ways. First, I wrote down information about the people—a sort of census of their families—and I wrote down the surprising things they would say. Second, I tried to learn the Kanjobal language systematically even though I did not have a text for vocabulary and grammar, or a method,

and I had to do it all by myself. I took on both "tasks" this time not for publication purposes, but for my own knowledge of this people with whom I had fallen in love. It was at this time that I moved away from the idea I had previously had of writing the trilogy and opted for a new type of "research" that served me in daily life. I was motivated by a real love which led me to a deepening commitment and service. This was the time when the lover wants to know his beloved more deeply, not because he wants to write a book about her, but because he loves her and desires to know her better and to serve her more.

During the bombings and military offensive, I experienced a symbolic strength that helped purify my love. The first bombing attack that I lived through with the people was on Saturday, October 17, 1987. It was the first bombing of my life, an experience of initial panic but also of curiosity. I realized that the bombing seemed a lot like a baptism. It had the effect on me of producing a deep identification with the people, moving me from death to resurrection, from fear to joy. When we began to hear the flight of the helicopters releasing smoke bombs over their targets, and when we heard the whine of the A-37 fighter planes, everybody crawled into underground shelters. We sank into dark trenches and began to feel the shaking of the earth in the silence of the sepulchre that protected the women and children. The trench where I was held ten people. The children had each been given a stick to bite down on so that their eardrums would not explode. One woman carried a flashlight to reassure her child, not because the child knew enough to fear the bombs but because he was scared by the darkness. She turned to look at me occasionally to see if I was scared, and she reassured me with her smile, saying, "Don't be afraid. It's the way it is, but you're with us. We're calm, and this will soon be over."

After twenty or twenty-five minutes of bombing, we moved out of the covered ditches. Some people were talking loudly, others were smiling, others were nervous. Everyone interrupted each other. I hardly understood anything anyone said because it was all in Kanjobal. So I paid more attention to the ambience of the conversation, which was rapid and enthusiastic. Later I learned that they were talking about

what they were doing when they heard the planes. It seemed that many men had not wanted to go into the trenches and, instead, hid behind trees to watch the bombs dropped from the planes. Everyone celebrated the fact that nothing bad had happened. I felt that it was a type of resurrection because we had been buried and yet were now alive.

Later that night, we learned that a community located about a fifteen minutes' walk from us had been at the center of the bombing. Yet they had all survived without even a single injury, not even a scratch, despite the fact that the yellow smoke-bombs had fallen into the mouth of one of the trenches. What happened? How had the community survived? A gust of wind, it seemed, blew all the smoke away and thus gave the A-37s a target that was fifteen or twenty meters away from the community. With this news, we felt even happier. With all the means at the Army's disposal, it still couldn't eliminate us! In our celebrating, someone insulted the Army out loud saying that all of its military power was insignificant before the power of God. The Kanjobal catechists gave credit for our salvation to the mysterious wing of God that had protected us.

This first bombing deepened my identity with and love for the CPRs. Now I was no longer the strange one. I could now tell others what I had experienced. I could draw real-life analogies about the Word of God. I had been submerged underground in a cave with my love while winged tigers roared overhead. And we had been reborn as husband and wife—not out of pleasure, but out of a communion of fear.

The military offensive brought another crisis that deepened my love for, and identification with, the CPRs, and had another, even more dynamic, meaning. I began to learn in the crisis another lesson: that of becoming a follower. I began to learn to follow in the journey of these people. The best example was "the emergency plan," which was nothing more than an orderly escape plan by the community to go from the encampment to a site deeper within the jungle. These types of marches were known to me since 1983 but now they had a sense of permanence they didn't have before. In other words, this march was now my path, and I began to choose it not just for a year

but for a much longer time. If I had said to my love and promised one, "Come, come down from the mountains of the lions and leopards," it was to be with her and walk with her, not to leave after she had heeded my call.

At last, after a long wait and after receiving information from messengers and scouts, we decided to abandon the southern encampments for good. It was a fatiguing march. The children were falling into the ravines, the women were loaded down with infants, pots and chickens, and the men were leading the families with the weight of the world on their backs. Everyone walked in single file, one family behind another, each group with its leader. I walked behind the family of the young catechist from the pastoral team who would give me food. Here I was, following these people in the march, on my own and without obligations. I carried three chickens in a net on my back above my already heavy backpack, in which I had also stored the *pinol* for the family. I felt as I had in 1983, that the Father had placed me with His Son.

I began to order these experiences of crises in the form of a petition, much like St. Ignatius learned to do after his conversion. St. Ignatius' petition was for "the inner knowing of the Lord, who for me has been made man, in order to better love Him and follow Him." I prayed this way many times, asking that my efforts be directed to know this people more deeply, so that out of this knowledge would spring more love of Him. I prayed that out of this love would come a following that was not voluntaristic, ideological or mechanical, but rather a free and gratuitous response to a gift received, because for me, my Lord was reflected in this people. After that, I no longer used the metaphor of the promised one. I saw instead the reality of this people, and I saw them as a woman loved by God and reflecting His beauty. That is why I was preparing myself to know her with all my love, to love her with all my loyalty, and to follow her with all my knowledge.

She, for her part, treated me with extreme delicacy. Many people asked me why I had gone to suffer with the people. At the end of our escape march, the family that cared for me offered me hot food—*tortillas*—and sometimes they would give me chicken broth. Chicken

was the food of *fiestas*. That is how the people celebrated their exodus. The Army would be fooling itself if it thought that we were despairing. In fact, it would be wrong. We ate in celebration, and the Army could not celebrate with the same hen. "Better that we eat it before the tiger eats it," they said. And they treated me with an abundance that was unknown in the normal times of hardship.

But there was a third incident that left me, in a certain way, as her only spouse: Julio became gravely ill due to a bleeding ulcer that worsened from the tension arising from the offensive. So with his heart heavy and with tears of anger and sadness in his eyes, he left the zone after having been with the community for more than a year. His greatest pain was realizing that his often expressed desire to die and be buried with the CPRs would not be fulfilled. In this he felt deeply disappointed. The gift of resistance had failed him, and he had to leave.

Julio's departure left me alone in charge of the pastoral work of the CPRs of the Ixcán. I had to assume the responsibilities and follow-up what Julio had initiated. Since we could not meet personally before he left the zone, he sent me a letter along with his recommendations and his will. He generously left us all of his belongings and told us about the places he had left his sacks, all carefully enumerated, underground.

So I felt just a little bit more important but, at the same time, very alone without my long-distance friend with whom I had become close through letters. Loneliness led me to look harder for friendships with the people. That feeling surfaced in my dreams, too, as I no longer dreamed only of people on the outside—the people of my "old" world. Now they still appeared but in a curious mix with the faces from the CPRs.

We entered a new stage in the pastoral work as well, all within the context of the offensive. With Julio gone, I left my communities in the south and I pushed myself to visit all of the communities. I reorganized the pastoral team because one of the catechists had fled, seeking refuge in Mexico. We also began to reactivate all the pastoral work within the limits of the possible, since the offensive had

shown us all its dimensions and we knew now what we could manage.

During these times at the beginning of December, I wrote an evaluation of the first six months of work to the brothers who supported me. I didn't have a typewriter and since my handwriting was illegible, I opted to record it. From that recording I have recovered many elements of this chapter, even though the evaluation referred more to the pastoral work, and I am concentrating here more on my interior experience. I also wrote to my provincial superior saying that for now I was "inclined" to ask him that at the end of the year I be allowed to return to the CPRs. I was aware of the process happening within me—that of becoming more permanently committed to the CPRs—but it was not until reflecting upon and writing these lines, that I realized that my promised one had already become my wife, precisely in the middle of the lions and leopards as the Song of Songs says.

~9~
Temporary Separation

My love has gone into the garden
...and goes in search of lilies.
—Song of Songs 6:2

A year after I came, I left the CPRs as had been agreed, six months after Julio had left. Julio had already talked with the new bishop of El Quiché, Monsignor Julio Cabrera, so that just a few days after I crossed the border, still skinny and all bones, I was able to meet with him as well. Monsignor Cabrera was the real husband of the people and was highly interested in knowing how the people were and what the church had been able to do.

Our tight and emotional embrace was the beginning of what would be a sincere talk between me and the bishop. I asked his forgiveness for frictions that I had unnecessarily caused in meetings several years ago, and he only smiled, casting them aside as if they had not happened. Then we began. Joined by other brothers who supported me, I informed him step by step of the military and political situation of the zone, of the stages of my stay, and of the reach of our pastoral work. I explained how the pastoral work had to be personalized since the CPRs were a large family. I also presented him letters from the coordinators of the catechists, as well as one of my own, inviting him to visit the CPRs, presumably through legal channels, so that he could confirm her in faith. In my letter, I said that his wife wanted to see him and that she needed the sacrament of confirmation, a sacrament that the catechists were requesting, not only as a rite but also as a sign of God's presence. The bishop's visit would be necessary to impart this sacrament. But more importantly, his entire visit would be a confirmation of faith as the source of resistance. A

second thing that I asked of him was permission to visit the CPRs of the mountains.

Bishop Cabrera thanked us for the work that Julio and I had done, and gave me the mission to continue it since the CPRs were part of his diocese. (The diocese of El Quiché was responsible for pastoral work while the diocese of Huehuetenango was in charge of the land issue for the CPRs.) He let us know of the diocese's plans to begin pastoral work in Xalbal, just south of the CPRs.

The principal thing he could give us was the mission to continue working, that is, the support of the church hierarchy. He also approved our pastoral work, even though some of our practices could have been perceived as rather irregular. I told him that during the offensive we had run out of hosts and wine and that I had consecrated toasted corn *tortillas* and sugar cane juice. I said that we had offered the Eucharist to men who were married but had taken another woman because the war had separated them from their first wives. I told him that we had changed the approved Biblical readings on Sundays—but not for the most important feasts of the liturgical year—because what we were using said more to the people at that moment. I told him, too, that the people had built multiple-use community houses because of the enormous amount of work to do after the offensive and that, at this moment, there were no houses specifically designated as chapels. He approved everything and understood everything emotionally, because he felt in his soul what his wife was suffering.

In regards to our specific petitions, he said that he could not respond in a positive manner. He said it was impossible for him to visit the CPRs at this time because that would endanger the entire diocese. To show his concern for the Ixcán, however, he said that he was preparing a pastoral team for Xalbal. He also responded negatively to my request to visit the CPRs of the Sierra, which did not have a priest. He said that the diocese desired to attend to them with visitors from the parishes to the south like Uspantán and Chajul, and that my visit could jeopardize this effort.

Altogether, I thought this encounter was a beautiful lily for the loved one.

The other lily was more difficult to cut for her. While I was inside the zone, there had been a change in the provincial superior of the Society of Jesus (the Jesuits). When I arrived in San Salvador I found that the new provincial had practically decided to pull me out of the CPRs because of the demands for priests in other places. Without anyone else present to support me, I told him about my work. During the meeting, I looked in his blue eyes. He was already convinced of his decision and responded only with jokes to my arguments. He did not take them seriously, I felt. But, without giving me a definitive response, he allowed me to talk about my work at the provincial council where the decision would be made.

In the council, which was made up of fellow priests, almost all younger than myself, I felt the Holy Spirit and the spirit of the wife inspire me and inspire everyone. From the moment I opened my mouth, I had their complete attention. I could tell in the way they stretched their necks and assented to everything I was saying. I noticed how the spirit of all the council members imperceptibly influenced the provincial, who had lowered his guard. He kept an open mind and refrained from making more jokes. First I reminded them that this apostolate was an apostolate of the border, characteristic of our Jesuit charism because of the absolute poverty in which the people were living, because of the dangers of the war, because of the utopic society that people were trying to build and because of the new type of pastoral work the situation required. Then I said that this work would be the lighthouse and the light for many in the church and that the Ixcán was making history. It was a place where the revolution coexisted with the church. It was the place where the church could confront the phenomenon of atheism, not from the intellectual world of Europe, but from the trenches of Latin America. There one could dialogue and evangelize just by having a presence. There the church could be the bridge of unity. At the end I reiterated that I was completely ready to go where I was sent, that I really felt that way, but I had to speak strongly on behalf of these people, because if I did not speak, no one would speak for them at this meeting. The people were waiting for me to return, and if I did not return it would be as if I had

given up. But if I returned, it was testimony that I had not given up, just as Mary at the foot of the cross had not given up.

Days later the provincial communicated to me the unanimous decision, both his and the council's, to assign me the mission of the CPRs for an indefinite time. I was asked to leave the CPRs every year for two months and use that time to communicate something of my experience to the young Jesuits.

This was the second lily that many people helped me to cut to take to the loved one.

The third encounter was with the brothers who supported me. It was to these brothers that I had sent the evaluation of our work. They had been thinking of forming a new grassroots and religious organization. It would be similar to Catholic Action in terms of its mystique, its democratic leadership, and its ability to cut across the borders of parishes and dioceses. But it would also be different in the sense that the new organization would be founded within the concept of the church of the poor and would be ecumenical. They asked me if I would be willing to collaborate with this effort in the CPRs, and I agreed, since in this way we could share efforts with those who worked with the refugees and since my pastoral work would thus not move out of orbit and be without advice and outside support.

This was the seed of a lily for our garden in the CPRs.

During my time away from the CPRs, I thought I would gather more and more flowers, all to adorn, animate and strengthen our work. So I made two visits to war zones: the first to Arcatao in the Department of Chalatenango in El Salvador and the second to Matiguás in Nicaragua. The purpose was to learn how the people lived and how the church worked in these two places where revolution and counter-revolution dominated, respectively. The example of Chalatenango was very illuminating, because there, despite the fact that it was a war zone, the people were not hiding from the Army, nor fleeing during military operations. They were staying in their places. For them the presence of the church had been a source of strength and protection as the church denounced the violations against them. For them, too, the return of refugees, both from Honduras and from urban refuges, had been decisive. After the offensive in the CPRs, there

had been efforts to promote the return of the refugees. The hope was that some refugees would return to the CPRs themselves and thereby gain legality and recognition for the CPRs. I returned to the CPRs and related all of these experiences in different areas so that they could draw strength from them and feel hope in what other brothers and sisters were doing.

The lesson of my visit to the zone of the Contras in Nicaragua was more church-related. Because of the polarization between the Sandinista government and the Contras, the church in this area was occupying an in-between space, robbing force from the Contras while not declaring itself pro-Sandinista either, because it was not nor did it want to be. This was the time in Nicaragua in which the Jesuits had left government positions and had begun public, constructive criticism of the revolutionary government.

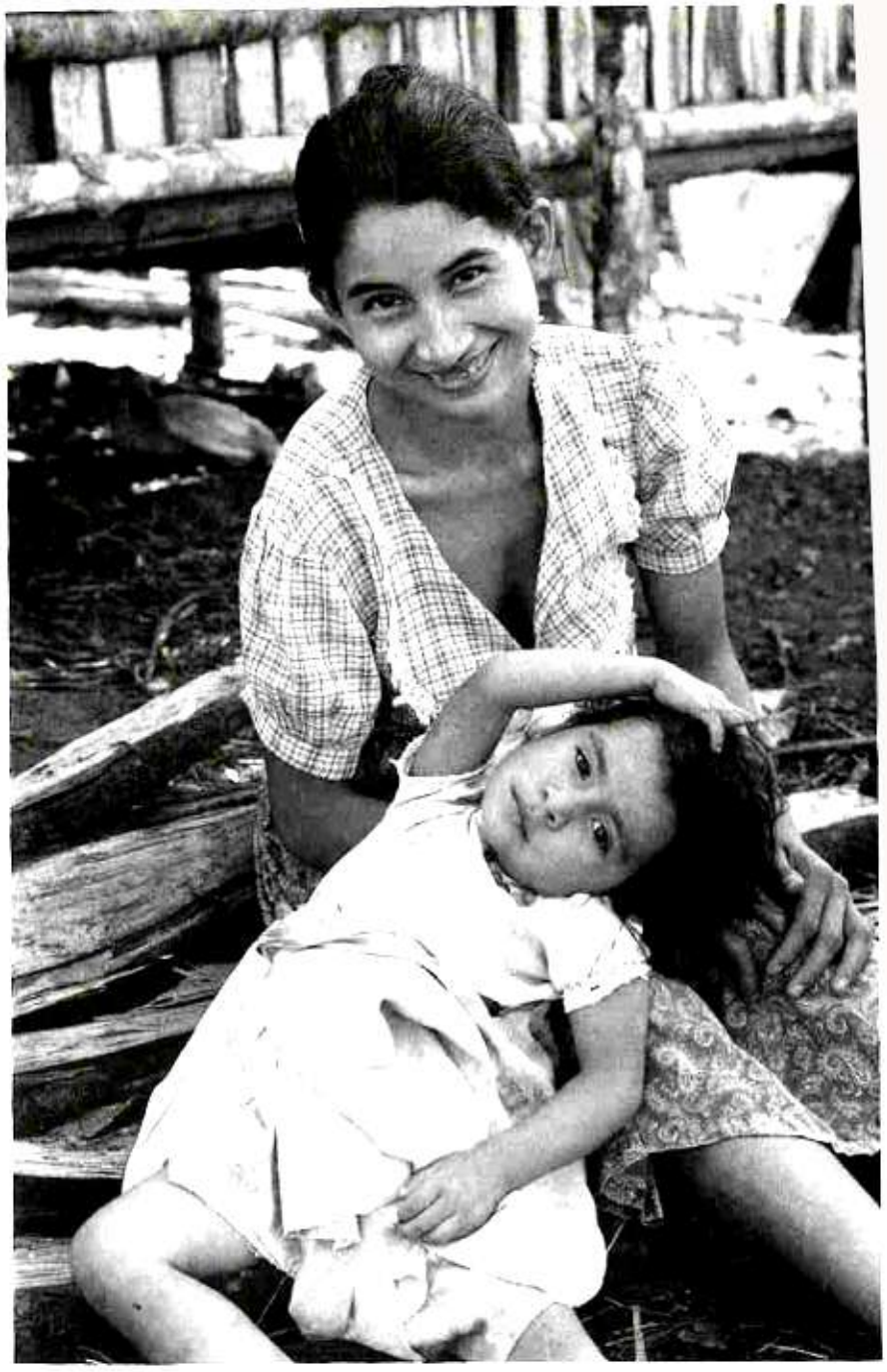
These two were lilies stained with blood, cut from our brothers' gardens.

I was always looking for more lilies to take to the loved one, not only approval, support and ideas, but also material things that would help the pastoral team keep the attention of the people in the CPRs. I especially wanted materials for the women and children, two groups I was beginning to attend to more. What kinds of things? A battery-powered slide projector, a solar module and rechargeable batteries, and slides of the Old Testament. Also a camera to take photos of the people and show them in the slide projector, with the idea of giving importance to their customs and their struggle. I also found paintings of the life of Jesus to use in the classes with children. These were useful because it was extremely hard to talk to them without their becoming distracted. I spoke with an artist who would later enter the CPRs with his own marvelous contribution: teaching the teachers and children to become more interested in drawing. In this place where the people were closed in under the trees, and where children had never seen an automobile, we had to take advantage of their enormous thirst to see, see, and see more.

And finally, the last little flower I cut was a Mayan history text I wrote while I waited for the word on my return to the CPRs. I later corrected the text with the teachers. I carried it, all prepared in sten-

cils, to print in the CPRs with our makeshift mimeograph machine.

The temporary separation was enormously fruitful, and when I returned everyone was happy with the lilies I brought. It meant that in my time away I had remembered them and worked on their behalf.



~ 10 ~
A Year of Many Romances

The winter is over,
letting one hear the cooing of the turtledove.
and count the fruits in the fig tree.
—Song of Songs 2:11-12

The winter was over, the storms had passed, and the winds that punished the jungle grew distant. The great danger of the offensive that had lasted six months was over. The Army concentrated its troops in the six detachments that encircled the CPRs in a half moon. The Army was fenced in with their backs to the border with Mexico, but in a situation of relative calm. The soldiers had returned to the barracks and restricted their patrols to areas close to the detachments. Instead of the noise of planes, we began to hear the singing of birds and the cooing of the turtledoves.

The cooing of the turtledove was not just a metaphor. With the easing of the repression, the people could make love at night in tranquillity. I was not aware of that until nine months after the offensive ended, when the number of baptisms increased in a dizzying way. With the retreat of the Army to the barracks, the men who belonged to the most frequently attacked communities no longer had to do guard duty at night. They no longer felt the nervous tension of a possible surprise attack. They had the space and the peace to renew the romance of their love.

One could not presume, however, that complete peace pervaded the zone and that the people lived without being scared. The cooing was suddenly broken by the thunder of an approaching storm when the Army launched artillery shells in the middle of the night with explosions that awakened us with a start. Some families dug trenches in the middle of their rustic dwellings in order to sleep underground.

The fruit of their labor in the fields was just beginning to appear, when the fresh corn was destroyed by machetes and the harvest reserves were stolen by the soldiers and the civil defense patrols of repatriated refugees. The burning down of encampments also continued: Pueblo Nuevo One suffered a surprise attack on March 10 (1989) and there was another planned attack on Mayalán in La Unión on April 20 in reprisal for the guerrillas' downing of the military plane Pilatus. But there was not an offensive, as such. We saw the rebirth of the world around us. The storm passed and the flood waters receded, flowers began to appear and trees became laden with fruit. We saw that kind of rebirth in ourselves as well.

The fruits were not just the mameys, oranges, tamarind, soursops, pineapples and bananas which the people could eat in tranquillity. The "fruits" were also the signs of progress in the CPRs, born out of the people's creativity. People's attitudes had changed as well. Since the Army had not been able to drive us out of Guatemala, their military goals had been defeated. For reasons of self-defense, the communities had been restructured and increased in size. Agriculture and livestock production, as well as the principal services such as education, health and even pastoral work, had been fortified. Thanks to the consolidation of several communities into one, a school that had served twenty children, could now serve one hundred or more. Instead of a production cooperative made up of a few men, a single cooperative now counted on many men. Instead of a meeting with two catechists, we could now meet with seven at a time.

At the pastoral level, the first thing we did after revitalizing the Pastoral Work Team (PWT) was to meet with some catechists in order to ground the enthusiasm and desire to work that bubbled up in all of us. We planned a course on the theme of the primitive church in the Acts of the Apostles. This theme had been discussed in earlier courses before the offensive and had motivated us to reorganize our little church according to the model of the first Christians. Now we decided to change the methodology, partly because the offensive still continued in part of the zone and partly because we wanted the catechists themselves to give the course. We did not attempt to bring all the communities together, only neighboring communities two by two.

So we prepared the theme, first by studying the text with the two catechists who were part of the PWT. Later we asked the communities to name five catechists to receive the course from the PWT, and then these five would repeat the course, together with the PWT, to the rest of the catechists. We insisted that the selection of the catechist not be based on who was the coordinator in the community but rather on who had the gift of explaining and revitalizing the Gospel. We wanted the people to see that ministry is not the same thing as charism, and that while the coordinators are part of the structure of the church and undertake a ministry of service, they may be lacking in the charism of the Word.

We were not charismatics or part of the renovation movement, but we did want to take advantage of the Spirit we felt flowing over us to give new life to our little church. At every step of the course we tried to evaluate in which moment the Spirit was letting itself be felt and in which moment it was absent. We not only tried to follow the Spirit out of these principles, we also tried to discern the Spirit. We not only pretended to follow its mysterious cooing, we also tried to understand its melody, its rhythm and its tone. We wanted to be in continual spiritual discernment by examining our pastoral work. The goal was not necessarily to strengthen resistance, but the course did take the catechists' minds off the sound of planes and helicopters and the explosion of bombs. Paying attention to this interior music gave rest to the spirit that became tired, even eroded, in the war, impairing creativity in the long-run. The interior music, then, strengthened resistance from within.

Later, we improved the methods used in the classes with children and the meetings with the women, and began using simple and small paintings. With the storm past, the flowers sprang forth along with the different colors and figures of our imagination, provoked by the Spirit of joy. There was a tremendous thirst among the people to see something other than the trees of the jungle. We took advantage of that thirst to attract the attention of the people, especially the women and children. With the help of an artist, we began to use large and colorful drawings painted with indelible markers on white plastic, depicting the life of Jesus. With the artist's inspiration and techniques,

we introduced drawing into the schools and sponsored drawing competitions between the communities. The children's paintings were reproduced on the CPRs' calendars that were distributed around the world. Among the children, the cooing expressed itself differently than among adults. It was the ambience of happiness. It was the song, the laughter, the satisfaction of understanding one's past and of sympathizing with one's heroes. It was the good feeling of tenderness that children could not define but still felt awakened in their hearts for the newborn Jesus, for the Jesus who was beaten by the soldiers, for the Jesus who is resurrected.

Another fruit born of the tree of the CPRs in this time of romance was a catechism that several of us wrote, which would have been impossible during the offensive when we were fleeing from place to place. First I wrote a draft and shared it with the others, even sending a copy to the bishop. With everyone's input, I edited a second copy. In a meeting with some of the more creative catechists, we did a round of questions and answers about the catechism to explain the examples and the comparisons used. We wanted a catechism that was adapted to the concerns and needs of the place where we were. The meeting of these selected catechists turned out to be very creative and enriched the catechism, which may not have been a model of theology, but as a text, did speak to these people. I then copied the catechism on a stencil, the artist illustrated it, and we made multiple copies on our hand-turned mimeograph machine so that each catechist had his or her own copy. We also offered a course so that all of the catechists could study and learn how to use the catechism.

On my trips to the communities, we started to show the slides with the projector, which made everyone happy, especially the children. When they saw us arrive in their community, the word would pass around, "Marcos just came! Marcos just came!" Even before greeting me the children would come to ask, "Will there be pictures?" Others would ask, "Will there be a movie?"

The first projector we used was a six-volt one, and to see the figures, one nearly had to guess what they were. In spite of our great poverty of equipment, many people came to watch and, with the help of explanation, they understood what was being presented on the

screen. That was the first step. The second step was for them to find its application for their lives of resistance, so the projector showings would not be just entertainment but would bring new insights to everyone's lives. Later we obtained a twelve-volt projector with a halogen bulb, like a car's headlights, and more powerful solar modules. Now everyone was impressed and dazzled because they no longer had to guess what they were seeing and could understand the figures on the screen without help.

The first slides we used were from the Old Testament, beginning with Noah. The catechists from the PWT and I had studied the passage to find its application to their situation. In a long journey from community to community, local catechists and other people suggested more and more examples. The application for the CPRs became evident: The rains of the flood were the massacres by the Army; the Ark was the holy jungle that protected us; Noah's faith was the faith of the people who fled into the jungle; the raven was the bad messenger who never returned and stayed in refuge in Mexico; and the dove was the messenger who returned with good news of hope. The application of the text not only looked into the past but also into the future, and Noah was an example of how we would leave the jungle one day just as he had left the Ark alive.

We also began reflection groups, another fruit of this year of romance. To begin the groups, we found inspiration from the Spirit we had felt in the catechists' groups, when sparks flew from the contact with the Word of God during the meetings. The catechists had found meaning and had enjoyed opening themselves to a story they might have heard many times before without much illumination. Thinking that others would participate and enjoy the joint reflections, we decided to form groups made of people who were not catechists. With them we inverted the method. Instead of first studying the Word of God and later looking for its application to our situation, we studied first our situation and from there illuminated it with the Word of God. We gained a reading of our situation by using the national and international news, for example, about the theft of wood from the nearby Petén jungle, or the return of the Salvadoran refugees from camps in Honduras or other similar things. Then in a second step we

would bring this news home to our situation asking, for example, if loggers might come to our area to cut our marvelous mahogany when the Ixcán is no longer a war zone or, without looking too far into the future, if we ourselves, by burning the jungle, were not taking care of the trees and what a loss it was when one of these extremely valuable trees caught fire. Then the national situation was interpreted in the light of our own situation. Finally came the third step: the reflection of faith. Despite the fact that the methodology seems simple, we often felt the temptation to remain in one of the first two steps, the news and then its importance to our situation, without passing to the step of reflection of faith. Often this was because it was hard to find a juicy new application of the Word of God in the groups of catechists. We found that crossing from one level to another was difficult in itself, and that recipes of methodology did not replace imagination.

These Christian reflection groups later integrated into a new, grassroots religious organization called Guatemalan Christian Action (ACG). Since the end of 1988, some of our catechists had participated in courses given in the refugee camps to help prepare for the birth of ACG. In August 1989, all of the interested groups sent delegates to the first assembly which took place in San Cristóbal de las Casas. On this occasion ACG was officially born and its national board was named by the assembly. The church groups in Guatemala included the CPRs of the Ixcán, and the groups in Mexico included the refugees. Joining the ACG was very beneficial for us, although tensions still existed between the rhythm of work on the outside and on the inside (within the CPRs). Another problem was that many catechists, who showed a lot of interest in the course or during the assembly, later forgot everything they had learned when it was time for hard work. As in any organization, there was the danger that people's motivation was not pure but influenced instead by the novelty of a trip to Mexico or by receiving something. As poor as the CPRs were, even receiving a pair of boots or a shirt was a great incentive. However, just as I needed to leave the CPRs each year, others too were anxious to leave and breathe fresh air, and they benefited a great deal from this. Outside the CPRs they could still hear the cooing of the turtledove.

We saw our departures as missions of our little church. There were pleasant missions, like going to Mexico, but others were difficult and challenging. We sent two catechists to the CPRs of the Sierra at the end of 1988 because the bishop did not want me to go. We knew that the six-day journey by foot was hard and dangerous, since one had to cross a strip controlled by the Army and the civil defense patrols. We also knew that the poverty in the Sierra was more extreme than in the jungle because the border with Mexico was even farther away and the people could not get supplies. In the Sierra, for example, clothes were held together with patches and mending, the people were barefoot, the machetes were made from pieces of used machetes riveted together, and the school children wrote with charcoal instead of pencils. Anyone who went on a mission to the Sierra must be prepared to suffer.

We sent two brothers who accomplished an impressive task there, in a way I could not have done. They left the Ixcán full of the Holy Spirit and ended up falling in love with the CPRs of the Sierra. In the mountain communities they brought the people together for catechism courses, for large worship services, and for baptisms so large that some people climbed trees in order to see them. Their visit deeply shook up the Sierra. In three months they performed around a thousand baptisms, many more than I had been able to do over the course of several years in the jungle. The success of their mission was attributed not only the apostolic desire of the missionaries, but also to the religious need, especially for baptisms, that the people in the Sierra felt.

The two missionaries returned to the jungle like hot coals, and, thanks to the courses taking place for the preparation of ACG, their testimony spread to many countries.

The missionaries returned accompanied by three catechists from the Sierra, chosen by communities in the Sierra, especially from Santa Clara where Catholic Action had kept its leadership board alive. The three catechists came down to the jungle to learn from us and to form

a pastoral team, which they called MPW (Missionaries of Pastoral Work). They were with us for a couple of months and later returned to the mountains. We kept up a continual correspondence with them for a long time. The bishop was informed, and he admired all of this. When he received our letters he heard the cooing of the turtledove because we always reminded him that the CPRs were his beloved wife.

All of these fruits of creativity during the year after the offensive had the character of romance because, like in all love, the things we said and did with each other seemed unique, as if they had occurred to no one before. They had a freshness, and we stirred up a burning in each other. We heard the cooing of the turtledove as if the turtledove had never sung before. And we ate the fruit of the fig tree as if figs had never existed before.

But all of these actions and words of romance were not restricted to the present. They were also promises that committed us for the future. In the following years we would need to continue what we had begun, and in doing so, some of the luster would be lost through repetition. In addition, as work multiplied creatively in areas like health and education, our hands were often tied for lack of time.

Romances are beautiful, but to be real, love should keep its promises.

~ 11 ~
Our Love Fails?

What is this that rises from the desert,
like a column of smoke
perfumed with myrrh and incense?
—Song of Songs 3:6

After the year of romances came a dry period that helped us deepen our true love. In 1990 we spied in the distance a column of smoke that covered us like the darkness of an eclipse. In this darkness we learned to use another sense, the sense of smell, which made us aware of the diffuse presence of objects, people, situations and the winds of change. We discovered in the very darkness of these events aromas to guide our people—like in the jungle when we find our way by the smells of cardamom.[38]

The column of smoke that covered the sun was the fall of socialism in eastern Europe and the Sandinistas' loss in the elections in Nicaragua. The CPRs were more affected by the Central American event because our people had considered the Nicaraguan triumph as something very much our own. Now suddenly, against every prediction, it was shown that the revolution did not have the popular support that the *campesinos* presumed. Wasn't Nicaragua already liberated? Were we not struggling to be like them? In the CPRs people assumed that all Nicaraguans were revolutionaries and that all of the leaders were perfect. Out in the fields, the *campesinos* commented often about the news some had heard on their radios and they came to the point where they did not want to talk any more about the issue: "I don't even want to think about it," one of the more confused ones told us.

During one of the sporadic encounters that I had that year with the guerrillas, I realized that they too were unable to figure it out. They felt that the Sandinistas had committed a grave error by participating in "bourgeois" elections, and that socialism began to break up when the door was opened to social democratic currents and to a multi-party system.

Nonetheless, good things emerged out of this darkness when we tried to sniff out the events. We found delicious aromas that indicated the presence of deeper loves. Above the divergent ideologies, the love of the people united us in a deep friendship. And we could converse during these different encounters without fracturing our old friendships. The breaking up of tightly held blocks of ideas proved to us that we all needed to search our motivations to find our common ground—although we were never able to do this.

Another perfume sensed by the people was their love of the church and their identification with religion. Growing in me was the love of the civilian population. I lived the fall of socialism and the Sandinista movement in the light of the recent martyrdom of my six companions and fellow Jesuits at the UCA in El Salvador. The martyrdom of Ellacuría,[39] especially, was the seal of approval on a line of open, critical thinking toward the revolution. He had been the color bearer of this independent, though supportive, posture toward the revolutionary vanguard. When I returned from El Salvador to the CPRs after having felt the wounds of my companions, I returned profoundly changed. I felt greater freedom to formulate and express judgements about the vanguard and to extol the identity of the civilian population and the identity of the church without necessarily looking to borrow outside models. To put this in other words, for me the image of the guerrilla as the ideal person was no longer convincing. Among guerrillas there had been heroes, like Ché Guevara and many Guatemalans, but being a guerrilla was not the only road to humanization. There were many other roads within civil society. Now it was our turn to find pride as civilians.

During this year the idea of autonomy and being recognized as civilians crystallized as the CPRs expressed a longing for a public declaration of their existence to the Guatemalan people and to the

world. Other local issues in the CPRs, independent of what was happening internationally, pushed for this declaration and lent an aroma of hope. Two of these issues were the refugee-return movement and the need for a dialogue with the repatriated refugees under the Army's control.

The CPRs needed friendly neighbors in order to resist the Army's strategies. After the offensive, the Army had settled the repatriates to the south of the CPRs and tried to push us little by little so we would leave and go to Mexico. The refugees were seen as the people who most naturally could live alongside the CPRs on CPR land or in the vicinity. But this could happen only if the CPRs were legitimized and the area pacified. The circumstances demanded that sooner or later the CPRs should dialogue with those who had repatriated under the auspices of the Army (or the government) in the areas south of us. Without dialogue with the repatriated refuges it would be impossible to reach an agreement over the lands, but this dialogue was seen as unthinkable if the CPRs did not issue a public declaration about themselves and become recognized as a legitimate population. Some of these events were seen in the distant future, but the installation of a pastoral team in Xalbal in July of this year gave greater probability that such a dialogue could take place. And it seemed plausible that the church could serve as a mediator even though we did not know how. All of these forces were coming together in the process that led up to the public declaration of the CPRs. The declaration itself carried seeds of hope since people saw open horizons in this road, independent of what had happened in Nicaragua or the socialist camp in Europe.

In the jungle we were living through this dynamic contradiction, between the inside and the outside realities, both hopeful and gloomy, when another event happened in Amakchel, where the CPRs of the Sierra were living. It ended the contradiction and rose like a dark, smelly column of smoke blocking the sun's rays from us. Our brothers in Amakchel were suffering extreme repression under the Army, which was destroying the people's crops. The Army had them cornered in a situation so difficult that it made us fear for their very existence, and then for our own in the near future as CPRs of the

Ixcán. But at the same time our brothers and sisters showed us the path with a soft aroma that emerged out of such an extreme situation. The CPRs of the Sierra had undertaken a consultation among all their members and had prepared documents that would be their letter of presentation to the world and to the people of Guatemala.

These superhuman efforts of the CPRs of the Sierra were witnessed by two catechists of the CPRs of the jungle who we sent as missionaries to carry the hosts to these people who were without priests. Upon returning, one of the catechists, who was moved by their suffering, recorded all he had seen on a cassette tape. He sent the recording to the bishop of El Quiché who played it to his presbytery in Santa Cruz. All the priests and the bishop listened on their knees. And the Word of Jesus Christ spread, like perfume, among His people (II Corinthians 2:14) and helped make public the declaration of the CPRs' struggle for recognition.

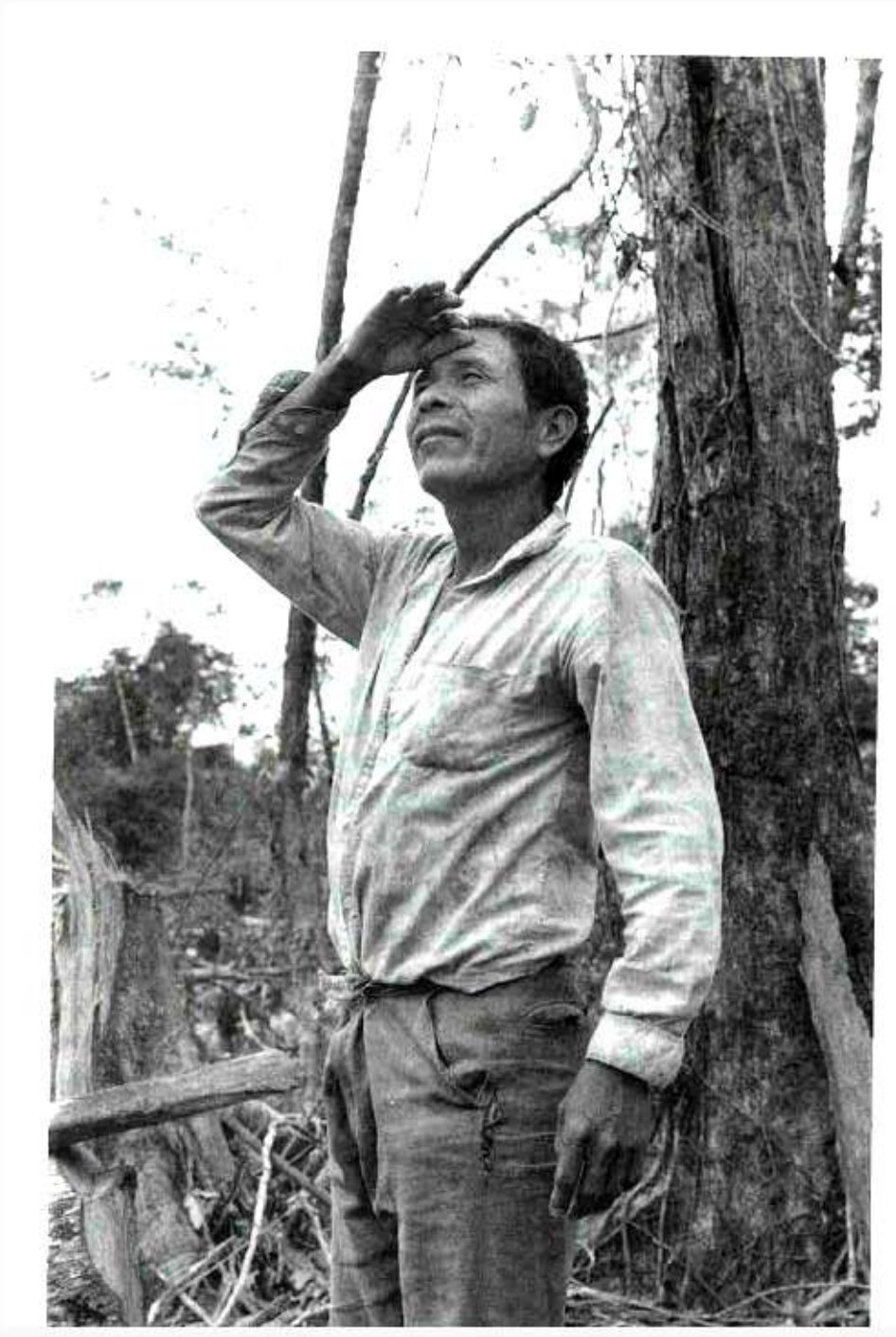
When we heard in the jungle that the declaration of the CPRs of the Sierra had been published in the beginning of September 1990, we began asking each other: "Why theirs and not ours? Why have they taken steps to 'live in the open,' while we're standing still?" In October we received a written copy of the declaration. The AGC groups studied the document and took the initiative to write letters to the Ixcán Committee[40] requesting that the Committee organize a consultation with the people and that we too take the next public step, just like the communities in the mountains, and enter a new political era. The perfume of the mountains had opened a road for us and there was no one who could stop the people. Our consultation occurred in December 1990 and culminated with a general assembly in January 1991 where the final declaration was approved. It would be published later the same month.

I cannot go on without describing the anguish I felt this year, an anguish related intimately with the process of the declaration of the CPRs. Myrna Mack, an advisor in the process of the declaration of the CPRs of the Sierra, was assassinated. She had served informally and had never visited them, knowing of them only through the surrounding population. I heard on the radio the news of a memorial service commemorating the ninth day of her death. It told the location of the service and mentioned members of her family who were invited. But I resisted believing the news of her death because there was no reference to how she died, and I knew she was in good health. I thought the radio was referring to a family member of hers and I wrote her a letter offering my condolences. My letter crossed paths with the news from my friends giving me the terrible details of her death.[41]

In the jungle no one knew who she was. I tried to explain it to the people but I was not able to express all my pain, which left me feeling paralyzed. Her stabbed body mysteriously emitted, just as the bloodied bodies of the Jesuits emitted, the same perfume of the sacrificial lamb. Again the contradiction of the senselessness one sees and the stubborn hope of a perfume that signals the path to take.

In summary, the year 1990 was the beginning of a new historical era in which the shadow of a large cloud would extend over us. We would not know its density or how long it would last. There were other dark events as well, such as the repression of the CPRs in the Sierra and assassinations that disfigured the bodies of the victims. But alongside these shadows came the perfumes of deep loves—the love of the poor, which did not disappear when socialism fell; the love of sisters and brothers who work for justice, dignity and the autonomy of civil society; and the love of the church with which we identify trusting in its mission to be the hope of the persecuted.

We began, too, to learn a new way of looking into the future. Not as much by the senses of sight and touch, which can delineate objects clearly, but by smell, which detects the paths of the poor and the presence of God in the large and the small—in the gigantic column that blocks the sun as well as in the little bag of myrrh that smells like lilies and rests between the breasts of the lover, according to the daring formula offered by the Singer of Songs (1:13; 5:13).[42] The schematic clarity of models fell to the ground but we were left with our intuition.



~ 12 ~
Visits to the Wife

Winds blow through my garden.
Enter, my love,
and taste its delicious fruits.
—Song of Songs 4:16

The desire for change on the part of church groups took shape in the popular consultation and the general assembly of the CPRs held at the beginning of January 1991. There, the declaration that would be published a few weeks later was prepared. It was an historic declaration, the first public voice of the CPRs in their almost ten years of existence. Men and women of the CPRs hovered close to their radios waiting for their declaration to be read. And when they heard it, at last, on the radio news station *Guatemala Flash,* they jumped with joy. They were impressed by the clearness of the reader's voice and the duration of the announcement, which lasted more than half an hour. The closed garden had truly opened for the first time so that the winds could blow through, scattering the aromas of the delicious fruits that had been cultivated by tears and suffering for so many years.

The document, contained many different demands, but the core was the demand for recognition of the CPRs as a civilian population. From that recognition derived the need to have nearby army bases removed, to have all attacks on the CPRs suspended, to attain full respect for human rights, and to have the freedom to move about to market the community's products. The document also requested recognition of the CPRs' organizational structures and dialogue between the CPRs and other popular organizations. The document reviewed the history of the CPRs going back to the beginnings of the coopera-

tives under the sponsorship of the Maryknoll priests, especially Fr. Bill Woods. Although the current activities of the Church in the CPRs were not specifically mentioned, the comparison was implicit between the CPRs and the early Christian communities where everyone shared their food and all lived as brothers and sisters.

The publication of the document was accompanied by the departure of the first CPR delegates to the capital, where the delegates would inform the people of Guatemala and other countries about who the CPRs are. The delegates would also work to organize an *in situ* visit by a Commission, which was later known as the Multipartite Commission.

The winds not only blew through our garden but also through the garden of the CPRs of the Sierra. They brought us the news that visits had occurred there—the first one at the end of January by the Human Rights Ombudsman, and the second by the Multipartite Commission at the end of February. This good news was communicated to us over Radio Quiché the following Sunday by our bishop Monsignor Julio Cabrera who had returned deeply impressed by what he had seen. When his words were cut off in the transmission, we suspected that it was because his words were too forceful against the military and that someone within the radio station had succeeded in cutting him off.

At last, on August 10, 1991, the long-awaited visit of the Multipartite Commission arrived at the CPRs in the jungle. It was an historic day and marvelous for all. Two civilian helicopters, one red and the other blue, made eight trips from Playa Grande to a clear space in the jungle. Twenty-four persons, including nationals and internationals, among them eleven people from the Catholic and evangelical churches, came to visit us after a month of uncertainty and failed attempts. Among the group were two Catholic bishops and the Adjunct Ombudsman for Human Rights. We noted the absence of the bishop of El Quiché for reasons we will later explain.

When we heard the noise of the first two helicopters searching for the patch of open ground in the immense green of the jungle, the Committee of the Ixcán gave the order to light a fire to create a gi-

gantic column of smoke. It was exactly the opposite of what we had always done. No longer did we try to hide our presence underneath the trees. No longer did we hear the rebukes that the local committees constantly made to the women: "This smoke! Put out the fires!" Now it was the opposite: "Make a lot of smoke! More, more! Throw more leaves on, more branches, more trash!" The leaders were afraid the helicopters might not discover the clear spot of ground and their visit would be turned back.

When at last they landed, some people hid in the high bush (myself included) fearful that the visitors came not in peace, but came disguised as civilian aircraft, the helicopters would fire their machine guns on us. But no. They landed. And the children were amazed to see them up close. The compartment door of one helicopter opened and out came Francisco Esteban, our delegate who had gone to the capital to struggle for our recognition. It was not a colonel, but a brother known to us, who came through the door of this shining machine.

In our bulletin "Mail from the Jungle" we printed the list of all of our first visitors. I reproduce it here as a tribute:

1. Alvaro Ramazzini, the bishop of San Marcos;
2. Thomas Gumbleton, a U.S. bishop associated with Pax Christi;
3. Lic. César Alvarez Guadamuz, the Adjunct Ombudsman for Human Rights;
4. Alberto Anleu, of the Ombudsman's Office;
5. Jean Walsh, Witness for Peace staff who translated for the U.S. bishop;
6. John Nelson, Witness for Peace staff from New York;
7. Margarita Similox, an evangelical sister from CIEDEG;[43]
8. Lauro Santiago Xetumul, evangelical pastor from CIEDEG;
9. Fernando Penados, archdiocesan staff from Guatemala City;
10. Dan Saxon, archdiocesan staff from Guatemala City;
11. Fr. Mauro Giacomelli, an Italian Franciscan from CONFREGUA;[44]
12. Sr. Genoveva Reyes, CONFREGUA;

13. Blanca Estela Fuentes, Permanent Assembly of Christian Groups;
14. Romeo Monterrosa, UASP;[45]
15. Andy Kaufman, CERJ;[46]
16. Lucía Quilá, CONAVIGUA; [47]
17. Arturo Echeverría, COINDE;[48]
18. Carlos Gómez, ASECSA;[49]
19. Gretchen Nell from the U.S., ASECSA;
20. Factor Méndez, CIEPRODH,[50] a human rights center;
21. José Reinaldo Carrera, a video cameraman with CIEPRODH;
22. David Holiday, Americas Watch;
23. Ramón Hernández, a journalist with the newspaper *La Hora*;
24. Francisco Esteban Francisco, a member of the Ixcán Committee and a delegate of the CPRs in Guatemala City.

It was a large number of visitors and a strong response to the difficulties the Army had imposed!

The month prior to the visit had produced much anxiety. At first the visit had been announced for July 13. We had walked several hours to the place where we would congregate to receive the visitors, but our efforts were in vain. The trip had been canceled and postponed for the next weekend. The next week the wait was even more dramatic because the bishop of El Quiché had been announcing the trip over the radio from Sunday the 14th to the following Saturday. But the next Monday he announced that Julio Quevedo, a rural promoter working with Caritas, had been killed. This assassination, like that of Myrna Mack, was interpreted by Monsignor Penados (Archbishop of Guatemala) as an attack directed against the bishop of El Quiché. To curb the bishop's actions on behalf of the CPRs, those close to him had been hit.

At 10:00 A.M. on the day after the assassination of Julio Quevedo, an A37-B warplane flew overhead. At 10:00 A.M. it dropped four bombs in the soccer field near the community of Los Angeles. Three of the bombs exploded. The fourth did not. We could read the yellow writing on the unexploded one and see they were two-hundred-fifty-

pound bombs. In our minds, all these events were linked—the cancellation of the visit of the Multipartite Commission the week earlier, the announcement of their visit again, the death of Julio Quevedo and the bombing. We deduced that the bombing was meant to intimidate the people so they would not congregate in an open area knowing that the Air Force could bomb the surrounding areas where families would camp. The Air Force had not yet detected the landing area that had been opened for the visit, so they may have been thinking that the visiting helicopters would land at the soccer field in Los Angeles, near the border with Mexico.

At midday on Friday the 19th, the news on radio *Patrullaje Informativo* and then on *Guatemala Flash* was confusing, but said that the Multipartite Commission would not come. I interpreted this as an attempt to use the media to confuse our people so we would not congregate, so I convinced the people to walk the three hours from our community to the point of concentration. That afternoon my misjudgment showed because in its evening broadcast *Guatemala Flash* transmitted the clear message that the Commission would not travel for reasons beyond their control.

All of this created the background for the August visit. The CPRs were, in effect, a closed garden, not out of love but because of the threats and violence by the Army. For this reason, when the Multipartite Commission arrived at last in August and when we saw the civilian helicopters repeat their trip to Playa Grande, first once and then again, bringing more and more visitors, we felt a deep consolation and a happiness that brought tears to our eyes. We were not alone. We felt an overflow of love similar to that which the lover feels, when at last the lover of her dreams appears after a long wait and she tells him, "Enter [the garden], my love, and taste its delicious fruits."

But in this visit I did not show myself. I could not come out to hug the visitors. Instead I stayed in the provisional huts built by people from different communities so they could spend the night near the heliport. I did not approach the center of activities where the welcome speeches and the mass were held. I stayed underneath the trees,

hiding in the jungle, where from the shadows I could barely make out the red shirt of John Nelson and the white cap of Lic. Guadamuz. I did, though, take a lot of photographs.

The logic of this illogic was that if I showed myself and declared my presence, it could endanger the pastoral work that had been evolving in the CPRs. I was not as concerned that the Army would hound me as I was concerned that the military would take actions against the diocese of El Quiché or some of its pastoral workers. The children, who were surprised and more spontaneous in their judgements, asked me, "What would happen if they saw you?" "They would not do anything to me, but others could be hurt," I answered. The children remained doubtful.

For me it was a difficult situation because I foresaw that it was the beginning of the end of my accompaniment. If this process continued and the people came out into the open, and if I could not accompany them on this step, then what was I doing here? The day will come, I thought, when I will have to withdraw through the same back door I entered, and the people will receive pastoral attention from the church in Guatemala by legal means. I thought that I would leave as quietly as I had come, at the time when the government was forced to recognize that the CPRs were, in fact, civilians.

Nevertheless, I wanted to be near the place where the visit occurred. I wanted to experience the joy alongside the people, as closely as I could, just as I had experienced their crises. For that reason, I made the pilgrimage with them. I watched the helicopters land, and several times a day I received news from the catechists on how the activities were going. Later I listened to the taped recordings of everyone's speeches so I could analyze what had happened and share that analysis with the groups and the communities.

The only visitor with whom I spoke on this occasion was Alvaro Ramazzini, the bishop of San Marcos. In the afternoon, after he finished playing volleyball, he went to bathe in the stream. He lay down in the water on one side and then, like a snake, turned over on the other side, according to the catechists who observed everything he did. Then, like Nicodemo, he came in the night to the edges of one of the provisional encampments to talk to me. Three catechists brought

him. They were very curious to see our reactions and to hear our conversation, but in a departure from our usual openness, I asked them to leave us by ourselves. I felt bad about that but the privacy was necessary at this moment to have the freedom to talk with sincerity.

Seated on top of a crudely made bed, we spoke that night, almost unable to see each other's faces in the dark. I thanked him for his visit and acknowledged the risks that such a visit entailed, as we had seen in the case of Julio Quevedo. Later I explained to him a little of what he had already seen, such as people sleeping on the ground as though it were an emergency situation, but how these same people had a clear awareness that they were entering a new stage. I helped him realize that the smoke signal for the pilots ran counter to all the habits we had developed by hiding under the cover of the jungle and cooking only at night. And lastly I explained to him the function of the church in the CPRs and its ministry of accompaniment (being with the people), its ministry of evangelization (knowing, loving and following Jesus) and its ministry of socio-political formation (interpreting reality from within and from the outside).

He asked many questions on the government's accusation that the CPRs were the political wing of the URNG. I assured him that the CPRs were different from the guerrillas but that the guerrillas did operate in the area. I explained that just as the guerrillas had given their consent for the Multipartite Commission to enter, it would not surprise me if the guerrillas had a plan to warn the Commission in case of danger. He insisted that he supported the CPRs because that was the position of the church, and not for political reasons. He wanted all the cards on the table so that the bishops would not be used as willing fools. He thanked me for my clarifications and he praised me because he said that many, including himself, had seen that the church had abandoned the people after encouraging them toward empowerment in the 1970s. But now he found me present with the people. "I see your consistency," he told me.

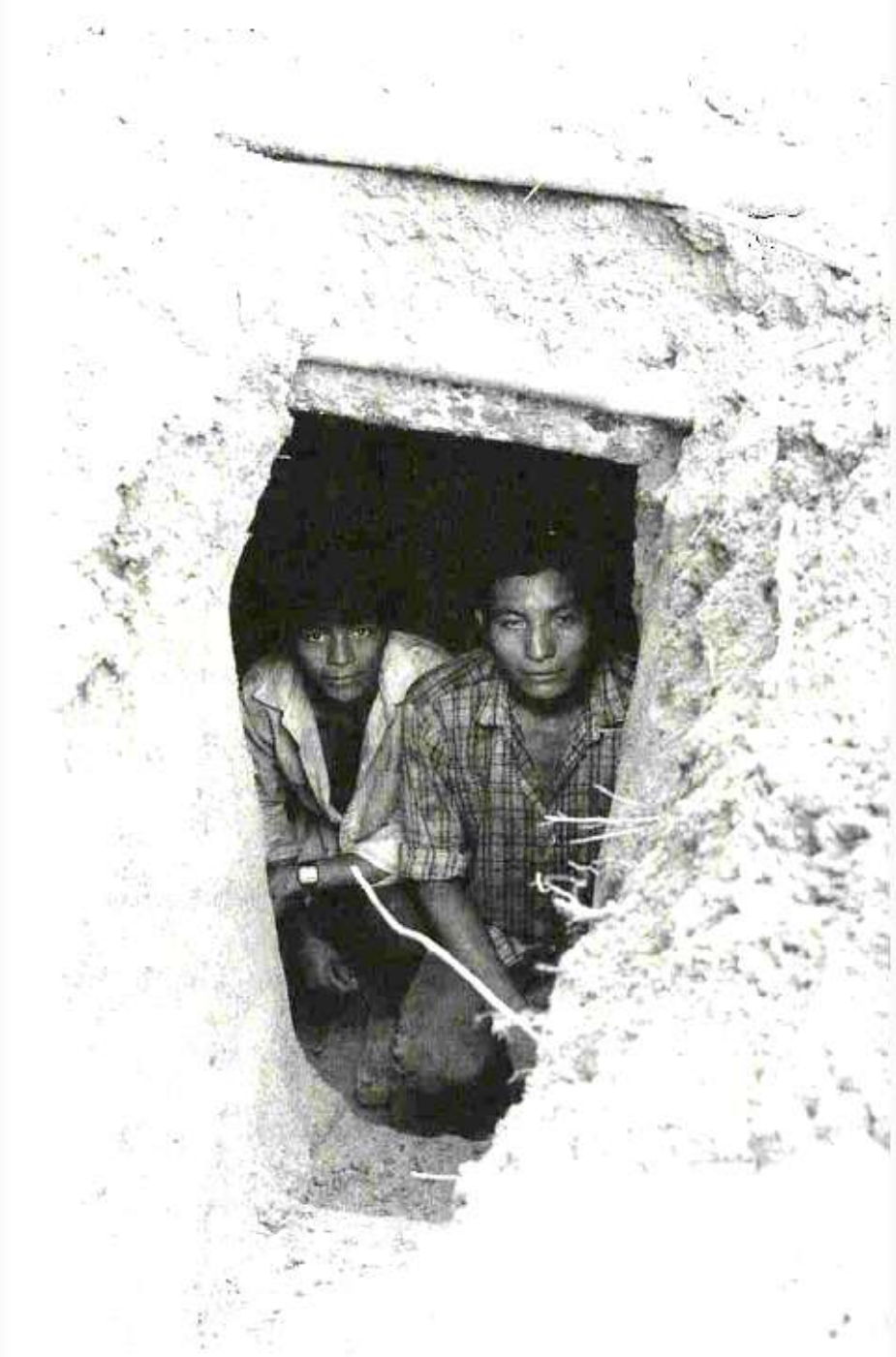
The visits occurred several times after that day of the first of August. In November the Commission came again and in March 1992 a Commission of European Parliamentarians arrived and with them,

unexpectedly, the bishop of El Quiché visiting the CPRs of the jungle for the first time. The real spouse, whom we had invited since 1988 after the offensive, at last climbed the fence into the closed garden. He arrived, just as the Song of Songs said, "with his head drenched with the dew drops of the night" (5:2) leaving behind a long trip of uncertainties and threats. Then the spouse, her heart singing, sang this emotional verse:

> *My loved one has come down to his garden*
> *to the garden floor of the balsam patch*
> *to feed in the gardens*
> *and to gather the many lilies.* (6:2)

PRESENCE IN THE ABSENCE

Perfect love grows in absence. Faithfulness nourishes it and the passage of life does not corrode it, precisely because it is based on absence. It does not depend on the life of the lover. Some say, "Long-distance love is a fool's love." But this love is not long-distance. It is up close because the lover is made present in her absence and the absence makes her more beautiful without even seeing her. It is a love of profound emptiness. It is a love that gives up all its memories. It is not a love that sustains itself with the belongings of the absent lover. No, this love gives up all the symbols of her presence because the symbols can falsify her absence. It is a love that does not need the presence of the lover because love makes her live. This love may seem strange, but it is real and human, and in one way or another, at some time in our lives, we all experience it. We may try to crush it because we cannot deal with the inner loneliness it brings, or we may let it flower and sing.



~ 13 ~
No Such Thing as Clandestine Love

Flee, my love!
Flee rapidly like a deer,
for the scented mountain!
—Song of Songs 8:14

Massacres in the Jungle was born from a suggestion made by several Jesuit companions to publish part of what I had already written for the five hundredth anniversary of the "discovery of America." What happened in Guatemala in 1982 was the continuation of the invasion of the Spanish. I tried to take advantage of this historic moment of the quincentenary to bring to light these terrible crimes of a decade ago in the hope that they would never happen again. This was the principal motivation for publishing *Massacres*. Second, the peace talks were taking place in El Salvador as well as in Guatemala, and the work of a "truth" commission was seen as a very important part of this process. Such a commission would make these crimes public and help bring about a future reconciliation. We considered the possibility that publishing a book like this would bring repercussions that, while unpredictable, would assuredly be negative. One person even suggested that it might jeopardize the pastoral work within the CPRs. But I felt I had to say aloud what had been hidden.

So I dedicated five weeks in September and October 1991 while I was in Mexico to write the book. I did not correct or touch up the volumes I had written already but rather wrote new text. For me writing the book was a forced march, utilizing the material of the work I had already done but giving it a different orientation. It would be a denunciation of repression to accompany the proclamation of life. In

this way the book was like the Gospel of Mark since the Gospel proclaimed the good news based on testimonies about the bloody events of Jesus' life, which the evangelist himself never witnessed. The landscape of the book is Christian, but in the text I tried not to make references to the Old or New Testament, leaving this for the footnotes.

From a literary point of view, I was not very pleased with *Massacres in the Jungle* because it seemed difficult to read given the density of the information, and less fresh than the original volumes I had written. It seemed uneven to me because some chapters, particularly the last ones, read more easily than the earlier ones. Part of the difficulty came from the treatment of the testimonies and the desire to preserve their integrity at a cost to the overall unity of style. But from the point of view of soundness and historical foundation, the book withstands criticism even though, as I said in one place, the truth is asymptotic[51] and one can never think that all errors have been eliminated. An eyewitness can always surface who adds a detail that only he or she knows. In the same way the lists of victims could have been more complete, but the fact that the massacres took place and that the responsibility was the Army's is undeniable.

The book was to be launched first in Guatemala and then in Los Angeles, California, but the event in Guatemala was canceled somewhat mysteriously, which only fed the publicity. "What happened to your book, my friend?" asked some of my acquaintances when I arrived in Los Angeles. They had been invited to the first promotional event in Guatemala, and when they got there they found no one. The event had been suspended at the last minute without explanation and without forewarning, according to what they told me.

So in Los Angeles I presented the book as part of my presentation during a panel in memory of Myrna Mack. Myrna had studied the displaced people, and she paid with her life. So here I came, in the shadow of her wings, to discuss the origin of the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people—the massacres of 1982. I began the presentation, like a poet inspired by a muse, with a verse by Edgar Gutiérrez who wrote that when Myrna returned to the city bathed by

the displaced, bathed by the mountains, and bathed by wrenching stories:

> *a dazzling butterfly revealed itself to me*
> *seeking refuge in the depths of her eye.*

The dazzling butterfly was the displaced of Guatemala that she and I, even though in different contexts and different zones, had interviewed and from whom we had gathered testimonies of denunciation and proclamation. At first glance they were the faces of the starving, filled with panic, the sick, the throwaways of humanity. But seen through the illumination of faith, they were a dazzling butterfly.

Days later in the same Latin Americas Studies Association conference, which is like a big science fair held in a luxury hotel, there was a forum on Guatemala, debated by a representative of the Government, Mr. Manuel Conde, and a representative of the URNG, Dr. Luis Becker. It was quite boring because neither entered into an open discussion but rather chose to throw clever barbs at each other. As the forum was coming to an end, someone asked a question about refugees. Dr. Becker said that the refugees had left the country because of repression while Mr. Conde said that was not so, rather that they had left because of the cross-fire. When I heard this, I lost my passivity. I had not been planning to speak, but I could not remain silent in front of such a statement since this was exactly why I had come to Los Angeles and this was why I had written the book—to let people know about the massacres committed by the Army. So I asked to speak and said that Mr. Conde's statement could not be sustained by evidence. I spoke with a calm voice and softly, as though I were saying, "I am sorry, but that is not so." And I gave some background for my assertion. I said that the refugees had not fled cross-fire but rather large-scale massacres, and that even though the URNG had also committed human rights violations, the violations by the Army were far more numerous and more severe. I felt then that the audience became electrified. Mr. Conde responded with generalities and

then Gen. González Taracena, who was seated in the first row, asked to speak. He said that they would study my book very carefully and that he appreciated that this discussion could take place in a respectful manner, but that we should remember that the Army had not started the conflict. This interchange led a journalist in Guatemala to write that I had left them like "fumigated cockroaches."

After the conference I returned to the jungle a little bit incredulous about what had happened. I felt like the child Jesus who after the experience in the temple once again sinks into the obscurity of Nazareth. October and November passed with some reference to the book on the radio, but the news did not register with the CPRs since there they knew me only as Marcos, or *compañero* Marcos or Fr. Marcos or brother Marcos or all together brother/*compañero*/Fr. Marcos, but not by my real name.

In this year, 1992, the Army launched two military operations in the jungle against the communities near the border. The first was in July before the publication of my book and the second in November after the publication. But both, in my judgement, had no relation to the book. In the July offensive, the Army sent its infantry to try to take the community of Los Angeles by surprise, but a surprise attack by the guerrillas cost the Army fifteen casualties and blocked the night advance of the soldiers. The Army, in order to "vent its anger" as the *campesinos* said, bombed the community of Los Angeles for three straight days and dropped what must have been a five-hundred-pound bomb in the very center of the camp on July 27. We had already abandoned the community, however, after the first day of bombing which was Sunday, July 25.

The second military operation, at the end of November, was a silent mission, without a bombing. Again the Army tried to surprise us but our messengers were faster than the soldiers and they warned us in time so we could leave. The soldiers burned the two communities of Cuarto Pueblo I and Cuarto Pueblo II on Sunday, November 29.

The motives for the 1992 operations seemed to be various: the peace negotiations, the refugee repatriation to a neighboring community of the CPRs in Polígono 14, and the troop replacement in the

Cuarto Pueblo barracks (which happened every four months). Another factor might have been the interest in dismantling a marijuana operation. For the past three or four years Mexicans were crossing the border into Guatemala and planting marijuana patches in the border area of Polígono 14.

In the November operation, it did not appear that the Army was looking for me, nor did it appear that they were trying to discover the hidden cache of the church, kept secret even from the people, except for three or four catechists. A cave had been dug by a catechist in dry ground. To enter one had to crawl, but once inside there was nearly enough room to stand. We called it the underground cathedral. On December first, as the Army climbed a hillside on a mission to burn down the community of Los Angeles (the same community it had bombed in July), it ran across the mouth of the cave. Apparently two columns of soldiers came together outside the cave, before they were to climb the hill. As they climbed, they exposed the camouflage (or perhaps the camouflage was not perfect), because a few of the soldiers detected the hiding place, opened the cave, and pulled everything out.

A few days later we went to the hiding place. After we searched the grounds for any hidden grenades the Army might have left behind, we were able to reconstruct what had happened. A soldier must have entered the cave and then passed everything, package by package, to an officer seated at the mouth of the cave. We deduced this because at the entrance of the cave we found the torn plastic bags we had wrapped around our documents to protect them from the humidity. The officer probably reviewed each bag with great care. We found a small bag containing outdated medicines that had been thrown aside, a sign that they had seen everything. Whatever they found interesting they took. Everything else had been burned in a fire set nearby. It was apparently a big fire judging from the scorched leaves of the branches of the highest trees. Those of us from the pastoral team met later to remember what we had stored there. We compared that list with the list of things we found in the ashes in order to deduce what the Army had taken.

The Army realized that I was in the area and that I called myself Father Marcos. That was correct. But they also asserted—I am not sure if they were fooling themselves or just lying—that I was a guerrilla commander, and that Rolando Morán, the *commandante* of the EGP,[52] had played an important role in writing the book *Massacres in the Jungle*. That was not so.

I learned of their accusations from *campesinos* who heard the news over the radio. I could not stay tuned constantly to the news, but I realized that the thing had exploded. Nonetheless, we sent a catechist to tell the bishop of El Quiché, the real spouse, what had happened. It turned out that the bishop had been called in by the president of the republic just before Christmas, so he already knew.

I decided to leave the area after much personal discernment about the dangers of such a trip; some people warned that if I tried to cross the border I would fall into the mouth of the lion. But I felt that it was very important that I personally inform the church about what had happened. That is why I left, not for security reasons, since the CPRs offered me great protection with their system of self-defense. The battlegrounds of debate were located outside of the zone of the CPRs and I had to respond to the accusations of the Army here. And I had to respond to accusations of which I knew only fragments.

I left on Christmas morning, loaded down with *tamales* for the road.

When I was outside the CPRs, the bishops told me they did not want me to return. I had the permission of my provincial to go back and stay until Holy Week, but the bishops felt that I should not do it. Their principal reason was the damage that I could cause to other pastoral workers in the diocese, given the known behavior of the Army to target substitutes instead of their real objects, as in the cases of the killings of Myrna and of Julio Quevedo. Another important reason was the desire to make the source of pastoral attention more appropriate. Instead of coming in from Mexico (as I was), it was better to provide pastoral care from inside Guatemala. This would also serve to reinforce the demands of the CPRs to be recognized as a civilian population.

I argued my case to the bishop of El Quiché telling him that the shepherd should not flee when the wolf comes. But after a great deal of discussion we arrived at the point that the real shepherd is the bishop and through him, the church. If I left the CPRs the church would not abandon the people. Even though it would be difficult for me to leave the place behind, I could be replaced. Other people would come and fall in love with these people, other people who were younger and who would have more energy, new ideas and, hopefully, would be better able to adapt to the world of *campesinos*. This loved one (me) always desired to be more adaptable, to be younger, to be better able to immerse myself into the daily life of my beloved wife. I was tremendously useless, and she had to do everything for me.

Later I learned that the women had cried when they found out that I would not return. I received moving letters from the people such as this one from a *Kekchí* man who said:

"Pedro Tomás told me, 'the Father is not coming back.' When I heard, we were working at the riverside. Right away I started to feel crazy. I felt very sad because of you. The night came. I left the house. I began to cry. The pain came over me even more. I will never see you again, as you know how I live here at home."

Then I realized that the relationship between the CPRs and myself had been like lovers and spouses because I, too, cannot stop thinking about her and speaking about her. I imagine her saying the verse from the Song of Songs (5:6):

I opened the door to my love,
but my love had fled.
My soul left me as he left.
I searched for him frantically, but I did not find him.
I went calling him, but no one responded.

Epilogue

The CPRs have changed immeasurably since Ricardo Falla wrote *The Story of a Great Love.* Gone are the days of hazardous night hikes through the jungle without flashlights and emergency escapes full of the fear of an encounter with Army soldiers. The horrific whooping of the helicopters searching for signs of brightly colored native clothing is no longer heard. The need to bury household belongings, even parts of the manuscript of this book, are of days past. The nightmarish military attacks against a civilian population are over.

In the years following Falla's reluctant departure from the CPRs, tens of thousands of refugees returned to Guatemala from Mexico after persuading the government to sign an agreement "guaranteeing" their security and their right to land. Peace Accords between the guerrillas of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) and the Guatemalan government were also signed and are now in the process of being carried out. And most importantly, in terms of this book, the CPRs of the Ixcán now have their own land and live openly—"in the light," as they would phrase it—without fear of reprisal. But has real peace come to the CPRs, or to Guatemala?

The Beginning of the Opening

In 1992 the Guatemalan refugees in Mexico attained a negotiated settlement with the Guatemalan government for their return. Previously, the government had been opposed to a massive and collective return of refugees. These were, after all, thirty thousand citizens who were likely to be a base of support for the political opposition movement.

Nevertheless, the government was caught in a bind because of

the pressure generated by the refugees and their international supporters. Either it had to recognize that safe conditions did not exist for the refugees' return, or it had to insist that these "undesirables" remain in Mexico. Either admission would have been a black eye for the Guatemalan government's prestige internationally.

Finally, the refugees struck an accord with the government allowing for "voluntary, collective, and organized" returns under conditions of "security and dignity."

The difference between the people in the CPRs of Guatemala and the refugees in Mexico was in one respect only a technicality. The international boundary between the countries defined that those on the Mexican side were "refugees," with all the rights and protection of the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR) and, eventually, the acceptance of those conditions by the Mexican government.

Those on the Guatemalan side, on the other hand, were "internally displaced." And though protected by the Geneva Conventions and Protocols, they enjoyed substantially less security.

After years of demanding recognition as a civilian community in a conflict zone, the CPRs saw that they could take advantage of the political space opened by the refugees. A month after the refugees began to return to Guatemala, the CPRs invited as many international observers as possible to visit them.

Hundreds of religious people, students, human rights workers and others participated in a three day "walk-in" that enabled them to verify the CPR's claim. They saw that the majority of the CPRs were children, women, and the elderly—hardly the guerrilla force claimed by the Army. The first step "into the light" had been taken.

The CPRs Seek a New Opening

A new period of history was underway in the Ixcán and throughout Guatemala. Even though the roots of the rebellion in Guatemala—lack of land for the poor majority and lack of a truly representative civilian government—were not resolved, the fighting between Army and guerrillas had been suspended. The CPRs were buoyed by greater

numbers of people who accompanied them as well as by the presence of the refugees from Mexico who settled nearby. The future looked brighter for the CPRs. There were no longer direct military attacks, they had a nascent bartering economy with the returned refugees, and, thanks to the bold move of opening up a CPR office in Guatemala City, they received substantial international support for their plight.

Unexpected Divisions Lead to New Options

In 1994 there was an unexpected split among the refugees that affected the CPRs. While nearly all the refugees had fled the violence of the Army, they did not all share the same opinion of the guerrillas. Many refugees felt that the guerrillas wanted to change society for the better; a growing number, however, felt that the guerrillas were pressuring them too much to provide money and energy for URNG political projects. The CPRs, on the other hand, had lived in a zone where the guerrillas had often protected them, or at least provided them with sufficient time to flee from the Army's onslaughts. Most in the CPRs were grateful to, and supportive of, the guerrillas.

The divisions within the movement of returned refugees deepened to the point that violence was threatened and communities were split. Inevitably the conflict involved the CPRs, as the question of land ownership was being untangled with returned refugees. One group of the refugees, organized under the "Permanent Commissions," insisted that they held titles to the land that the CPRs had been occupying. Only two hundred out of the five hundred CPR families had any kind of legal title to land. But the CPR families without titles also felt that they had a claim to the land that they had defended with their blood for so many years.

Many felt that there was enough land for all in the Ixcán Grande. However, as intransigence grew on the part of the Permanent Commissions, it was necessary to look for other solutions for landless members of the CPRs. With the help of the Catholic Diocese of El Quiché, a CPR commission solicited a loan to purchase land from CARITAS, a Catholic relief agency. CARITAS agencies from Ger-

many and several other European nations approved the proposal and gave the equivalent of US $1,100,000. CPR members became eligible for interest-free loans to be repaid in fifteen years (with a three year grace period). The payments would go into a revolving fund to be managed by the Quiché Diocese for the purchase of land for other landless peasants.

With this victory, a CPR land commission was formed in 1994 to resolve the issue of where to buy land. It was not until September 1995, however, that parcels of land were identified and the legal process was begun to make the purchase. The land commission was hoping to buy a total of 5,000 acres, but eventually settled for the purchase of three farms with approximately 2,350 acres.

Finally, A Permanent Home: Moving to the New Land

After being unable to put down roots in any one place for more than a decade, the CPR-Ixcán now have somewhere to call a home. "Primavera del Ixcán," as the CPRs have named their new community, is located on the banks of the Chixoy River in the Zona Reyna, in the southeastern part of the Ixcán. It is composed of three farms: Finca San Isidro, on the Quiché side, is about 1,540 acres, while Fincas El Carmen and Triángulo in Alta Verapaz total 800 acres. The CPRs had hoped to buy land closer to the Ixcán Grande Cooperative, where many people have relatives. But in the end, they were forced to look farther away due to the lack of available land.

The community sent twenty families to the newly purchased land in early December 1995, to begin planting and to take care of the one hundred plus head of cattle on the property. In January the rest of the people began the move at a pace of four families per day. The families carried their belongings on their backs for the three- to six-hour walk out of the old CPR communities to the nearest town with a road. There they went by truck to a town downriver from Primavera, and from there they loaded the people and supplies on boats and travelled half an hour to reach the new community. The whole moving process lasted until March, when the last of approximately two hundred eighty families arrived at their final destination.

During this time, community members never expressed any bitterness about the difficult task of moving an entire community or the reasons why they were forced to relocate in the first place. They were already focused on rebuilding their own community.

From the Ground Up: Primavera del Ixcán Takes Shape

The CPRs decided that the urban center of the entire community would be constructed in Finca San Isidro, on the Quiché side of the river. All community buildings, including offices, clinics, the school, the church, the market, and a park will be part of this center. A stretch of land, which falls within the urban center, will be leveled so it can be used as a landing strip. All housing will be in San Isidro. The land on the Alta Verapaz side of the river will be used solely for cultivation. This means that every morning at about 5:00 A.M., boats will transport men to the Alta Verapaz side to work in the cornfields and pick them up again at the end of the workday.

The three hundred lots of four *cuerdas* each (one *cuerda* is twenty by twenty meters) have been measured, and teams of builders have begun to construct semipermanent houses. Each family also receives ten cuerdas to use as they see fit. Allotting small plots of land to individual families is a new phenomenon for the CPRs as cultivation was collectively done in the old communities.

Community buildings have also been erected. The dental clinic is completed as well as the medical clinic, human rights office, offices of the local committees, a permanent school, and the church. The community is divided up into four settlements, with families remaining in roughly the same groupings they had on the old lands. Each settlement has it own committee in charge of planning development, delegating work, and distributing supplies.

The highest governing body of the CPR-Ixcán is the Executive Committee of Primavera del Ixcán, known as the CEPI. The CEPI is composed of seven elected members. Nine highly active committees, whose members are also elected, are responsible for security, projects, purchasing, education, health, production, land, the capital delegation, and human rights.

Collective Work is Still Essential

In December 1995, the CPRs had their last general assembly on their old lands. The assembly voted overwhelmingly to continue working in a collective manner after they moved to Finca San Isidro, thus affirming the value of collective organization not only in times of emergency, but also in times of peace.

In Primavera del Ixcán, the majority of community work is done collectively. This includes cultivation, construction of community buildings and individual houses, health and education work, as well as the work of elected leaders. In this way the work of a community leader, a teacher, and an agricultural worker is equally valued, and each receives the same amount of corn, beans, produce, building supplies, and whatever else is distributed to all families. Men are required to do collective work five days a week. So, for instance, if a health promoter works in the clinic only two days a week, he or she will be assigned other work, probably in the fields, for the remaining three days. Collective work is assigned by the local committee in each of the settlements.

By working collectively, the CPRs have avoided a problem that often arises in returnee communities: the attrition of health and education promoters due to the fact that they are usually not given much compensation for their work. The CPR model actually encourages the health and education promoters to continue and advance in their work, since the service they perform is recognized as equally important as that of agricultural and construction workers.

Goals for the Future

Peace Accords were finally signed between the Guatemalan government and the URNG on December 29, 1996, but the causes that gave rise to the war in Guatemala continue to be as real as they were decades and centuries ago. Poor people—and especially the indigenous—are still excluded from meaningful participation in the country's economy. The CPRs' balance of individual and collective

rights and responsibilities could be a model for other newly reestablished communities in the Ixcán—communities that may be in danger of becoming ghost towns again, losing their best workers to the short-term jobs offered by the encroaching oil companies.

The CPRs' goals are many. They hope to increase the number of agricultural products they produce to include not only corn and beans, but also rice, sugar cane, pineapples, bananas, and other fruits. The Finca El Carmen has cardamom, and the community hopes to plant more to sell as a way of generating income. The women hope to be able to expand their communal vegetable gardens as well. The small amount of beef production they now engage in may be replaced by a more economically sustainable dairy project or some pig and/or chicken production. Community leaders also hope to solicit funds to build more permanent houses with waist-high block walls and boards that reach to the roof.

The CPRs want to have open and friendly relations with their neighbors. People from surrounding communities already come for consultations at the CPRs' medical clinic. And with the help of the UN Mission in Guatemala, the human rights committee of the CPRs has given workshops attended by people from twenty nearby communities. In addition, the CPRs and members of other communities have joined together to pressure the government to make improvements on the main access road to the Ixcán.

In a few short years, the CPR-Ixcán has gone from being a community hidden in the jungle, unable to have much contact with greater Guatemala, to having approximately one hundred twenty-five of its members vote in the 1996 elections. This opening of political space will continue to grow as the CPRs and others attempt to reconstruct their communities and change Guatemalan society. With a spirit of resistance almost unparalleled in Guatemala's recent history, the thousands of people who live in the CPRs are living out a model of individual accomplishment balanced with societal accountability.

A widow or orphan has a far higher chance of living a productive and healthy life in Primavera del Ixcán than in the rest of Guatemala. Yet support is still needed to build their community and ensure their survival. There must be no backtracking to the days when chil-

dren ran to mud pits, fleeing the piercing bullets of Army helicopters, or to the days when such brave souls as Father Ricardo Falla, his white hair and beard stiff from mud and his clothes reeking of the eternal dampness of the jungle, had to live clandestinely with the people he pastored.

The example of those who live and those who died in the CPRs will hopefully allow many more to forever "live in the light."

"Benjamín"
Curt Wands

Help on this epilogue came from Jonathan Moller and Melanie Boesger, as well as Kurt "Chico" Miron, all who have worked to improve the lives of the members of the CPR-Ixcán.

Become Involved

For information on accompaniment and building community-to-community relationships with the CPR of the Ixcán, and/or other displaced and returned refugee communities, contact:

National Coordinating Office on the Refugees, Returnees and Displaced of Guatemala (NCOORD)
1830 Connecticut Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20009
Tel: (202) 265-8713
email: ncoord@igc.org

Information on ongoing human rights violations may be obtained through:

Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA
3321 12th Street NE
Washington, DC 20017
Tel: (202) 529-6599

To work on advocacy campaigns around Guatemalan issues, contact:

Latin American Working Group (LAWG)
110 Maryland Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002
Tel: (202) 546-7010

Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala (NISGUA)
PO Box 6069
Washington, DC 20005
Tel: (202) 234-6474
email: nisgua@igc.org

To become involved in a faith-based network to defend human rights and uphold the right to a life of dignity for all Guatemalans, and to learn more about these initiatives, contact:

The Campaign for Peace and Life in Guatemala
PO Box 29627
Washington, DC 20017
Tel: (202) 635-0355
email: eirik@igc.org

To create a lasting link with your group, town or church with a community in Guatemala, get in touch with:

Guatemala Partners
1830 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009
Tel: (202) 783-1123

Sister Parish
1209 Harewood Road
Baltimore, MD 21218
Tel: (410) 467-0454

Delegations to see the social, economic and political realities of Guatemala may be arranged through:

Ecumenical Program on Central America and the Caribbean (EPICA)
1470 Irving Street NW
Washington, DC 20010
Tel: (202) 332-0292
email: epica@igc.apc.org
web: www.igc.apc.org/epica

Chronology

of the Communities of Population in Resistance

1954: The United States CIA backs a military coup that overthrows the democratic government of Jacobo Arbenz. A series of military dictators rule the country until 1986.

1960s: Maryknoll missionaries with the support of the Dioceses of Huehuetenango and Quiché begin large-scale cooperative development projects in remote indigenous areas of northwestern Guatemala. It is called the Ixcán Grande Cooperative. Catholic Action organizes indigenous people for Bible study, reflection and community action.

1970s: Guerrilla presence begins in the highlands of Guatemala. By the late 1970s and early 1980s guerrillas seem to be gaining widespread support in northwestern Guatemala. Catholic Action becomes more politicized. Many Catholics are advocating political change. There is also significant unrest in the capital.

1975: The Guatemalan army builds five permanent bases in the Chajul municipality. Two others are built in Cotzal and four in Nebaj. All three towns are located in the province of Quiché and form what came to be known as the Ixil Triangle. Most community organization is prohibited.

November 20, 1976: Maryknoll Father Bill Woods and his co-workers are killed when his plane mysteriously explodes over northern Guatemala.

1976-78: One hundred and sixty-eight Catholic Action and village leaders are assassinated by the Guatemalan army or death squads in the department of Quiché alone.

August 1980: Bishop Juan Gerardi decides to close down the Diocese of Quiché to protest and to protect itself from the indiscriminate killing of indigenous people and religious working with the diocese. The region is left without official pastoral accompaniment.

1981-84: The Guatemalan Army carries out a "scorched-earth campaign" aimed at eliminating the base of civilian support for the guerrillas. Some 440 indigenous villages are wiped off the map as the Army moves in and

massacres people, torching the remains of the villages. Tens of thousands flee to Mexico. Others flee to the remote jungle and mountain areas of Guatemala and eventually congregate to become the Communities of Population in Resistance (CPRs). They are a civilian population that is protected by the URNG guerrillas.

Two major CPR groups are formed in the northwest parts of the Quiché and Huehuetenango provinces: the CPRs of the Ixcán (in the jungle) and the CPRs of the Sierra (in the mountains). Simultaneously, other groups are displaced from the Petén in northern Guatemala and some band together to form the CPRs of the Petén.

February 1983: Ricardo Falla begins his clandestine pastoral accompaniment of the CPRs of the Ixcán.

1983: The Ixil triangle is designated as a "development pole" by the Army. Survivors of massacres are captured and concentrated into "model villages." Some individuals captured from the CPRs are also forced to live in model villages. Other people who need land are brought in from other areas to take over the land left by the fleeing victims. By 1988, 45 model villages have been built. Civil Defense Patrols (PACs) are established around the country to "protect" communities against the guerrillas. In these patrols, civilian villagers are armed and forced to carry out orders of the Army.

Late 1984: The United Nations pressures Guatemalan refugees living in camps along the border of Mexico and Guatemala to relocate farther into Mexico. Many refuse and perhaps 1,000 return quietly to the CPRs with no international assistance.

1986: Vinicio Cerezo is elected president of Guatemala. He is the first civilian president elected since the 1954 CIA-backed coup.

Late 1987 - early 1988: Particularly intense offensives are launched by the Army. Somewhere between 3,000 and 7,000 civilians are captured from the CPRs or turn themselves in because of starvation.

September 1990: The CPRs of the Sierra break the silence about their existence by publishing a communique in the Guatemalan newspapers. They state their demands to be recognized as a civilian population and to be allowed to organize and move about freely without Army repression.

January 1991: The CPRs of the Ixcán follow suit and publish their own communique.

1991: Jorge Serrano Elías is elected president of Guatemala.

September 1991: A delegation of the CPRs of the Sierra goes to Guatemala City to open an office. They begin a permanent presence of representatives in the capital to continue their campaign for recognition as a civilian population.

October 1991: The CPRs of the Petén publish a communique with demands similar to those of the other CPRs.

1991-93: Following the publishing of the CPR communiques, religious and human rights groups in Guatemala City organize a Multipartite Commission that sends five different delegations by helicopter to the CPRs of the Ixcán and the Sierra to communicate support for the CPRs' demands. Army attacks on the area continue between visits.

October 8, 1992: The Guatemala government signs accords with the refugees living in Mexico. The accords guarantee their right to a collective return as well as their rights to security, documentation, land titles, and credit.

December 1992: In an Army offensive, the secret cache containing Ricardo Falla's pastoral supplies and documents is found and the Army learns of Falla's presence in the CPRs. The Church decides to ask Falla to discontinue his accompaniment of the Communities of Population in Resistance.

February 1993: Four hundred people from 14 different countries do an overland walk into the CPRs and verify their claims to be a civilian population.

March 1993: An Army offensive against the CPRs of the Ixcán forces more than 700 members to flee across the border into Mexico.

April 1993: The Guatemalan government denies the request of the Organization of American States (OAS) to visit the CPRs.

May 1993: With the support of the military, President Serrano decrees partial suspension of the Constitution and dissolves the Congress, the Supreme Court, the Office of the Attorney General and the Office of the Human Rights Ombudsman.

June 1993: The Army forces President Serrano to resign, and the Congress selects Ramiro de León Carpio, the former Human Rights Ombudsman, as president until the 1996 elections.

September 1993: Two hundred members of the CPRs of the Ixcán, along with 400 members of the CPRs of the Sierra, travel to the capital to petition the government to recognize them as civilian populations.

February 2, 1994: The seven communities of the CPRs of the Ixcán unite to form five "open settlements" and end their long period of hiding in the Ixcán jungle.

1994-95: Some members of the CPRs restart the Ixcán Grande Cooperative begun years ago by the Maryknoll missionaries. Others resettle and move to lands purchased with the help of the Quiché Diocese and CARITAS from various nations. Many of the people that Ricardo Falla once accompanied move and form a cooperative community called Primavera del Ixcán.

November 1995: Businessman Alvaro Arzú is elected president of Guatemala.

June 1996: The Guatemalan government announces plans to demobilize the Civil Defense Patrols.

December 1996: Final Peace Accords are signed between the government of Guatemala and the URNG guerrillas. New communities are formed as refugees continue to repatriate from Mexico.

April 24, 1998: The Archdiocese of Guatemala releases its "Recuperation of the Historic Memory" (REMHI) report, an interdiocesan project containing thousands of testimonies about the violence of the 36-year war in Guatemala. Two days later, Bishop Juan Gerardi, General Coordinator of the Archdiocesan Human Rights Office and presider at the event when the REMHI report was released, is assassinated at his home.

Notes

[1] Marcos was the pseudonym used by the author in the jungle. It was common to change names for security reasons.

[2] *Quiché* - a branch of the Guatemalan Mayans. Also their language.

[3] *Los jateados* - people who are packed in, like cargo, up against one another in the back of a truck, as is the case with many seasonal laborers.

[4] *Nahual* - protective spirit, sometimes in the form of an animal.

[5] "*Nicaragua, Nicaragüita*" (Nicaragua, Little Nicaragua) is a famous song by Carlos Mejía Godoy that praises the beauties of that country after the Sandinista revolution.

[6] *Campesino* - peasant farmer.

[7] Society of Jesus is the official name of the Jesuit order.

[8] Fr. Luís Eduardo Pellecer is a Jesuit who was kidnapped and brainwashed by the Army in 1981. He later left the Society of Jesus.

[9] Fr. Rogelio Ponseele is a Belgian priest who served as a chaplain for the guerrilla side during the civil war in El Salvador.

[10] Fr. Ignacio Ellacuría was a Jesuit priest and rector of the *Universidad Centroamericana* (UCA) where he was assassinated with five other Jesuits and their housekeeper and her daughter on November 16, 1989. Two Salvadoran military officers were convicted of the crimes.

[11] Under the scorched-earth policy, the Army burned houses, destroyed crops, killed animals, and massacred entire populations in order to take away civilian support for the guerrillas.

[12] For the whole testimony, see Falla, Ricardo: *Voices of the Survivors: The Massacre at Finca San Francisco*. Cultural Survival, Inc., and Anthropology Research Center, Boston, 1983.

[13] *Principal* - a religious elder of the community.

[14] The massacres at Shabra and Shatila were massacres of Palestinians in Lebanon in 1982.

[15] *Ladino* - the usual term for a non-indigenous person in Guatemala, although indigenous people who wear western clothing are often referred to as *ladino* as well.

[16] *Mam* - a branch of the Mayan people and also their language. The Ixcán was inhabited by people who spoke seven different Mayan languages.

[17] Monsignor Casariego was the Archbishop of Guatemala from 1974 until 1983. He was regarded as a conservative and anticommunist.

[18] *Pintos* - refers to the soldiers because of their camouflaged uniforms. Literally, it means speckled or spotted.

[19] *Huipil* - a cloth worn by women as a top, woven in traditional patterns that identify each community.

[20] The homemade trap was a hole in the ground, covered with branches and leaves. In the bottom were sharp wooden stakes, made from such a hard wood that they were almost like metal. Such traps were created to stop an Army advance, but sometimes the people whom the traps were designed to protect would accidentally get caught in one.

[21] *Navajuela* - a jungle plant characterized by knife-like leaves.

[22] *Puebla* (the document from the third Conference of the Latin American Bishops in 1979), nn. 31-39.

[23] *Pinol* - a powder ground from toasted

corn. It can be carried in a plastic bag and lasts for weeks, even months. The powder can be made into either a hot or a cold drink.

[24] Permanent Commissions - the elected representatives of the Guatemalan refugees in Mexico.

[25] *pura lata* - nothing but trouble.

[26] "So too, the Spirit assists us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray aright, but the Spirit pleads for us with sighs that are beyond words." (Romans 8:26)

[27] Saint Ignatius of Loyola had a famous vision in 1538 on his way to Rome: "He felt such a change in his soul, and he saw so clearly that God the Father was putting him with Christ, that he couldn't think of doubting it." (Autobiography of St. Ignatius, n. 96) He thought they were going to kill him, but instead the Company of Jesus was approved as a religious order.

[28] *La Crónica* - a Guatemalan weekly magazine.

[29] The author will explain later in the book about the assassination of six Jesuits and the housekeeper and her daughter in El Salvador in November 1989.

[30] *Marimba* - a traditional Guatemalan musical instrument like a large xylophone made entirely from wood.

[31] The Blessed Sacrament is the host used in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

[32] *Pox* - palm branches.

[33] The bed was made from poles lashed together with cane.

[34] Vinicio Cerezo was the first elected civilian president since the U.S.-sponsored coup in 1954. Head of the Christian Democrat party, Cerezo's victory raised the hopes of Guatemalans for peace and good government, but at the end of his term Cerezo departed under accusations of corruption and human rights abuses.

[35] The URNG is the coalition of four political and military organizations that made up the guerrillas.

[36] *Ixil* - another Mayan group and language.

[37] *Kekchí* - another Mayan group and language.

[38] Cardamom is a medium-sized shrub that produces a strong-smelling fruit, used to make perfumes. Guatemala is one of the world's biggest cardamom producers.

[39] As noted earlier, Ignacio Ellacuría, a Jesuit priest, was rector of the Salvadoran University of Central America (UCA) when he and seven others were assassinated by the Salvadoran Army in November 1989. At the time of his death, Ellacuría was advocating a peaceful negotiated settlement to El Salvador's 12-year-old civil war.

[40] The Ixcán committee was the leadership committee of the CPRs of the Ixcán.

[41] Myrna Mack was a 41-year-old Guatemalan anthropologist who was stabbed to death when leaving her office in Guatemala City on September 11, 1990. She had done field work among the displaced in the dangerous war areas of Quiché.

[42] "My beloved is a sachet of myrrh/ lying between my breasts./ My beloved is a cluster of henna flowers/ among the vines of Engedi" (1:13).

[43] CIEDEG: A Protestant and evangelical-based Conference of Churches in Guatemala.

[44] CONFREGUA: The Catholic-based confederation of men's and women's religious orders.

[45] UASP: An umbrella grouping of popular organizations and labor unions.

[46] CERJ: An indigenous organization advocating for human rights.

[47] CONAVIGUA: An indigenous organization of widows.

[48] COINDE: A coalition of national development organizations.

[49] ASECSA: A non-governmental health organization.

[50] CIEPRODH: A non-governmental organization for social service and the support of human rights.

[51] Asymptotic is a trigonometric term that refers to a curve that approaches a straight line toward infinity but never touches the line.

[52] EGP is the Spanish acronym for the Guatemalan Army of the Poor, one of the organizations that made up the URNG.

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Video

Against Forgetting: Monuments to Truth Edited and produced by Jonathan Treat, Campaign for Peace & Life/Sunshine Productions, 1996, 22 minutes, $19.95 (Add $3 postage and handling for videos.)

Esta Esperanza: Hope for El Salvador Produced by Richard Breyer, Filmaker's Library, 1997, 52 minutes, $21.95

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Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA

Ricardo Falla is an anthropologist and Jesuit priest. He is the author of *Massacres in the Jungle, Esa muerte que nos hace vivir,* and *Quiché Rebelde.* In *The Story of a Great Love,* Falla reveals his innermost spiritual self as he narrates the tale of his growing relationship with a brave and powerful people.

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