

Dateline Mexico by Valerie Rush

The confessions of Bishop Ruiz

The Zapatista Army's commander-in-chief has inadvertently given Mexicans an earful about his true intentions.

All of Mexico is astir with the unintended "confessions" of Bishop Samuel Ruiz, made at an April 27 breakfast meeting in Toluca with his supporters, which were secretly tape-recorded and leaked to the media. The meeting was called to plot strategy on how to secure the Nobel Peace Prize for the San Cristóbal bishop. Far from coming off as the pious savior of Mexico's abused and downtrodden Indians, "Comandante" Ruiz revealed himself as a self-serving and most unpriestly manipulator, who would rain terror and chaos upon his country, in the name of "justice."

Not the least of his inopportune revelations was one in which Ruiz claimed to have "brainwashed" government Peace Commissioner Manuel Camacho Solís into supporting the Zapatista cause. Said Ruiz: "I believe that [Camacho Solís] is a sincere man who was developing a certain autonomy as the [negotiating] process advanced. . . . The first day he was more a man of the regime, [but] I brainwashed him to understand the full dimension of the dialogue with the Zapatistas." Ruiz went on to describe his relationship with Camacho: "Look, two drunks together never fall down, because they support each other. [Camacho and I] are like two drunks; you give me political strength, and I give you moral credibility, and thus we balance each other."

This admission raises the interesting question of just when this "brainwashing" took place, since as early as Jan. 11, Ruiz was already gloating that "the pyramids are now inverted. The vertex of the church pyramid now rests on me, and that of the govern-

ment on Camacho."

Once his comments appeared in the media, Don Samuel, as Bishop Ruiz is fondly referred to, claimed that he had "slipped up" by using a poor choice of words for his "joke." Joke or not, most Mexicans found the comment highly credible. Neither was the Mexican Army laughing.

In his Toluca address, Ruiz also justified his immodest pursuit of the Nobel Peace Prize by describing it as "a bullet-proof vest and a platform to defend my work in the diocese, which is being defamed." Ruiz was referring both to the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement (MSIA), which has denounced Ruiz as a traitor for his part in organizing the bloody Zapatista insurrection of Jan. 1, and to the Vatican, which tried but failed to oust him from his diocese last October, for "doctrinal deviations"—not the least of which is his embrace of Marxism.

Indeed, in that same address, Ruiz insisted that the Catholic Church has written no document condemning either the Theology of Liberation or Marxism, which prompted Zacatecas Bishop Javier Lozano Barragán, head of the Doctrinal Commission of the Mexican Bishops Conference, to reply the next day that Ruiz is a liar. Said Bishop Lozano Barragán, "The teachings of the Catholic Church, from Pope Leo XIII to John Paul II, have explicitly and implicitly condemned Marxism as a closed ideological system which denies the existence of God. . . . Whoever says there is no explicit condemnation of Marxism as such, is simply lying."

Bishop Lozano also denounced

Ruiz's advocacy of an "autochthonous Indian church," saying, "when Don Samuel Ruiz speaks of not changing the pagan religion, of not bothering any Indian culture with the Gospel because we are violating their integrity, their traditions, their religiosity, take care! Religion is the essence of culture. . . . We have our own culture, [it is] universal, and that culture by virtue of its universality carries within it not only every Indian and mestizo culture, but all the innumerable cultures we have both in Mexico and in Latin America."

Bishop Lozano is by no means the only clergyman who has begun to challenge Ruiz's sudden claim to speak for the Catholic Church, but he is the most prominent thus far. Another is Sohora Archbishop Carlos Quintero Arce, who charged in April that Ruiz's large network of catechists in Chiapas had introduced the Marxist ideology of opposition to the rich, and manipulated the Indians into armed violence. During his Toluca speech, Ruiz insisted that he was not trying to "sanctify violence," but he quickly added that "the first shout was given in the Chiapas Highlands, and now all of Mexico is encompassed; stability and tranquility are lost because those on the bottom-most rung of society are no longer afraid of repression."

The increasingly vocal opposition to Ruiz from within the Catholic Church is in large part due to the impact of a poster issued by the MSIA, with the headline "'Comandante' Samuel Ruiz: Wanted for Treason." Until the poster went up on walls in several key Mexican cities in early April, Ruiz appeared to have acquired the mantle of "untouchability" in the aftermath of the Chiapas uprising. Today, Ruiz sees those same posters plastered daily on the walls of his own church in San Cristóbal, Chiapas. The handwriting on the wall?