

The Importance of Land Ownership in Developing World Cooperatives

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*When we go into another culture, we go into another's home.
If we are to be with these others, we must learn to respect them. (Maximiano Campa)
Those we go to will teach us.
The Kingdom of God begins on Earth.
The Kingdom is made up of many different and distinct cultures. They all contribute.
They must be respected and appreciated.
Corn is sacred for the Mayan people.
They must have the opportunity to produce their own corn on their own land.*

Maximiliano Campa came up to me and asked, "Padre, why did you come here?" I had been in San Lucas Toliman, Soloia, Guatemala but a few months and was the only foreigner in town.

"Don Max, I would like to serve the people." He looked me in the eye and turned to walk away.

Several days later as I walked about in front of the church, again Don Max came up to me, "Padre, why did you come to San Lucas?"

A bit concerned now because of the repetition of the question, I replied, "Don Max, as I mentioned the other day, I hope to be able to serve the people." Again he looked me in the eye – again he turned and walked away. Don Max was a rather tall man and walked with a regal stride.

His clothing was of his own people – homespun long white trousers, a homespun white pullover shirt and a bright red sash. He looked the respected 'wisdom' person of the community he was. Not many days later, Don Max stopped me a third time and asked that same question; "Padre, why did you come here?"

"But Don Max, we have been through this several times! Like I have said, I would like to serve the people!"

This time as he looked me in the eye, he said aloud: "I think you do. You must be patient, Padre. You must be patient with yourself and with my people. You must learn to be patient. I want to help you learn. I am only sorry that I am no longer young so I could work with you as you learn. But I will do what I can." Maximiliano Campa would appear often and simply walk with me as I moved about town. At that time he spoke to me quietly, confidently and with authority.

He was always teaching. Several years after this initial encounter, Don Max sent his grandson Jorge Mucia to ask me to come to their house. As I entered, I found Don Max sitting on a small chair bent over, thumbing kernels of corn from an ear into his overturned sombrero. He glanced up and motioned with his head for me to sit on a bench against the wall in front of him. I did so. Nothing was said for what seemed to be such a long time and then he spoke. "Padre, I want you to give me \$50. You are my friend, aren't you?"

"I am your friend Don Max. Indeed I am. But what do you want \$50 for?"

"Soon I am going to die Padre, and we need the money for my wake and funeral. I cannot ask to borrow the money because I am going to die and cannot pay it back. I cannot ask my family to pay it back – they are too poor. When an old person dies among my people, you must have a little fiesta because that person is going home. You must have some coffee and sugar. You must have some bread for those visiting to eat. You also must have a little laguardientel (a local type of rum) for those who would like a drink. I must have the money to pay for all of this. Will you give me the \$50?"

"Certainly, Don Max, I will give you the money but you are not going to die. You are strong. If you feel ill, we can go and see a doctor to help you."

"No, Padre, I am going to die soon. And thank you for the money." It was just a matter of weeks after that visit that again Grandson Jorge Mucia was sent to call me to his grandfather. This time I was to bring the sacraments of the sick. Arriving at the house, I found Don Max lying in his bedroom on a low plank bed with a blanket pulled up to his chin. He seemed to be looking into the ceiling of the room. He moved only his eyes as I came through the door and spoke softly, asking for "that blessing you give people who are dying." Again I urged him to go with me to a doctor. He said nothing and waited for "that blessing." I gave him the sacrament of the sick.

As I finished, he said, "Padre, kneel down, I want to give you a blessing now." I did and he spoke to God: "Please teach this young man to be patient, patient with himself and patient with my people. He must always be patient. Lord, take care of him. Lord, teach him to be patient." He took his hand from my head and returned it under the blanket. He thanked me for the blessing of the sick, told me I could leave and looked again through the ceiling of the room. Slowly I left the house. I could still feel that firm hand on my head and his words continued in my mind. There was a lump in my throat. I was halfway through the walk back to church when I heard running footsteps coming up behind me. I turned to see Grandson Jorge: "Padre, your friend Don Max just died!" I stood there in the middle of the dirt road – dumbfounded. Tears filled my eyes and rolled down my cheeks. All was blurry as I wandered home. It was Christmas Eve.

Whenever we go into another's culture we are going into another's home. If we are allowed in or invited in, we go in to come to know, to appreciate, to respect and to walk with these others. We are the outsiders. We go into what belongs to another. That must be respected. This realization must be a primary requisite for any "globalization step." If we

"go in," we "go in," to "walk with" not "lead about." (c.f. recent editorial by Paul Krugman)

My own experience has been living in another's culture. Most of my life has been living in another's home. But I was not prepared for it. I am not a scholar doing research in order to teach. I am only a diocesan priest going to be with a people who are not my own. They had to teach me why I was there, how to act, what to do. I had to learn (and continue to learn). Those I was to be with were my teachers (and continue to be my teachers). As a priest, I am supposed to work hard to bring justice and peace to the world. I am supposed to do that. I had better try. I realize fully well that as baptized Christians we are all supposed to do as Jesus the Christ did and teach as Jesus the Christ taught. After all we were anointed to Jesus Christ: Priest, Prophet and King. As an ordained ministerial priest, I have chosen to dedicate my life and all my efforts to bringing peace and justice to the world.

Can we even hope to live justice and peace on earth? Is the peace spoken of at the Incarnation but a dream on this earth to be lived only in the afterlife - maybe? It would seem that the very act of the Incarnation tells us that God wants to reign on earth. The Son was sent to bring peace and good will to all. The child born was to be called: Immanuel ... a name which means "God-is-with-us"; St. Matthew tells us in verse 24 of the first chapter of his gospel.

Yes, the reign of God is to begin on earth – now. The actions of Jesus tell us what to do in the kingdom of God on earth. The teachings of Jesus tell us how to get it done. The basic values and principles are all there. We must learn them. We must live them. We must teach them. Then the Kingdom can be lived here and can go on eternally after the change called death. Biblical scholar, Benedict T. Viviano, O.P. Ph.D.(1) writes: "The term 'basileia/malkut' in the Bible has two references: it refers to the political government of a territory (as in modern English), or to the personal activity of ruling by a King, which may be called a King's Reign. It is important to retain both connotations. The territorial sense makes the term concrete and earthly. The personal sense is a reminder that this Kingdom is God's." Viviano speaks to us of how the Kingdom is dealt with in all of the Gospels, in Paul and in Revelations. Allow me to take up his insight of the Kingdom in Matthew's Gospel. "... First, the Kingdom of God is a social reality; it is not individualistic. ... Second, the Kingdom preached by Jesus is intended to be an earthly as well as a heavenly political reality. ... Third, the Kingdom of God is personalistic, not tyrannical or insensitive. ... Fourth, the Kingdom is universal, intended to all men and women, all peoples and nations: ... Fifth, the Kingdom of God is God's Kingdom. ... The Kingdom is Jesus' future hope and promise for this world just as the resurrection is the hope He offers for the next world, for heaven."

Viviano offers an interesting insight into what can cause some confusion in John's Gospel. "In the Revised Standard Version text of John 18:36, Jesus says, 'My Kingship is not of this world. My servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews; but my Kingship is not from the world.' This common translation gives the casual reader the impression that Jesus' Kingship has nothing to do with this world. But in fact the

Greek text shows that it has no other meaning than the common synoptic doctrine, since the Greek preposition is 'ek', meaning 'from'. Thus the verse should read: 'My Kingdom is not of this world ...' That is, it does not come from here, does not originate here, a possibility directly taught and prayed for in the synoptics. The danger of the RSV translation lies in the fact that it tends to diffuse the powerful promise of Jesus for this world into a purely heavenly, mystical, and spiritual idea of Kingdom. Another frequently abused passage, often twisted to justify social injustice and indifference to the poor, is Jesus' reply during the anointing at Bethany, 'The poor you will always have with you' (Matt 26:11). The corrective appears in the earliest form of the story (Mark 14:7) and in its Old Testament source (Deut. 15:11)."

Mark 14:7 tells us, "The poor you will always have with you and you can be generous to them; whenever you wish, but you will not always have me." Deut 15:11 says: "The needy will never be lacking in the land; that is why I command you to open your hand to your poor and needy kinsman in your country."

For Gustavo Gutierrez, the father of liberation theology, the presence of God's Kingdom on earth is of special importance and he writes of this Kingdom with particular force. "The Kingdom of God brings with it the demand for certain kinds of behavior. The disciples of Jesus who accept the gift of the Kingdom respond to it by a specific conduct. This is the ethical dimension of the Kingdom. 'Repent, is the demand that accompanies the gift of the Kingdom and leads to a new kind of activity in relation to God and one's brothers and sisters. Repentance, or conversion, supposes a break, but above all it means entering upon a new, and indeed constantly new, way: 'Believe in the Gospel.' To believe is to say 'amen' to God; it is to declare our fidelity and our acceptance of the Kingdom and its demands. The acceptance finds expression both in thanksgiving to God and in deeds done for our brothers and sisters. It is in this dialectic that the meaning of the Kingdom emerges. The Kingdom requires us to change our present reality, reject the abuses of the powerful, and establish relationships that are fraternal, and just. With this way of acting we accept the gift of the Lord's Presence."

If Gustavo Gutierrez' theology of liberation has brought anything to us, it has brought the appreciation of God's preferential option for the poor. If the Kingdom of God is at work on earth, we are going to see it at work readily in active concern for the marginalized, oppressed, and neglected of that very Kingdom. In accepting a Doctorae Honoris Causa from the University of Montreal, Gutierrez summarized his thinking about the 'preferential option for the poor.' I was struck especially by his way of dealing with the word 'preference' or 'preferential.' (3) "I have often met people who find it strange to use the term "preference." Would it not be better to say simply "option for the poor" since "preferential" sounds too gentle? I do not agree. Preference implies the universality of God's love, which excludes no one. It is only within the framework of this universality that we can understand the preference, that is, "what comes first."

The Bible speaks of God's preference for the poor. In Genesis, why does God prefer Abel to Cain? Nowhere does it say that Abel is better or that Cain has something evil about him. But Abel was the younger brother, the last. God preferred the sacrifice of Abel to

that of Cain. Cain's sin was his refusal to accept God's preference for Abel, and so Cain killed Abel. The rejection of the preference means failing to grasp that we must combine the universality of God's love with God's preference for the poorest. And this was the expression typical of Pope John XXIII, "The church of all, and particularly the church of the poor." As Christians we cannot say, "only the poor count." Such an attitude is not Christian; neither is claiming to love everyone while in fact loving no one. Holding the two aspects together, universality and preference, is not easy. It is a great challenge.

Would it not be better to look at the Kingdom as made up of different cultures that people at this time in their history want to live. The Kingdom is different cultures, different lifestyles, different ways of looking at God, nature, and life in Community. This way we can see the Kingdom as richly endowed by God, with many distinct groupings of people offering their own God-given gifts and talents to the Kingdom as a whole.

Still, the concept of culture is difficult to grasp. I like the way Fr. Louis Luzbetak, S.V.D., Ph.D., speaks of it: (5) "Culture – the total life –way and mentality of a people. Culture is a design for living. It is a plan according to which society adapts itself to its physical, social, and ideational environment." Respect for and appreciation of these many different cultures is of utmost importance if the Kingdom of God is to work on earth today. John Dominic Crossan, using anthropology as a tool in his search for the historical Jesus, quotes anthropologist Gerhard Lenski. Crossan writes: "Lenski's model divides human societies, primarily by technology and only secondarily by ecology, into hunting and gathering, simply horticultural, advanced horticultural, agrarian, and industrial societies. All of those societies not only were known from past times, but were available somewhere in our contemporary world when social anthropologists first began scientific study of their specific characteristics, complexities and differences." (p. 44 of Crossan's first book) Lenski speaks of the simple horticultural people as planting with wooden tools ... advanced horticultural people as planting with metal tools with no moving parts ... agrarian people as using machinery for planting. I use this material because I am convinced that the Mayan People of rural Guatemala want to live the advanced horticultural lifestyle but also I do think Lenski's insight gives us a good look at 'general cultures' lived in the Kingdom today. We can see these cultures lived within nations today. We know of 'hunters and gatherers, who want to live their lifestyle in the rain forests along the Amazon River in Brazil today. Most Mayan People of Guatemala want to live their heritage in the advanced horticultural lifestyle Lenski speaks of even though the Nation of Guatemala hosts a strong industrialized culture lived by some. We can get a picture of cultures in the Kingdom using the categories Lenski has written about.

Cultures can change. Culture is part of the human condition. As human beings we live with change. If those living in a given culture decide they want to change, that is just fine. However, if the change is brought about by force either from the host nation or by a foreign power, then I think that is

Wrong. In my way of thinking, that is oppression. If a culture is weakened by poverty, special care must be taken lest a people be forced from their culture. Rather, if the Kingdom of God on earth is working, it will reach out to help a people live the lifestyle

they wish. If poverty weakens a people in their culture – we work to relieve the poverty – not force change on the people.

Using Lenski's categories as a guide, I would propose that the strongest "culture today is the industrialized." Using President Clinton's numbering from his State of the Union Address this year, there are 24 industrialized nations. Of these, eight are listed as the principle ones: Japan, Germany, Italy, France, England, The U.S.A., Canada and recently-added Russia. These are commonly referred to as "the Group of Eight." Their governments are a form of democracy and their economics a form of capitalism. Globalization gives them a vehicle to reach out and touch all other cultures in the Kingdom. This is all just fine. However, my concern is that these strong cultures of our day must not force other cultures, especially those weakened by poverty, to submit and become part of the industrialized world. Poverty must be relieved and difference in culture must be respected in the process of Globalization we know today. There is a danger. The capitalism common to us today often carries with it a neo-liberalistic slant. That is – profit is key. Profits are our guide to growth. If profits lessen or soften, that is decline. For profits we must produce at low cost and sell at high cost – and – sell a lot. As Globalization marches throughout the Kingdom, we must be careful not to stomp on the weak.

Communications of all kinds, the electronic age, time and funds for travel have indeed made the Kingdom of God on earth a very small one. Sisters and brothers in any given part of the Kingdom can reach out and touch or be touched in moments. A morning earthquake in Japan is on the noon news in the U.S.A. A starving child in Africa and the reason why is material for any given television talk show. Information about that child with pictures is made available moments before the show is to begin. Chico Mendez and his rubber union workers can be a subject of a documentary film that is broadcast to the world while the struggle for survival goes on. We can know so very much about so very many of our brothers and sisters in the Kingdom with so little effort – the effort it takes to read a newspaper, watch a TV show or listen to a radio. Once we can recognize that the Kingdom is really alive on earth and we know what to do and how to do it in that Kingdom, then we can take the next step. We can become more and more aware of what is happening in the Kingdom and what we can do to become better citizens of that Kingdom. Often times, the Kingdom is broken into two parts by those speaking of 'this world we live in.' There is the north, and the south or the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. There are those who like to show that a division can be made like this: 80% of the world's resources are used by 20% of the people and 80% of the world's population have but 20% of the world's resources for use. It was not long ago that a popular way of dividing the Kingdom in the world was between: democratic-capitalism as a way of life and opposed to communistic-socialism world saying we want to live differently or a third-way. Hence – first, second and third world. I would rather that we look at this Kingdom as made up of cultures wanting to be lived by a people with different cultures, different lifestyles, different ways of looking at God, nature, and life in a community. Respect for each of these cultures and how they are lived is of utmost importance for the Kingdom of God to work on earth today. This can be a problem. It can be a problem especially if the culture wanting to be lived is oppressed for whatever reason.

Brazilian Liberation Theologians, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff (4) deal with this problem of oppression in the Kingdom. "Faced with the problem of the oppressed, the liberation theologian's first question can only be: why is there oppression and what are its causes? ... So, if we start with the fundamental expression of oppression as socio-economic poverty, we then need to find what causes it. Here, Liberation Theology has found three ready-made answers, which might be called The Empirical, The Functional, and The Dialectical explanations of poverty. ... The Empirical explanation: poverty is vice. This approach produces a short and superficial explanation. It attributes the causes of poverty to laziness, ignorance, or simply human wickedness. The Functional explanation: poverty as backwardness. This is the liberal or bourgeois interpretation of the phenomenon of social poverty: It is attributed to economic and social backwardness. ... The Dialectical explanation: poverty as oppression. This sees poverty as the product of the economic organization of society itself, which exploits some – the workers – and excludes others from the production process – the underemployed, unemployed, and all those marginalized in one way or another." (I introduce this insight of Leonardo and Clodovis Boff from their book: INTRODUCING

LIBERATION THEOLOGY – Orbis Books –1990, because I think it tells us how the poor of the world are seen all too often. We must encourage a people to live the culture they wish to live rather than attempt to tell them or show them what culture we think they are supposed to live.)

Back in the early 1970s, our elementary school in San Lucas Toliman was blessed with fine auxiliary teachers. Their primary job was to help the Mayan children with language in class. National Spanish was a second language and in some cases came slowly. Bilingual Ricardo Ajpuac was particularly good at his job, director of the auxiliary teachers and very proud of his heritage. He approached me one morning before class. "Padre, you won't believe this, but it is true. This morning after breakfast my wife, Guicha Maria Luisa, asked me if I noticed anything different about the tortillas. I told her that she always makes good tortillas but today, for some reason, they tasted better. She said, "Yes I know. This morning is the first time we have ever eaten tortillas made from corn we have raised on our own land!" Scientific study of that corn compared to other corn would certainly wonder about Ricardo's statement. And yet, an Ecological Profile done by the Jesuit University, Landivar, of Guatemala City in 1988 tells us: "But more important than the quantity of the corn consumed is the belief that corn might give strength. It should be produced by the Indian himself with his own personal labor (work)." It is a common Mayan belief that corn produced by the family on its own land is not only better tasting, but more nutritious. Again scientific study might wink at this.

Carlos Jacinto Chata is a local lad of many talents. He earned his master's degree in education and was principal of our elementary school for several years. Today he works with the Christian Brothers in their fine secondary school, Santiagito, in Guatemala City. Carlos is very proud of his heritage and teaches with pride the Mayan Tradition. In writing a Mayan Story of Creation to be used in an information booklet for a Marimba Group traveling in the U.S.A., he told of how human beings came into existence." After Hunaphu, father god, failed in his attempt to make human out of clay, stone or wood,

Alom, mother god, said she would make human beings. She went to Ixmuchane, grandmother god, and asked advice. Ixmuchane instructed Alom to take corn from her grindingstone to make humans. Alom did and human beings came to be made of corn. The Mayan culture cannot be lived without corn. The tortilla is sacred. It blesses life.

Oftentimes the eating of tortillas is used to express returning to health after sickness: *Ya puede comer unas dos tortillas* - She can now eat a few tortillas! The tortilla is often used to indicate the imminence of death. *Ya no pasa la tortilla* - He cannot swallow even a piece of tortilla, means that we should hurry with the sacraments of the sick because the person is at the threshold of death.

Inevitably this is true. Obviously the tortilla and its value are directly related to the land. As I have mentioned, it is a Mayan Belief that tortillas made from the corn a family has raised on its own land are better tasting and more nutritious. The very being of the Mayan People is directly related to the land. The earth is Madre Tierra ... she gives us what we need for life.

In a little book called *Fibras del Corazón* written by Daniel Matul in 1996, we find a rather poetic expression of the very fountain of the true worldview of the Mayan People from the depths of the (reflective) silence of the nation. On page 11, the author presents this insight, "This very day all of the Mayan People know that we are one with Mother Earth and our responsibility is to defend her (care for her). It is here in Mother Earth, where humanity must live the experience of the spirit, the transcendent; where must be built the balance between Nature and Culture." (My translation)

The cry for land is heard constantly in Guatemala. The Episcopal Conference of Guatemala has written two strong Pastoral Letters proclaiming this cry of the people. Written in 1988, "The Cry For the Land" goes into detail on the need for land by the Mayan People (all rural people actually) and what happens to a people who are without the land they need. Written in 1992, "Five Hundred Years" speaks to us of the coming of Christianity. This Pastoral Letter also speaks of the unhappy results of the Spanish Land Grants to but a few.

Commonly newspaper articles speak of the people asking for land, protesting for land, and invading lands. Though I do not have an actual count of articles – certainly such articles appearing three times a week is conservative. I personally do not spend a day in San Lucas without a minimum of three persons or groups asking me to help them acquire land for planting.

Statistics abound in pointing out disparity in land ownership. I will use but one. This year the Guatemalan Government institution CIEN that studies the economy of Guatemala has published that

80% of the arable land of Guatemala is in the hands of 2% of the people. In a Country where the greatest resource apart from the people is land, this figure can point to serious problems.

There are Government Organizations existing for the expressed purpose of helping the landless acquire land. (c.f. editorial by Humberto Preti – *Prensa Libre* of March 25, 2000 entitled *Juan Sin Tierra*) However, bureaucracy, complexity of request forms, distance to official offices, cost of procedures and corruption make these organizations ineffective.

Since the early 1980s, many organizations funded by institutions and groups from outside of Guatemala called Non-Governmental Organizations or NGOs have sprung up throughout the Country. Their objectives are multiple but most commonly are designed to enhance community organization, non-traditional political organization, committee formation and general *capacitación*. During the years of the overt violence in Guatemala, 1979 to 1985, the funding institutions did not require lists of names of leaders and committees nor was a careful accountability of use of funds asked. Since the 1996 Peace Accords lists of names of leaders and participants as well as accountability of use of funds has been asked – but extremely difficult if not impossible to attain. There has developed in Guatemala a level of middle management type people who handle these funds themselves. Salaries are relatively high for leaders, office structure becomes expensive, vehicular transport very expensive and little is done for the very people who they have been designed to serve. An NGO quickly becomes a search group looking to various and sundry institutions for funds for the people they pretend to serve. If funds are to be acquired for the people in need, many requirements are demanded of those receiving. There may be requirements to pay back a loan... with interest, requirements of how a piece of land acquired is to be farmed. What to plant and how to plant it (an outside agronomist is often brought in to direct) is demanded. More often than not cash crops are preferred and once again the institution handles the selling. Freedom for the farmer does not exist. Another type of patron is in charge.

The Mayan Farmer knows how to farm a small piece of land. Hand labor is the strength of a Mayan Family farming its own land. It is common to see four people cropping a piece of land. I have seen up to six cropping the same land. Perennial plants are used for food and medicine Mother Earth does indeed, produce for the life of the Mayan People – when they can work with Her. God's Kingdom begins on earth. The Kingdom is made up of multiple, diverse and contributing cultures. Cultures must be free to be lived. Interaction between cultures must be based on appreciation and respect.

Today the electronic age has made possible a ready communication between cultures. This makes globalization possible. Any and all forms of globalization must, first of all, respect cultures. It must allow cultures to be lived. If a culture has been weakened by poverty, globalization must work to strengthen this culture, not dominate or destroy it. A stronger culture must not, through globalization, take over or force the weaker culture to live the lifestyle of the stronger, i.e. to force the weaker culture to change. I am convinced that the Mayan People of rural Guatemala want to live the lifestyle of small hands-on (advanced horticulture) farmers. This is their very heritage, the very base to their culture. To do this they must have a small piece of land. A family would need about three acres (2 hectares). Two-thirds could be used for basic food crops (corn, black-beans and squash) and one-third for a cash crop. A young family is able to work this land with but minimal outside help.

There are legitimate concerns that such an idealistic theory could be workable. Allow me to address some of them.

1. Land available. Projected needs for land based on population growth would lead us to believe that this is mathematically impossible. Within so many years all of the land would be divided up into such small amounts that this lifestyle would be impossible. In these projections I would ask that there be considered:

A. Need for persons as part of a support system to the small farmer lifestyle. A few of these:

1.educators

2.medical persons

3.builders (construction)

4.processors of products grown on the land

5.transport

6.seamstress

7.tailor

8.furniture makers

9.merchants

10.tool makers

B. Use of marginal land

1.Terracing of hill–sides

2.clearing of rocks

3.building up of soils with compost

C. A good and prolonged study of more production from small amounts of land used.

1. Today the Mayan People will readily four–crop a small piece of land. I have seen six crops growing (at different stages of growth) on a single small piece of land. Multiple cropping lands can be developed considerably.

I am concerned that projections so readily available today can be an excuse for not responding to an expressed felt need of a people. Paul Trowbridge, a student in the Department of Anthropology of Central Connecticut State University doing thesis work this summer (June–July–August 2000) in San Lucas Toliman, has spoken of how he hears often from informants in his study and people he converses with that getting land through our parish efforts makes them free to become part of the Mayan Movement in Guatemala today. Our parish efforts make small amounts of land available to the people with no strings attached. Our efforts are not heavily structured. Trust in the expressed need of those requesting is of utmost importance.

There is land available for those wanting to farm small plots today in rural Guatemala. How to get that into the hands of those wanting to live their own heritage and long standing traditions (The Mayan Culture) is the key. Allow me to review some possibilities:

1. Government Land Reform at this time in our history is not a reality. There is too much fear of what might happen to the gross national product if large plantations would be divided up among small farmers. There is concern that new technologies supporting major export crops like coffee, sugar, bananas, cotton, rubber, cotton and cattle would not be able to be used for production increase and more efficient processing, thus increasing the gross national product. There is also pride in land ownership passed on over the centuries from the Spanish Land Grants of those years ago.

2. A recent Title Search throughout the Country for taxation purposes showed that many plantations used maps rather than actual registered titles to claim land ownership. These maps were drawn to include land that was acquired simply by putting into use land that was not being used. There was some land that was not in use but projected to be put into use sometime in the future that was drawn into the map used for ownership. Laws in the Country even allow for bringing under title this acquired lands after so many years of use with no other claim being made to them. It is true that a public search for others who might claim this land was required. But this could be made through newspapers that were not easily available to a community – or if available could not be read with understanding. Attempts were made by speaking with plantation owners for negotiation, to little avail. Attempts were made to ‘invade’ these lands and were met with forced removal by security forces.

3. There are Government Agencies that do exist with the expressed purpose to help the landless acquire land. Bureaucracy and corruption make them ineffective. Distance to offices where a request can be made and the multiple requirements that must be met will often lead to a person or a committee to take over the land search for a community or group of people. This in turn leads to a very costly attempt to get land that can easily end in failure. Too often the individuals offering help are con-men taking advantage of a whole community of people. Committees can be formed by the needy community or group but inexperience or individual greed by some members of the committee lead to failure. NGOs have sprung up throughout Guatemala in the last two decades. These privately and institutionally funded groups were not made responsible to give lists of

names of leadership nor were strict accounting procedures required. This is because many of the INGOs' came into being during the years of overt violence in Guatemala between the years of 1979 – 1985. At that time people feared giving out lists of names and thus following up with good accounting procedures was difficult. These NGOs had various and sundry objectives; most involved some way or another in community organization and *capacitación* (awareness raising) programs. Many turned quickly into 'search for what a community might need' groups. They are readily made for 'land search' committees. Difficulties arise when funds made available go quickly into offices, expensive office equipment, transport 'needs' (a vehicle can so easily become a status symbol), high salaries and nepotism in leadership. Tight control and little accountability can make these committees into 'patron' figures. Even if land should be acquired by the NGO for a community or group – very strict control is kept over how the land is distributed, how payments (with interest) are made, what is to be produced and how productions are to be handled. Too often the recipient cannot use the acquired land freely. Too often I am told by those receiving parcels of land from an NGO Committee, "We wanted land of our own to be free to work it and use it as we wished. We wanted to be free to work for ourselves. Now we have another 'patron.'"

I was part of an incident back in about 1967 that comes to mind often. It was the fall of the year and time for me to go back to Minnesota for a fund-raising visit. I was leaving San Lucas early in the morning to catch a same day flight to the USA. Just as I was coming over a short drop in the road at the edge of town, the bouncing headlights of the Toyota jeep startled a little elderly woman taking her *nixtamal* (corn prepared for grinding, the first step in tortilla making) to the mill. The carefully prepared *nixtamal* was being carried in a small clay dish on her head. She jumped before the bright bouncing headlights and the corn spilled from the dish as it fell from her head. She quickly knelt to pick up each kernel from the dirt road and tears rolled from her eyes. I stopped the car and got out to help pick up the precious kernels of corn. My apologies were lost in her attempt to smile off the fright and embarrassment. She put the dish back on her head and turned back toward home to wash carefully once again her precious *nixtamal*. I stayed that night with my folks in New Ulm, Minnesota. The early morning scene was so vivid in my mind that I had to tell them of what had happened. Early the following morning I left home for Marshall, Minnesota and some talks with high school students. The road took me through the town of Morgan, Minnesota right past the elevators brimming with corn from another bumper crop. Silos were already filled, so corn from the huge crop was being held for shipping in quickly constructed bins in the elevator's parking lot. Some of the corn had spilled over and across the black top street. The headlights of the car picked out where vehicles tires had crushed their way through the spilled corn from the surplus crop. I couldn't drive through. I stopped the car, backed up and went around the block. All of this in but a matter of hours! I have thought of that incident many, many times. What should I do? Shovel up the corn from the streets of Morgan and ship it to that little woman on the streets of San Lucas? No, that is not the way. If I really want to help, I should make the road for the little woman smooth so she won't have to stumble even if she is startled!

It is commonly held that the Mayan People domesticated corn. From them this versatile grain has moved throughout the world. Today they should have the opportunity to plant their own corn on their own land in their own way.

TO BE CONSIDERED:

1. With globalization a part of our world today in search of inexpensive labor, could the textile industry move into rural areas and use existing cottage level industries to meet its needs? Tailors do exist in Mayan Communities as part of an existing support system to the small advanced horticulture farmers. If needed, could small shops be developed to take advantage of existing labor, some on a part-time basis, in the rural communities where the people can more readily live their Mayan Culture? Could not systems be arranged so workers for a factory could still have time and space to grow their own corn?

2. Is there a way to encourage and develop with rural Mayan people the opportunity to process crops they would produce as cash crops, and make available as directly as possible to the consumer their high quality product? In the area we live in, we have been able to do this with the highest possible quality coffee. Could the same be done with avocados, jams, jellies and sauces from locally produced fruit?

3. In education, would a Jesuit University be willing to begin a university-level class schedule in the rural areas dealing the Agriculture (advanced horticulture level) using local resources as much as possible: Education focused on developing good teachers with a sense of the Mayan Tradition and Rural Community Living, health developing a good school of nursing aimed at service on the rural community level. I think the basic infrastructure exists in some rural communities for these areas of concern to be considered.

4. Church: I think Church has to get more and more involved in integral human development. Parish structures can be a good vehicle . For this to happen:

A. Courses in the Church's social doctrine should not only be taught in seminaries, but must have high priority in scheduling.

B. Seminarians must find some way to have third world experiences during their preparation years.

C. Catholic Universities have excellent programs for students to have social service experiences. These are excellent. Seminaries have a good example to follow here.

D. Church people working in these areas must consider long-term commitments. There is so much to learn. All takes time.