



The  
Christian  
*Ethnographer*

Eastern University's  
Journal of Anthropology

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*The Christian Ethnographer is a student-run anthropological journal dedicated to enriching the field of Christian anthropology. We study anthropology in order to better understand God's creation and what it means to be created in His image, and our journal aims to explore these ideas through the writing of ethnographies. We strive to give a voice to young anthropologists who can revitalize the discipline through a faith-based approach to ethnography.*

# A Call for Christian Anthropology

Anthropology as an academic discipline has a long history of secularism—sometimes to the point of open hostility towards Christianity. James Frazer, an early social anthropologist, made the claim that Christianity was a sort of totemism, and like any other primitive form of thought, whether religion or magic, had been rendered obsolete by science. This seems to have set the tone for anthropology through the ages. Christianity, to most anthropologists, should be treated as merely a cultural phenomenon. It is perfectly legitimate to study Christianity as we would study other religions; it can be the object of anthropological study, but nothing more. Because of this, anthropologists who are Christian have not always been respected within the field. How could someone who studies cultural and societal constructs succumb to a mere myth, a social construct? Christianity, it is said, prevents an objective understanding of the world and people around us. And anthropology, as a social science and academic discipline, must be objective—or so they say.

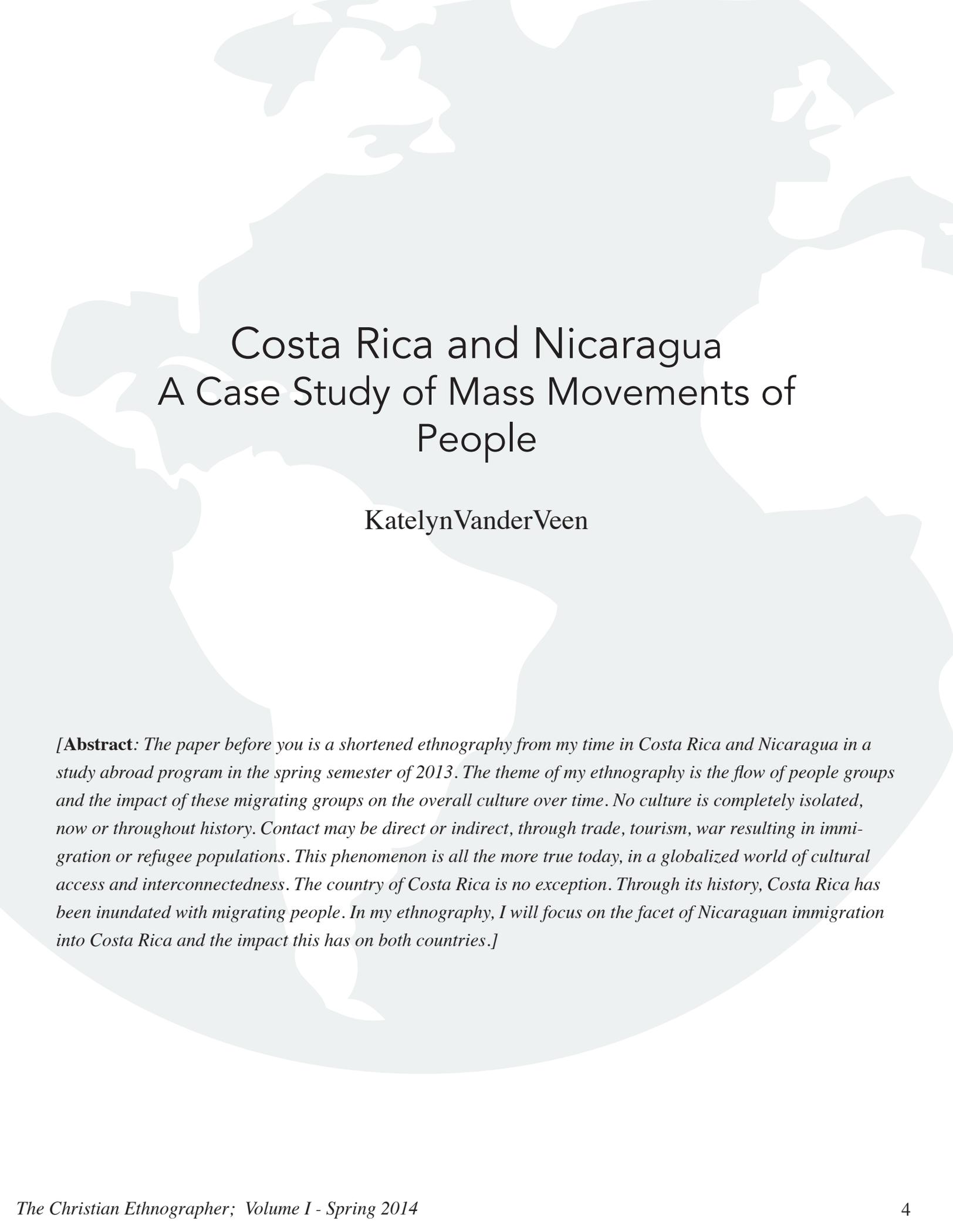
This idea of objective, detached knowledge comes from the Enlightenment. Although anthropology as a discipline didn't yet exist, its philosophical roots allowed it to be heavily influenced by the thinking of the period. Indeed a core goal of some of the influential early anthropologists was to study humans (and their practices, including religion) as 'other' scientists study other natural phenomena. As E. E. Evans Pritchard said, because of the Enlightenment "human societies...are seen as systems" (Marett Lecture, 1950). Even today, modern anthropologists have a tendency to reduce cultures to something more machine-like than human.

But anthropology cannot be detached. We could argue that true objectivity, even in the hard sciences, is impossible. And that is indeed a worthwhile argument. But the argument for a subjective anthropology goes beyond that. Anthropology is the study of culture, of what it means to be human. It requires—or at least it should—a deep empathy. At the very least, this empathy is required because to know another is to know the self. When we study another culture, we learn just as much about our own as the foreign. We as anthropologists seek an intimate understanding of the other, and through the other we seek to know ourselves.

Christianity, then, is not obsolete at all. In fact, the faith deeply enriches our understanding of what it means to be human, and thus allows us a fuller understanding of culture. As Christians, we understand all humans to be created in the image of God, and all humans as having infinite value in His eyes. This imbeds a sense of empathy within us, which allows us to open our eyes wider to the world around us and the vast diversity of humanity. Because we as Christians have a unique sense of what it means to be human, we may approach the same questions, even the same data, as secular anthropologists, and come out in the end with different conclusions. Knowing others as anthropologists is enriched by knowing them as Christians. And is not the goal of anthropology to know the other on the deepest possible level?

So here is the call for a Christian anthropology. People are not machines but reasoning, creating, loving beings. Societies are not merely detached systems of function but living webs of interactions. To treat humans and their cultures as anything else is to devalue them. And so anthropology can no longer approach the human world in such an objective and mechanistic manner. This does have its uses – it is not a matter of 'either/or' – but when we see a study proposing to explain a certain human event or situation in mechanical terms without remainder, we would do well to be suspicious that something has been forgotten. We do not have to reject social theories and models, but we need to be careful not to let them override the otherwise seemingly obvious fact that the people being modeled are in fact people. We cannot see them as only passive nodes in an analysis even when such analyses are helpful for some questions. They are still like us. They go about their lives in very routine ways but also have hopes, fears, aspirations, and are potential agents in the life of a time and place. If we truly want to understand what it means to be human, we must be willing to empathize, and we must be willing to look as deeply as possible. Christianity allows—and requires—this, because if we are indeed created in the image of God, then we are infinitely precious.

Carolyn Wason,  
*Senior Editor*



# Costa Rica and Nicaragua A Case Study of Mass Movements of People

Katelyn VanderVeen

*[Abstract: The paper before you is a shortened ethnography from my time in Costa Rica and Nicaragua in a study abroad program in the spring semester of 2013. The theme of my ethnography is the flow of people groups and the impact of these migrating groups on the overall culture over time. No culture is completely isolated, now or throughout history. Contact may be direct or indirect, through trade, tourism, war resulting in immigration or refugee populations. This phenomenon is all the more true today, in a globalized world of cultural access and interconnectedness. The country of Costa Rica is no exception. Through its history, Costa Rica has been inundated with migrating people. In my ethnography, I will focus on the facet of Nicaraguan immigration into Costa Rica and the impact this has on both countries.]*

During my time in Costa Rica and Nicaragua, I learned through both the readings and lectures of the program and the lived-out cultural experience with my host families. Both gave me deep insights into the historical and current relationship between the two countries. Costa Rica and Nicaragua are neighboring countries on the isthmus of Central America. As an anthropologist in training, as it were, I strongly value the approach of anthropologist Franz Boas with his emphasis on historical particularism, so here is a brief history of both countries to better understand the historical events that have influenced the current situations of both Costa Rica and Nicaragua.

Costa Rica is by far the wealthiest and most stable of Central American countries. At the start of the Spanish Conquest, Costa Rica, unlike other areas, did not have a very high indigenous population because there was very little natural wealth, such as precious metals or land for agriculture on a grand scale. This translated into Costa Rica being the poorest Spanish colony because there were no valuable minerals nor was there a large slave population. It was the “Cinderella of the colonies”. Costa Rica escaped the oppressive hierarchy and established exploitation found in most of the other Central American colonies because the few European settlers did not have the same opportunities of exploitation; rather for the most part they became farmers and tilled the land themselves, often mixing with the native inhabitants. On September 15, 1821, the colonies received their independence from Spain. Within two years of receiving their independence, Costa Rica had ratified a federal constitution. Over the next century the government worked hard to ensure democracy, though with various fallbacks into aristocracy and dictatorship, by promoting education and trade. Especially since 1948, Costa Rica has become peacefully and firmly established both in internal and international affairs. Costa Rica emphasized social programs and became a welfare state. Although various interna-

tional trade stipulations have infringed on the way of life in Costa Rica in recent years, resulting in an on-going economic stagnancy, Costa Rica currently remains the wealthiest country in Central America, and as such, represents a utopia to many immigrants from poorer countries such as Nicaragua. Nicaragua is an incredibly poor nation due to intense political strife over many years. The country has a history of violent dictatorship and international involvement. After years of political instability since gaining independence, Nicaragua was ruled by the Somoza’s, a family dynasty that controlled the country from 1937 until 1979 with an iron fist to maintain subservience. The Sandinistas led a long and bloody people’s rebellion against the Somoza dynasty from 1961 to 1979 and finally ousted the dictator. Immediately following their victory, however, the United States began aiding the Somoza family indirectly by funding an army called the Contras in the name of fighting Communism. This started another war as the Sandinistas defended their newly won country from the U.S.-funded Contras. The U.S. continued aiding the Contras, first legally and then covertly until 1986, when, in the unravel of the famous Iran-Contra Scandal, the U.S. was exposed as secretly selling weapons to Iran and then illegally diverting profits from these sales to provide aid to the Contra army. After the U.S. cut off their aid, the Sandinista army was able to push the Contras back and regain their victory in 1990. However, the death toll and the economic cost of the years of turmoil have crippled Nicaragua to this day. In the middle of that time, there was also a devastating earthquake in 1978 that killed up to 10,000 people. Though there is much more political stability in Nicaragua now, the country is still reeling from the violence that tore it apart, leaving countless families impoverished.

According to the CIA World Factbook of 2012, almost half of Nicaragua’s population lives below the poverty line. There are very few jobs and virtu-

ally no job growth. Because of this, thousands of Nicaraguans look to Costa Rica as the source of hope for improving their lives, or even to simply survive. Thousands immigrate to Costa Rica to find work, either legally or illegally. They usually work low paying jobs, such as construction, agricultural labor, or domestic services. Much of their incomes end up being sent back to their families in Nicaragua, a system known as remittances. In Nicaragua, remittances account for almost 15% of the GDP. (CIA World Factbook, Nicaragua, 2012). Many Costa Ricans, or Ticos, feel resentment towards the Nicaraguan immigrants, since the Ticos have also been struggling especially since the Recession. I observed a number of cases of this animosity in my time in Costa Rica, though what I heard and saw were only indirect comments made by Ticos to me or amongst Ticos themselves, usually about how Nicaraguans are dirty, dishonest, dangerous and stealing jobs from Ticos. I did not witness any directly hostile action or word to a Nicaraguan, although I know they happen regularly. My first host family in San José, the capitol of Costa Rica, was directly affected by the Nicaraguan migration into Costa Rica. Marcos, my host father, lost his job the year before I arrived, as many Ticos have in the stagnant economy. He would go out every day to various contractors to try to find some work in jobs such as painting or cutting planks of wood. It was very low-paying work to begin with, but contractors would prefer the Nicaraguans (Nicos) waiting in line for jobs because they are often in the country illegally, meaning they could get away with paying them even less than the standard rate. The Nicos often end up receiving the jobs that the Ticos themselves also need. This creates a dynamic of hostility between the Ticos and Nicos, who are both trying to provide for themselves and their families.

My host father never showed anger at this. Marcos was always disappointed when he did not find work for the day, especially as a Latino man who could not

provide for his family in a culture of machismo. But I never heard him blame the Nicaraguans for taking a job from him. Marcos was very aware of systemic problems that caused certain situations so he rarely vented about the personal aspects in which he was affected. In fact, my host family in San José was quick to show me that they were loving and inclusive towards Nicaraguans. Some of their good family friends who came over to the house at all times of the day were immigrants from Nicaragua. Many members of the church my family attended had moved to Costa Rica from Nicaragua.

In my second home stay, I rode with my host father, Wilker, almost every day for an hour each morning and evening to and from the school where he worked. One of our routes took us past a huge coffee plantation that had a reputation for seasonally hiring illegal immigrants from Nicaragua and treating them very poorly. Similar to the relationship between the United States and Mexico, much of the agricultural industry in Costa Rica is worked by Nicaraguan immigrants, many of whom are illegal. On this particular plantation, there were run-down barrack-style buildings where the workers, usually illegal Nicaraguan immigrants, stayed during the coffee harvest season, often with their families, packing the buildings well over the capacity limit. Yet the authorities turned a blind eye. Wilker said they would occasionally conduct haphazard raids to deport a few of the workers or inspections to supervise the working conditions, but were never very serious about the process. The raids were more for show or to remind the Nicaraguan employees that they are outsiders than to actually stem the problem. The authorities and the agriculture companies both recognized the importance of poor immigrant labor in the industry and how to utilize it for the gain of the individual, the company or the country, without any thought for the health and safety of the immigrants, knowing the immigrants will do almost anything to provide for their families.

My study was also informed by a brief stay in Nicaragua where I lived with a Nicaraguan family for eight days. My Nicaraguan host parents, Josué and Rosa, live with their two small sons in a poor, rural community. They live in a two-room house that holds their beds and a small space to sit if it rains. A small open lean-to type building serves as their outdoor kitchen where Rosa cooks over a fire. Electricity is sporadic. They have no running water; rather, every other day they fill a big tub with water from the irrigation pumps that water the nearby pineapple fields. That water must last until the next day of irrigation. [I do not describe their life-style, so different from our own in the States, to elicit pity or the North American compulsion to give aid, both of which can become unhealthy]. My host family had a joyful outlook on life, and they had everything they needed, though it might not be up to par with what we so often think of as necessary to lead a quality life. The problem is their lack of ability to maintain their life of simplicity that they loved. Though the area is an agricultural hub, there are no jobs for the locals because the land is owned by a big international company. Jobs are incredibly scarce, and even though the cost of living is very low in Nicaragua, my host family and many of the others in the community could barely make ends meet. Costa Rica beacons of better opportunities for those living in poverty with little hope of an escape from poverty.

A year and a half before I stayed with them, my host father, Josué, went to Costa Rica to find work. He did not say if he traveled on a visa or not, and I did not press him so I do not know if he was there legally or not. He said he found work on a lumber-yard near Volcán Arenal, the most famous volcano in Costa Rica. The area around Arenal is a huge hub for tourists. He stayed there for eight months and sent money back to Rosa, who at this point had already had their oldest son Alvir. Josué represented the many Nicaraguans living and working in Costa Rica to send

money, known as remittances, back to their families. Josué told me he was often scared in his time in Costa Rica because he heard many stories of violence against Nicaraguans, even the deaths of Nicos, that went unreported and uninvestigated. Rosa told me that she too was always worried something would happen to him and she would never know. She also confided to me that she was terrified that Josué would find another woman in Costa Rica and settle there with her, never returning. This is a common situation when family members, particularly men, leave home to find work abroad.

But Josué and Rosa have a beautiful story. While living in Costa Rica, Josué became a Christian. Neither he nor Rosa had any overtly religious upbringing except for a Catholic mass here and there. In Costa Rica, Josué encountered the growing evangelical Protestant movement. He gave his life to Jesus, as the evangelical phrase goes, and came back to Nicaragua shortly after. He and Rosa had been living together for two years already but were not married. I learned that in many poorer nations, though it is also growing in the United States, many couples live together their whole adult lives without having an official marriage ceremony. Weddings are expensive social events so many couples simply dedicate themselves to each other without the ceremony. Also, because separations and divorce are so common, especially with men often leaving for work or other women, many opt to save the expense. But after eight months of working in Costa Rica Josué returned a dedicated Christian. He and Rosa were married and now have added another son to their family. They are both actively involved in the little church in the community. Things are still not easy in their community, with widespread poverty. Josué did not have work again for a very long time. Actually, during the eight days that I stayed with them, Josué started work at a candle factory in the next town, about a forty-five minute bike ride away. He was so happy to have a

steady job. The first few days he came home he was excited to share what he had learned about how to run the machinery and about safety protocol. I do not know the working conditions of the factory but Josué is happy and content that he can now stay in the area and still provide for his family. My Nicaraguan host family is an excellent example of the current situation of the country and how that contributes to the dynamic relationship between Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

Costa Rica and Nicaragua are both cogs in the machine of modern global influence, especially in the realm of politics and economics, understood in the comprehensive term of capitalism. Capitalism, though an impersonal system of economics, rests entirely on human interactions and histories, and is therefore inherently political and social. The balances are tipped to favor those that were and are able to compete, namely those with stability, both politically and ecologically, to grow in power and wealth. This holds true across the international spectrum. In the case of Costa Rica and Nicaragua, Costa Rica has a history of much more stability, mostly due to the lack of wealth in minerals and agriculture that caused it to be ignored in the political turmoil of the Spanish conquest. This provided the space for the nation to grow in wealth and power over time, almost ignored. Nicaragua, on the other hand, was firmly involved in the oppression and hierarchy of the Spanish conquest and, even after gaining independence, experienced years of violence and tyranny on many different domestic and international fronts, up through the late 1900's. Nicaragua never had the opportunity to establish itself in peace and therefore today, after so much turmoil, sits in poverty. It is unable to compete in the international realm of capitalism, which then continues the cycle of poverty because there is no opportunity for the nation to grow economically.

This phenomenon sets up the relationship between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Costa Rica holds

a higher position on the scale of “developing” countries in globalization, which brings it into direct contact with the immigrants from Nicaragua, a country lower on the “development” scale. In the words of current anthropologist Arjun Appadurai, Costa Rica and Nicaragua are participating in deterritorialization, “one of the central forces of the modern world because it brings laboring populations into the lower-class sectors and spaces of relatively wealthy societies, while sometimes creating exaggerated and intensified senses of criticism or attachment to politics in the home state.” (Appadurai 576) Deterritorialization includes movements of people all around the world for whatever reason, be it war, poverty, persecution, or job offers. In a world so much more connected and accessible than ever before, people leave their native culture and blend into, with their own particularities, another culture or multiple cultures. Nicaraguans are crossing into Costa Rica in droves, driven by need and hope of a better future. They integrate as best they can into a different culture with different values. Yet the immigrants show their ties to their native home in the remittances they send back to Nicaragua. Whether they settle long-term in Costa Rica or stay for a short time to earn money, Nicaraguan immigrants learn to balance and blend to some degree the two cultures they now participate in. Costa Ricans themselves also participate in this blending, consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, as they come into direct contact with the Nicaraguan immigrants.

The mass entrance of Nicaraguans into their culture and economy creates a blending of culture as two people groups meet and interact regularly within the grand cultural and political scheme of the world. The same sharing of culture happens when the Nicaraguan immigrants return from Costa Rica to their country and their families. The relationship between Costa Rica and Nicaragua serves as a case study in the prominent role of migrating people groups in the

interconnectedness—historically, economically and politically—of today’s globalized world.

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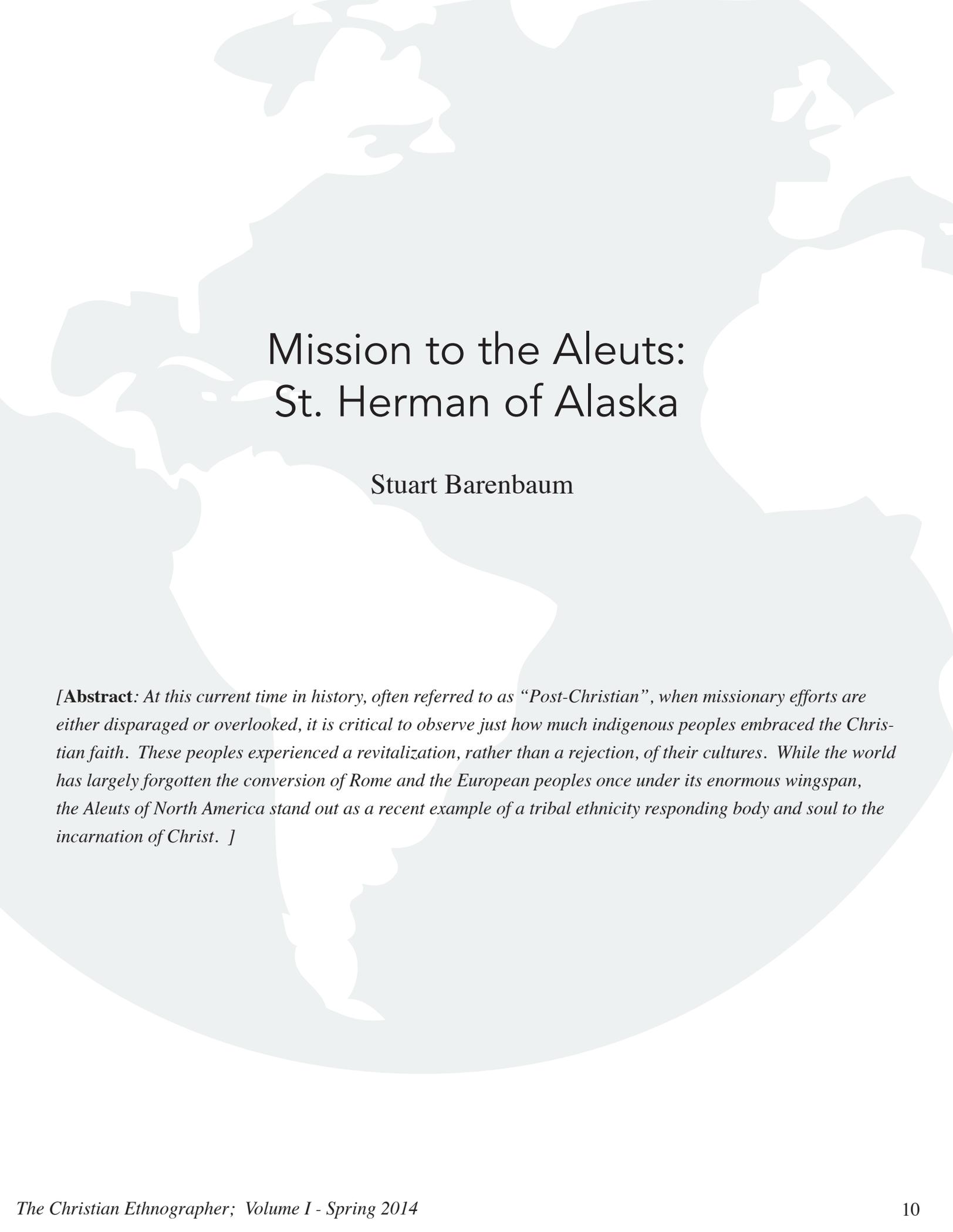
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# Mission to the Aleuts: St. Herman of Alaska

Stuart Barenbaum

*[Abstract: At this current time in history, often referred to as “Post-Christian”, when missionary efforts are either disparaged or overlooked, it is critical to observe just how much indigenous peoples embraced the Christian faith. These peoples experienced a revitalization, rather than a rejection, of their cultures. While the world has largely forgotten the conversion of Rome and the European peoples once under its enormous wingspan, the Aleuts of North America stand out as a recent example of a tribal ethnicity responding body and soul to the incarnation of Christ. ]*

The conversion of the Aleut people involved centripetal and centrifugal strategies, plus a struggle against an exploitive secular authority. St. Herman was the central figure in all, battling the Russian government, seeking the people, and building a monastery which attracted them. This Russian monastic passionately loved the Aleuts and lived a life dedicated to God in purity and uprightness. As we discuss the mission strategies of St. Herman and others who revealed Christ to the Aleuts, we will also consider the Aleut culture and the history of this mission before Alaska's purchase by the United States in 1867. Some current observations about Aleut Christianity will be included as well.

We will begin by examining the chief protagonists in our story, namely, the Aleuts, the Russians, and St. Herman himself. The Aleut people are primarily associated with western Alaska and the chain of islands stretching 1500 miles from Asia to America, although the word is often used to refer to the Alaskan people in general. Four hundred miles from the Aleutian Isles is Kodiak Island, inhabited by the Alutiqs, particularly targeted by St. Herman at the beginning of the mission. Another term frequently used for Aleuts referring to one of the main languages spoken thereby is Unangan. Unangan means original people or "seasider". "The earliest people, the Paleo-Aleuts, arrived in the Aleutian Islands from the Alaskan mainland about 2000 B.C. Other studies suggest the Aleuts inhabited this area for over 9,000 years." ("Aleutian Islands", Sept. 17th, 2012). The antiquity of this habitation suggests a migration, perhaps, through the now-submerged Bering Strait Land Bridge which is thought to how people came from Asia into the American continent. (Balter, Jan. 13, 2012).

While wind, cold temperatures, and rough seas made life challenging for the Aleuts, their response was a well-developed culture which went beyond mere survival. "Bone, stone, sinews, skins and natural fibers

were skillfully turned into useful tools and products. This technology used the whole spectrum of marine mammals, fish, birds, plants and land animals to create finely honed tools, clothing, housing materials and food. The result was that the Unangan actually lived a relatively prosperous life with sufficient extra time for art, music, dancing and ritual carried along by a strong oral tradition." ("Unangan/Aleut Culture", Aleut (Unangan) Ethnography). Their kayaks, for instance, were of exceptional quality and were used for deep sea fishing, as well as hunting big game like whales and otters. In addition, seals, sea lions, caribou, and bear were hunted, and berries were mixed with animal fat and fish through a process known as alutiqquitigaq.

Of most importance in comprehending the Aleut people's world view is their religion. "Shamans were the aboriginal specialists in dealing with supernatural. They cured the sick, foretold the future, brought success in hunting and warfare, and performed other similar tasks." (Veitre, 1996). The main artifacts and tools of the shaman and of Aleut worshippers in general were masks. Masks were considered the holiest of objects and stored in special places for preservation and purity. According to a host of observers and commentators, masks transformed the wearer into the being represented, made the wearer visible to the spirit-world, hid the wearer's human identity from others, and gave power to affect events outside the human sphere. (Mousalimas, 2003, pgs. 132, 133). All Alaskan tribes had a unique concept of animals, spirits, and time. Animals and their spirits were seen as one. Since hunting was necessary to the subsistence lifestyle of the people, it was necessary to honor, respect, and be grateful to those creatures who surrendered their lives to feed humanity. Also, the people believed that all animals had a language which was once known by ancestors at the dawn of time. As for the way time is perceived, "by reenacting the eternally significant actions of "the Begin-

ning”, each generation is also united to and placed in solidarity with its ancestors.” The “Beginning” here referred to is the rituals concerning family life, community, and seasons, particularly significant in dealing with the harsh northern climate. (Oleska, *Orthodox Alaska*, 1992, pgs.15-21).

The Russians, by the time of their journey to the Aleuts (1741), were a nation 800 hundred years old with a written language given to them by missionaries. These missionaries, the brothers Cyril and Methodius, came from Thessalonica which at that time was part of the Byzantine or Eastern Roman Empire, with its capital at Constantinople. Thus, the link between Greece and Russia was forged. When Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev converted to Christianity in 988, he brought the whole nation with him. While some might question this conversion as typical of “Constantinian Christianity”, the truth is that the faith survived the Mongol invasion two hundred years later, bad rulers, and countless Russian winters to remain in the people’s hearts. It also survived 80 years of Communism as evidenced in our own era. One of the fruits of Russian Christianity was an active monastic movement. This movement flourished despite a western secularizing trend that surfaced in the reigns of Peter the Great and Catherine in the 18th century. But earthly rulers have their place, and it was Peter the Great who organized the Great Northern Expedition to map a northern sea route to the east, leading to Alaska’s discovery. The expedition inspired Siberian fur dealers to pursue their interest on islands around the Alaskan mainland. (“Great Northern Expedition”, 2013). In 1741, Captain Vitus Bering landed his ship, the *St. Peter*, on the Shumagin Islands among a Unangan-speaking people and claimed the area for Russia. A clash between state and mission was forthcoming.

It is time to introduce St. Herman. Born around the Moscow diocese area in the year 1756, he entered the monastery at age 16. After 5 years in the St. Ser-

gius Monastery near St. Petersburg, he went to the Valaam Monastery on Lake Ladoga, Siberia, a place he deeply revered all his life. Soon, he would be summoned.

Everything converged at Kodiak Island, the Aleuts, the Russians, and missionaries from Valaam and various monasteries, including St. Herman. When merchant Gregory Shelikov established the first permanent Russian settlement among the indigenous people at Three Saints Harbor near the present city of Kodiak, he sought help from the government and the monastery. Sincere and ambitious, Shelikov wanted justification for his enterprise. In 1793, the Empress Catherine complied and directed the Abbott of Valaam Monastery to select the appropriate monks for the first mission to the new colony. In order to interest the monarch and the monks, Shelikov claimed to have created schools and converted natives, in addition to founding business cartels to hunt fur-bearing animals, his main purpose. Not entirely truthful about helping others, he did draw the Russian monastic tradition into its first overseas mission. (*Orthodox Church In America*, 1975, pg. 15)

The monks arrived after a journey of 293 days and 7,327 miles in September of 1794. There had been previous baptisms in the 50 some years since Bering’s first journey, but no organized effort that provided real education for converts. This time, a church was established in Kodiak in just two months. From Kodiak, missionaries went to the Aleutian Isles and also into the actual interior of Alaska where St. Juvenaly was martyred in 1796. In just this short period, the population of Kodiak was baptized as well as many on the Aleutian isles, followed later by many on the mainland. A school for children was established.

Conditions were absolutely terrible for the native people in their continual struggle for food, clothing, and shelter in the Arctic, and the monks shared these conditions without a qualm. While Shelikov claimed

to have supplied the monks with everything, he did nothing of the kind. This is where the influence of the Desert Fathers upon the missionaries came to bear. “One of the most important elements of the Russian Orthodox worldview which contributed to the evolution of Aleut culture and identity was the monastic tradition which had its roots in antiquity. Since no one can survive in the desert without divine assistance, to dwell there means to confront Satan on his home ground “ (Oleksa, *Orthodox Alaska*, 1992, pgs.72,73). As was the desert, so the polar regions!

Almost immediately, the monks were forced into a social justice confrontation on behalf of the Alutiq peoples. Shelikov’s main manager was a man named Alexander Baranov. Baranov often forced native hunters at gun point to search for sea otters, the most valuable fur commodity. He had a native mistress and encouraged others from the Russian fur companies to do the same, as though Aleut women were nothing but prostitutes

I have taken time to preface our discussion on mission strategy with the above in order to demonstrate the fight, not only against native prejudices and difficult conditions, but against colonialism with its twin evils of ethnocentrism and greed. St. Herman was head of the mission school. He became head of the entire mission when Father Joasaph drowned returning to Alaska from Russia after being consecrated as bishop. Let us examine the missionary strategy he and others employed from the perspective of a non-Orthodox, most likely, non-Christian for the sake of objectivity. Patricia Partnow, in her book *Making History: Alutiq/Sugpiaq Life of the Alaskan Peninsula* (2001), attempts to discern the reasons for mass Aleut conversion even in the very beginnings of mission history in Alaska. While she speaks much of possible economic benefits that may have interested some converts who observed Russian prosperity in the fur trade, she makes a fascinating point about the priest (as Christ’s and the Church’s

representative) taking on responsibilities formerly borne by individuals and their families alone. “Whereas in the past hunters and their families had to adhere strictly to taboos and rules associated with the supernatural sua (life force) of animals, Russian Orthodoxy taught that much of this responsibility was shouldered by the priest alone. Through the sacraments of baptism, confession, and Holy Communion, he took responsibility for ensuring proper behavior and achieving absolution in case of a lapse.” (pg. 87). Insofar as hunting was the most important part of the Alaskan subsistence lifestyle, this switch from appeasement of animal spirits to reliance on participation in the actions of Christ as celebrated by the church, reveals a strategy based on the Incarnation and culture. [“The Incarnation is a statement of God’s relationship to culture: He honors culture, but also challenges it.”] The Aleuts found in their reliance on Church life not a lucky rabbit’s foot for success in the hunt, but a way to connect their greatest needs with Christ’s coming . It also delivered them from associating their sufferings with the guilt of personal uncleanness.

Another thing we observe from Partnow’s statement on what attracted the Aleuts in regard to missionary strategy is the issue of “The Excluded Middle”. Paul Hiebert, a missionary in India, explains this concept as the supernatural in our everyday life, a place between rationalizing with people however much based on Biblical Truths and dismissing their concerns for the supernatural altogether as “unscientific”. (*Perspectives On The World Christian Movement*, 2009, Chapter 65). St. Herman, in his own struggles to pray, once told the story, “many times demons would come to me in the form of a man for some necessities, and sometimes in the form of a beast, and did many fearful and evil things to me; this is why I do not receive anyone in my cell without the prayer.” (St. Herman Brotherhood, 1989, pg. 53.) The Aleutian people understood this super-

natural dimension of existence.

The secular multiculturalist Partnow also concludes that “Finally, two church policies invited Alutiqs into the Orthodox fold: the willingness of the clergy to preach in Alutiq and the church’s role in promoting social and economic mobility through its practice of educating creoles (mixed races) and, later, full-blooded natives to be priests.” (Partnow, 2001, pgs. 87, 88). The most basic act of contextualization is communicating in the people’s own language and translating the bible and other sacred texts into the people’s language. “Soon after the founding of Russian America, attempts were made to learn Native languages. As early as 1805 Nikolai Resanov of the Russian American Company compiled a dictionary of some 1200 words in six Native Alaskan languages. The greatest proponent of multilingualism was Father Ioann Veniaminov (aka St. Innocent). He created an alphabet for the Aleut language, and, with the help of the Aleut Toien (Chief) Ivan Pan’kov, wrote and published in 1834 an Aleut catechism, the first book published in an Alaskan Native language.” (Library of Congress, July 23rd, 2010). In the same way the Russians were given a written language by Greek missionaries, so the Russian Church gave the Aleuts a written language.

We have named St. Herman as our particular example of missionary virtue. In St. Herman’s prayer for the Aleuts, he cried out to God, “Wipe away the tears of defenseless orphans, cool the hearts melting away in the fire of sorrow, help us to know what consolation means.” St. Herman’s particular focus was always children. In the early days of the Aleut ministry, he taught the church school. This was the centrifugal part of his strategy. “I have baptized more than 7,000 Americans (Aleutians) and performed more than 2,000 weddings. We’ve built a church and if time permits, we’ll build another, then two more chapels to use when travelling. . . We live happily. They love us and we love them. The people

are good, but poor. Both men and women walk around in the same type of outfits, made from birdskins (a type of long-sleeved robe) without undershirts.” (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1989, pg. 161)

The centripetal phase of his mission strategy began in 1810 when Father Herman went to Spruce Island across from Kodiak Isle to build a monastery called New Valaam. It became a school and refuge for Aleut orphans, of whom there were many. He lived an ascetic lifestyle while taking care of the children. He built the small chapel, school, and guest house, raising food for the orphans and himself from his own experimental garden. He was especially fond of baking cookies for the children, in addition to teaching them. People were drawn to the small wilderness monastery. Their need grew greater when a ship from the United States visited and brought a smallpox epidemic to the Aleuts. Father Herman tended the sick, going from person to person, comforting the dying and praying for them. He brought back the orphans of the plague to care for them in the monastery. (Orthodox Church In America, 1975). St. Herman lived in his monastery farming and feeding orphans for nearly 40 years. Even ermines and bears were said to be tame in his sight. (“The Life of St. Herman of Alaska”, Pravoslavie.Ru).

But one might still inquire, how were the Aleuts really converted? Don Richardson, one of the chief missionaries of our own era, said, “There are precursors to the gospel in every culture.” In the book *Orthodox Alaska*, Michael Oleksa breaks down step by step the connections found between the native religions of the Aleuts and Christianity. The Aleuts had sacred stories they revered; missionaries steered them to the sacredness of the Bible. The Aleuts tried to imitate their ancestors or what they deemed “eternally significant acts”; missionaries taught them to imitate Jesus Christ. The Aleuts had taboos for regulating human behavior; missionaries

brought them the moral/ethical standards of the Ten Commandments as understood through the New Testament. The Aleuts were initiated into their religions by ritual death and rebirth; missionaries introduced them to baptism and communion. Aleuts believed in the Yua/Inua , their version of the animating life force; the missionaries turned them to the Logoi , “the life-giving and God-oriented” power directing them towards Christ the Word, or the Divine Logos. The Aleuts had annual festivals to appease spirits and tell sacred stories; missionaries gave them the annual cycle of feasts to remember and venerate “crucial events in the life of Christ, which amounts to our salvation history.” The Aleuts had ceremonies using all the art forms to symbolically represent their past; missionaries gave them the worship cycle including vespers, liturgies, incense, icons, singing, architecture, and vestments which symbolize both the reality and power of the Kingdom of God. The Aleuts had shamans who ritually acted out their sacred stories in order to heal and guide; the missionaries were saints, living the Christian life, radiating Christ’s presence, and carrying His cross. (pgs. 125, 126).

In conclusion, objective sources testify in abundance to the continuity of faith among the Aleuts throughout history and up until this present hour. When the United States officially purchased Alaska in 1867, U. S. agent Charles Bryant noted that, “they carefully observe all ceremonies and rites of the church which goes far in relieving the monotony of their lives.” In 1946, almost 80 years later, a U.S. school teacher said “these people are deeply religious and much of their lives center around the church.” In 1976, Dorothy Jones, an American sociologist said, “they remain devotedly committed to the Russian Orthodox Church which they view as a powerful cultural symbol.” (Mousalimas, 2003, pgs. 2-15). Presently, native Alaskans are still struggling economically against unfair practices by Americans of European descent, just as they did against Russian

fur companies. Despite this, as exemplified by St. Herman, “the joyful north star of Christ”, the Aleutian Church remains a present comfort, a future hope, and a protest against past social injustices and their manifestations today.

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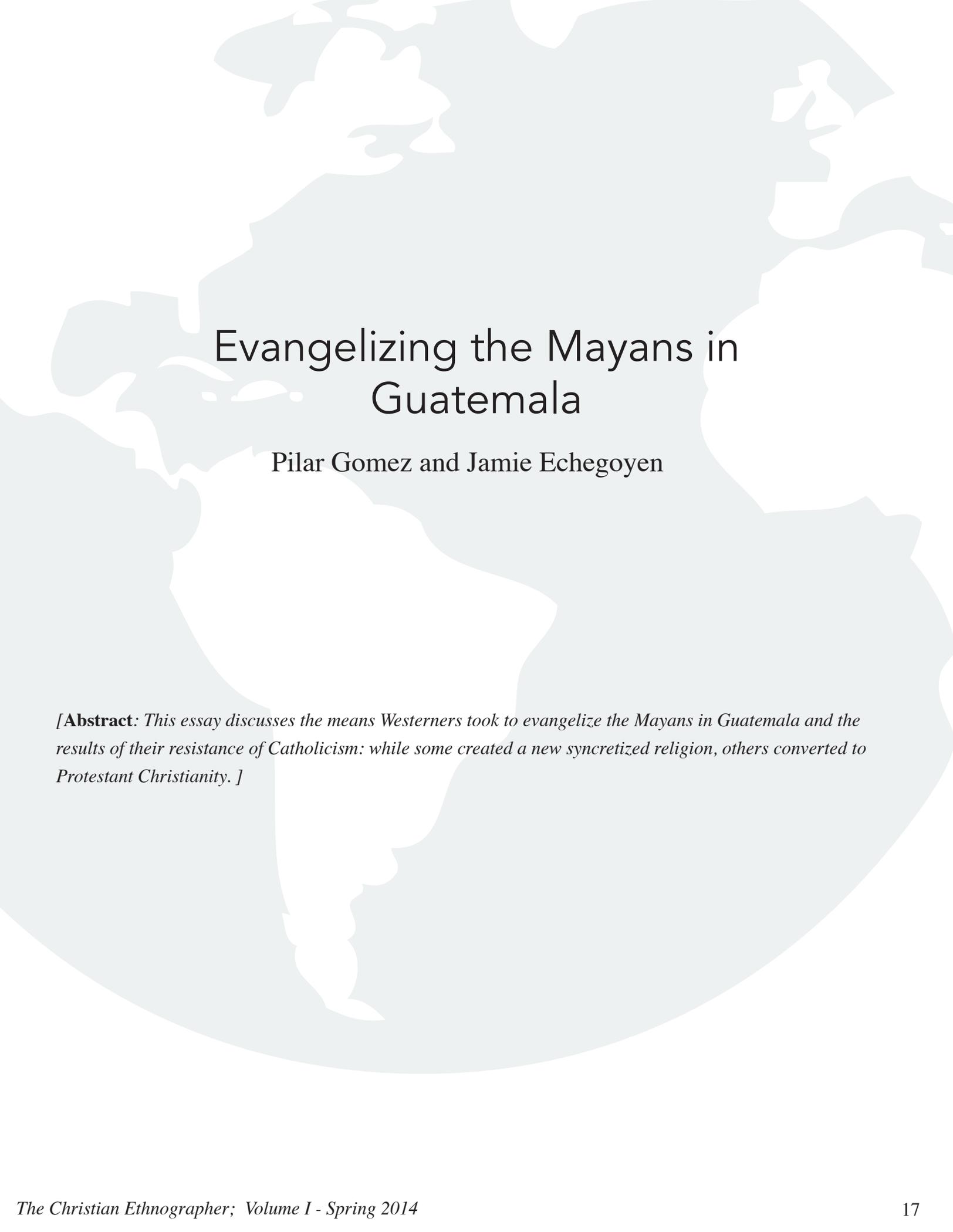
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# Evangelizing the Mayans in Guatemala

Pilar Gomez and Jamie Echegoyen

*[Abstract: This essay discusses the means Westerners took to evangelize the Mayans in Guatemala and the results of their resistance of Catholicism: while some created a new syncretized religion, others converted to Protestant Christianity. ]*

When we hear of missionaries evangelizing people who had never heard the Good News of the Gospel, we admire them. We admire their will, their suffering, their compassion, their sacrifices, and their love for the people. We are amazed by their work after we read the books they have written about the experience. They show us how evangelizing is a beautiful gift that God has given them to share with the world. They tell us the stories of people leaving behind their old and sinful ways to believe in the one and only true God who created us. The love and the commitment that they show others by taking them through the process of making them Disciples of Christ is hard work that requires true dedication. However, this graceful experience of evangelization has not always taken place.

The evangelization of the Mayans in the 16th century was an event of cruelty, suffering, wars, and destruction. It was mixture of fighting for political power and superiority of religions. The desire of Spain to take control of the New World involved converting the indigenous people to the Catholic faith. After seeing the death rituals that were part of the Mayan religion, the Spanish deemed them pagans who had no knowledge of God. They believed that their job was to convert them to the Christian faith, but the Mayans instantly showed resistance. And so the process of evangelization took many years.

For the Maya, religion was very important. The significance of religion in the Mayan life is seen in the resistance and long history of their conversion. The Maya worshiped and paid homage to many different gods. Some of these include: “Kukulcán or feathered serpent, god of the civilization; Ah Puch, the lord of death; Chac, the god of water and rain; Yumkax, the corn god; Ixchel, the moon, childbirth, and flood goddess...” (Tutor 1988:18). They would celebrate religious ceremonies with many different varieties of sacrifices, including that of humans (Tutor 1988:18). The use of human sacrifice was not

practiced very often, it was only done in desperate times (i.e. in times of drought and famine). They valued and thought that the human life was sacred and offered it only when it was crucial.

Their lives revolved around their religion and thus it explained their way of life. Juana Batz Puac, a K’iche’ Maya, states that “Our Creation Story teaches us that the first Grandparents of our people were made from white and yellow corn. Maize is sacred to us because it connects us with our ancestors. It feeds our spirit as well as our bodies.” (Smithsonian 2013). Puac reiterates the significance of the Maize for the Maya. It is the substance that created their “Grandfathers” and “feeds” their people.

When the Spaniards arrived to the New World, they saw the opportunity of expanding their empire. The beauty of the land they had discovered was perfect because of the abundance of gold, silver, and other natural resources. These resources could raise them to a new level of power. Without hesitation the conquerors took the land as their possession. They named it after the kings and queens that had given them the support for their trip of discovery and adventure. But the places that they took ownership of already had names. There were people already living there. They were people who had built not only small towns and villages, but great cities and civilizations never seen before. They had a culture, social classes, trading, a language, and a religion.

The Westerners tried to teach the Mayans about a new type of faith, but the Mayan religion was penetrated deep into their culture. This brought a lot of frustration for the priests who wanted to evangelize the Mayans. They wanted the Mayan religion to disappear and make the people adopt a new religion, even if this meant forcing them to believe.

Frustrated by the local populations’ reluctance to accept Christianity, some priests tore down native temples and burned their spiritual artifacts. Most notably, in 1562, Diego de Landa, a Franciscan Bishop

from Spain, was responsible for using brutal force to convert the Maya to Catholicism. He also, was responsible for the burning of millions of codices and the inquisition against the Maya. Before his brutality, Landa learned to speak the Mayan dialect and took notes to record the Mayan culture. “[Landa] spent several days...piecing together evidence of what he was convinced was a pattern of human sacrifices in the Mayan idolatries” (de Landa 1937:478). Diego de Landa’s careful recording and observations were made to demonstrate that the Maya were idolaters. He purposefully looked for proof to accuse them of idolatry and thus force Christianity upon the Mayan people. Landa believed that the Mayan practices were the works of the devil and so he did everything he could to eliminate the Mayan culture.

Landa states that “some of the Indians out of grief and deluded by the devil, hung themselves; but generally they all showed much repentance and readiness to be good Christians” (de Landa 1937:30). The grief and suicide of the Mayan people demonstrates that Landa was very cruel in the means he used to convert the Maya. The suicides are also a sign of a desperate escape of the hostility imposed on them. Diego de Landa had a clear idea of what a native person would be like once they were ready to be “good Christians”. Most likely this determination was compared to Landa’s Western culture and the native’s willingness to assimilate to it. Don Francisco de Montejo Xiu states that “...the Franciscan religious, who had taken us to teach the doctrine, instead of which they began to torment us hanging us by the hands and whipping us cruelly, hanging weights of stone on their feet, torturing many of us on a windlass, grieving the torture of the water, from which many died or were maimed” (de Landa 1937:115). These words depict that inhumane torture was being used to force Christianity upon others. Landa’s form of conversion changed the way Christ came to convert the nations. Instead of coming with love and compassion, Landa

came with brutal force and condemnation.

Many believe that the Mayans couldn’t accept the message of Christianity because the Christ that the Spanish presented was not the same Christ of the New Testament. The priests had forgotten the words of Jesus that said, “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

The Spanish method of evangelizing brought a series of conflicts between the two cultures. While the conquerors saw the Mayans as savages, there were some who saw them the opposite way. In the middle of the 16th century a priest named Bartolome de las Casas, who lived in the New World, described the Mayans as “simple people, without malice, obedient, and faithful to their masters and to the Christians they serve; very humble, patient, peaceful and calm. Without rancor, luxuries, hate, or desire of revenge”. (Translated from “Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias”). In the same book, de las Casas compared them to tame sheep that were incapable of committing any sin. In contrast, he compared the Europeans to cruel wolves and tigers that were hungry and ready to hunt their next victim. Bartolome de las Casas was distinct from the other Spaniards because he advocated for the rights and prevention of exploitation of the indigenous peoples.

Eventually the Mayans became part of the Roman Catholic religion, but they adapted their own religion to the new practices creating a religious syncretism. Amazingly, today’s Mayan people still practice their ancestors’ way of living. For instance, many of the farmers use “the slash-and-burn agricultural technique” (Stuart 1983:44). The native dress is still worn especially by the Mayan women and children. Hand washing clothes and air drying them, and making handmade tortillas are among other practices still done today. Paying homage to [their gods] through sacrifice is common especially in caves and Catholic

churches. Many of the colonial Catholic churches in Guatemala were built on top of Mayan sacred grounds and thus is why many Mayan people make sacrifices to Mayan gods at the Catholic churches. They also worshiped the Virgin Mary and put their own idols next to her. They planted a Ceiba (Guatemala's national tree) in front of the churches because it was their tree of knowledge and wisdom. The Maya still have rituals for the death of their relatives, and they have a special day to remember their ancestors. On the day of the dead, they go to the cemetery to leave offerings of food and drinks for those who they want to remember. These are practices that the priest learned to tolerate. This was part of their culture that could not be taken away from them.

“The present day Maya have preserved much of [their] ancient ways, [they remember] the old folk tales of the creation of the world and the doings of the old gods, and in [their] prayers [they] still [name] the old gods mixed with the saints of the Roman Catholic Church.”(J. Thompson 1963:118). It is remarkable how the Mayan people have held on to their native traditions post colonialism. They created a syncretic religion with both animistic and shamanistic Mayan and Catholic traditions. Guatemala has been one of the countries where the Mayan people still speak their aboriginal tongue, still practice their native traditions, and wear their indigenous dress. Today, the Indigenous Mayans are now part of the lowest class in the land where they once lived as masters. The European and the mestizo became the masters, the leaders, the teachers, the presidents, and eventually, the dictators. Guatemala was able to gain their freedom from Spain, but the Mayans still were not free in their own country. Most fall in the category of the poor, the neglected, and the uneducated.

Many have argued that the sudden popularity of Protestantism in Latin America was due to a need for change in the Catholic religion. Others say that it was the work of the Holy Spirit in a place

where people had always suffered. Some, like Dow and Sandstrom, in the book *Holy Saints and Fiery Preachers*, say that “Guatemala had the fastest growing protestant population (which) was due to evangelization efforts...and a new protestant identity for Indians suppressed by Catholic Ladinos for many years” (Dow 2001:5). The Mayans were also attracted to Protestantism because of the similarities they saw to their own religions. Speaking in tongues, communicating with the supernatural, and miracles, were all elements that appealed to the Mayans (Dow 2001:11). No matter what the reason had been, the growth of a new faith in Guatemala was impressive. The Mayan civilization and people express a very rich and extravagant history of their ancestors, beliefs, cities, and so on. Their story of converting to Catholicism was violent, but this intense effort to remove Mayan culture and religion failed, instead giving birth to a syncretized religion. Landa's efforts to convert the Mayan people did not stop with him. Missionaries have started ministries to continue the spread of Christianity that differ from the imperial colonialism.

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# Sonrisas de Copán Buinas

Smiles of Copán Buinas, Honduras: A Photo Essay

By Jamie Echegoyen



Two sisters holding hands smiling.  
- Copán 2013

These past two summers (2012 and 2013) I had the privilege to go to Copán Ruinas, Honduras and capture smiles that transcend joy. My hope is that when you finish this essay you have smiled at least once, and that these smiles inspire you to capture your very own moments of joy.



A Ch'ortl' Mayan boy - Copán  
2012



Four beautiful women smile in their colorful dresses. The fifth one hides behind her sister. - Copán 2013

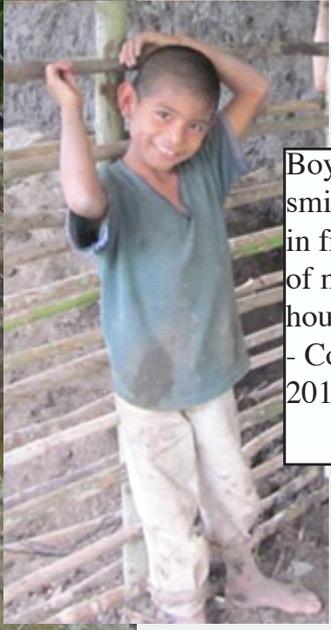
I had to capture these children at play because their laughter brought smiles to my face. - Copán 2013



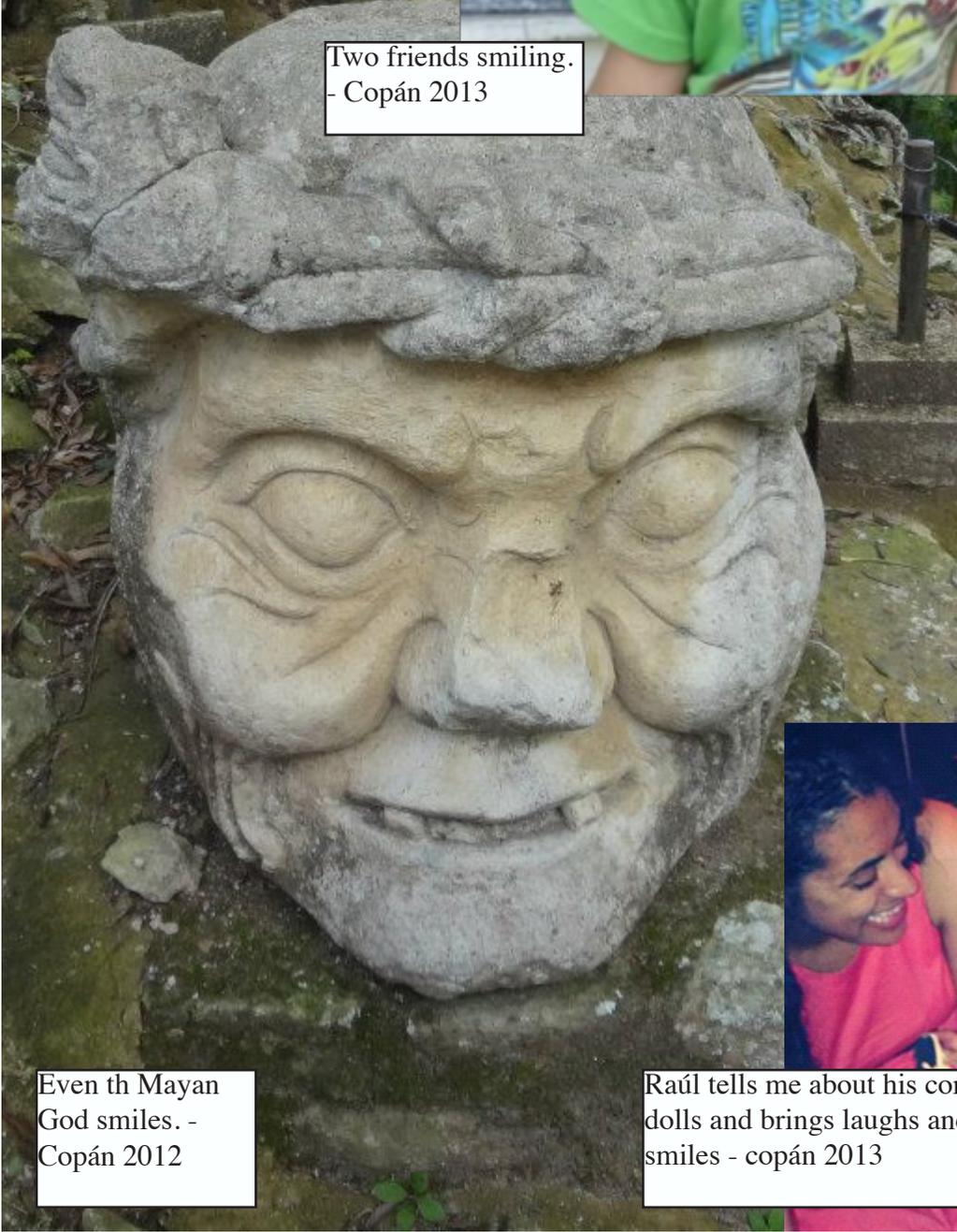
The cucumber eyes bring out his smile. - Copán 2013



Two friends smiling.  
- Copán 2013



Boy smiles in front of mud house.  
- Copán 2013



Even th Mayan God smiles. - Copán 2012



Raúl tells me about his corn dolls and brings laughs and smiles - copán 2013



My great aunt singing with the macaws. - Copán 2013



This pictures says 'beautiful'. - Copán 2013



"The Sun" shining smiles. - Copán 2012

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