

The Story of Cu'

by
Ray Elliott

It was October of 1964. The CAM school for missionary children in Huehuetenango operated on a modified Guatemalan school year plan, so it was vacation time. Linda, who had come to Guatemala to help out when Marsha was so desperately ill in February, had returned to Wheaton College in May, so only seven of the children were at home with us in Nebaj--Marsha 13, Steve 12, Debby 10, Jan nearly 8, Shari nearly 6, Dan 3, and Karen nearly 2.

On this particular day, we were on the way out to the *campo* (soccer field) for a picnic, and as we rounded the last corner of the dirt street before the cemetery entrance, Steve, Dan and I were together. Suddenly, the ground began to buck and shake! Most earthquakes are so mild that a person walking may not even be aware of them, but this one made itself quite obvious. Even at his age, Dan was impressed. For several years after that, whenever we happened to walk past that corner, he would remind us, "This is where the earthquake was!"

It was only after we returned from our picnic that we realized it had been hard enough to damage some of the houses in town--but of course it was child's play compared with the violence and destruction of the "Big One" in February of 1976. But I'm from Kansas, and any earthquake big enough to be noticed is quite sufficient for me!

Reactions to the quake among our Indian neighbors were quite varied. Some of them came by to ask, "Is the earthquake over yet?" They couldn't believe I had no more data on that than they did. A Spanish-speaking former military commander rushed over to assure us that there was nothing to be afraid of--the army had merely dropped an atomic bomb on the town of Coban (about forty miles east of us, the third largest city in Guatemala), and another one, he said, was scheduled for 8:30 that evening.

What concerned people more than the houses which were left with cracked or fallen walls, however, was the fact that some of the above-ground burial vaults in the cemetery had been badly damaged. Not only were bones visible in some of them, but the spirits of the dead had been set free--at a time when they would not usually be abroad! That in itself was terrifying enough. But to have been shaken open so rudely--surely the gods were enraged, and were bound to be vengeful. In the minds of many Nebaj people, it was far more urgent to have the remains of the dead courteously and quickly restored to their accustomed places of rest, than to repair the houses which had been left shaky by the force of the quake.

But Guatemala has had lots of earthquakes, and within another day or two, this one of October 1964 ceased to be a topic of excited interest. It was back to life as usual for most people. It was only later that we learned in an especially poignant way that such was not the case for everyone.

II

Most of three years passed. One Sunday morning in 1967 I was in the Nebaj marketplace, which twice a week occupied the town square in front of the Catholic church. As I threaded my way through the throngs of colorful people who were buying, selling, bartering, and catching up on

the week's news, I felt a tug at my coat, and turned around. I didn't see anyone who appeared to be trying to get my attention, so I assumed I had been mistaken. But no sooner had I turned back to resume my course than I felt that tug again. This time as I looked around I also looked down--into the eyes of a nervous, bird-like scarecrow of a man whom I didn't know, in clothes so tattered that even the patches had patches. Very haltingly, he asked me,

"Do you have my medicine?"

A few years earlier, such a question would have puzzled me greatly. But by now enough people had come by to ask, "Is my money with you?" or "Will you give me my water?" that I recognized this man's question for what it was: he needed medicine, and was asking if I would supply it for him.

I asked him, "What kind of medicine? What do you need it for?"

"Fright," was the answer.

That too might have surprised me a great deal some years earlier. But by now I knew that "fright" was a much-feared disease. So I told him, "Well, I'm not sure, but if you will come home with me, I'll see."

And with that I started toward home. I moved more slowly than usual, and checked occasionally to see that the sick man was following, for I knew that no Indian would presume to walk beside a non-Indian. He came meekly along, a safe and respectful two or three paces behind me.

At the house I led him to my office, where he perched on the edge of the chair I offered. For one thing, he was simply too nervous to relax. For another, if he had sat back, his feet would not have reached the floor.

His name was Cu', he said. He lived at Salch'il, which I had visited once nine years earlier, a six hour walk from Nebaj for an Ixil man carrying a load, but it took me a couple of hours longer than that with no load at all.

"Tell me about the fright," I said. "How did it begin?" And he told me the story.

A long time ago, there was an earthquake, remember? At the time, Cu' was one of the thirty or so men who performed "voluntary" service for the town hall on alternate weeks. (It was "voluntary" in the sense that a man could choose not to serve, if he didn't mind spending several days in jail.) All the men on town hall duty were rounded up and given an emergency order: "Get those burial remains back underground!"

It was an ugly, awesome, terror-inspiring job! In the process, Cu' was careless enough to let his bare hand come into contact with a bone. The spirit of that dead person would be seriously offended. Retribution in some form must inevitably follow. Would Cu' be struck down dead? Would he become ill and waste away? Would the attack upon him take the form of sickness or death for one of his family? Would his corn crop be lost? Would his animals be stricken? There was no question at all that punishment must come, the only question was what form it would take.

But nothing happened that first day nor throughout the long hours of that terrible night. Nor the next day nor the next night. A week went by, a month. By now, three years later, it hadn't happened yet and Cu' was a wreck. He had had no appetite for months and months. He would lie on his hard board bed, wrapped in his one blanket, and jerk with fear every time he heard one of the spirits nearby. (He knows now that some of those sounds came from the wind filtering through the thatch roof, or from expansion or contraction due to the warming or cooling of the poles and cornstalks which made up his house walls. But he didn't know that then.)

For months he had tried to find relief from his fear by means of the traditional animistic system of payments and rituals designed to placate offended spirits. Whether the spirits were placated or not, the fear remained unabated. Some of his friends told him of a newer group forming within the "traditionalist" church, and so Cu' became a Catholic. But nothing the priest did took away the fear. "He just kept asking us questions and more questions," probably a reference to the system by which novices were catechized, "but none of those questions helped me."

Sometimes a friend would suggest he try some kind of medicine sold in the local general store, but his fear remained unchecked. So far as he knew, he had in good faith tried every way he possibly could to placate the wrathful spirits and find peace of mind. But after all those months and years of literally waiting from one hour to the next, expecting the boom to be lowered in some form, he was nervous, skin-and-bones, almost like a walking skeleton. And now he was also desperately poor, for the demands of the prayermakers had been deemed even more important than food and clothing for the family.

"So I'm still afraid, and I don't know what else to do. Finally someone told me that you or your wife can do magic even more powerful than that of some of our official prayermakers. So I knew I had to ask you for medicine."

During the later stages of this recital, I was asking the Lord, "What can I say to him? How can I help?" And what He brought to my mind was the Gospel of John, chapter 10.

The Gospel of John was not yet translated into Ixil, but I hoped the passage about the Good Shepherd, who gives himself for his sheep, might speak to Cu'. Many Ixiles keep a few sheep, even though Ixil customs involving sheep were in some ways different from the Jewish customs reflected in the New Testament. I was very halting as I tried to express in his language some of the things Jesus said about himself.

"He calls his sheep by name ... he leads them out and goes before them and the sheep follow, for they recognize his voice ... I am the door; if anyone enters by me, he'll be safe! He'll come in and go out and find pasture. I came so you could find life ... I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd risks his own life, even gives it up, on behalf of his sheep ... I am the good shepherd. I know my sheep, and they know me ... My sheep recognize my voice and obey it. I know them and they follow me ... My father, who gave my sheep to me, is stronger than everyone and everything else, and no one is able to snatch them out of my father's hand."

Cu' had never heard anything like that before! For good reason: it had never been said before in his language by anyone at anytime. There was not a single word in all I shared with him from John 10 that was strange or new to him. But never before in the history of the Ixil people had anyone put these ordinary words together in this way.

By now Cu' showed much less nervousness, and had settled back somewhat into his seat. He showed no hint of hurry about leaving, so I shared the gist of Mark 14, 15 and 16 with him: This same Jesus who is the good shepherd of his sheep actually did lay down his life for his sheep. Cu' listened attentively. The Holy Spirit had used God's Word in his own language to hook him! His fears did not disappear, but they had been overshadowed by something that had him entranced. He didn't know how to read, but somehow he just knew he had to have a copy of that book I was reading from. I gave him a copy of the Gospel of Mark in Ixil. He carefully tucked it into his inside coat pocket, out of sight.

III

The following Sunday, Cu' was back again. He told me he had given that copy of the Gospel of Mark to a friend; could he have another? I said he could, but that he would have to pay for it. "How much?" "Fifteen cents." (It had cost the American Bible Society \$1.05 per copy to have that first edition of 500 copies printed, but because of their generous subsidy we were allowed to make it available for only fifteen cents.) Cu' said, "I don't have the money now, but if you'll let me take the book, I'll pay you next week." I said OK, and he took it with him.

It was several years later before Cu' told us what had really happened to that first copy of Mark. When he left the house to return home, he had to stop to make a purchase at the crowded general store. When he finally pushed his way to the counter and took his turn, he had to reach into his inside coat pocket to get at the little bag in which he carried his coins--and the book was on top of it. He removed the Gospel of Mark, furtively laid it on the counter, made his purchase, and left. Only when he had squeezed his way back outside did he realize he had left that book on the counter. What to do?! He didn't dare push back in and ask for it; since that would make it obvious to many of his people that he had actually touched the White Devil's book! There was no help for it--it was lost to him.

Cu' soon met his friend Teck, a neighbor in Salch'il, and they started out of town to begin their six hour walk home. As they wound their way in and out, up and down, Cu' told Teck what had happened, how he'd actually gone into the White Devil's house, and talked with him--"Imagine him being able to speak our language!"--and he had read to him out of a book. No, he didn't have the book, but he remembered what had been said. And he proceeded to relate to Teck the entire incident.

Teck was alternately amazed and horrified. "You don't dare get mixed up with anything like that!"

"I know. But listen to what he said!"

And soon Teck was hooked, too. He agreed with Cu': somehow they just had to get another copy of that book. But how? Finally Teck suggested: "Why don't you go back next week and just tell him you gave it to a friend and would like to have another one for yourself?" That was what Cu' agreed to do.

But when the dreaded time came, Cu' was afraid to enter the house. He walked past, then on around the block. And again, for he was still afraid to enter the second time around. As he approached the door for the third time, he noticed others of his own people approaching the door. Cu' scooted up until he was just behind them, and walked in as if he were a part of the group. Once

inside, he made himself as unobtrusive as possible as he heard the White Devil speaking with other visitors. Finally, he was the only one left. And he asked for a second copy of the Gospel of Mark.

IV

Due to a combination of circumstances, I didn't see Cu' again until another three years had passed. To tell the truth, I forgot about him--there was so much going on with so many other people during those times when we were able to be in Nebaj. I had duties in Guatemala City which took us away for varying lengths of time, and we had two short trips back to the U.S. during that three years.

Then early in 1970, Cu' came to the house again, but I didn't recognize him. When he told me who he was, I could see the resemblance, but he had fleshed out quite a bit, his facial bones weren't nearly so prominent, and he was a much more relaxed person. His clothes didn't seem to be a bit better, so obviously he was still quite poor. He was still a quiet, withdrawn person, but he had lost much of the hesitancy I had remembered. He seemed to have a degree of self-confidence I had not been aware of before. But he had problems. He had questions. He waited again until he was alone with me before saying,

"People have been telling me about 'porcatoriyo.' Does your book say anything about 'porcatoriyo'?"

"No," I replied, "there is nothing about purgatory in God's Word. But it does talk about what happens when we die." And I shared some pertinent Scriptures with him. He continued to question me about it until he was sure he understood what I was telling him.

The following Sunday, he was back again. We learned that one way he stretched the meagre income of his family was to traipse over the mountains in his area and buy up from his neighbors as many eggs as he could carry on his back. He would carefully wrap each egg in a dried corn husk and tie small knots in shreds of the husk so that the egg wouldn't escape, then pack a layer of them into a wooden box which he could carry on his back, suspended from his forehead by means of a tumpline--a wide leather band to which small ropes were attached and then tied into the cargo net in which the box was carried. After a layer of eggs came a thin layer of pine needles. Then another layer of eggs followed by another layer of pine needles, until the box was full. When solidly packed, the box held two hundred and fifty eggs. In buying them up from his neighbors, Cu' had to try to guess what he could sell them for in the Nebaj market the following Sunday. If everything went well, he would clear a profit of one-half cent per egg, use part of that \$1.25 for buying some needed supplies for his family, and then begin the six-hour walk back home.

And eventually we learned something of what Cu' did with that second copy of Mark. He would take it with him when he went to hoe his cornfield, and would put it down with his jacket, shoulderbag, and field lunch in the shade of a tree at one end of the field. He would hoe a furrow the length of the field, and then hoe back the next one, and each time he returned to the starting end of the field he would allow himself to try to spell his way through one page of the book, before hurrying on to the next two rows. He had never had any schooling, but someone had shown him some of the letters of the Spanish alphabet. And he remembered so well what he had heard that day in my office that he began to associate groups of letters with some of the words he had heard. He taught himself to read Ixil, practically unassisted, in this fashion.

So here he was now, the second Sunday in a row in 1970, and he had another question. "Is it a sin to read the Scripture?"

"No, it is not a sin. In fact, God says in his Word that we should read it and think about it. Why do you ask?"

"We have been told that it is a dangerous sin for anyone except the priest to even touch the big Bible that is chained to a post in the church. He can do it, because he has not sinned, but the rest of us have wives, so we are sinners, and for us to dare to touch that book would bring instant wrath upon us. So we are taught."

Another discussion followed, and again, when Cu' was sure he understood what I was saying about God's Word, he left. And for a number of Sundays in succession, he was back each week with another serious question. Always it was, "My people believe (such and such a thing); what does your book say about it?" Or, "We have been taught that (so and so); is that what your book says?" And I was sure the Lord was guiding me to speak positively about what He says to us in his Word, rather than to emphasize what was wrong about the notions Cu' already had. It was as if the Holy Spirit reserved for himself the prerogative of convincing Cu' about the truth of what he was hearing for the first time. My role was to give Cu' an option he had never had before.

After weeks of conversing with Cu' about his questions, a period of months went by during which we didn't see him at all. We were away all that summer of 1970. (That was the summer that was!--but that's another story: within a period of two months, we attended three of our children's graduations. We celebrated our own twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, and were in the wedding of our second daughter, Marsha. Linda, our first, presented us with our first grandchild, and received her own master's degree, thus becoming an MA twice in a matter of days! We took delivery of a new car for our return to Guatemala. It was almost too much emotional involvement for such a short period of time!) Back to Guatemala City in the fall, pulling a forty-foot house trailer from Dallas. And then eventually we were home in Nebaj again.

And again, we saw Cu'. By now it was Christmas time, 1970. He came by on a Sunday as had been his custom, but this time it was a different kind of question he presented to us:

"Can you and your wife come up to Salch'il on [a certain Sunday] in February?"

"Well, we'd like to very much, and we really appreciate the invitation, but that happens to be the time when our mission has its annual meetings, and nothing short of a grave emergency can excuse us from attendance. Maybe we can come another time."

His disappointment was obvious.

"Why that date?" I asked. "Was it to be something special?"

"Well, it's just that we are having the dedication then, and we wanted you to be there with us for it."

"Oh. What are you dedicating?"

"Our new chapel."

"Oh. You have a chapel?"

"Yes, we decided we needed a chapel, since our houses are too small."

"Oh. Who is 'we'?"

"Well, there are eleven families of us."

"Oh. Eleven families. What do you do when you get together?"

"Oh, nothing, really. It's just that since we have Jesus in our hearts, we like to get together and sing and pray and talk about what we know of God's Word."

"Oh. I see. I think that's great! And all the more we would like to be with you for your dedication. We will be asking God to give you a special time! And as soon as we can, we will come and visit you."

V

It was a while before we were able to fill in some of the details. Here's a short version of it:

Cu' and Teck had talked many times, and for many hours, about what they found in the White Devil's book. Cu' shared with Teck the conversations he had with us on the subjects he questioned us about. (So far as we know, Teck himself never visited us at the house.) They were still afraid of those white people whom they had heard so many fearful things about. But they couldn't shake the growing conviction that there was truth here, that what they were hearing not only seemed consistent with their own better thoughts but also seemed to have coherent answers to many of life's problems. Finally, they made a covenant with each other: "We will try to walk in the road we hear about from the White Devil. We will try to follow Jesus. We will try to obey what he says to us. We will talk together about what those words mean; we will pray for each other; we will encourage each other. For if one of us tried to follow that way alone, it would be too much, and we would not be able to hold out against the opposition of our neighbors. But if we help each other, perhaps God will help us to live in the way he wants us to."

They did not underestimate the opposition of their friends and neighbors. For in an animistic community, it is held to be extremely important for everyone to think alike, to join unitedly with the whole community in placating the spirits. For if even one person offends the spirits, it can bring down the wrath of the gods upon the whole community.

So it was not surprising when neighbors noticed that Cu' and Teck no longer took part in communal activities, and that they talked about things which were not consistent with community beliefs. Fear spread. Fear led to hate. Hate led to threats of violence. Men intercepted Cu' and Teck on the trail and threatened to kill them and their families, or burn down their houses, if they didn't give up this "Jesus" nonsense and return to their former customs. Their reply was, "You may make yourselves our enemies, but we want to be your friends. Since Jesus came into our hearts, we have no desire to quarrel with you like we used to."

When the wives of Cu' and Teck went to the spring to draw water or wash clothes, any

woman already there would immediately pick up her things and leave. Their husbands had told them not to have anything to do with these women and their strange new ways. Their children were taunted and had rocks thrown at them by the very children who used to be their playmates.

For us whose background is a culture which prides itself on individualism, on not being like the crowd (so long as you are different in a way consistent with your peer group!), these may seem like small things. But in a culture where solidarity was everything, to be thus cut off from their fellows was psychological torture.

One Salch'il man especially, of considerable influence among his peers, promised to hack Cu' and Teck to bits with his machete if they didn't turn back from their new evil ways. They replied, "Even if you kill us, we wish you had Jesus in your heart like we do." Soon after that, this man departed for seasonal work at a coastal plantation. While he was away, his wife became sick, and was unable to care for herself or her small children. Cu' cut firewood for her and left it at the house. He sent his wife over with soup, and she fed the children, cleaned them up, and cared for the sick woman. When her husband's work contract was completed, he returned home to find that the very scoundrels he had threatened to kill had nursed his wife back to health and cared for his children. At first he was enraged, but as he thought about what happened, his resistance broke completely. He accepted Christ and became one of the pillars of the slowly growing church in the area. Cu' and his family had literally loved him into the Kingdom.

VI

A Bible translation workshop was scheduled for the fall of 1971, to be held at Wycliffe's translation center on the southern edge of Guatemala City. We were to work on Galatians and First Peter. Due to a series of circumstances which are not part of this story, I had no regular translation helper at the time. As I was wondering who I might find to work with me in the workshop, the Lord brought Cu' to my mind.

Cu' had no formal training of any kind, and was not familiar with the capital. I hesitated to try to work with him in a workshop context, since he had no experience in working as a language source nor in Bible translation. We had to leave Nebaj several weeks before the workshop was to start, but Cu' couldn't be away from his family that long. I didn't want to ask him to risk coming to the capital alone by bus.

But I felt I should ask him, and he gave it serious thought for some moments before he said quietly, "I will come." Then we talked about arrangements: we would be leaving Nebaj on such-and-such a date. But on the appropriate Sunday just before the workshop was to begin, Cu' would come to Nebaj, receive money for his bus fare from don Donaldo, and board the 3 a.m. Monday bus for the capital. On that same Monday, in Guatemala City, I would be at the bus terminal to meet him when the bus got in. We went over these arrangements until Cu' was clear about them. He returned home to Salch'il. Before he came to Nebaj again, we had gone to the capital.

I went to meet the Nebaj bus just after noon on the Monday which marked the beginning of the workshop. Cu' was there--obviously much relieved to see me, and quite impressed by the noise and bustle of the terminal market and the mass of vehicles, the like of which he had never seen before. I inquired about his family, and he said they were all right. I did not learn until some time later that his reply oversimplified the situation a bit.

Just a few days before Cu' was scheduled to come to the capital, a snake bit his oldest son, Shas, who was about 13 at the time and upon whose shoulders the responsibility as "man of the family" would fall while his father was away. Shas' leg pained him terribly and swelled up to double its normal size. Friends and relatives were quick to gather around and scold Cu': "You see what happens when you stop honoring our tribal gods! Now your son will surely die!" This latter remark, of course, was based on lots of experience with snakebite from long years before anyone in the area had accepted Christ, but of course in a situation like that logic gets you nowhere. There was, however, tremendous pressure upon Cu' to recant and have a prayermaker called in for the "cure." From "somewhere" Cu' thought to slit Shas' flesh at the fang marks on his leg and suck the bloody poison from the wounds. "I sucked and spit and prayed," Cu' told me later, "sucked and spit and prayed. And I knew in my heart that whether Shas lived or died, God was God and I could not turn back to the former ways."

But now another kind of pressure asserted itself: Cu' had promised me to go to the capital on a certain day, and he assumed I would be looking for him on the bus. If he did not go as he had promised, who would help me express God's words in his language, so that he and his people could feed themselves upon them? But how could he possibly leave his family at a time when his oldest son's life was still hanging in the balance?

Cu' and his fellow believers prayed, and Cu' was impressed with the conviction that he should go. "Whether Shas lives or dies is in God's hands, whether I go or stay. Even if I am here, I cannot heal him. We will commit him into the hands of God." He asked his Christian brothers to help his family if they had need while he was gone. And he came on in. But even when he arrived in the capital and I asked about his family, he did not tell me about Shas. "I was afraid you might send me back home," he told me later, "and I was sure God wanted me to help with the translation."

VII

Work progressed normally through the detailed discussion and drafting of Galatians, and on into First Peter--until we reached verse 7 of Chapter 5, which proved to be an almost impossible obstacle! As with the other books I had worked on up to that time, with the help of various Ixil men, I roughed out a trial draft in Ixil which I intended to serve as a starting point in my discussions with my helpers, since as yet I had not found an Ixil man who understood Spanish well enough to use it as a point of departure. As usual, I would begin by reading a passage to Cu' and then we would talk about it and seek ways of expressing it clearly in Ixil. But when I did this with I Peter 5:7, we hit a brick wall. His immediate reaction was one of surprised but definite negation: "No," he said, shaking his head, "we can't say that."

I was surprised, since I wasn't aware of anything all that unusual in the verse, but I tried it again, anyway, a little louder (increased volume is a great aid to understanding, no?), with the same response. But I had no clue as to what the difficulty was. Should I change something in my choice of vocabulary? Was there something unusual about the grammatical pattern? What were some alternate ways of saying the same thing in Ixil? For over half an hour I tried every variation I could think of in an attempt to express the wonderful message of that verse: "Throwing all your burdens upon him, for what concerns you matters to him." But Cu' reacted in the same way to everything I tried, and I literally did not know what else to try. I sat back in my chair and prayed silently, "Lord, where do we go from here?" After all, I didn't like the idea of First Peter with out verse 5:7! And while there was no audible reply, God put the thought into my mind: "Change the way you are asking your questions!"

So once more, I read to Cu' the first trial draft that we had started with, then I asked him, "Cu', if we say it this way, what will people understand by it!?"

Again, he shook his head, and answered with a half laugh, "If we said that, people would get the idea that God is individually concerned with each of us. We can't say that!"

"Oh," I said, "is that what they would think?"

"Yes," he replied, "that is what they would think. We can't say that."

"All right," I said. Then I read another one of the alternate ways I had tried, and asked the same question: "If we said this, what would people understand by it?" His response was the same: "They would think God cared for them individually." So in the same way I reviewed with him all the other alternatives we had tried, and uniformly he responded to each of them. So at least that part of the session was reassuring: everything I had tried conveyed the same message, even though with differing emphases.

Finally, assured that we were understanding each other, I said to him, "Cu', as a matter of fact, that is precisely what Peter is saying here." He had already begun to shake his head again when it dawned on him what I was saying. He asked me for a repeat, sure that he had misunderstood. So again I said, "That is exactly the meaning Peter is expressing here." But he was not going to give up so easily. Now he had a series of questions for me! And when he was sure we understood each other, that indeed that was what Peter was saying about God, Cu' sank back into his chair, tipped his head back and began to laugh! Finally he controlled himself a bit and said, gasping for breath, "Imagine that! The same great God who created the world has that kind of concern for one single person like me!" And then for some moments he was speechless. He just couldn't get over it. (And in a sense, as we shall see, he never did!)

@

I was emotionally exhausted. I needed to make a series of notes about vocabulary and some of the grammatical structures we had talked about in connection with the verse. It was also time for a mid-morning break. So Cu' went on over to our trailer, where Helen had coffee and cookies waiting. As she described it to me later, Cu' just came floating in. He was still up in the clouds. But that didn't keep him from exclaiming to her, "Txu' El (as he called her), do you know what we just learned?! Did you know that ..."--and he went on for some minutes, expressing the wonder of it all.

I have often wished we could have been little mice in the corner when Cu' returned to Salch'il and shared his discovery with his family and the other believers. But since that time we have had repeated indications of what a life-changing breakthrough that was in his own experience with the Lord. "But Cu' was already a Christian!" people have exclaimed to us since, "so how could that have possibly been such a surprise to him at that point?" The only answer, it seems to me, lies in the fact that even though he and Teck and now others had become convinced that Jesus' way was the only true road for them, and that had already testified to the way in which he had made their bitter fearing hearts become sweet and trusting, emotionally it was still primarily a matter of awe and duty with them; for there was nothing in the history of the Ixil people nor in their religious system of placating nature gods which could in any way have allowed them to assume God's personal interest in them.

Following this experience, even John 10 took on a greatly enhanced meaning for Cu'. He shared this with the others in the congregation, and with others yet who had not accepted Christ as their savior. The Christians were still drawing wrath and opposition from their fellows, and now Cu' had an added weapon in his spiritual arsenal. He and Teck and some of the other believers became living examples of loving confidence in their God who had a personal interest in their welfare, and a loving concern for their troubles. In the next few months, the congregation doubled in size, and when Helen and I visited Salch'il at Eater time in 1972, there were 21 families of baptized believers in the Salch'il area.

That was an unforgettable visit. As we trudged into Salch'il after what was, for us, a long and difficult trip over rugged mountain trails, we were intercepted by Cu' and several other believers. We were glad for the welcome, and gladly paused for a bit of rest, even though we were saturated by then from the persistent light mist that had enveloped us near the top of the last climb. They led us on into the village, gave us some coffee to drink, and said people had already begun to gather from around the area in anticipation of the church service that was planned for the next day. Then Cu' indicated he had something special to give us. Very solemnly, he pulled a ragged piece of paper from his pocket, and ceremoniously handed it to us. It was only later that we realized more fully what that occasion meant to him and the people who watched. He and the other leaders of the group had discussed what they wanted to say, and Cu' had spent several hours of his spare time over several days composing just what they wanted to say and then printing it out laboriously with the stub of a pencil. It was the first written communication produced in Ixil by anyone in the congregation. As I read it and shared it with Helen, tears came to our eyes. It translates as follows:

®LM5⁻

We thank God, sir, that you came here with your wife. We are happy you came because we are about to benefit from the message in our language today. This is what we and our wives are so happy about. By contrast, Spanish has no sweetness for us, but the message in our own language is very sweet to us as we listen to it. That's all I wanted to tell you, Mr. Raymond. May God help you in the U.S. [we planned to begin a furlough a few months later]. Thank you for helping us here in our town. Our Father's word strikes us because of you."

®LM0⁻

I have a friend in Irving, Texas, who used to be the personal pilot of General Douglas McArthur in Japan and Korea. At one time he described flying for me as ninety-eight percent boredom and two percent pure panic. I have often thought of that as an analogy to the work of Bible translation: days, months, years of slow painful progress in gaining mastery of a beautiful but complex and difficult language, often facing hardship and inconvenience and, at times, tempted to yield to Satan's question: "What are you doing here? Why don't you go back to doing something productive and worthwhile? Don't you think you could make a better living doing something more pleasant?" The Lord, in his grace and mercy, has given us occasional times like that one atop the rugged Cuchumatanes mountains in Salch'il. Just one glimpse of how the Holy Spirit uses God's Word in an understandable form to change lives can balance a great deal of slogging discomfort.

VIII

Need to find our trip to Salch'il in 72

We'll jump now to Christmas 1977. The following story, on the surface, has nothing to do with Cu', for it deals primarily with a different family. But that family lives about a half-hour's walk from where Cu' lives, and Cu' is the leader of the elders in the church which Shas and his family are associated with. Cu' was the principal elder in their story, and I relate it here as further evidence of the development of Cu' in his own Christian life and ministry. In addition, it indicates what the Lord can do in the lives of people who take his word seriously. THE FARMER'S DAUGHTER AND THE MAGIC WAND The farmer's daughter was in trouble. No, she wasn't pregnant. At least, not yet. She could have been; that would have been only natural in the circumstances. But that was not the trouble. The farmer's daughter lived on a kind of extensive shelf-like shoulder of a large and high mountain range called the Cuchumatanes in northwestern Guatemala. Nearly sixteen years before, she had been born in the wrong place, to the wrong parents, and had grown up speaking the wrong language. This was a pity, but it was not the trouble. The farmer's daughter's name would have been Juanita if she had chosen English-speaking parents, or Juana if they had been Spanish-speaking. But her parents spoke only Ixil (pronounced ee-SHEEL), so her name was Sheev. Sheev's father, whose name is Shas, was dirt poor. He had never been to school, and had never learned to read--but he had an exceptional memory. He had been forced by his poverty into contact with Spanish-speaking people and had thus learned a limited amount of Spanish, enough to get along somewhat with those he hired himself out to for day-labor, when he could find any work at all. Shas's father had mortgaged the small family farm on the mountain slope years before. He did not have access to it except when the man who took it over allowed him to plant corn on part of it, extracting some of the poor yield as rent. Clothing, food and shelter were hard to come by, and this had not changed with the passage of time and the increase of Shas's family. [In the late 60s, a visiting friend had let me \$65.00 (at a time when we were short of money ourselves) which enabled us to give it to Shas, who was thus able to regain ownership of the land which his father had mortgaged years before! That amount of cash, relatively small to us but monstrously huge to Shas for decades, made him a self-respecting land-owner! I mentioned this to my seatmate on a flight to the U.S. several years later, and he exclaimed, "I spent more than that last night just 'out on the town!'"] Things were different for Shas's children than they had been for him, in several ways. Shas had grown up as an orphan, virtually a slave to his foster parents, when he had any. His children, however, grew up hard-working and poor but in a loving home. Shas and his wife had become Christians several years before Sheev was born. Thus they did not fear the many gods which governed the daily lives of the non-Christians around them, nor did they have to sacrifice what little they had to appease them. Whenever Shas made the six-hour walk over the steep mountain trails to town, he attended church services. They were in Spanish, so he did not understand much of what he heard, but he remembered what he did understand and over the years it added up. So the Christian outlook in his home was much different from that of other homes nearby, even though this did not solve their economic problems. But it did mean that the available resources were spent for food and

clothing, and not for the liquor, skyrocketed, and propitiation fees charged by the local prayermakers for their services. The grinding poverty was partially offset by spiritual freedom from the ever-present fears which dogged the lives of his neighbors. So Sheev knew better.

My introduction to Sheev's trouble was in the week after Christmas 1977. At the invitation of Ixil Christians in Salch'il, a hamlet a half-hour beyond Shas's house, I had spent Tuesday on the rough mountain trails between our home in town and Salch'il. I expected to spend several days in special meetings with the believers from Salch'il and the surrounding area. This included the community of She' Piyu'n [Below the Horizon], among whose scattered houses and cornfields were those of Shas and his family. It was about five on a Tuesday afternoon when I arrived in Salch'il. I was warmly greeted by the Christians, given a bottle of soda pop, and briefed by the local church leaders on their plans for the next day: that night I could rest (so I merely talked with people until after ten). The next day, quite a few people were expected from the neighboring hamlets to add to the Christian group from Salch'il itself. In order to give the visitors time to arrive, they planned a service starting at noon. There were a number of new believers to be baptized, and a desire to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Another service would begin at around five in the afternoon. Plans for Thursday? Well, maybe an errand would take some of my time. There was a problem with one of Shas's daughters, and it would be a great relief to the church leaders if I could tell them how to handle it. The situation was like this: Nearly a year ago, in January, Sheev and married a neighbor boy named Lahs who had recently

become a believer. Quite to everyone's surprise, in August she had left him and the community, and begun living with another Ixil man named Teck who was not a Christian. Teck came from the village of Ahcool, about four hours away. Sheev insisted there was no way she could be persuaded to leave Teck and return to live with her husband, Lah. As if that were not scandal enough, she had returned to her father's home, along with Teck, who was now showing interest in the Gospel. What made it especially awkward was that Sheev and Teck were attending the meetings of the Christian fellowship a half-hour's walk up the mountain, in Salch'il. This made the congregation uncomfortable, to say the least, but it was especially embarrassing for Shas and his wife, not to mention Lahs and his parents. Lahs's parents were quite elderly, and, since Lahs had married Sheev, they had accepted Christ themselves. So, in attendance at most services, there were Sheev and Teck and Seev's family, and Lahs and his parents, all as part of the same congregation. The Christians felt this was not right. The women especially were incensed, and the leaders were concerned for the spiritual welfare of those involved as well as for the kind of precedent they feared was being set by allowing the wayward Sheev and her second "husband" into the fellowship. "So," Cu' and the other leaders told me, "this seems like a serious problem to us. It doesn't fit with the way we understand what we know of God's word. We don't know what to do about it. You'll have to tell us." "How do you see the situation?" I asked. "What would be the result of resolving it?" So they spelled it out. And if I could have waved a magic wand to accomplish what they desired, the outcome would have been something

like this: --The roots for dissension would have been removed from the body of local believers, and both unity and a sense of rightness would have been restored. --There would be repentance and reform on the part of the erring daughter. --There would be forgiveness on the part of the first husband, Lahs, and he would not take the matter to the local officials for a legal settlement against Shas and his family. --The insult to Lahs would not cause him nor his parents to turn back from following the Lord. --Something would be learned about the root causes of the

problem which could be a help to the leaders with their flock. --The second husband would be led to Christ. --The position of respect and dignity of Shas and of his wife would be restored. --The church leaders, whose number usually included Shas, would be encouraged and strengthened in the Lord, in the Word, and in their local autonomy. Where do you find that kind of magic wand? And how would you use it if you could find it?

Before I went to my sleeping bag that night on the dirt floor of my host's home, this concern mingled with thoughts about the other demands, some known, some unexpected, which the next day would bring. Wednesday Cu' and four other elders directed the service, which began just after noon and lasted until nearly six p.m. (so they decided not to have the 5 p.m. service after all). The service included many sessions of singing and praying, but it also included 26 baptisms (preceded by an explanation by me--at their request--of the significance of baptism) and a celebration of the Lord's Supper (preceded by an explanation by me--at their request--of the significance of the Lord's Supper), after which I was asked to teach them from the Word. I was worn out both physically and emotionally by the time it was over, but I also felt I had never before been in a service where the Lord's presence was so manifest through the local leaders.

Afterward, there was visiting with a number of the believers who had come for the service--including Shas, who invited me to come to visit him in his home the next morning. I accepted. It was already mid-morning (from their perspective) when several of the believers, including two of the local leaders, went with me toward Shas's house the next day. People who are accustomed to being up and at it before dawn would have trouble understanding "office hours" which (if there had been any around) would have just been getting under way. Part of the discussion as we walked the half-hour or so toward Shas's house was centered on a review of the problem I would be facing. When Shas met me at a trail junction, the others, after

appropriate greetings to him and farewell to me, continued on their way. I conversed with Shas as we walked the further ten minutes to his home. After a welcome from his wife, they showed me, with some pride, their one-room tile-roofed dirt-floored house which had been built with financial help from another friend of ours. Shas then let me know that he had a serious reason for urging me to visit, and asked if anyone had mentioned to me the problem that he and his family, the church, and the community were facing. I acknowledged that I had heard something about it but would be interested in hearing from him what it was about. He proceeded to give me his version of it--in the presence of his wife as well as of Sheev and Teck! This wasn't mere theory: the principals were sitting in on the discussion and eventually participated in it! And a rather remarkable thing developed: the version of the problem that Shas gave me in the presents of Sheev and Teck was virtually identical to the version given me by the elders of the church! Well, you might say, what's so remarkable about that?--in both cases they were merely telling me what the problem was, weren't they? That's right. But stop and think a moment: in how many cases that you are aware of did the offended and offending parties to a dispute give you the same version of what the problem really was? Several things were confirmed for me by Shas's version: the elders' discussion of it with me had been factual, not gossip. It was aimed at getting trouble settled, not at augmenting the problem or at self-justification for anyone. The elders had thus indicated deep respect and sensitivity for the people involved. They were looking for help, not trying to hurt someone. And I took this to be an indication that Shas himself was not painting a false picture for them or for me; he made no attempt to safeguard his pride. But at the same time it was evident that he was still a loving father, concerned for the welfare of his daughter.

Further, it was obvious that he wasn't holding back, either from me or from the elders, the pertinent facts of the case. Questions I asked Sheev and Teck substantiated for me, from their own point of view, the various details of the picture. In summing up, Shas was explicit about his concerns. The family of Lahs as well as Lahs himself had been offended and would be within their rights, by local custom, if they decided to press charges against Sheev and, by extension,

against her family. That route would result in considerable hardship for Shas which he was not trying to evade, but neither did he welcome the prospect. But Shas also knew that a "solution" which would be considered legal and "civil" as locally administered by people who did not understand Ixil and who were not believers would not necessarily, at the same time, be a Christian and culturally viable solution. But Shas's main point was Sheev herself: she was his daughter and still a loved member of the family. But they could not protect her from correction at the expense of her continuing to live in a wrong relationship with her current mate, her family, the body of believers, and the Lord. I shared this concern. Then Shas came to his principal questions: To what extent was his understanding of the Scriptures accurate? After all, he could not read them for himself, even if all the appropriate passages had been available in his language, which was still not the case. Then, specifically, what would be the implications of these Scriptures for all of them in this situation? "Tell us what to do," he said. I feel a great abhorrence toward coming on heavy, toward being the kind of foreign missionary who legislates local custom for the Christian community, whose culture and language he does not completely understand. But I also had a strong desire to see healing and strength replace a situation which was draining spiritual vitality from many people. What should I do? The best place to start, I thought, was with the Scriptures themselves. So I read, or summarized, or translated on the spot, the passages which seemed most directly to bear upon the situation. The words of Jesus himself from the Gospels. The writings of Paul and John and Peter. The Lord renewed to my mind the sections which were important to a proper understanding by Shas, as head of his family, and also for Sheev and Teck, in making their upcoming decisions. The discussion was not specifically intended to have an evangelistic focus, but you would have to know something of the details of the local cultural system, the fearsome animism and the demands of community solidarity in spite of hatred and distrust of each other, in order to appreciate a little of the impact all of this had for Teck as he was exposed for the first time in his life to the Scriptures in a context of offended people working in a loving way toward the solution to a problem in which he was involved. It would be hard to imagine a more striking contrast between what he was accustomed to from his own past, and what he was both a witness to and a participant in that morning. Yet, both because the discussion was friendly and informal, and because Shas was concerned in learning and in doing the right thing, and not primarily in upholding his own dignity and position, he was able to ask questions when he didn't understand, for he felt no need to pretend

knowledge or wisdom he did not yet have. Also, when the discussion revealed to him that some of those present didn't understand what someone else was saying, he was able to supply vocabulary or pinpoint the meaning of a passage for them in ways that helped me as much as them. It was communication at its best, in both directions! After the phase of input from the Scriptures, Shas returned to his main question: "What are we to do now? Specifically, what is the Lord expecting now of Sheev?" I didn't have that magic wand yet. I'm glad I don't.

We did not have much contact with Cu' after Easter of 1978. We went to the U.S. in May 78 and returned to Guatemala in August 80. During that absence, the guerrilla warfare already under way in the Ixil area heated up considerably. We visited Nebaj briefly late in November 1980, but did not see Cu' at that time. We and one of our children had helped provide schooling for his oldest son--the Shas who was bitten by the snake back in 1971. Shas finished primaria--sixth grade--but his Spanish was not good enough to get him through the first year of junior high. He returned to Salch'il and was working with his father, Cu'.

The church in Salch'il continued to grow. And during the nineteen seventies there was growing tension throughout the Ixil area. For years, decades, the Ixil people had been systematically exploited, misused, betrayed, by non-Indians, and their legitimate complaints and requests for respite had been, at the very least, ignored by various government agencies. At times their please for help were turned against them: "You are complaining against the government. This means you are one of our enemies. If you persist you will be dealt with as we deal with the rest of the Communists."

The Ixil people became quite polarized. And outsiders came into their area and insisted, "You should not continue to put up with this kind of oppression. Look at all the ways you have been misused and lied to for all these years. If you will help us get control of the government now, we will help you after we are in power." Certainly the basis of oppression was there, and many people aligned themselves with the persuasive outsiders.

After increasing tension, civil war erupted. It is not easy to put a date on it. How do you decide when increasingly violent incidents on both sides, the government and the guerrillas, has become war? But certainly it was open war by 1979, and the forces which opposed the government had control of much of the Ixil area.

In July 1982 we were able to spend five days at Nebaj, and while there we talked with a man named Lu, who lives in She' Piyu'n, the same place where Shas, the father of Cat, lives. So Lu' also was one of those from She' Piyu'n who regularly attended services in Salch'il. I asked Lu' about his father, and he told me that he and another brother had persuaded their father to come to town as ordered by the military, so they were in Nebaj now. I regretted not having time to renew acquaintances with the father of Lu', who back in 1954 had helped me with the Ixil language for a time.

When I asked Lu' about Cu' and the other Salch'il brothers, he told me that he had tried to persuade all of them, also, to come to Nebaj earlier this year, without success. Cu' said (as reported by Lu'): "There is nothing for us in town. We have no house there, no food, no work. We're better off staying home here. Besides, after some of the things the army has already done to us, how can we know what they will do this time if we go to them in town? Maybe they will beat us. Maybe they will kill us. We're better off staying here."

Lu' says he asked Cu': "But what will you do if the army comes through, or those of the other side?"

Cu' told him: "We just hide until they go away, hoping they won't find us. If they find us, then if we must die, we will die. But until then we only put ourselves in God's hands, and try to avoid those from one side and those from the other." And Lu' was not able to persuade Cu' and his family and the other believers of Salch'il to come to Nebaj.

As I said, the conversation between Lu' and Cu' took place months ago, perhaps in March 82. We have nothing more recent than that. Lu' could only speculate with us as to whether Cu' and many other who are not guerrillas have been able to avoid being killed by one side or the other. So we can only wait, and pray, and trust that God will yet be glorified by further developments in the life of Cu'.

In the public view the war in the Ixil area is usually not characterized as a religious war. But it has had religious implications, if one judges from the testimony of many Ixil people who have been under guerrilla control against their will. And people from Salch'il have been among these.

"We were not allowed to leave the village; trails were watched, and people who wanted to go into town and refused to turn back were shot. We were told we must stop meeting together to pray and read God's word and encourage each other. Finally, we decided we would not tolerate this situation any longer."

Secretly, one family at a time, most of the believers in Salch'il decided to try to sneak away under cover of darkness. A time was agreed upon, and a group of nearly three hundred people gathered during a moonless night in August, 1982, outside the village. After a period of waiting produced no further additions to their group, they began to walk away, avoiding main trails and taking deliberate and difficult detours, in order to move without attracting the attention of any who might try to stop them. From Tuesday night until Thursday noon they alternately walked and rested, carrying elderly people and babies on their backs, moving slowly so that women in advanced pregnancy and those whose shoes or sandals had come apart could stay with the main group in spite of bleeding feet (see Appendix Two). One woman gave birth the day they arrived in Aguacatan, and another just a week later. They were received by Christians in the town of Aguacatan and fed by them, with some help from temporary military stores and then from food, clothing, and medical help supplied by Christian agencies. We had the privilege of buying up supplies and helping get truckloads of clothing, medicines, food supplies, and blankets to the group while they were in Aguacatan. Eventually they were brought back to Nebaj, and gradually dispersed to other places.

For Cu', it was a difficult decision. He wanted to go with the others, since that would mean that his family would thus have an opportunity to escape. But not all the Christians he felt responsible for were going, and in the end he elected to remain behind, with his family, to help those who remained.

It was in the line of what Cu' thought to be his God-given duty that he was climbing a hillside one Saturday afternoon a few days later, on the way to help a family that had a problem. As he climbed, he began to experience severe stomach pain. He struggled on to his destination, but when he got there he could only lie down and wait out his inner agony. Next morning, he was found to be dead.

Cu' is the Ixil equivalent of the Spanish name Domingo. Domingo is also the Spanish word for "Sunday." The Spanish word derives from a term which means "belonging to the Lord." And on that Sunday (Domingo), Cu' (Domingo), who certainly "belonged to the Lord," went to be with him.

Cu' is the Ixil equivalent of the name Domingo in Spanish. domingo is both a name and the Spanish word for Sunday. It comes from a Latin word which means "pertaining to the Lord."

Cu' first made contact with me on a Sunday. He went to meet the Lord on a Sunday, early in August of 1982. Typically, he was serving his brethren. He could have come out of Salch'il with the group which took the night trail to Aguacat`an, or he could have come out with the second group. If he had, he might have been near medical help when the severe stomach pain began. But he just did not feel easy, he told one of the brethren, about leaving while some of the believers were still there in Salch'il.

In Nebaj, in November of 1982, I spoke with some of his neighbors who had more recently come from Salch'il to the Nebaj refugee camp. They said that the wife and children of Cu' are still in Salch'il, and that there are a number of people still there who would now gladly come to Nebaj, if they had protection on the way. In October, the army escorted a large group from Salch'il to Nebaj, but they were fired upon by guerrillas as they came down that long, tortuous trail. At least one soldier died in the encounter, and several others were wounded, and had to be evacuated by helicopter. But none of the Salch'il people themselves were hurt.

What does the future hold for the Ixil people of Salch'il and the surrounding mountain areas? It is impossible for us to predict. But the fact that some of the Ixil refugees in Nebaj are now asking for Bible studies, and are determined to go on with the Lord, no matter what, indicates that Cu' has left an example of stability and quiet courage in an area of strife and upheaval.

Word has recently come [I add this note in August 1984] that the son of Cu' was forced into the guerrilla army, but after a time he found an opportunity to surrender himself to the army, and is now free--as free as anyone can be in an area where the guerrillas still control much of the mountainside. The family of _____ (who had gone for several years not knowing if they were alive or dead) has finally been able to make their way into Nebaj, in desperate physical condition, and are receiving medical treatment.

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[Decide where to insert the following section]

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Several years after his conversion, Cu' was working with Helen at a workshop for developing reading materials in Indian languages. During that workshop, Cu' recorded for her some of his experiences in becoming a Christian. Here is a transcript of part of the story, as edited by Helen:

TESTIMONY OF CU'

We have lost our way! We follow the prayer-makers, I said to myself. That's the way it seems to me the people are doing. There are many of us who don't teach ourselves anything about the Word of God. We just lose our way, I think.

Formerly, when I still didn't know the Gospel, my religion was Catholic Action. I was in that religion and I experienced a sickness we call fright. I asked Mr. Ray in town, "Maybe you have a remedy. Maybe you are a doctor," I said to myself. "Is there a remedy with you?" I asked him.

"Perhaps there is. Come with me," Mr. Ray said.

So I went with him, but I said to myself, "I'm going just for the medicine." I went with him into his house. He got out a Bible. I was really scared because I knew he was a demon. I said to myself, "He teaches the things of the devil." I was really scared, but here I was in the house with him.

"Listen to what the Word of God says here," he said. "Maybe you will put your confidence in God."

Slowly I lowered myself to a chair, slowly I sat down there with him.

"Look, do you have a religion?" he asked me.

"Um hm," I said.

"Which religion are you in?"

"Catholic Action," I said.

"Then why are you afraid, if you're in Catholic Action?" he said. "For God's Word doesn't say we should be afraid if we're in His hand."

"I don't know," I said to him. Slowly I listened to what the Bible said. Slowly I listened, for he could speak my own language. I listened closely to what he said. It was different in the Catholic church, for there they used only Spanish.

There I heard only Spanish, so I could not place my confidence in God. We desired to pray to God but did not know how to put our trust in him. I just tried to do the number of prayers the priest said I should do, and when they were finished, then I told myself I had prayed to God. But I didn't understand what I had said to Him. "God will hear this," I told myself, "but I don't know what I have asked him for." You see what I mean?

Slowly Mr. Ray explained the matter to me. Then he said, "Take this book and study it," he said. "This book is from the Bible, it is Saint Mark in your own language," he said.

"All right," I told him. And I brought the book, whatever it was, home with me.

"I'll lend it to you," he said, and then you can bring it back to me."

"All right, sir," I said.

But I was afraid of the Bible. I was afraid of it. I hid it in my pocket. but somehow I lost it in a store. I did my buying and somehow I lost the book there.

When I got home, I told a friend about it. He also was a member of Catholic Action, but he too is a believer now.

"Thus I did with that man," and, "Thus I did with him," I told my friend.

"Aah! That is very bad if we speak with those people! Don't ever talk with them because they are very bad!" my friend said.

"And not only that, he gave me a book written in our own language!" I told him. "'You read the Bible,' he told me," I said to my friend. "It is in our language," I told my friend, "but I lost it. It is just as if I'd thrown it away, because I left it there in Mr. Armando's store. But that man told me that it is God himself speaking to him in that book. "I wish I had not lost it. If I had brought it we could look at it a little. I just can't get it out of my mind. I'm going back to hear more," I said.

"I lost the book, sir," I told him. I had gone to see him again.

"Then you'll have to pay for it," he said, but he was joking with me. "If you want another one, take it."

"Please give me another. I'll buy it," I said to him.

"All right, fine," he said.

I looked at it, and then I brought it, I bought it from him. Slowly I read it, and I saw that the words in it were very sweet. Can you imagine? Because I had another New Testament [in Spanish], it pertained to the priest, it was the New Testament but we never studied it. It was just there on the god-table. I never did now that it had God's words in it. I never did read it, but now I slowly read Saint Mark. It was a pleasure to hear what Saint Mark said.

"But who is this man who speaks our language?" I wondered. "Because this was our

language. Who is the man who speaks our language correctly?" I said, because these words really entered my heart! These words were really sweet--but it wasn't the way we had been doing in the church. We were doing some bad things, because we never heard it in our own language. But these were sweet things. "The things that those people observe are sweet," I said. I told my friend this.

Slowly I understood the word. And I sensed that it was true. But in the church it was different, because we could not understand the word there, I said to myself.

I thought about it, and it was just that way I became an evangelical. But then this caused a division between us and the priest.

"You know, he's gone in with those evangelicals now," they began to say about me, for I was telling them what I found in the book.

"Aah, but maybe now you're an evangelical, maybe you're a protestant," they said to me. "Because, where did you get these things you're telling us? You're probably a protestant!"

"No, look, fellows, it's all right here in the Bible that I saw it, right here in the New Testament that I got from the priest," I told them. "I wouldn't be talking like this if it was from the believers. It came right from the priest. It's only the New Testament that I've been reading," I told them.

"You're a liar, man! Did you go study somewhere? You're lying to us. Some protestant is teaching you," they said to me.

"Well, you think that if you want to, but that's where I read what I'm telling you, right where I said," I told them. "When I understood Saint Mark in our language, my stomach stood up to understand what I saw there. They are very good words, sweet, just like candy! They're just like our food that we fill our stomachs with!" I told them.

But that is what they said to me then.

So that is why we separated ourselves from the priest. We took ourselves out of the church. We were Catholics, so we were there with them. But we took ourselves out of the church. For the priest got angry when we talked about the Bible. He didn't like it. The priest asked me, "How many Bibles do you have? Now you think you know the Bible, you say, but you don't really know anything much at all. Now don't you go trying to teach the Bible until you understand all of it!" the priest said.

"All right, but how is it that you don't teach it to us? That's all we want, we want to learn," we said to the priest. There were two of us who wanted to learn.

"If you want to study, then you leave me, you hunt another place, you hunt another church. You go join up with Mr. Victor in "Above the Bad Place," you don't belong here with me anymore," the priest told us.

So I told the priest, "Even if you tell us to get out, that we don't have any part with you any longer, even if you put us out of the church, we will still love you. We will still be your friends,

because that is what God tells us. 'You should love each other,' he says, and we want to do what he says," we told the priest.

"Yes, that is what the Bible says," he said. "It seems you do know a little of the Bible. But it is not our custom to study the Bible. Because if I teach the Bible to the people it will scare them. I follow the customs of the people, I observe their traditions," the priest said. "If you want to study the Bible, then you have to separate yourselves from me," he said.

We talked about it, for we were rather sad to think of leaving the priest and the church. But the two of us left, we got out, I and another brother. There were just the two of us, and I was the only one who could read, for the other man couldn't. But he was firm in his heart. The Holy Spirit spoke to him and he was firm in his heart. "Even if we have left the church," he said, "we are following after God."

So we encouraged each other. He would encourage me to stay firm, and I would encourage him, also. "Well, let's pray to God, for now we are lost, we have abandoned the Catholic religion! See what all the people say about us now! So let's pray to God," we would say to each other. So we would really pray! With all our hearts we would ask God's patience with us.

"We've done it now! Now there is a division between us and the priest! But you help us, please, Sir," we'd pray to our Lord, "you help us, you bless us," we said to our Lord with all our hearts as we knelt before him. For we were in need, we were experiencing trouble, and we were sad.

But as we prayed, there were others of our brothers who gradually joined us from among the Catholic Action group. It is only the Bible we talked about there, it is only the Bible we had before us to direct us, it was only the Bible we were working with. We found our direction only from the Bible in front of us, it was a useful tool to us, just like our machetes. These things we said to each other.

"Yes, indeed!" the other of us would say, "when we pray to God, he makes our hearts strong, and we then speak to our fellows, our brothers. With strong hearts we can work with the word of God."

How we thank God that we encouraged each other from the word of our Lord! Now there are many of us, and it is the Holy Writings that we follow. They tell us that our Lord is alive! God encourages us and gives us confidence in him. He does what he promises.

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The following is from a translation of an interview taped in Ixil at Aguacat` an on 20 August 1982. Questions by Ray Elliott. Transcription in Ixil by Manuel L` opez Santiago. Translation into English by Ray Elliott.

What happened at Salch'il that made you decide to leave?

We left Salch'il because of all the problems there. We've experienced a lot of trouble, and were very sad. We've suffered a lot. We finally left Salch'il because we decided it was the best thing we could do. We were losing out with reference to God's Word, too. We weren't able to have prayers services, or get together to study God's Word, and that made us very sad. Even more so, since we would listen to the radio and knew that people in other places were having good meetings for prayer--in Santa Cruz del Quich` e, in Guatemala City, for example--and it was so nice, what we were hearing on the radio, but it was a very depressing situation there where we were. That's really why we left there, we wanted to find a better place. That's why we left there. Here were all these guerrillas around us, and they kept telling us that we should hide ourselves in the woods: "It's a bad scene if you stay in your homes. Get out of there, get out into the forest," they told us, "get out of your homes," they said. Well, we did as we were told, we got out, but it was really hard on us to be run out of our homes by those people, and any time one of us didn't do what they said, then they threatened us. "You are friends of the army!" they said, "any of you that don't get out, then it's necessary for you to be killed," they told us.

Naturally we were quite scared by what they threatened, and we were very sad. We spent a lot of time hungry there among the trees. Finally we talked it over and decided to leave. At first we thought we'd just go into town (Nebaj), but the guerrillas didn't allow us to pass. "Any of you that try to get into town will die along the trail," they told us. We knew it was time to get our new boleto de ornato papers (a type of head tax), but they said, "You can't get your papers!" That's why lots of us don't have current ornato papers now, but it's the fault of those men who wouldn't let us go to town to get them. It was getting sadder all the time trying to get along where we were. We were put into the position of being the President's enemies by those people. As a matter of fact, they insisted that we should oppose the President, that we shouldn't be friendly with him, they said. but we kept remembering the bible says that we should obey the President, for example that we should get our new papers, because the Bible tells us that people don't come to power just because they decide to, but rather that God is the one who puts them in power, and it made us sad to be made out to be the President's enemies, it was hard for us. But the bible tells us that we shouldn't join ourselves to the guerrillas--that's what the Bible tells us. But here we were in a situation where they'd kill anyone who refused to do what they said. And they've actually killed some of us who didn't go along with them, and this bothered us a lot. We talked it over, and decided to leave. Thank God for the way he helped us do it.

At first we didn't plan to go to Aguacat` an. We thought perhaps we might go to one of the plantations along the coast, like many of us had done before, if we were able to make it that far. And, if not, then maybe we'd die along the way. We were in God's hands, it was up to him

now what happened to us, we told ourselves. by saying these things among ourselves, we were prepared for the possibility that we might not make it. So we really thank God that we made it this far, and for the way our brothers here received us. We're really grateful to them for the way they gave us food. We haven't suffered any hunger here, thanks to them. We really appreciate how they've helped us here. And of course the mayor and other authorities here also, they've given us food too. The people here have really helped us, and we thank them.

Anyway, that's what we decided to do, we didn't see any other way out, for we were being fed all kinds of lies there in our own village. There are still a lot of people there, and they go on needing to hide like we were forced to, because of all those big lies they were telling us and the rest of the people there. For example, they kept saying, "Don't worry! don't worry! There's no problem! Because we're going to win this thing," they said, "and when we do it won't be just the kids but all the adults too will have milk to drink, and you'll have (rich man's) bread to eat, and you'll be driving around in your own cars," they kept telling the people--all of it lies, of course--and we thought it was bad, bad, what they were doing, and we finally ran away from it. We thank God for his help. That's all I really wanted to explain here. So we left. Two hundred and eighty seven of us here now, all told, including the children we brought out with us. And that's all I'll say for now.

Did the word reach you in Salch'il that the army was calling all of you in to Nebaj? Had you heard that? How did you react to that?

We got the word that we were supposed to go in, but it was simply impossible. The trails were blocked for us by the guerrillas, and they were really heavily armed, and no one could go. If anyone tried to go, they ordered him killed. that's why it wasn't possible for us to get there. We wanted to do as the soldiers had said when they summoned us, but we were blocked from using the trails, and were being driven out among the trees. We weren't allowed to stay in our own homes. "Quick! Get out! Get into the woods! The soldiers are coming!" So we got out. "They're coming to kill you! They'll kill you all! Let's get out of here, and hide ourselves!" they told us. Some of us decided then we'd try to leave. We heard the message, "Come into town! The soldiers won't kill you," they said--but we were never allowed to do that. Sometimes the guerrillas cut trees and blocked trails with them, so we couldn't get by at those places. It's really something of a miracle we got out alive, but we did it by traveling at night. We left home around 9 at night, and walked all the first night. It was really rough going, and we suffered a lot, but thank God we got out. We didn't dare leave by daylight, because trails there were being watched. But that's why we didn't go on down into Nebaj, there just wasn't anyway we could do it because of the guerrillas. For example, where there had been bridges across the rivers, there weren't anymore. Both stone bridges and wood bridges had been destroyed in any direction we needed to go. We finally found a bridge we could cross a river on, and we didn't have to try to ford the river itself, but it wasn't much of a bridge, really, and it was really bad getting across on it. So we really thank God to be here!

I was in Nebaj about two weeks ago, and I was told there were about eighty of your people from Salch'il there in Nebaj as refugees. Did you know about that?

No, we weren't aware of that.

How did it happen that you agreed to come out? Did you have a meeting? What did you do?

I'm pastor of a church there in Salch'il, and I was aware of all the trouble people were having. Many of them were crying and complaining, and some didn't have food, some were without blankets, some were having to sleep in the woods. I saw all this and it made me sad. I talked to some of our people. "What are we going to do, brothers? Is it possible that it's only here that this kind of trouble is being caused? Maybe we should leave. What should we do?" I said to them. Several leaders of the church agreed with me that we should leave, and that's what we did. The word was spread among the people of the church. There were two families that came that weren't of the church, but they were in the same kind of trouble we were in, and we allowed them to come with us. We brought them out with us when we came. We decided on a place to gather after dark, and all of us gathered there. We left, and traveled at night. There were only two or three of us in on it at first, and we made the plans. Then we passed the word to a few others, and then to a few others, and we were glad to get out of there. We reported to the authorities in the aldeas we passed through on the way, and they were glad to see us doing what we did. We thank God.

It wasn't just that we were in a bad way for physical food, although that was certainly a factor, but it was spiritual reasons we were sad about. For example, the guerrillas kept telling us, "There is no such thing as God, so you ought to quit all this nonsense you're involved in. There's no God at all!" they said. Well, of course the Bible says there is a God, and we were put out at being told there wasn't. They also said there was no hell, there was no devil, and we are bothered by that, because God says there's a hell, there's a devil--and there is God, too! He says we're his likeness! These are some of the things that have bothered us. The guerrillas are telling us to stop believing and acting like we do, and that makes us sad. They don't want us to pray to God, they want us to get rid of his word. "If one of you tries to go around preaching god's Word, if you go around offering God's Word to people that haven't accepted it before, if you try to get poeple to obey God, then we'll kill you!" they say. And we don't like that. And since we couldn't hear God's Word like we usually did, we were as sad about that as we were over not having physical food. It left us feeling awful.

The people you said were still there in Salch'il--how did it happen they didn't come out when you did?

Those people are all as sad as we were, but the situation is like this: There's one cant`on where we all lived, and we got the word around among us. But there's another cant`on that the word didn't get to, and they are still there. Another small group yet, about fifty other people, came in here last Friday, and apparently they decided just among themselves, too.

Did they live in the same cant`on where you did?

They're from the same aldea, Salch'il.

Yes, the same aldea, but were they from your same cant`on?

No, their cant`on was a little beyond ours. The one we came from

is called "By the Pond," and the cant` on they came from is called "Above the Church."

So it was 8 p.m. when you left. What trail did you take? Did you walk all night? What did you do during the daytime?

We left our houses at 8 p.m. At 6:30 a.m. we reached an aldea called Pajuil Pa` is, of the Aguacat` an jurisdiction, just about dawn. We left Tuesday night, and it was Wednesday morning when we got to Pajuil. It was about dawn when people there stopped us and watched out for us while we rested. It was probably about 3 in the afternoon when we left there, and we were given a place to sleep in another aldea named Peric` on, so we slept there. At 5 a.m. we left there on Thursday and it was about 11:30 that morning when the [Peric` on?] authorities brought us into Aguacat` an here.

How many leagues did you walk, then?

From Salch'il it was probably 8 kilometers. [This was quite an understatement!]

How did the little children bear up on the trip? Wasn't it hard on them? What happened to them?

Lots of them really injured their feet, so there was lots of crying along the way. When we left an aldea called Chex, some of the men there really helped us, brethren from the church there. They carried the little children for us, and they carried our packs. some of the older men among us were really tiring badly, and the tump-lines were wearing the skin off their foreheads, leaving them bleeding. Some of our older men were carrying two children each, and leading another crying child by the hand. The Chex men felt sorry for us and wanted to help, so they carried our loads and stayed with us until we got here.

How about the women? Wasn't the trip hard on them, too?

Lots of the women really were suffering, especially with their feet. some had left home with shoes on, but the shoes just came apart on the trail, and were left along the way, and the women's feet really did hurt! some of them were crying from pain, so they were really glad when we got here.

I was told by _____ -- do you know him?

Oh, yes! He's the pastor who received us here.

He told me that there were two families who left Salch'il with you but didn't arrive here with you. What happened to them?

We had told them where we were going to meet at eight that night, but they never showed up. We waited a long time for them, but we knew the roads were being watched by the guerrillas. Who knows? They may have fallen into the hands of the guerrillas. We waited for them, and time was passing. It was aroun 8 when we left our homes and came to the place where we were to meet, and it was around 10 by now, and no one else came to join us, and we just had to leave. So we came away. We don't have any way of knowing whether those two families are still alive, or whether they were taken by the guerrillas, or whether they were killed.

When the other group of fifty came, those two families were not among them?

No, they never showed up. They never showed up.

Has any word reached you from "By the Deer Hole" or from "Above Calaaam River"? Do you know what is happening in those places?

Things there are about like they were with us in Salch'il. they were in sad circumstances, and their chances of leaving were about like ours, since the roads are being watched by the guerrillas.

Do you have any way of knowing whether others will be coming here?

When we came, I sent 14 men back there. they had an escort of soldiers with them. They summoned everyone to meet at the village hall. That man right over there--he was one of the 14. So he was able to see the people who are still there, that you're asking about. He says there must be about 250 or so still in Salch'il, who gathered when summoned by the brothers and the soldiers. They wre called in by using a loudspeaker.

Do you know how many guerrillas are still there?

Are you asking about the guerrillas, or about the people who live there?

I'm asking about the guerrillas. Are they known to you?

No, we don't recognize them. We see them passing on the trails, but we don't know who they are.

They're not Salch'il people? where do they come from?

No, they're not Salch'il people. We don't know where they're from. Their language, of course, they speak our language, but we don't recognize them or know where they'e from. As you kow, this is a large area. We see them pass, but nothing more. We don't recognize who they are.

Are you the one who said you went back to Salch'il?

Yes, and I'll tell you what I experienced. We left here with some soldiers, and we reached a place called "Above Paana." We met some people there, and some of the brothers in our group suggested they might want to go to Salch'il with us, but they didn't want to. When we got to Salch'il, we used the loudspeaker to call people together, and they came around. When I left there, there were perhaps 250 people there, all told, and I suspect there were others who didn't come in response to the summons. I didn't linger there, since I was told by the soldiers' commander that I would be their guide as they came back [and the other 13 men stayed there in Salch'il for the time being]. So we started out. I was serving as guide as we left Salch'il to come back here. As we were climbing up out of the village, at the place known as "Tile-Roofed House," guerrillas opened fire on the soldiers, and they killed one soldier there. Possibly some of the guerrillas were killed or wounded, too, we don't know, but there was a trail of blood left behind by the guerrillas when they ran away. We came on to Palop, and I saw some of our Ixil people--four of them--lying dead, but there was no way of identifying them, since dogs had eaten away their

faces. Their eyes and part of their heads were gone. We came straight back from there! the others who went back from here stayed on there at Salch'il, where they'll probably get the word around to other brothers there. That is what I experienced on the trip.

I'd like to hear what happened to the leader named Cu'. Are you the one who brought back word about him?

There's really not much we can tell you about him. We got the word after we had already left Salch'il the first time. There were some brothers who lived up above Salch'il in the mountains, and Mr. Cu' went up there to see them. He was approaching the little hut of one of them when bad stomach pains started. It was a very bad attack. And the next morning he was dead. The word reached us that he was dead, and that's all we know. It was possibly from hunger, some say, that he died, but it was illness, not from being shot. He was buried up there.

When did he die?

He died on Sunday. It was Sunday he died, and since people were afraid to try to bury him in the cemetery, he was buried rather hurriedly in the woods. It was about dawn when he died. It was getting dark Saturday evening when the illness hit him, and Sunday morning he was dead, and he was quickly buried there by the brothers. They'd have preferred to bury him in the cemetery, but they were afraid to try it, so they buried him in the woods.

No, that's not right. It's _____ you're talking about. Brother Cu' was buried in the cemetery. It was the other brother who died who was buried in the woods, in a grassy place. That's what really happened.

What about brother Teck, the one whose hearing went bad?

He's still living.

It's good to hear that! Have you had any word from "Below the Horizon"?

Yes. I came along with the group that pastor _____ brought here. I'd talked with him about what I was seeing there, how bad things were, really dangerous times. It had been a long time since we'd been able to have services. Not at all like it used to be, when we could have our services whenever we wanted to and everyone was happy about it. I really liked that, and I went to all of them. But now it wasn't possible any more, and we couldn't get together for meetings like that, because the guerrillas told us we couldn't. And they also told us there wasn't anything wrong with killing us, since there wasn't any God in the first place. "I don't know whether there's a god or not, but as far as I'm concerned there isn't," they'd say. It really hurt me to hear them talking like that. So we talked to the pastor about it, and a group of us decided to get away from there if we could. But it was still hard to leave, very sad. I might have stayed if I'd been alone, but I thought it would be best to get my family out of there, especially my wife. We had to leave behind everything we had, there in the house, we just had to abandon it. For example, I had animals-- three cows, two horses. all our clothes, our shelled corn, our unshelled corn--all those things we had to abandon there where we'd lived. But all because of what those guerrillas are doing. We were

afraid of them! If we hadn't gotten away, then whenever they thought the army was coming, they'd say, "Get on out of here, right now! Go on away! Whoever doesn't get out of here, we'll take your life, we'll kill you, because otherwise you'd just be 'army ears'--tattling on us!" they'd tell us, and they really scared us. And we thought about how many of our neighbors had already been killed, for no apparent reason. They weren't following God's Word when they injured us! What they were doing was just plain bad! We recognized that fact because we had God's Word in our heads, and we finally just ran for our lives. But we had to change our route [from the usual trails] when we left, and so when the brethren here stopped us it was quite a relief! The army, too. The colonel was very happy when we turned ourselves over to him, and the brethren here are continuing to help us, here in Aguacatan. There sure are a lot of believers here! And they've really helped us. We're happy to be here now. But that's why we left our homes. Our hearts are happy here now, but when we think of all we had to leave behind, it's hard. Our tools are back there. But God is helping us now, and he will bless not just us but our brothers who are helping us.

Do you have any word about our brother _____?

No, we didn't see him or talk with him. Who knows where he might be now! But when some of our own people turned guerrilla and ran us out of our own homes, it really scared us, and we left. There were lots of the believers themselves that we never had a chance to see, and since we couldn't have meetings we hadn't seen some of them for a long time. It's been a very sad time. But we're glad we are able to join those who came here.

You know _____, who is son of _____. He is working with me in the capital. It has been a very long time now since he has had any word about his father or mother or brother.

He is still alive. I talked with his brother, _____. He said, "We're still alive, we're all right just now, but we're completely surrounded by guerrillas, and only God knows what will happen to us." That's what he told me the day I left. I talked to him in the Salch'il market.

I'm very glad to hear that, since for a long time now _____ hasn't known whether his family is alive or dead.

A lot of people have died since I saw them, of course, so we can't say what their situation is right now, but as of that day about a month ago, they said they were all right. And of course, they had not had any word about their son who was away from them, either, so they didn't know whether he was alive or dead. The father of _____ said, "These are such dangerous times, and very sad! Please pray for me, and I'll be praying for you, too. That's what God's Word tells us to do."
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