Mixtec Evangelicals

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I decided to work in the agencia of San Juan Diquiyú for a variety of reasons, most having to do with the ways it contrasts with the Mixtepec agencias. First, its population (700) is larger than the agencias I worked with in Mixtepec. Second, it is in the district of Huajuapan de León, while Mixtepec is in the district of Juxtlahuaca. Third, the municipio that Diquiyú is in has a low rate of emigration compared with the municipio of San Juan Mixtepec. There is also a smaller percentage of non-Catholics in Diquiyú, and it is much closer to the main highway than is Mixtepec. Intuitively, one might expect that it would have a higher emigration rate, given the ease of leaving, but this is in fact not the case.

In addition, I must admit, the proximity of Diquiyú to the town of Huajuapan was a factor in my decision to work there. Diquiyú is about an hour away, compared with the four grueling hours it takes to get to the village of San Juan Mixtepec, and another hour to each of the agencias.

San Juan Diquiyú is an agencia in the municipio of Tezoatlán de Segura y Luna. Compared to the village of San Juan Mixtepec, the town of Tezoatlán is larger (with a population of 2,375 versus Mixtepec’s 1,806), it has a bank where remittance checks can be cashed, it is on a paved road, and most of its streets are paved.
There are land telephone lines, although there is no bus service. There are of course the ubiquitous “suburbans,” which are more expensive than buses but better than walking. In general, one might say that Tezoatlán is more modern than Mixtepec. Another way to describe it would be that it is more Mestizo. The town looks more like other towns in Mexico. The census, which identifies indigenous people as those who speak an indigenous language, would characterize Tezoatlán as Mestizo: only 3 percent of the residents speak Mixteco. By contrast, in San Juan Mixtepec, 93 percent speak Mixteco.

**THE VILLAGE OF SAN JUAN DIQUIYÚ**

Compared with the road to San Juan Mixtepec, the way to San Juan Diquiyú is like a superhighway. Although Diquiyú is within what I call the great unpaved region, the road is paved until Tezoatlán. After that the terrain becomes more rugged and the road more serpentine. Diquiyú itself is as its name describes it: on a rock (or maybe more like an inverted cone). Like most communities in the region, the village is as vertical as it is horizontal. Most streets go up and down the rock, with cross streets at a tilt. The Catholic church, the ayuntamiento, and the community basketball court/dance floor occupy the only flat spaces. Even these are somewhat uneven: the basketball court is below the agencia offices; the two are connected by cement stairs. The offices are lower in elevation than the church.

There is a lower percentage of Mixteco speakers in San Juan Diquiyú than in the Mixtepec villages (see tables 3.3, 3.4 and 4.1), but they still make up a majority of the population; the census would categorize the community as indigenous. However, I noticed that few of the children in Diquiyú speak Mixteco. Some may be able to, but they prefer to speak Spanish. They say they understand Mixteco but they do not speak it. By contrast, the great majority of children in Yososcuá and San Lucas speak Mixteco.

Unlike Mixtepec, the agencia of San Juan Diquiyú does not have a large pine forest. The dominant vegetation is scrub and some very small palm trees. The trees are small because the leaves are cut for use in making *palma*, the woven baskets and hats available in Oaxaca City markets. For some people in Diquiyú, *palma* is their only source of money. The price paid for one hat, which takes about one-third of a day to make, is one peso (US$0.10 cents).

On the other hand, the terrain around Diquiyú is more amenable to agriculture than that around the Mixtepec agencias, as there are rolling hills with small parcels of land suitable for growing corn and beans. The land is less eroded than that of Mixtepec and affords more pasturage for horses, cattle, goats, and sheep. The vegetation surrounding the village is dense enough to provide firewood, the source...
of most of the heating done in the village. As in Mixtepec, it is illegal to cut green
wood, but dried or dead branches may be taken. Ninety-one percent of the house-
holds in the village use wood for cooking.

One day as I was driving to Diquiyú, I saw two elderly women emerge from the
brush carrying large bundles of firewood on their backs. Sweat was streaming down
their faces and bodies. I naturally offered them a ride to the village. I tried to lift one
of the bundles of wood into the bed of my pickup truck, but I could not budge it.
It must have weighed over fifty pounds. The women easily lifted the bundles into
the truck. As we drove to the village, I asked how long that wood would last in their
households. Three days. To buy that amount of wood would cost 50 pesos (US$5),
or the equivalent of fifty straw hats. Most people gathered their own wood, as it
was “free.” That is, money was not required to obtain it. The sweat is not counted
as a cost.

There are men in the village who gather firewood using burros to carry it; they
can get more than three days’ worth. But many of these men sell firewood to other
members of the village. There are also men with pickup trucks, generally purchased
in the United States. They can gather the most wood at a time; in some cases,
these men sell the wood in other communities. Some residents complain that the
men with the trucks take all the available wood, leaving none for the burros and
the humans to carry. As with many aspects of life in the village, those who have
migrated are more prosperous than those who have not. The migrants tend to be
the people with pickup trucks. Here is another example of selective modernity: a
majority of the people in the village cook with wood, but some of them collect the
wood using modern pickup trucks.

In 2002 the Mexican government established a “tres por uno” program, three for
one. This development program is intended to help emigrants to invest in their
own communities. In this program, officially, the state government and the federal
government together provide 50 percent of the funds for these projects. The rest
of the funds are provided by the migrants and the village. In reality, the municipal

<table>
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<th>Table 4.1. Language and religion: San Juan Diquiyú</th>
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<td>Population over 5 years old</td>
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<td>Mixteco only</td>
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<td>Mixteco and Spanish</td>
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<td>Catholic</td>
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<td>Non-Catholic</td>
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government contributes expertise—advice on how to construct drains, for example—and information on how to navigate the Mexican bureaucracy. The people in the village provide the labor, through tequio, and the migrants provide the money.

Migrants remain in touch with one another and with the autoridades in the village. Cell phones are essential to this. According to the agente, every year the autoridades call the migrants and tell them what project the community has decided on, and how much money it will cost. Then the migrants, including the non-Catholics, send the money. This pattern is common throughout the Mixteca region, without need of any national program. One such project was under way in San Juan Diquiyú in 2004: providing a drainage and sewer system that residents could hook up to and thus have indoor plumbing, a luxury they had not had before. Over a period of several months, every street in the village had a trench dug into its center. Then, enormous concrete pipes were piled up in the middle of the village. Eventually, these pipes were installed in the trenches by members of the village. Although some returned migrants have a little knowledge about construction, having worked in construction in the United States, the village residents depended on advice and expertise from officials in the government in Tezoatlán. The drainage project was only the most recent of a series of projects funded by the migrants and installed by the people in the village. These include fixing up the cemetery, installing a new basketball court/dance floor in the village center, and providing drinking water to all the houses in the village. These are impressive contributions to the community as a whole, and residents are happy to point them out.

THE FIESTA SYSTEM
The fiesta system in Diquiyú is much the same as it has been for many years, with some exceptions. The traditional system featured two major fiestas (San Juan Bautista, June 24, and San Juan Degollado, August 29), as well as a smaller fiesta, for Nuestro Señor de Chalma, on the first Friday of Lent. In the past, there were mayordomos for each of the fiestas, and now there is one mayordomo for all three. However, the system is virtually intact. There are thirty-six socios, twelve for each fiesta. These are men and their families who contribute time, labor, and money to the fiesta. When so many are willing to participate, the cost is much less for each family. In 2004 the amount of cash required from each socio was about $400 dollars. In several cases, the 2004 fiestas were sponsored in part by village members who live in the United States. Instead of rejecting the fiesta system, these migrants are interested in maintaining it. So, the weakening of the fiesta system is much less visible in Diquiyú than in the Mixtepec villages. Being mayordomo is not a terrible onus to bear, or, as it seemed to me in the Mixtepec villages, an example of a dying tradition.
On the other hand, migration has had some clear effects on the Diquiyú fiestas. There are still fireworks (essential for every important event in Mexico except those sponsored by non-Catholics), a dance, and a jaripeo—competitive bull riding. But nowadays the bull riders have to be hired by the fiesta sponsors because there are not enough young men living in the village or returning for the fiestas to ride the bulls. This is also true of the matachines, people dressed in costumes with large masks, who participate in the processions and dance at the fiesta. Still, there is clearly an effort to maintain the system as it has been. The members of San Juan Diquiyú are using money from migrants to keep the traditional fiesta system to the extent possible.

**ORTHODOX AND FOLK CATHOLICISM**

The Catholic pastor of Tezoatlán has organized a group of catechists (all women) in San Juan Diquiyú. This is part of the response to the increase in the number of non-Catholics in Latin America generally, and to the shortage of priests. It is part of the campaign to make folk Catholics more orthodox. Catechists receive special training from the parish priests in the meanings of various Catholic rituals, in Catholic beliefs, and in how to answer questions raised by non-Catholics. There are catechist groups in several villages in the municipio of Tezoatlán. They have their own meetings in the cofradías—the buildings used during the fiestas—and their own celebrations. The catechists are part of a lay ministry that could take up some of the tasks that priests did in the past. In addition, catechists and priests are trying to enforce the rules of the church regarding the sacraments. For example, couples who want

| Table 4.2. Socioeconomic indicators: San Juan Diquiyú |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Inhabited houses                | 161 |
| Using gas to cook               | 15  9% |
| Using wood to cook              | 146 91% |
| With indoor toilet              | 115 71% |
| With indoor water               | 149 92% |
| With drainage                   | 0  0% |
| With electricity                | 156 97% |
| With no water, drainage, or electricity | 2 1% |
| Marginalization level           | high |

*Source: INEGI 2000.*
to be married by a priest must prove that they have been baptized, have received first communion, and have been confirmed, before the marriage can take place. The church also wants to convince the villagers that God is more important than the saints, including the patron saint of their village.

The catechists are tasked to convince the other Catholics in their villages of the correctness of these rules. However, the persistence of the fiesta system in Diquiyú suggests that they have not been very successful. The folk Catholics seem to be holding their own. It is highly unlikely that even large numbers of catechists will convince villagers that the patron saint is not the central ritual figure. After all, San Juan (Saint John) sends the rain, it is believed. God is not taken into consideration in the celebrations of the villagers at the fiestas. Ironically, the Orthodox Catholic Church and the non-Catholics agree on the importance of God over the saints, but the similarity stops there. The Catholics still believe in the saints, while the non-Catholics do not. There is no strict line between orthodox and folk Catholics. While most fiesta participants are not catechists, some catechists participate in some parts of the fiesta. Here, as in much of Latin America, the traditions of folk and orthodox Catholics overlap. The fact that there are catechists in Diquiyú suggests some movement toward orthodox behavior, but the robustness of the fiesta system calls that possibility into question.

**NON-CATHOLICS IN SAN JUAN Diquiyú**

Like the rate of out-migration, the percentage of non-Catholics in Diquiyú is also lower than in the Mixtepec villages: 8 percent, as opposed to San Lucas, with 40 percent, and Yososcuá, with 25 percent (see tables 3.2, 3.3, and 4.1). When the first non-Catholics arrived in the village, many Catholics denounced them, saying they were crazy, and trying to punish them or force them to return to sanity (i.e., Catholicism). Alternatively, the Catholics made fun of the non-Catholics. The element of ridicule of non-Catholics is very present in the village. Many non-Catholics pointed out that the Catholics ridicule their beliefs, and embarrass them in front of their own families. Often it is the families who make fun of them. This is given as a reason for the low number of non-Catholics in the village. According to the Catholics and the non-Catholics alike, the latter either leave or remain outside the village because they do not want to be ridiculed. This may account at least in part for the small numbers of non-Catholics in the village.

In 2004 Catholics in Diquiyú criticized the non-Catholics by saying that the hermanos do not contribute to the community, they refuse to pay for repairs of the community basketball court/dance floor, they do not do tequio, and so on. But according to the political leaders of the village, it is only the activities associated with
the fiesta, such as bull-riding or dancing, that the hermanos will not pay for. One man said that when he was agente, in 1994, the non-Catholics threatened him with bodily harm if the Catholics insisted on forcing them to take on religious cargos. The two groups did not in fact resort to violence to settle the matter. Nonetheless, there was definitely hostility between the Catholics and the non-Catholics at that time. This event was part of the conflict that followed the conversion of the first non-Catholics. By 2004, the village had agreed to let non-Catholics have only secular cargos. Still, people ask why they won’t pay for fireworks or the carnival rides, which are not strictly Catholic. The non-Catholics see these activities as frivolous and a waste of money.

There are two congregations of non-Catholics in Diquiyú: the Seventh-day Adventists and the Trinitarian church, a mission of the Centros Bíblicos in Huajuapan.

**SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS**

In Diquiyú, the Adventist presence began when a resident of another village, part of the agencia of Diquiyú, converted two brothers who eventually moved to the village of Diquiyú, where they live now. This first conversion occurred in about 1981. This date is earlier than the arrival of non-Catholics to the Mixtepec villages. (The earlier converts tended to bear the brunt of Catholic rejection.) The siblings of the first converts, and their wives and families, all converted to the Seventh-day Adventist church. At first, the Catholics of the village criticized the Adventists. “Nos odiaban” (they hated us), according to one member. They forced one of the converts to be a socio of the mayordomo. This man clearly succumbed to the pressure from the majority in order to keep the peace and so that all the Adventists could remain members of the village. By 2004, the attitudes of the Catholics had changed. “Ya no dicen nada” (they don’t say anything any more), an Adventist woman said. The village as a whole has agreed to give the non-Catholics non-Catholic cargos, such as the school committee, the water committee, etc. The non-Catholics have to take up more of these cargos in order to compensate for their absence from the Catholic committees. The Catholics are clearly not happy with the arrangement, but have accepted it. This is perhaps because the non-Catholics do not proselytize and generally keep their heads down.

Although emigration from the Mixteca began in the 1980s, the Adventists never migrated out of San Juan Diquiyú. In addition, as an extended family whose members did not migrate, they have no relatives who migrated, thus they have no access to help from relatives in the form of remittances or gifts. And unlike other Adventist congregations in the region, they never succeeded in converting their neighbors.
As a result of this, there have been no new members. Today, the membership consists of the extended families of the original converts. These families are among the poorest in the village. They are among the people who make palma. Their houses are small, one- or two-room shacks made of wood, with dirt floors and no modern amenities such as refrigerators or televisions. These contrast with the houses of returning migrants or the relatives of migrants in the United States. Those houses are made of cement, and some have cement floors. Many have large televisions as well as other consumer goods such as sound systems, video recorders, and the like.

This case contradicts the general pattern of migration and conversion. The Adventists converted earlier than most, they never migrated to anyplace outside the agencia, and they are poorer than most people in the village. This exception tends to prove the rule, however. If conversion is associated with migration, and migration is associated with an increase in wealth, it is not a surprise that these converts are poor. They have never seen the enormous numbers and variety of consumer goods available to migrants in the United States, and even if they saw them they would not be able to afford them. They never made any converts outside the extended family; this is highly unusual and has a predictable outcome. The fact that they did not migrate, along with their lack of interest in converting others, points up the opposite pattern in other groups.

All Adventists are not like those in Diquiyú. In the village of Santiago Asunción, in the Silacayoápam District, the process of migration and conversion was similar to that of other communities. The first convert, Arnulfo Solano, had migrated to the United States in 1990 and had been converted by his brothers, who were already members of the church. He returned to the village in 1992, determined to found a church there. He had convinced a few Anglo-American Adventists to accompany him to the village to help with the evangelization project. In addition, his uncle was the agente and might be persuaded to support the new church. This plan did not work, and there was great opposition to the group, especially to the building of an Adventist church in the village. Arnulfo and the others were so successful in making converts that they eventually convinced the government authorities in Silacayoápam and Huajuapan to support them. With letters from both, the Adventists finally were allowed to build the church. This church building is one of the largest non-Catholic churches in the entire Mixteca region. It is also very prominently located on the road through the village, while the Catholic church occupies the traditional space across from the government buildings.

Today the majority of the villagers and most of the autoridades are Adventists. The fiesta system has become less important. There are only two fiestas in comparison with the pre-Adventist number, seven.¹ In addition, attendance at fiestas has declined.
This story contrasts sharply with that of Diquiyú while following closely the pattern of other communities. A crucial difference between Santiago Asunción and San Juan Diquiyú was the outside support from other Adventists and from municipal and district authorities. Without this, and without more converts in the village itself, Santiago Asunción may well have had a similar history to Diquiyú’s.

TRINITARIANS IN SAN JUAN DIQUIYÚ

The other non-Catholic group in San Juan Diquiyú is a mission of the Centros Bíblicos in Huajuapan. This is a Trinitarian church, and most of its members have been migrants. According to the pastor of the congregation in 2004, two families of non-Catholics first returned to Diquiyú in 1984. They were members of the village and had converted to Pentecostalism during the time they were migrants. Once in Diquiyú, they began to evangelize; they later returned to the migrant stream. In 2004, there were fifty to sixty members of the church in Diquiyú; about half were in the United States. According to this pastor, the relations between this congregation and the Catholics in the village were friendly. He said, “we are different, but there are no arguments.” This is the attitude of most of the members of the Pentecostal church in Diquiyú.

The pastor of the main congregation in Huajuapan wanted the Diquiyú members to do a better job of evangelization so that more souls would be saved. In one homily, he asked; “Who are the saints? For the world [(i.e., Catholics)], the saints are images [(i.e., statues of saints)]. But for God we (the hermanos) are the saints. As in the hymn ‘When the Saints Go Marching In,’ we will be among the saints. We are going to fly, and the Catholics will be left behind.” On another occasion, he prayed for an avivamiento, an awakening, in the village to inspire people to convert. During the fiesta of San Juan, the patron saint of the village, he criticized the Catholics harshly, saying that there was a weight bearing down on the village. Then he said that San Juan is the devil, the prince of darkness. He encouraged the hermanos to work harder to bring people into the light so that they would be saved. He recommended that the hermanos greet everyone, not just hermanos, by saying God bless you (the standard greeting of all Evangelicals). The implication was that such friendliness might lead to an invitation to a service, which might lead to another hermano in the village. However, in a village of 700 souls, it is likely that everyone knows who the hermanos are and would reject such an offer of friendship, knowing the reason behind it. The church members in the village are not willing to proselytize, but the pastor from Huajuapan is trying to get them to do so. I believe they want to preserve the peace.
San Juan Diquiyú seems to be a village whose members are trying to get along despite religious differences. One of the reasons for a lack of conflict over religion is the quiescence of the non-Catholics. Neither group has made many efforts to convert their fellow villagers. Although the Centros Bíblicos group has grown, its growth rate is quite a lot lower than those of the Mixtepec agencias or other communities such as Santiago Asunción. As long as the non-Catholics remain a small minority of the population (at 8 percent, quite a bit smaller), the Catholics seem to accept their presence and go along with adjusting the cargos so that the non-Catholics take on more secular cargos than religious ones.

However, it is in the nature of Pentecostals to spread the news broadly and loudly. This is what the Centros Bíblicos leaders are trying to encourage not only in Diquiyú, but in other villages as well. To do this, they are trying to push the hermanos into conflict with the Catholics by saying that their saint is the devil. It is doubtful that any non-Catholic resident of the village would make such a statement in public because they are not willing to create the kind of conflict that has gotten non-Catholics expelled from other villages. On the other hand, Catholics are not averse to an occasional remark making fun of the hermanos or asserting to outsiders that the hermanos do not participate in the activities of the village. The comment by one Pentecostal speaker from outside the village that he feels great when people make fun of him was aimed at convincing the hermanos to proselytize, even if they are ridiculed—they will grow to like it.

The topic of ridicule by Catholics came up during my interview with Hermano Jacinto, the pastor of the Diquiyú Trinitarians. The context was a discussion of where people are baptized into another denomination. It seemed to me that, generally, Mixtecs go through a fairly long process that sometimes results in baptism. I had assumed that most are baptized outside the village, in the migrant population. However, Hermano Jacinto said that it is best to be baptized in the village, because then the individual already knows that he or she will be ridiculed. Those who are baptized elsewhere are not prepared for the invective that might greet them when they return to the community. Hermano Jacinto said that just about all of the non-Catholics in his congregation had heard about Jesus during their migrations away from the region. However, he encourages prospective converts not to be baptized elsewhere. He told me that a convert baptized in the United States is like a plant that you might bring back from the US: you hope it will thrive, but it may not. As such plants often are unable to adjust to life in the Mixteca, so people baptized in the United States are often unable to maintain their faith in the face of the ridicule of their friends and family.
According to the pastor, some of these people return to the Catholic Church, or else “no son nada” (they are nothing, of no religion). Many other villagers, Catholic and non-Catholic, said this is a pattern in Diquiyú. This may partially explain the low number of non-Catholics. Although the 2000 census found no completely secular residents, I know of at least one family who is. This is the trajectory I found in my earlier research in Sonora: rather than returning to the Catholic Church, non-Catholics simply become secular and stop attending any church. I did not find any people who returned to Catholicism after converting. However, both Hermano Jacinto and a member of the Adventists in Diquiyú said that there were converts who went back to being Catholics. Perhaps this is because “being Catholic” is more than simply belonging to a church; it means accepting the rules of the village, which include the entire fiesta system as well as the support of the Catholics rather than their ridicule.

**DISCUSSION**

Why are there fewer non-Catholics in Diquiyú than in the Mixtepec villages? One factor, and an important one, is the lower emigration rate for the municipio as a whole. As it is importantly return migrants who belong to non-Catholic churches, lower rates of emigration and return migration have resulted in there being fewer non-Catholics. However, the role of ridicule seems to be a much bigger issue in Diquiyú than in any of the other communities.

The combination of these factors has, in turn, had several consequences in Diquiyú. First, the fiesta system is much more intact than in the Mixtepec villages. Furthermore, money from remittances helps pay for people from outside the village to take on fiesta roles for which no one in the village qualifies. Thus, money earned by emigrants is being used to maintain the fiesta system. Another factor is the history of religious conflict in Diquiyú. Both of the non-Catholic churches were founded in the early 1980s. This was a period when expulsion of non-Catholics was a real possibility; it is when the expulsions of the congregations that today form the Centros Bíblicos in Huajuapan took place. In Diquiyú, the Catholics forced at least one non-Catholic to participate in an expensive, complex role in the Catholic fiesta during this period. There was also the incident in 1994, when the non-Catholics were driven to threaten the mayor with physical violence if he tried to force them to participate in the Catholic part of the fiesta. This shows that a level of conflict lasted at least into the 1990s. At the same time, the ridicule of the non-Catholics by the Catholics is evidently an important reason for some converts to return to the Catholic Church, while some become completely secular and others remain outside the village. Evidently, the combination of all these factors has
made the non-Catholics reluctant to proselytize in the village. The lack of conflict in 2004 thus derives at least in part from the inaction of the non-Catholics.

It might be suggested that the village is less modern than the Mixtepec agencias. It certainly adheres more to the traditional fiestas than the other communities. The paucity of return migrants also corresponds to lower numbers of modern vehicles and consumer goods. However, in Diquiyú there is another approach to modernity. The members of this village take on development projects paid for by the entire community. While all villages in the Mixteca depend on remittances to maintain their infrastructures to some extent, in Diquiyú the community as a whole contributes to development projects such as providing potable water and indoor plumbing to all members of the village. Even the poorest villagers received both these products of modernity. The community’s subsequent development plan was to pave the streets of the village. This level of commitment to the community as a whole is not seen in the Mixtepec villages. Yet it has resulted in modern facilities in Diquiyú that are available only to a minority of members of the Mixtepec villages. There are clearly more ways of becoming modern than converting to non-Catholic churches. In Diquiyú, the migrants help pay for the maintenance of the non-modern fiestas, and they help develop and maintain the community as a whole. Thus, selective modernity—potable water, indoor plumbing—is provided from within the traditional system of usos y costumbres.

NOTE

1. The information on the Adventists of Santiago Asunción comes from Espinosa Hernández 2003:63–70.