

From Theology to Language Ideology: Accounting for Difference in Ritual Language Use among Q'eqchi'-Maya Catholics

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In the last fifteen years or so, Charismatic Catholicism has begun to make inroads as an alternative religious identification alongside mainstream Catholicism¹ and evangelical Protestantism in the rural and peri-urban Q'eqchi'-Maya communities of Cobán, Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. While Charismatic Catholicism is formally quite similar to Evangelical Protestantism, its members, nonetheless, maintain that they belong to the Catholic Church and that they are engaged in a project of renewing Catholicism, not, as it were, leaving it to join another religion. Perhaps because of this somewhat liminal status — formally Evangelical, but nominally Catholic — Charismatic Catholics have met serious resistance from the local religious elite (both lay and clergy) in Q'eqchi'-Maya communities². As parishioners have begun to convert to Charismatic Catholicism, the issue of who counts as a good Catholic has become extremely important. Although both groups make claims to being sincere Christians and authentic members of the Catholic Church, the obvious difference between their ritual practices has created tension and engendered a debate over how one should go about being properly Catholic.

¹ I use the term “Mainstream Catholicism” as a short-hand to refer to the majority practices and beliefs in the parish of el Calvario. This is not a term that is used locally, or as far as I know, in other Catholic settings where the non-Charismatics have the advantage of being the unmarked category of Catholics. Mainstream Catholicism generally refers to that set of practices and beliefs that comes from the Catholic Church’s post-Vatican II reforms and the Theology of Inculturation, however, the term should also be understood to incorporate some elements from a longer history of syncretic Catholicism that incorporates elements of Maya spirituality, such as veneration for the Tzuultaq’a mountain spirits (Wilson 1997) and the central role of maize in the Q’eqchi’ cosmovision (Pacheco 1985). Locally, the opposition is sometimes formulated in terms of Charismatics and Catechists, but I prefer to use the term “Mainstream” both to be more inclusive (if less specific) of who and what Charismatic Catholicism sets itself in opposition to.

² Evangelical Protestant churches, which I do not focus on here, have become a less pressing issue for the lay Mainstream Catholic hierarchy. They tend to consider them part of another religion entirely, and though they do occasionally have contact with them and there is evidence that there was more serious animosity in the recent past, their default position is to try to ignore Protestants. The clergy, however, especially at the Diocesan level, do see Protestants as competition and thus a problem for the Church.

This debate is often carried out through a discourse about people's communicative practices during rituals. This paper seeks to explain why this linguistic differentiation has become such an important point of contention. I argue that the language ideologies that shape these group's communicative practices are intimately linked to the theological concerns that each group tackles through its ritual practices (Robbins 2002). Understanding these groups' language ideological positions requires that we investigate their theologies and vice versa.

1. Marking Difference

Fairly early on in my fieldwork in Cobán³ I heard Mainstream parishioners and church workers complaining about Charismatics by commenting on things like the level of noise that they made during their meetings, their use of Spanish, that they gesticulated wildly, and that in general they were “*escandalosos*” — that is, they made a ruckus and were out of control in their meetings. As one informant put it while trying to enlist my help in convincing the parish priest to ban a Charismatic group from using his village's chapel (a move the priest did not support), “*No dejan dormir. Toda la noche hacen relajo gritando. Solo en Castilla gritan y gritan.*” (“They don't let us sleep. They make a ruckus yelling all night. Just in Spanish they yell and yell.”) Charismatics defended their practices by saying that what they were doing they were doing for God and that thus it wasn't right to tell them how to talk to God or, worse yet, to keep quiet. There is thus a low intensity, but quite public, debate in the parish about the behavior of Charismatics that focuses on the way they communicate in their rituals.

This debate is not just, or even perhaps primarily, about communicative norms, however. As linguistic anthropologists working with the paradigm of language ideology have pointed out, public discourses about language and language use often index discourses about the social and cultural formations that speakers of those languages inhabit (Woolard 1998; Irvine & Gal, 2000). In this case, because the discourse about the appropriateness of language use is mapped on to a religious rift, I take the debate to be not just about the behavioral norm, but in fact about theologies that inform them. Q'eqchi'-Maya Catholics' concern over how one's neighbors communicate in church thus serves as a proxy to talk about membership in a religious community, and perhaps more importantly, the way one ought to morally position oneself vis-à-vis the sacred.

While there are certainly similarities in how members of these two groups use language (e.g. the genres they perform, the vocabularies they use, etc.), the differences, which can be quite striking, are what are socially salient. The difference that my informants comment on most often is the varying use of Q'eqchi' and Spanish in the two groups. Most of the members of the Q'eqchi'-Maya communities with whom I worked are functionally bilingual in Spanish and Q'eqchi', though this varies depending on each individual's level of formal education, occupation, contact with Ladinos (i.e. non-Mayas) and Ladino institutions, and residential proximity to urban centers. However, there are significant differences in the code choices that people make in rituals. Mainstream Catholics tend to be “purist” (Hill 1998) users of Q'eqchi' in ritual settings, meaning that

³ I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in Cobán, Guatemala between 2004 and 2006 under the auspices of a Dissertation Fieldwork Grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

masses, Celebrations of the Word⁴, and Rosary prayers are performed exclusively in Q'eqchi'. Although most informants know and can perform the ritual texts in Spanish, they have a strong preference for using Q'eqchi'. I regularly observed participants conversing in Spanish or a mixture of Q'eqchi' and Spanish before rituals started, and then switching to a restricted use of Q'eqchi' once the ritual event was marked.

Charismatics, who are also by and large functionally bilingual in their daily lives, use both Q'eqchi' and Spanish in their rituals, and on occasion they also practice glossolalia, further adding to the mixture of linguistic codes. Most genres of speech in Charismatic rituals are conducted in a mixture of Q'eqchi' and Spanish, except for hymns, which are exclusively sung in Spanish (see below). This mixing initially came as a surprise to me, since I had gotten the impression from my Mainstream informants that Spanish was the only language that Charismatics used. The fact that this difference is exaggerated emphasizes the social importance of that split.

Besides these differences in code choice, there are also noticeable paralinguistic differences between the groups. Mainstream Catholics tend to speak quietly and follow regular rhythmic patterns, whereas Charismatics tend to modulate both the volume and the speed of their speech. There are also noticeable differences in the physical stances they adopt and the ways that they produce gestures. Mainstream Catholics tend to be very constrained in the way they use their bodies as a communicative resource, while Charismatics make a point of gesturing and moving as part of their rituals (see below). The question is, why do these differences matter?

Historically, language and religion have been important markers of ethnic boundaries in Guatemala. As with most Maya ethnolinguistic groups in Guatemala, traditional Catholicism and the usage of a Mayan language had long been two hallmarks of Q'eqchi'-Maya identity (Wilson 1997). Charismatic Catholicism, like Evangelical Protestantism, subverts both of these markers, and thus can be read as an affront to community solidarity. By not using Q'eqchi' exclusively and changing the form of the rituals, Charismatics break with *tradición*. Charismatics figure these new practices as a more authentic mode of Christian worship. However, Mainstream Catholics interpret it as disrespect for the community. Charismatics, in turn, interpret Mainstream Catholics' opposition to change as a recalcitrant stance that prevents people from focusing on the important part of rituals — celebrating God.

Because this split in the linguistic practices of the two groups is drawn along religious lines, and not ethnic, racial or class lines, it seems reasonable to say that the motivating factors must also be religious. Bauman (1982) has shown that a community's theological concerns can order its members' speaking practices, often with significant social and political consequences. Thus, I want to suggest that in order to fully understand why each of these congregations adopts a distinct set of linguistic resources in their religious rituals, we need to understand the language ideological position that inform their practices index. In order to understand that, we need to know what is at stake for participants in these rituals, and how they tailor their linguistic practices to try to address these concerns. I take

⁴ Celebrations of the Word (Spanish *Celebración de la Palabra*; Q'eqchi' *Xning'ehinkil li Raatin*) are semiweekly services held in each Ecclesiastical Base Community (CEB) and include prayers, the singing of hymns, scripture readings, and a sermon. They are similar to masses, except that since no priest is present, the Eucharist is not celebrated.

as a starting point the idea that language plays a substantive role in religious ritual (Gossen 1978), so that particular ways of using language help to create the conditions of that interaction and are required (like certain material and sensory elements) for the ritual to be successfully performed. I thus posit that the way that the interactional organization of rituals can be read to uncover the theologies that inform them.

2. Theology

I am using the term “theology” here broadly to refer to people’s culturally organized ideas about God, their relationship to the divine, their spiritual subjectivities, etc. I have chosen to talk in terms of theology for three reasons. First, the term suggests that there is some systematicity to the ideas that people have about the nature of the sacred and its relations to them and the world they inhabit. The second reason stems from the fact that most of my primary informants are people who hold some leadership role in the parish, their base communities, and Saints’ confraternities (Spanish *cofradías*, Q’eqchi’ *chinamil*). Holding these positions implies a level of sophistication in religious knowledge, and is tied to receiving training from the parish, the diocese, or some para-church organization. Thus they are used to thinking, sometimes quite critically, about their religion and its relationship to their lives.

Finally, thinking in terms of theology here figures my informants as active participants in a global arena where institutional discourses about spirituality and religiosity are contested. The Mainstream Catholics I worked with draw many of their ideas from the Catholic Church’s Vatican II reforms and the Theology of Inculturation. The Theology of Inculturation, has been an important theological movement in the Catholic Church since the 1970s, especially Africa, Latin America and Asia where clergy took the basic precepts of the Second Vatican Council and began to work on the vernacularization of Catholic texts and rites. Inculturation proposes that the Catholic Church must respect the cultural values of each social grouping, and provide it with a culturally specific set of liturgies and rites (Angrosino 1994; Orta 2004). The process of inculturation is meant to address what is perceived as a significant gap between the doctrines and practices of the institutional Church and the lived experiences of believers (Irrazaval 2000). Inculturationists believe that the Church must aid local congregations in developing and practicing a form of Catholicism that respects their culture and that the pastoral role of the clergy is to “accompany” these congregations in the process of achieving salvation. Inculturation seeks Catholicism through particularism on the grounds that each culture has some primary access to divine truth, and that it is the Church’s role to help that truth be discovered and enacted.

Likewise, the Charismatic Catholics with whom I worked are part of a global theological movement within the Catholic Church. Though they are not as rigidly organized and their institutions aren’t as well defined as the Mainstream Catholics’, Charismatics nonetheless participate in a variety of activities that bring them into contact with representatives of the Charismatic Movement from other villages, municipalities, and countries. Through the circulation of oral, written, and musical texts, Charismatic Catholic Q’eqchi’-Maya are implicated as consumers, and at some level as producers, in this transnational community. The theological underpinnings of Charismatic Catholicism are more closely related to evangelical Protestantism, especially Pentecostalism, than they are to what is usually thought of as Roman Catholicism. The Charismatic Catholic Movement originated at a retreat held by Duquesne University students and faculty outside of

Pittsburg, PA in 1967. Attendees at the retreat were “baptized in the spirit” and subsequently began to organize prayer groups that would become the foundation for the Charismatic Movement within Catholicism (Chestnut 2003). The foundational theological point of the Charismatic Catholic Renewal is that every individual can and should be baptized by the holy spirit and receive a gift (‘charism’) from God (Csordas 1997). Although membership in the Charismatic Catholic Renewal is primarily located in the local prayer group, these religious communities are not necessarily thought of as being as culturally specific. Cultural and social positions become epiphenomenal in Charismatic Catholicism where the emphasis is on a direct and unmediated relationship between the individual and God.

When I speak of these two groups having differing theological orientations, what I mean to highlight is that the debate between them might well be fought on the grounds of language, but ultimately what’s at stake is what it means to be a Catholic. Fundamental to these definitions are the relationships that people form to the sacred as well as to each other. As we shall see in the examples I present below, these configurations evidence two different language ideological positions.

3. Hymns

To exemplify the contrast between the two groups’ approaches to language use, I want discuss two examples of people singing hymns during parallel New Year’s Eve celebrations in 2005. These examples were video recorded as part of my field research and the description below comes from my subsequent analysis those videos. I argue, that in the ways that members of each of these two groups sing hymns we can see people enacting the basic ideological positions of “effusiveness, spontaneity and joy” in the Charismatic case, and “constraint, control and respect” in the Mainstream case. I have chosen to use sacramental music as an example here because members of both groups hold hymns to be an especially important part of their rituals because they are thought to be doubly pleasing to God since they combine speech (prayer) and music.

My first example is taken from a Charismatic vigil in a village about 10 km outside of the city of Cobán where the parish center is located. Vigils are a particular kind of celebration held on certain holidays (about three or four times per year.) Vigils draw a significantly larger crowd than regular meetings and are all-night affairs that begin at sunset and end at dawn the following day. During the course of these events a wide variety of speech events occur including sermons, prayers, testimonies, skits, and a large part of the night is devoted to the singing of hymns.

In the first example we see a male preacher teaching the congregation a hymn in Spanish along with a little bit of choreography that he wants them to perform as they sing along. As I have suggested above, the choice of code is one important element of the way that this particular genre of ritual speech is performed. There is another aspect, though, that I find equally important — the way that the participants draw on their bodies as part of the performance of the hymn. As Bourdieu has pointed out, language use and bodily practices are both conditioned by habitus (1991). That is to say, both are ordered and naturalized by the ideological foundation of a culture. Thus the ways in which one “naturally” speaks or moves one’s body are culturally conditioned. We can thus propose that speech and bodily practice work together to create the participant’s position in the ritual interaction. In this first example, lyrics about the Holy Spirit inhabiting the singer

and making her move involuntarily work in concert with a dance that represents the loss of personal bodily agency that one experiences in the presence of the Holy Spirit. This loss of personal agency is considered a desirable end in Charismatic rituals, and we might see this hymn as not just representing, but actually modeling that behavior. The hope is that by acting out that loss of control, one is opening up the possibility of actually being inhabited by the Holy Spirit. The dance might even be a necessary part of a successful performance of this song. When the congregation sings the hymn, the majority of them do the dance, and those who don't either improvise similar side-to-side movements or perform other complementary actions like rhythmic clapping. The intention of this performance is for the congregants to physically evidence the optimal emotional disposition for the event — “joy” (*jubilo*). Thus, the congregants are making a claim about their authentic participation in the ritual by figuring themselves not just as believers, but as joyful believers. The interactional structure of the event is designed to produce the necessary moral and emotional conditions for the desired outcome of the ritual — the ecstatic joy that comes from being in contact with the Holy Ghost. The effusive display of “joy” in this first example is all the more interesting when compared to an analogous situation in the Mainstream mass.

In the second example we see people singing as part of the Mainstream mass held at the parish church in the city of Cobán. The congregation is singing a hymn in Q'eqchi' that praises the three parts of the Trinity and thanks them for the things they do. What is remarkable here is the stillness of participants as they sing. Participation in the singing of hymns among Mainstream Catholics isn't marked by clapping, dancing, or even necessarily by vocalizing the lyrics. Rather, the proper way to participate is to read from the hymnal, sing along quietly almost to oneself, or just stand and listen. Several of the congregants can be seen simply standing with their arms folded listening as the chorus performs the hymn. Although the song is written from the first person plural perspective and is perhaps also meant to model a certain frame of mind (gratefulness and respect) or action (thanking God directly), unlike in the Charismatic performance, the proper stance for one to take is one of restraint, of controlling oneself in order to show respect⁵. The ideal participant here is a dutiful and respectful listener, not an engaged performer as in the Charismatic case. These bodily dispositions go along with and reinforce the conservative use of spoken language that characterizes this group. In these ways congregants display that they are in the properly respectful state of mind to receiving communion in the ritual of the Eucharist.

Thus in each of these cases the performance of this particular genre of speech — the hymn — exhibits its own interactional order with differing sets of bodily and communicative norms. Participation in ritual means very different things to members of each of the two congregations. These interactional orders index differing concerns about how one ought to place oneself in relation both to other congregants and to God. My next set of examples will illustrate this further.

4. Preparing to Preach

One of the central events of many Catholic rituals is the sermon. Sermons are particularly important to masses and Celebrations of the Word, but they are also present in

⁵ Hilary Kahn (2006) argues that respect is a central value for the Q'eqchi'-Maya she worked with in another Guatemalan town.

vigils like the one described above, when a Rosary is prayed, or for other special occasions. Sermons can be understood both as particular kinds of speech events and as texts produced for the consumption of the congregation. Here I want to concentrate less on the actual sermons and more on the way that people become authorized to produce them. In this way I hope to show the language ideologies that undergird the construction of the believer as a particular kind of speaker, and the sorts of relationships that the two communities' models of the ideal speaker entail.

On the last Sunday of every month, catechists (Spanish *catequista*, Q'eqchi' aj tzolol tij) from the parish's CEBs (from Spanish *Comunidad Eclesiástica de Base*, or Ecclesiastical Base Community) meet in the El Calvario church's training center hall with the nun in charge of catechist training and four instructors for an event called a ch'olob'ank (English "explanation") to receive training for the sermons they will give over the course of the coming month. Catechists are in charge of delivering weekly sermons to their CEBs based on a prescribed set of Bible verses and these meetings serve to both prepare them to do this and to normalize their interpretations of the verses. A ch'olob'ank typically starts with a short prayer and a hymn, and then a catechist reads one set of verses out loud. When the catechist is done, an instructor gives a brief explanation how the verses articulate to reinforce a central message. He then outlines the ideas the catechists are expected to touch upon when preaching. This process is repeated for each week's verses. At the end of the session each catechist pays for a photocopied set of notes about the readings. Sometimes the catechists have questions about the material, but usually they sit, listen, and, if they are good enough writers, take down a few notes. The cholob'anks I observed in Cobán took about hours.

Catechists' preparations for giving weekly sermons do not end there, though. Every week the catechists in each base community meet with each other for an hour or so to discuss the plans for the coming week's Celebration of the Word. They re-read the verses, go over their notes, and discuss their understanding of the verses to map out a general outline of the sermon that one of them will give at the coming Celebration of the Word. During the Celebration, after the lectors read the appropriate verses, the designated catechist will take the floor and deliver his sermon in Q'eqchi', carefully repeating and elaborating the central message of the day and generally hewing fairly closely to the ideas presented at the monthly meeting. The catechists' authority depends on his or her position as a particular kind of church worker in a hierarchical chain of authoritative speakers that theoretically includes the Pope, local clergy, and the catechists themselves.

Charismatic Catholics, on the other hand, do not go through a comparable training process. Before every Charismatic Catholic Celebration, while the band is tuning up and people are arriving, the three men who lead the group meet for a few minutes in a corner of the church hall to prepare for the event. They talk about that meeting's sermon and mark a few verses in one of the Bibles with pieces of string. Sometimes the verses are selected according to the same ecclesiastical calendar that Catechists use, but just as often one of the men suggests the passages for some other reason. When the ritual gets to the point of the sermon, the man who has been designated to preach will kneel before the altar, his Bible in hand, while the other two men stand by him their hands above his head and upper back. One of them will then lead a prayer asking God to bless that man, give him knowledge, and inspire him to preach. The other members of the congregation join in this prayer holding their palms out towards the preacher. This lasts for several minutes, and when it is over, the preacher will stand, read one or more of the Bible verses that he

marked and begin delivering his sermon. Sermons last about twenty-five minutes, usually cover several different topics or themes, and are delivered in a mixture of Q'eqchi' and Spanish. As far as the congregation is concerned, it is by virtue of God's grace that that man is able to effectively weave together a moral narrative from a few Bible verses. Although there are only roughly as many Charismatic preachers per group as there would be catechists in a Mainstream CEB, their position is not determined by their formal membership in a particular group of authorized speakers. Neither is their authority mediated by other positions (e.g. clergy). Rather, they say that a preacher's talent for speaking is a gift from God and that his authority follows from the fact that God has given him this gift.

As with the examples of hymns discussed above, these two styles of preparing for delivering sermons evidence the language ideological contrast between the two groups and point us towards two different sets of theological concerns. Mainstream Catholics' methods stress chains of authority that one can only enter into at the bottom, but in which one can also move up by studying and receiving instruction from specific sources. Their interpretative style stresses the dissemination of information from the top down. That is, from the nun and the instructors, serving as mouthpieces for the priests, the bishop, etc., to the catechists, and subsequently to the parishioners at large. Catechists are carefully selected from each community by the clergy, who must choose someone who has the necessary practical skills (e.g. literacy), as well as good moral standing and enough social clout within the community to lead. The people who work as catechists are expected to follow the ecclesiastical calendar and attend meetings regularly in order to keep their positions. This model thus also stresses the idea that consensus about the core message of the scripture is what validates the sermon.

Charismatic congregations, on the other hand, believe that a preacher is authorized by his individual ability to receive divine inspiration. Though there may be *de facto* consensus about their understanding of a particular Bible verse, it is not derived from a community of speakers (integrated either vertically or horizontally), but rather, they believe, from the singular meaning that the text itself carries by virtue of being produced by God. This style of preaching stresses the immediacy (in both senses of the word) of the message, since ideally its explanation is produced in the very moment of inspiration as a more or less direct emanation from God. The written and oral texts do not exist independently of divine will — they are really just artifacts through which God manifests himself.

The difference suggests the fundamental ideological positions that members of each of these congregations hold in regard to what constitutes a moral self and how one should go about being a Catholic. Mainstream Catholics' highly structured system of acquiring competence and legitimacy in performing sermons evidences a conservative disposition that highlights one's ability to carefully control what one thinks and says, and which also requires catechists to submit themselves to speakers positioned above them in the chain of authority. In their view, respect for those chains of authority is necessary for the perpetuation of the religious community. On the other hand, Charismatics' apparent dependence on inspiration and the idea that it is a divine gift for preaching that authorizes preachers, suggests that their approach relies on spontaneity and the idea that one can only really enter into relation with the meaning of the Bible if one gives up human mediation and comes into direct contact with the divine.

The ideological aspect of these two sets of practices, I think, can best be seen when we consider what parts of the processes are highlighted and occluded. Each of the two models of preparation involves the erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000) of certain aspects of people's practices and the foregrounding of others. For example, despite all of their institutionally sanctioned preparation, Catechists still essentially "wing it" when they give a sermon to a congregation. No catechist carries a prepared paper, note cards with talking points, or, for that matter, an annotated Bible to the pulpit to give a sermon. While they do prepare a sort of mental outline of what they are going to say when they go up to the podium, they rely on their experience performing this particular speech genre to get through it. Performance of the genre of speech is thus in many ways spontaneous, even though the ideology behind how a catechist is authorized stresses the importance of formal pedagogy within a hierarchical institution.

On the other side, Charismatic preachers do study their Bibles at home and they also make mental outlines of the key points that they want to make when speaking. Additionally, they spend a significant amount of time preparing in other ways. For example, Charismatic preachers often listen to Christian radio, they attend regional conferences whenever possible, and regularly talk to each other about the Bible as a means of becoming more sophisticated in their religious knowledge. Asking God for a blessing before a sermon does not mean that they enter into preaching as blank slates. The few men who act as preachers are considered to be good public speakers who also have insight into what the Bible means. Moreover, several of them had been catechists before converting to Charismatic Catholicism. However, what is important at the moment of giving a sermon is making the right kind of ritual actions so that the speaker appears to give up his autonomy and enter into an unmediated relationship with God.

Because these practices work to both refine and display ideological positions, performing these ritual functions in a manner consistent with their ideas about what constitutes a good moral self is crucial to maintaining their sense of religious identity. By encoding these ideas about the relationship of self to text and religious institution, these two processes work to make each of these denominational positions more like themselves (cf. Woolard 1998, 12.)

5. Conclusion

The linguistic divisions that exist among Q'eqchi'-Maya Catholics are intimately linked to their expectations of what should occur in religious rituals. Ritual action is fundamentally interactive, and thus is co-constructed by participants. Because language use is such a central means through which rituals unfold, it follows that people's expectations about language and language use should fit closely with their understanding of the cosmos they inhabit. Likewise, gestures and bodily postures may be seen as indispensable communicative resources in this type of interaction. I have suggested that we can characterize the two groups' language ideological positions as foregrounding either "effusiveness, spontaneity and joy" or "constraint, control and respect", and I have hinted that these positions place ritual participants in different types of relationships to each other and to God. These basic language ideological positions, I argue, are recursively manifest in a number of different aspects of communication. Members of both groups seek contact with a divine presence through their participation in Christian rituals, but they go about doing so in very different ways.

This, of course begs the question, in what way do we want to claim that these language ideological positions are theologically motivated? Above I sketched out the origins of the two theological movements to which my informants belong and suggested something about the way they deal with questions of universality and particularity. The fact that these practices exist as local instantiations of the larger transnational religious movements is part of the reason I claim that they have a theological basis. However, there is one specific aspect about the way that each of these traditions formulates the relationship between God and the believer that I want to comment on a bit further and that is the role that mediation plays in each.

While both theologies ultimately hold up the fundamental Christian belief that salvation is something that is achieved individually, each proposes slightly different methods for achieving this. I would like to argue that for Mainstream Catholics personal salvation comes through a series of mediations that the Catholic Church effects between the believer and God. The emphasis on cultural particularism, the role of dutiful listener, and the rigorous training that catechists go through all evidence the basic idea that the Church is the agent that allows people to commune with God. For Mainstream Catholics the ideas of constraint, control, and respect are a means of placing themselves in the proper moral position of submission to the teachings and practices of the Church.

Because Charismatics hold the immediacy of the experience of the divine as a primary motivator for ritual action, their communicative practices foreground the indeterminacy of agency and thus configure the subject as a Christian who is in close and unmediated contact with the divine. They signal this state by being spontaneous, effusive, and joyous. Because ultimately the moral person is the person who can and regularly does come into direct contact with the sacred, participants in these rituals take up practices that appear to eschew individual autonomy in favor of direct submission to the Holy Spirit. The flexibility in code choice, the role of engaged singer, and the idea that sermons ultimately are authored by an invisible divine presence all suggest that the goal is to be subsumed by the divine. The Church in a sense becomes epiphenomenal when access to the primary religious experience is based on divine gifts that are granted to individual believers.

Each of the two groups thus has a different understanding of how the person should seek to come into contact with God. Susan Gal has said that, “different ideologies construct alternate, even opposing realities; they create differing views arising from and often constituting different social positions and subjectivities within a single social formation” (1998, 320). In the case of Q’eqchi’-Maya Catholics, two opposing language ideological constructions have created not only a differentiation in practices and identifications, but have also raised certain problems for people attempting to define their social and moral identities in a context where, formerly, Q’eqchi’ ethnicity and (at least nominal) Catholicism were closely linked. Thus, both the language ideological positions these people have adopted and the theologies that motivate their religious actions should perhaps be understood as part of a single process of subject formation.

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