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A Practice Approach to Ritual

Catholic Enactment of Community in Yucatán

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Abstract. – Semantic and pragmatic theories have dominated anthropological approaches to ritual, focusing on signs as read by practitioners and audience. A practice approach, in contrast, attends to the ritual orchestration of bodies, how ritual instantiates relationships through obliging people to act in certain ways with one another. The continuous cycle of Catholic ritual activity in Yucatán, Mexico, especially in the months of November and December, coordinates cooperation, sharing, and expressions of goodwill among family and community members. Ritual can be seen, therefore, not as a separate realm that symbolizes society, but the network through which society operates. *[Mexico, Maya, ritual, religion, practice]*

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Introduction

Several writers have argued that a major distinction between Catholic and Protestant Christianity is their configuration of personhood. They have concluded that – in a relative, but not an absolute sense – Catholicism promotes a relational conception of the person and Protestantism promotes individualism.[1] This discussion can be traced back to Weber, who suggested that what characterized the Reformation was an "unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual" (Weber 1992: 104). Salvation was placed in the hands of the individual, and was dependent upon the inner development of faith, divorced from any mediation by the sacraments or the church. The individual's duty was to avoid complications with the inherently sinful world except insofar as finding one's personal "calling" and laboring dutifully in that activity for the glory of God (Weber 1992: 104–109). In contrast, Catholic doctrines are seen to convey ideas of corporatism, in which the fate and fortune of the individual person hinges upon relationships with other people. The salvation of the individual soul is secured through "works," through charity expressed in social relationships, and through the mediation of the church, priests, and saints versus a direct relationship with God. Catholic corporatism is also symbolized in the doctrine of "the body of Christ" which represents both the community of the church and the physical body of Christ, which is ingested in the sanctified host creating an actual physical communion between the deity and the communicants.[2]

Without implying that Catholic practice is similar everywhere, an analysis of Catholic practices in a Maya village in Yucatán, Mexico, confirms this

1 Lukes 1973: 94–98; Shanahan 1992; Troeltsch 1931; Weber 1992.

2 Lukes 1973: 94–98; Shanahan 1992; Troeltsch 1931.

characterization of Catholicism as promoting relationality. However, while historians have focused on messages explicitly communicated in church doctrine, this work also examines how Catholic ritual obliges people to act as a cooperative community. As such, this work asserts a practice approach, which considers the ways in which relationships are instantiated in ritual practice. In the community of Dzitnup, the church stands at the center of both the physical and social space. Generally speaking, Catholic ritual practices tend to reproduce relations that unite villagers into a corporate body. As they reproduce Catholic practice, villagers indirectly reproduce community structures. To be a Catholic in rural Yucatán is, in a real way, to act as a member of a village community.

This work describes semantic and pragmatic theories about how religions influence social life, which focus on signs that are read by practitioners and the audience. The article explores a practice perspective, which reveals how ritual practices oblige people to enact (put into practice) "right" social relationships. By way of illustration, the article shows how Catholic rituals in Yucatán semiotically project relationality, and further, how they actually forge or instantiate social relations through obliging large groups of people to interact collectively and cooperatively, and to do so nearly continuously for large portions of the calendar year. While anthropologists have become accustomed to think of ritual as a clearly demarcated, discrete time "out of time" (Turner 1977: 96), this case calls attention to other cycles of ritual activity that stretch out over long periods of time, overlap, and blend into everyday activities. In such cases, ritual is the actual stage for social life, rather than merely a representation of it.

The Power of Religion

In the anthropological literature, the power of religion – the effect that it has on people – is typically attributed either to the creation of a worldview through symbols or to the representation of a world through indexical signs in the performance of ritual. First, in what we might call a semantic approach, religion projects a worldview that then shapes how people interact in their daily lives. (Tambiah [1979] makes the basic semantic/pragmatic distinction.) This approach is most often associated with Geertz, who considered religion both a "model of" and "model for" (1973: 94) the sociocultural order. In his view, the supernatural order is also a direct reflection of (a model of) the social world, and thereby serves as a model for its reproduction. Religious rituals may be read as texts to reveal the worldview which they impart. For Geertz, religion, as a set of symbols, is able to reproduce the social order because of its manipulation of emotion. In religious ritual, the worldview and the ethos, the moods and motivations by which people live, are united in one set of symbols. In this way, the moods and motivations are more permanently attached to the established social order: "By inducing a set of moods and motivations – an ethos – and defining an image of cosmic order – a world view – by means of a single set of symbols, the performance makes the model *for* and model *of* aspects of religious belief mere transpositions of one another" (Geertz 1973: 118; emphasis in the original).

Turner similarly attends to the social efficacy of ritual symbols. In particular, he notes that ritual symbols often encode both "physiological phenomena" – blood, breast milk, semen, birth, death – and also "normative values of moral facts" – respect for elders, matriliny, generosity to kin, etc. The very performance of ritual is essential for its effectiveness: the singing, dancing, etc., lead to an altered sensitivity, so that the normative becomes invested with the physiological, and, therefore, imbued with deep sentiment: "The drama of ritual action – the singing, dancing, feasting, wearing of bizarre dress, body painting, use of alcohol or hallucinogens, and so on, causes an exchange between these poles in which the biological referents are ennobled and the normative referents are charged with emotional significance" (Turner 1974: 55). Ritual achieves social effects because through the ritual process emotion is attached to the symbols of societal norms.

In contrast, in what we might call a pragmatic perspective, religion affects the social world not necessarily through symbols of a worldview, but more so through indexical signs that signal a relationship between those who wield the signs and others. Crucial is the idea that the actual practice of the ritual – who performs it and how – has greater effect on social life than does any worldview embedded in its symbols. The pragmatic approach may be traced back to Durkheim, who in fact begins his discussion of ritual with a semantic approach. As such, he asserts that the symbols of religions (such as totems) are actually symbols of the society: "the sacred principle is nothing more nor less than society transfigured and personified" (Durkheim 1965: 388). In collective worship of these symbols, the participants in the ritual indirectly worship the society, thereby reaffirming their collective beliefs. Moreover – and this is the pragmatic element – through their collective partic-

ipation in the ritual, the participants recognize their collective membership in a group. Durkheim insists that the collective performance of rituals is essential to the maintenance of society: "Society cannot make its influence felt unless it is in action, and it is not in action unless the individuals who compose it are assembled together and act in common. It is by common action that it takes consciousness of itself and realizes its position; it is before all else an active co-operation. The collective ideas and sentiments are even possible only owing to these exterior movements which symbolize them" (Durkheim 1965: 465 f.). The social order is doubly reaffirmed in ritual: both in the worship of symbols that represent it and in the recognition of comembership by the participants.

When Durkheim claims that the collective action signals to ritual participants that they belong to a common group, he is essentially asserting that that action is an indexical sign. Tambiah (1979) develops the focus on indices in his "performative approach" to ritual. He claims that the signs may be symbols representing a world order, yet because they are signs manipulated by participants in the ritual and in front of observers, they also serve as indices, representing relationships between people (Tambiah 1979; also Bloch 1986).

Although Tambiah's approach to ritual very importantly points out the meanings communicated by the facts of who manipulates the signs and who reads them, still in his analysis signs are depicted as carrying meanings which are interpreted by actors and audience. This approach implies that people "read" rituals like texts. Schieffelin (1985), while still focusing on signs, also highlights ritual performance. He argues that ritual symbols are not read, but are *experienced* by the participants as they enact the ritual itself: "Performance does not construct a symbolic reality in the manner of presenting an argument, description, or commentary. Rather, it does so by socially constructing a situation in which the participants experience symbolic meanings as part of the process of what they are already doing" (Schieffelin 1985: 709). Participants construct a symbolic reality vis-à-vis their creative participation in the ritual and they directly experience these symbols as they manipulate them (Schieffelin 1985; Mason 1994). Kaluli people do not make a firm distinction between the "ritual" and "real life" with respect to their curing séances; instead the symbolic world created within the performance is part of their pragmatic world of health and well-being (Schieffelin 1985).

Schieffelin rightly points out that many ritual activities may involve collective participation as opposed to a clear performer–audience dichotomy. In such cases, the actions of people as part of the ritual deserve the greatest attention as people may be more focused on their own participation as opposed to an abstract symbolic worldview. This is the case for Yucatecan folk Catholic rituals since, in most of them, there is no distinct set of performers, but all participate. Further, Schieffelin's insight that Kaluli séances are considered part of the "real" world – not constituting a distinct sphere of life – is relevant to most Catholic rituals in rural Yucatán. Although Catholic rituals are considered special times, they do not constitute a wholly separate moment in time. The ritual activities stretch out over weeks, as people continue to take care of pragmatic tasks. Firm boundaries demarcating the beginning and end of a ritual do not exist; I often found myself asking, "Has it started yet?" and "Is it over now?," waiting for a clear symbolic marker, and not finding one. Also, sets of activities for one saint overlap with the next, and planning for ritual activities begins months in advance. The point is that ritual is part of ongoing social life rather than constituting a "time out of time." Social life in Yucatán is thoroughly and continuously infused with ritual. As such, the relationships enacted in ritual persist even after the dishes have been washed and people have gone home.

Even though he discusses the emergence of symbolic meanings through performance, Schieffelin still stresses the interpretation of signs. There remains another analytical element to be considered. Durkheim made an additional observation about ritual that can be labeled neither semantic nor pragmatic. He wrote that periodic rituals actually physically bring people together, sometimes being the only occasion upon which this group of people gathers: "Howsoever little importance the religious ceremonies may have, they put the group into action; the groups assemble to celebrate them. So their first effect is to bring individuals together, to multiply the relations between them and to make them more intimate with one another" (Durkheim 1965: 389). In fact, a third kind of perspective is necessary to describe the ways in which ritual affects the social world, and for this we must leave the realm of signs and talk about practice.

A practice approach to ritual would consider how the ritual obliges (or provides the opportunity for) people to move their bodies in such a way as to practice, to enact, certain kinds of social relationships. Ritual, sometimes, perhaps most of the time, does more than represent a social world – it creates a social world. People move their bodies in specific ways, inhabiting ways of being. Ritual

obliges groups of people to come together, to coordinate their movements and their goods at regular points in time, and to perform submission, hierarchy, opposition, community, and gender. Alternatively, it may require people to act as isolable individuals, to act independently of others, to focus inward, to establish relationships directly with the sacred. Rappaport (1979: 200) hints at a practice approach in his example of how kneeling not only communicates submission but also creates a submissive person: "the use of the body defines the self of the performer for himself and for others. In kneeling, for instance, he is not merely sending a message to the effect that he submits in ephemeral words that flutter away from his mouth. He identifies his inseparable, indispensable, and enduring body with his subordination." Bell adds that ritual "does not send messages but creates situations" (1992: 111). She suggests that "ritual systems do not function to regulate or control the systems of social relations; they *are* the system … In other words, the more or less practical organization of ritual activities neither acts upon nor reflects the social system; rather, these loosely coordinated activities are constantly differentiating and integrating, establishing and subverting the field of social relations" (1992: 130; emphasis in the original).

In Yucatán, folk Catholic ritual puts into practice – creates – a social world. It does so through obliging people to coordinate and pool their goods and labors at frequent and regular points in the calendar year to orchestrate enormous festivities that bring families and villagers together and feed everyone. Certainly, symbols and indices in these ritual performances represent conventional social relationships, but Catholic rituals in Yucatán also enact these social relationships; they oblige people to act as members of a community. Because these rituals occur frequently, overlap, and are not sharply delimited from "profane time," the relationships forged are not easily abandoned after the ritual period ends. Further, because so much of the calendar year is taken up with preparation for and participation in Catholic rituals, Catholic worship instantiates and reproduces a social world characterized by community relations. Rather than simply representing the social world, ritual is the network through which community relations take place. To demonstrate this, I will describe first how Catholic discourses configure the person as inextricably tied to others in this social world and then show how Catholic ritual activities actually orchestrate cooperation at the community level continuously throughout the calendar year. The relationality of Catholic action is made clearer through comparison with the Pentecostal Church, which obliges the person to act as an individual. To emphasize that I am describing local patterns rather than claiming patterns true of Catholic or Protestant practice everywhere, I use local terminology: *católicos* (Catholics) attend the *iglesia* (Catholic Church) and *hermanos* (Protestants) attend the *templo* (Protestant Church).[3] Reflecting Yucatán's past as a Spanish colony, 92% of the village is Catholic; the 7% who are Pentecostals are members of the Church of God of the Prophecy and have all converted from Catholicism within the past fifteen years (see Kray 2001). This schism has created a great deal of rancor, as Catholics are disturbed by the disruption in village unity. Since Catholic action requires collective action, the very existence of a separate body of worshippers is taken as both a religious and a social affront.

Discursive Relationality

In general, the discourses and rituals of the iglesia project a "corporate" personhood, in both senses of the word. The person is configured as "corporate" as in corporal, material, physical, and also "corporate" as in relational, sociocentric, collective, and communal. Iglesia discourse and ritual place greater emphasis on the physical body over an interior, spiritual element. Similarly, iglesia discourse and ritual valorize connections to social others versus a sense of individuality, isolation, and disjuncture. The ideal person is necessarily linked to the social world of family and community, and the body is the necessary vehicle for salvation, as bodies labor, produce offerings, and genuflect in community rituals. Salvation of the individual is ultimately dependent upon one's postures and gestures within the social and physical world, rather than a mental, spiritual, direct relationship with God. Rather than faith, what is stressed are one's actions within the social world and one's participation in embodied collective rituals, rather than individualized prayer. The iglesia does not reject the body, but rather celebrates the carnal aspect of God in the example of Christ who became flesh and whose body and blood are ingested in the Eucharist. The iglesia does not reject society as an evil and corrupt "world," but desires for a true community of a unified church on this earth in this lifetime.

3 This article is based on a total of two years of ethnographic fieldwork in the 1990s (spanning 1990–1997) and a follow-up visit in 2004.

In católico discourses – what is conveyed in sermons, the nuns' instructions, songs, and prayers – the interior soul of the person is not ignored but simply deemphasized. A faith in God is taken for granted and not discussed. The hermanos often refer to themselves as *kreyeenteso'ob* "believers" (from Spanish, *creyentes*); the católicos also refer to the hermanos as kreyeenteso'ob, as they recognize the templo emphasis on belief. For católicos, belief and faith are beside the point – of course one believes, but the real issue is what one does. For example, the priest's homilies generally explore how the principles of the scripture readings can be applied in one's daily social interactions. Iglesia discourse emphasizes the social obligations of individuals. The "social doctrine of the church" implies that one be respectful and loving towards all humans. This is a common theme of the priest's homilies, the nuns' informal talks, and villagers' discussions about God's will. Many iglesia songs envision a world united in one church under God. In one favored song, the parishioners walk together: "Together like brothers / members of a church / we go walking / toward an encounter with our Lord. / United at prayer, united / in song" (*EDISEPA* n. d.: 24). In another song, parishioners go together to the altar where they will eat from the "table of unity": "We go together / singing to the Lord . . . We Christians run / all together to the front of the altar / and we all want to eat together / from this table of unity" (*EDISEPA* n. d.: 30). While the templo rejects society as an evil and corrupting "world," the iglesia envisions a united religious community on this earth. In conversations outside of the church setting, Dzitnup católicos also stress social obligations as the most important element of religious practice. In interviews with católicos, when asked, "What does God want us to do?," they typically mentioned actions which preserve social relations, such as: "Respect your elders," "Love and get along with our fellow humans," "Don't lie," and "Don't say [mean] things to people." Moreover, to the question, "What are the worst sins?," católicos typically mentioned sins against people, including adultery, lying to your mother, and lying to your father.

Católicos also talk about being responsible for one other's spiritual development and salvation. After death, unless the soul is free of sin, it goes to purgatory, where it must suffer in fires "until all the sins are burned away," after which it passes on to heaven. The family bears the responsibility of saying a series of prayer services called *rezas* at set anniversaries of the death to pray that the soul of the deceased be sped on its way from purgatory to heaven. These rezas are conventionally performed three days, one week, three weeks, thirty days, seven months, and on every anniversary of the date of death. Additionally, one can light a candle and say a prayer to a saint for the spiritual rectitude of a family member while he or she is alive. In contrast, hermanos insist that the salvation of the individual is completely in his or her own hands. One cannot pray for another's spiritual health, and once a person dies, there is no purgatory to pass through; one goes directly to heaven or hell.

In the iglesia, the corporeal aspects of person and deity – the ties to the real, physical world – are not rejected but often stressed. The person is linked to the physical world, including his or her body. In contrast to the templo, the iglesia does not reject such physical pleasures as dancing, drinking alcohol, smoking, and dressing up, but considers these to be "natural." In fact, small parties that include dancing, drinking, smoking, and dressing up take place in the family's home after each of the sacraments of baptism, first communion, and marriage. Drinking is criticized only if it leads to incorrect social action, whether fighting or draining the family's finances. Dressing well is in fact a major responsibility of teenage girls, and many hours before parties (including religious festivities) are dedicated to their hair, make-up, jewelry, dress, and shoes; a nun once reminded the catechists that the mass is a "fiesta," and that to honor their "host" (Jesus Christ), they should dress up for him. Rejection of the body simply is not part of iglesia practice. Fasting is encouraged during Lent, but fasting is simply taken to mean not eating meat on Fridays (and villagers say this actually only applies to red meat), and leaving a little food on the plate so as to feel a little hungry. Moreover, fasting is viewed not as a rejection of the body but rather a practice with the purpose of experiencing pain so as to empathize with Christ's pain in his final hours.

While the templo God is transcendent, accessible only through mental, spiritual exercises, the iglesia God is imminent. While hermanos spiritually commune with God through individual prayer and individual Bible study, católicos physically commune with God through the Offering and the Eucharist. In the Offering, parishioners commune with God by giving the "fruits" of their physical labor; with this money are purchased the wine and bread that are transformed in the Eucharist into the body and blood of Christ. In contrast, hermanos describe their donations of money not as offerings to God but rather as contributions towards the maintenance of the templo and the ministers. Further, regarding the Lord's Supper, hermanos say that it

provides for symbolic (not real) union with God, who is transcendent, not present here on this earth. In the iglesia, however, the Eucharist is not merely a symbol of God but is the actual body and blood of Christ transubstantiated in the mass, and parishioners commune with God by physically ingesting him in the communion wafer. Moreover, wine (representing the blood of Christ) and water (representing humans) are mixed in the chalice, bringing about a real, physical communion of humans with Christ. Similarly, to the catechists, a nun described the line to receive the communion wafer as a "pilgrimage" in which the church as a whole meets to commune with God, and she stressed that when parishioners partake of the wafer, they commune both with God and with the community of the church. The themes of the corporeality of Christ and of the church's communion with him and the church community in the Eucharist are themes in the common song, "The Lord Invites Us Now" (*EDISEPA* n. d.: 85):

The Lord invites us now
with love, his body to ingest;
it is no longer wine, no longer bread,
Christ gives himself
Hallelu, Hallelu, Hallelujah.

. . .

Today the family of God
that breaks the bread on the altar,
eats the body of the Lord,
and coexists in the union.

This Holy Communion
is brotherly food;
it is a testament of love,
it is a family banquet.

Human labor, fruits of the earth, and the body and blood of Christ are united in the chalice and then ingested in unison, instantiating the family of God.

In accordance with a view of a transcendent God, hermanos concentrate on the spiritual aspect of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit – and actively seek to bring the Holy Spirit "into their hearts." However, the Holy Spirit plays little role in iglesia religious practice. In answering questions about "What is God like?," "What is Christ like?," and "What is the Holy Spirit like?," católicos had much to say about God and Christ. Yet, about the Holy Spirit, they tended to shrug their shoulders and say they did not know much about it, or they said simply that "It's the spiritual part of God," or "It's the air around us." While Pentecostals trace their origins to the Day of the Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles, católicos are content to let the Day of the Pentecost go by unnoticed.

Rather than the spiritual aspect of the Trinity, the carnal aspect – the incarnate Christ – is given the most attention by católicos. The human Christ – whether Christ the King, the Christ Child, or Christ Crucified – is the focus of the priest's and nuns' work, what católicos talk about in informal conversation, and what the católicos plan their major festivals around. The nuns often reminded parishioners that, like humans, Christ became flesh and lived on this earth, and as such, he understands us and can be our friend and guide, as also conveyed in one favorite song: "Held by the Hand, with Jesus I go" (*EDISEPA* n. d.: 393). God is also said to be the "king" of this earthly world. Hermanos look forward to the Second Coming of Christ and a release from this profane "world." In contrast, católicos seek to create the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, a social body unified and reigned over by God. This is a theme of many homilies, songs, and iconic representations of Christ in banners.

Finally, corporeality is reflected in católico discussions of evil. In the templo, evil stems from the hearts of individuals, and this evil, unless purged through intense prayer and meditation, will prevent the majority of humans from entering heaven. Católicos will not deny that individuals have "bad" thoughts, but in interviews most católicos said that the majority of people eventually go to heaven. Further, for católicos, evil is more physical than mental. Sins are said to weigh down the heart, and so when kneeling in church for extended periods of time, only the knees of those people with many sins begin to hurt. Further, St. Peter decides whether a person ascends into heaven or goes to purgatory by placing the heart on a scale; heavy hearts with many sins go to purgatory where the sins are "burned off." The physical nature of evil for católicos is also apparent in the attribution of responsibility for misfortunes. Hermanos often point to natural disasters and call them God's "punishments" for the evil of humans. Católicos also call them "punishments," but rather than viewing them as punishments of human evil, they say that these disasters are "reminders" from God. They say, "He is calling us," reminding us that he is powerful, and that "We should hear his Word."

Rather than discussing the evil nature of humans, católicos locate evil in a variety of nonhuman agents in the world that go around creating havoc and harm. The *x-tabai* is an evil snake that takes the form of a beautiful woman in order to entice men to their deaths. The *k'áak'as íik'* is an unnatural wind which by night causes disturbances, will sometimes grab hold of and frighten people, causing illness, and which can sometimes take human shape. The

wáay is a shape-shifting witch who sneaks into people's houses at night to steal things. The *alux* is a trickster dwarf that lives in the forest and has great speed and agility that allow it to sneak up on farmers on their way to the fields, scare them, and steal their bags. Finally, the *k'áak'as pixan* is the ghost of a person who died in such a way that he or she could not be buried, such as by drowning. The *k'áak'as pixan* is unhappy that it is alone, and tries to catch other people for companionship. For católicos, then, evil is physical rather than mental, embodied in sins that weigh down one's heart and embodied in a variety of supernatural (but tangible) agents that wait for the opportune moment to strike.

Enacted Relationality

Apart from what people say about their religion, much religious activity occurs in the absence of explicit analytical commentary. The nonverbal, embodied aspects of worship must be considered, including such things as gesture, posture, spatial orientation, visual images, and the placement of bodies. Such practices have the potential to instantiate social relations, as people are obliged to act in certain ways with respect to others, or to turn inward and act as individuals. Iglesia rituals tend to project and instantiate relationality in semantic, pragmatic, and practice modes. Through these rituals, the person is linked to social networks in a definite physical world. From a semantic perspective, certain ritual symbols – such as the patron saint and the "Grandfathers" – represent the community as a single unified entity. From a pragmatic perspective, certain ritual indexical signs – such as collective presence, collective action, and tracing out the village space – remind villagers that they belong to one community. And finally, from a practice perspective, the rituals actually forge social relationships, through obliging villagers to pool their goods and labors to feed one another, and through obliging villagers to enact "respectability," and, therefore, social equilibrium.

To illustrate, first, the three main ritual activities that are coordinated within the church building – the mass, rosary, and novena – are collective activities. There is little that the individual worshipper does that is not also done in the same way at the same time by everyone else. The parishioner has no decisions to make about what to do or what to say; he or she simply learns what to do by watching others and mimicking their actions. In the mass, the priest leads the congregation through a service whose order never varies, and the congregation recites memorized, set responses at given intervals. There is relatively little time during the mass set aside for individual, direct communication with God through spontaneous prayer. One exception is the moment when parishioners kneel before going up to receive the Eucharistic wafer, but most católicos jump up to stand in line. Another exception is the moment when parishioners kneel to pray after the receiving the wafer, but most católicos move into a seated position after a pause encompassing just enough time to recite the "Our Father" and make the sign of the cross. Rarely do the priest or the nuns encourage parishioners to individualized prayer, but they will instead teach new prayers for the family to recite in unison. There is no designated time or place for prayer stemming from an inner "conscience" of the individual, and in one homily the priest in fact warned that the conscience of the individual is dangerous apart from the guidance of the church.

The rosary is a prayer service in devotion to Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. The rosary is composed of fifteen decades, divided into three sets of five, which respectively celebrate the Joyous, Sorrowful, and Glorious Mysteries of the lives and deaths of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. On a particular day, which is determined by the diocesan calendar, only one designated set of Mysteries is recited. One catechist begins by signaling everyone to stand and make the sign of the cross. Everyone recites the "Our Father," three "Hail Marys," and one "Glory Be to the Father." Then, one of the catechists kneels at a bench in front of the altar; she reads a passage about the first Mystery, then leads the group in a repetition of one "Our Father," ten "Hail Marys," and one "Glory Be to the Father," as she counts the prayers with the rosary beads. A song ends the decade, another catechist moves to the front, and the four remaining decades proceed in turn. The first catechist ends the rosary by reading the Litanies, then leading the group in the "Act of Contrition," the "Nicene Creed," and the "Hail, Holy Queen." The novena is another standardized prayer service in devotion to a saint. Ideally, the novena is spread out over nine nights, culminating on the saint's designated day in the Catholic calendar (*noj k'in*, "high day"). The novena is also recited by groups, and its form never strays from that provided in diocesan doctrinal literature, except for that the catechists may substitute some songs.

The coordinated movements of bodies during the mass, rosary, and novena indexically signal to parishioners that they are a collectivity, and through their participation parishioners enact collectivity. The mass begins with everyone seated in the pews,

Table: Iglesia Ritual Calendar.

Date	Festival	Activities
5–6 Jan.	Three Kings (Epiphany)	*gremio*, Christ Child stands
Feb.	Carnaval (Carnival)	presentation by schoolchildren
Feb.	Ash Wednesday	mass; ashes
Feb.–Mar.	Lenten Season	*vía crucis* around village every Friday
Mar.–Apr.	Holy Week	procession with palm fronds; five *celebraciones de la misa*; ritual reenactments of Last Supper, of death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and of *vía crucis* of Mary; break the Lenten fast
25 Apr.–3 May	Holy Cross	novenas in church
1–31 May	Month of Mary	nightly rosary; four *gremios*; reenactment of the Visitation; crowning of Mary
1–4 July	Blessed Sacrament	four *gremios*; first communion
7–15 Aug.	Assumption of Mary	novenas
31 Oct.–30 Nov.	Finados	*rezas* for the *pixans*
22–30 Nov.	San Andrés	novenas; *gremio*
4–12 Dec.	The Virgin of Guadalupe	novenas; *Carrera Guadalupana*
16–24 Dec.	San José	*posadas*
24–29 Dec.	Niño Dios	two *gremios* with *jarana* dances; Dance of Abraham and Isaac

facing forward, legs together, hands folded in the lap, eyes open. At different times, everyone will in concert make the sign of the cross over the face and chest, give a standardized response to a priest's utterance, sing, kneel, and fold their hands and recite a standardized prayer, put ten centavos into the collection basket, and stand in line to receive the Eucharist wafer. The novena and the rosary similarly entail unison in action. The catechists take turns going to kneel in front and read the Mysteries or a meditation on the saint and to lead the group in standardized prayers and songs. During the whole of the rosary, the rest of the congregation sits and faces ahead in the pews, makes the sign of the cross at the appropriate moment, repeats one prayer one hundred times, another two prayers ten times each, sings songs, and concludes the service with three more standardized prayers. The parishioner makes no decisions and there is no designated time or activity that would encourage individual reflection or expression. The mirrored movements of bodies and the standardization of the rituals indexically signal that Catholicism is a collective activity, and through participation, people act as a group.

Similarly, in the sacraments, the unit of participation is not the individual, but the group, including the bilateral, extended kin and the spiritual family, or godparents. In the templo, an adult makes a conscious decision to become baptized and accept Christ as his or her "personal savior," and templo members do not participate in godparent relationships. In the iglesia, however, the child becomes a member of the "family of God" by being brought to baptism by the parents and godparents. Villagers say that one cannot go about "making yourself" (*meentikaba*), but one requires family and godparent sponsorship and counsel in preparation for and participation in the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, first communion, and marriage. In each of these sacraments, godparenthood creates two kinds of lifelong bonds of fictive kinship: bonds between child and godparents and between parents and godparents. Godparenthood is a relationship of extreme respect and from that point onward special terms of address must be used. The relationship is an extension of kinship: children may not marry the children of their godparents. Again, participation in the iglesia does not just signal relationships between people, but actually forges them.

In regard to "folk" rituals, or rituals organized by the community rather than the clergy, festivals center around the day in the Catholic calendar designated for the veneration of different saints. In the community, each month of the calendar year (except for June and September) involves celebration of a major festival lasting a week or more (Table). Add to this the constant waves of weddings, baptisms, and first communion festivities, and literally

two weeks do not go by without one or another religious festivity that must be attended. There is no need to organize social activities outside of iglesia festivities, because something is virtually *always* going on in and around the church, or it is time to begin preparations. The iglesia is the social hub of the community, as it is the primary context for socializing and entertainment throughout the year and the life cycle. It is nearly impossible to exaggerate the role of the iglesia in village social life. Even though the iglesia is the center of socializing throughout the year, November and December are especially filled with activities and they are described here by way of illustration.

Finados: Feeding the Dead

November and December are times of nonstop ritual activity, including the rituals considered the most solemn (Finados) and the most festive (Niño Dios). In the Catholic calendar, 1 November is All Saints' Day and 2 November is All Souls' Day, which are observed to commemorate the lives of the saints and to pray for the souls of the deceased, respectively. In Yucatán, these two days are extended into an entire month of ritual activity, beginning on 31 October and ending on 30 November. Much to the dismay of the priest, the saints are effectively ignored during this time. Exclusive attention is given to the souls of deceased family members, and this time is referred to accordingly as Finados, the deceased. The primary ritual activity of this time is the reza, and the entire month is a time when extended families reunite, and people visit from house to house helping with each other's prayer services and sharing food.

The reza has two purposes: 1) to pray to God that the deceased person's sins be forgiven so that he or she can pass from purgatory into heaven, and 2) to feed the *pixans* (souls) who come back to earth to visit. Both purposes entail the notion that one's well-being – physical and spiritual – after death is dependent upon family and friends. A pixan is not fully released from sin without the intervention of living family members who give rezas. On 31 October, the pixans all are "given permission" by God to come home to visit their relatives for a month.

In addition to the prayers, the main element of the reza is the *u janal pixan* (pixan meal) that is offered to the pixans. Two types of feasts are prepared. The first is for family members who died as children, who are, therefore, without sin, essentially saints. While in the orthodox Catholic calendar, these souls (along with the other saints of the Church) should be remembered on 1 November (All Saints' Day), in Yucatecan villages this feast is offered on 31 October. The meal prepared is that of tortillas, hot chocolate, and cookies – food more appropriate for babies. The second, largest type of feast is for all of the deceased relatives who died as adults; according to the Catholic calendar, this should be done on 2 November (All Souls' Day), but in Maya communities it is first performed on 1 November. A table is pulled out into the center of the house and decorated with an embroidered tablecloth, a vase of flowers, sometimes photographs of the deceased, and beeswax candles. The family gathered together makes a list of all of their deceased relatives, including parents, bilateral grandparents, bilateral aunts and uncles, bilateral great aunts and great uncles, siblings, and adult children. A special meal is prepared, usually *chakbil káax* (stewed chicken), *chachakwaj* (thick chicken tamales reddened with annatto and cooked in an underground oven), steamed tamales, or *xpeloniwaj* (thick tamales with *espelon* beans cooked in an underground oven). On the table, servings of food and *atole* (corn gruel) are set out in separate plates, bowls, and cups for each one of the pixans invited.

A *x-meeyaj reza* (female prayer maker) leads the prayer service. The extended family members, compadres, and friends are assembled in the room. The prayer maker kneels in front of the table and recites a series of special prayers and songs. Those assembled chime in with "Hail Marys," "Our Fathers," and "Glory Be to the Father" when prompted, and sing along to songs they know. The prayer maker then takes the list of the family's deceased (sometimes quite extensive), and calls each of the pixans by name to come and eat. The pixans enter and eat the "vapor" that rises from the hot food, and the food on the table is then distributed to all in attendance.

During Finados, connections between households are enacted. The entire day of 1 November is spent in attending several rezas at different houses. As an adult, you will attend the reza in your own home, the home of your parents, the home of your spouse's parents, and typically the homes of your different siblings. You will probably also be invited to rezas at all of your compadres' homes, the homes of your spouse's siblings, the homes of your married children, the homes of the parents-in-law of your married children, your neighbors' homes, and you may also walk into any reza uninvited. Children run around from house to house visiting and tasting the food of many pots. Over the rest of the month, family members who live in other

villages and towns will come back to visit the house that belonged to their parents (now to a sibling), and another reza will be made on those days. Most households perform a reza once a week throughout the month of November because the pixans are still around, visiting their living family members. On 30 November, a final reza is given in every household, and the pixans depart once again.

Semantic, pragmatic, and practice perspectives can be applied to the pixan meal. Semantically, feeding the pixans reminds people that they exist within family networks and that their spiritual and physical well-being are dependent upon right relations with family and friends. Pragmatically, reza guests are reminded of their relationships with another through copresence, collective action, and commensality. Finally, from a practice perspective, the feeding of the pixans and the distribution of food among the guests puts into practice idealized social relationships, the ideal that kin, fictive kin, and covillagers gather together, socialize, and feed one another. As people participate in the month of interhousehold fellowship and commensality, they enact and strengthen family and community relationships.

San Andrés: Celebrating Community

Even while the month of Finados is still underway, festivities for the community patron saint, San Andrés, take place (22–30 November). Until the 1970s, the sacred time of San Andrés would be celebrated with a full *cha'an*: the nine nights of a novena, bullfights with four bulls, *jarana* dances every day and on the first night (*vaquería*) of the cha'an, *cumbia* dances the other nights, fireworks, processions, and masses – all drawing crowds from nearby villages. Because of increasing fiesta costs, now a couple sponsors a smaller version of the fiesta, called a *gremio*.

Beginning months in advance, the *j-kuch* (male sponsor) and *x-kuch* (female sponsor) will organize the ingredients and the labor for the gremio feast. The j-kuch visits all of his extended family members, his wife's extended family members, his compadres, friends, and neighbors, and asks them to assist with the preparations. A family will typically promise a chicken, a turkey, a quarter of a pig, two 8-kilo buckets of corn dough for tortillas, or a bit of money, and they help with the preparations. The kuch couple will hire the band and the festal cook, pay for the mass, and contribute all of the beer, at least a quarter of a pig, and the tomatoes, onions, and spices for the stew. A sensory indication that the ritual cycle has begun is the stinging of the nose and watering of the eyes as the festival cook burns (blackens) the chilies days in advance and the clouds of chili smoke waft throughout the community.

A novena in the church marks every night of the full nine days (*novenario*) leading up to the saint's day. The prayer service is followed by a ritualized *t'ox* (distribution) of a sweet, hot drink (sweet rice, hot chocolate, or sweet corn gruel) along with crackers or cookies for dunking. It is a very social occasion: the elderly, women, teenage girls, and young children attend the service itself, but men and boys hang around outside, waiting for the t'ox. The *x-ch'úupals* (marriageable and nearly marriageable girls) dress up, and the *xi'ipals* (marriageable and nearly marriageable boys) know that the t'ox is their chance to exchange smiles and perhaps a couple of words with the x-ch'úupals. (X-ch'úupal and xi'ipal are highly significant social distinctions, and so these terms are used here.)

On the day before the saint's day, the rest of the preparations for the *relleno* (turkey, chicken, pork, and blackened chili stew) begin in the sponsoring couple's house yard. At 4:00 A.M., everyone is awakened by the squeals of hog butchering. Work to prepare the stew and underground oven will occupy up to one hundred people throughout the day. Women and girls kill, clean, gut, and divide the poultry; cut up the pork and vegetables; and make tortillas for lunch. A group of men and boys butcher the hogs and cook down the pork skin to make lard and chitlins; a pot of beans is put on the fire and the helpers eat beans and chitlins for lunch. Another group of men and boys dig a long pit in the earth to build a *pib* (underground oven), and by sunset vats are placed in the oven to cook overnight.

The next morning, men unearth the pib and haul out the vats. Girls take the corn to grind, and by ten o'clock begin filling buckets with fresh tortillas. In small groups, the helpers go home to bathe and dress up. By noon, the guests begin to arrive – extended family, compadres, friends, neighbors, potentially the entire community, as well as family and compadres from other communities. The streets are active with people either heading to the gremio house or returning home to change. The x-ch'úupals come in their best dresses, with coiffed hair and make-up; the chore of serving the guests is welcomed as a chance to exchange words with their favorite xi'ipal. At the back or side of the house, men and xi'ipals congregate, drink beer, and chat. Women may stay indoors, chatting with sisters and comadres, while kids run around outside and play with cousins and friends.

A mass and procession conclude the day. The patron saints of seven nearby towns and villages are brought to "visit" San Andrés, as they are his "fellow apostles." The church is generally packed, with nearly all católicos in attendance. All of the saints are dressed with special robes and crowns, and they are placed on the steps around the altar, surrounded by flowers offered by parishioners. Following the mass, the priest leads a procession of the saints and parishioners around the church. People then stand in line to pray and show their devotion to the saints through offering them coins, making the sign of the cross upon them with a leaf or flower, and kissing their hands or the bottom of their robes.

The gremio for San Andrés both signals and orchestrates relationality. From a semantic perspective, the patron saint represents the village as a whole, and so villagers, in their veneration of the saint, indirectly venerate the collectivity. From a pragmatic perspective, the participants in the preparation and consumption of the relleno meal recognize themselves as equal participants in a common activity that indexically points to their common interests and membership. Finally, from a practice perspective, the pooling of goods and labors by members of almost all of the households in a collective effort to feed one other is an instantiation of idealized social relationships. In these ways, the gremio both represents and animates relationality.

The Virgin of Guadalupe: *Communitas*

Just four days after the day of San Andrés, on 4 December, celebrations for the patron saint of Mexico, the Virgin of Guadalupe, begin, and they proceed until the saint's day on 12 December. Novenas are held the full nine nights of the novenario, and the other main activity is the *"Carrera Guadalupana"* (Guadalupe Run), which has taken place in Mexico since 1969. It occurs over three days (10–12 December), as a truckload of people drive to a location hundreds of kilometers from their hometown and run a relay back home, carrying a torch in honor of the Virgin of Guadalupe. The run is undertaken as a *promesa* (promise): parishioners promise the saint to run in her honor if she will grant them health in the coming year. In 1993, the group from Dzitnup ran home about three hundred kilometers from Chetumal, Quintana Roo. Most of those who went were xi'ipals, plus a few young married men, and, for the first time ever, eight x-ch'úupals, including me.

We rented a small cattle truck and piled into the back compartment, measuring about ten by twelve feet in size. The compartment was uncovered and the wooden slat sides allowed the wind in as we drove along. With two wooden benches from the church placed in the back, some could sit down, while the rest perilously straddled the sides of the truck. As we started out, spirits were high; one xi'ipal brought along his boom box and we sang to cassettes of popular cumbia and romantic tunes. Oranges were peeled and segments passed all around. As the hours passed, the physical demands of the trip wore on us. The truck, with threadbare shock absorbers, jostled along the gravel roads marred with deep dips cut by the rain. We took turns moving from the benches to straddling the sides of the truck, but the wooden benches offered only slight comfort. An over-hanging branch on the side of the road whipped into a boy's face, drawing blood. Our faces were burned by the sun and covered with a film of sweat and dust from the roads. Around 6:00 P.M., the radiator hose burst. Waiting for eight hours until a replacement arrived, we had a makeshift dinner of packaged chips and sweets from a nearby store. By the time we set off again, we were behind schedule, and the driver drove as fast as the creaky truck could go, bumping us around even harder. The December night was frigid, and the wind whipped through the slats. In our uniforms of red shorts and Guadalupe T-shirts, we were unprepared for the cold, and huddled under a few blankets to keep warm. The noise from the ancient engine kept us awake, and by the time we arrived in Chetumal for the morning mass, we were already tired, even before the running had begun.

After the mass, we hung on the front of the truck a banner that displayed the Mexican flag and an image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, and we began our slow run back to the village. For fifteen minutes at a stretch, a runner alit and carried the torch. As the sun beamed down, and as other trucks of runners passed along the road each coming from different places and heading back to their hometowns, people's spirits noticeably lifted. Despite the physical hardships, we laughed, joked, and goofed around. We cheered on the runners and applauded them as they reentered the truck. A set of inside jokes emerged. Some people earned nicknames that stuck for the rest of the trip, such as "Beans," "Nose," and "Rock Star." The effervescent feeling of group belonging, Turner's "communitas" (1977), bubbled inside me, and the deep grins on others' faces let me know they felt it, too. On the one hand, we shared physical hardships: fifty-two hours without sleep, a lack of good meals, thirst, aching leg muscles, sore backs from sitting on the benches and the sides

of the truck, the frigid winds, and no relief offered by a bath or a change of clothes. We also shared the experience of collective action, with everyone cooperating to reach a common goal. The inside jokes and nicknames were markers of group belonging – because only we understood them, they indexically signaled the solidarity that was emerging.

On a couple of occasions, group boundaries were aggressively asserted. First, one of the young women on the trip is the only person in the village who refuses to speak Yucatec Maya. She understands it, but she speaks Spanish exclusively. While villagers are often critical of her, that "she thinks a lot of herself," this criticism is usually made beyond her earshot. During the trip, however, people took strength from numbers and harassed her to speak in Maya – dissension was not going to be tolerated. Another example of group defensiveness was animosity directed at a templo. Throughout the trip, at every Catholic church we passed, the runner would enter, kneel, and make the sign of the cross before the image of the Virgin. When we came upon one Pentecostal templo, though, the shyest girl of the group ran with the torch into the templo. This would have been an affront to the hermanos, for whom devotion to the saints is a form of idolatry. Xi'ipals jumped off the truck to join her in this confrontational display of religious chauvinism. The rest of the people in the truck shouted a chorus of "Iglesia, iglesia, iglesia!" ignoring the shocked expressions on the faces of the hermanos who were entering for their service.

Tired and hungry, we arrived outside of Dzitnup midafternoon on the third day. We jumped out of the truck and ran together the final two kilometers to the church, holding the Guadalupe banner and torch in front. Most of the village had come out for the Guadalupean mass and cheered us on. We ran once around the church, and then took our places on special benches to the side of the altar. We held candles throughout the mass, and I thought the beaming smiles on the runners' faces would never relax. When the priest asked what we liked best about the run, Antonio summed up what I think many had been thinking when he said, "the fellowship among us." The shared experiences and physical challenges, the emotional highs and lows, the nicknames and inside jokes generated a delighted and profound sense of group belonging and solidarity. When I returned in 2004, one couple who had their first flirtations in the Guadalupe Run had since married and "Nose" and "Beans" still had their nicknames. In this case, rather than simply representing relationships of collectivity and cooperation, ritual provided the setting for them.

Niño Dios: Theatrics of Reversal

Four days after the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, on 16 December, the more than two weeks of festivities surrounding Christmas begins. While Finados is a solemn time, the Christmas festivities are characterized by entertainment and frivolity. The Christmas season begins with *posadas* (lodgings) performed in honor of Saint Joseph from 16–24 December. The posadas are a reenactment of Joseph and Mary's search for lodging in Bethlehem the night Niño Dios (the Christ Child) was born. Each night, a different family hosts a novena in their house and grants lodging to the Holy Couple. The evening service begins in the church where, behind the altar sits a crèche made of palm fronds, covered with electric Christmas lights, in which are placed the images of Mary and Joseph. Mary is dressed in a white wedding gown and veil for the occasion. A novena is held with Christmas carols and the litany is sung in Latin. Afterward, one of the four elderly men who serve as *padrinos* (caretakers) of the saints takes up a staff with an image of the cross on top, and leads a procession out of the church. The couple that is granting posada stands next in line, the woman carrying the image of Mary and the man carrying Joseph. Behind them follow the catechists and parishioners, singing Christmas carols and holding candles, as the procession wends its way around the community streets. The procession stops at two houses where the Holy Couple is denied posada, but at the third house, they are allowed to enter. Inside, the host family has constructed a crèche, where the saints are placed to rest for the night. The crèche is set on a table covered with a tablecloth newly embroidered for the occasion. Some of the crèches are simpler, made of palm fronds. Others are more elaborate, made of wooden planks or cardboard covered with wrapping paper, lace, beads, and electric Christmas lights. Bowls of atole or another hot drink are placed before the saints so that they may eat. The house is crowded with devotees, with children and men spilling out into the dark roads; the novena is followed by the t'ox distribution of a hot, sweet drink. The next morning, the padrinos of the saints and the host couple carry the Holy Couple back to their crèche in the church to spend the day before the next posada that evening.

On 24 December, the celebrations for the Christ Child begin as women and girls throughout the community spend the day in the time-consuming task of preparing huge pots of steamed tamales; some are eaten for dinner and two from each house are taken to the church to be distributed later that

night. In the afternoon, the masked "Dance of Abraham and Isaac" begins. The two primary dancers – while bearing the names of the Old Testament patriarch Abraham and his son Isaac – are configured as brothers, and are known as "Our Grandfathers" (*k senyoresilo'ob)*, or the "Grandfathers of the Village." They wear two wooden masks and long dark blue robes with hoods and are joined by a third dancer, the *k'áak'asba'al* (the Evil Thing [the Devil]), who wears a leather mask in the shape of a horse's head and a set of green army fatigues. (The association of evil with the horse probably dates back to the conquistadors, who introduced horses.) The "Dance of the Grandfathers" is a dance-drama: the Devil knows that Niño Dios will be born that night, and he wants to steal the baby, while the Grandfathers try to protect it.

The Devil is a prankster character that goes around the village disrespecting property, people, and polite behavior. He runs into people's yards and steals buckets and brooms. He steals fruit from people's trees and sits spread-legged in the middle of the road to shove it in his snout. He runs after children to scare them, picks people's flowers and offers them unabashedly to x-ch'úupals, and he rides off on people's bicycles chasing after dogs, sheep, and goats. The Grandfathers are buffoons. As elderly people who have lost their teeth, they speak with lisps. They are simpletons, misunderstanding the things that people tell them, and replying with kind, but confused and confusing answers. They chase after the Devil, trying to stop his antics, but often trip over themselves and each other. Spectators also ignore polite behavior and jokingly hurl insults at the dancers. The Devil and his mother are insulted, but he is mute and cannot retort. The Grandfathers are teased for not hearing and speaking well and they are asked where they misplaced their teeth. The Dance of the Grandfathers is a rite of reversal in that conventions of social life are temporarily overturned. The Devil is a prankster who breaks rules of respect and respectability, and the respect normally given to elders is denied to the buffoon Grandfathers. Spectators set aside conventional patterns of respect and poke fun at all three dancers. Overall, tensions engendered by normal obligations of respect are relieved, and yet everyone is also subtly reminded that, while the dance-drama is humorous, the disrespect enacted is not to be otherwise emulated.

The evening is Nochebuena (Holy Night), the night when the Christ Child was born. At 10 P.M., virtually all village católicos are at the church for a special mass. The women and x-ch'úupals have donned new dresses that they have purchased or sewn just for this occasion. Everyone then moves outdoors to the church courtyard to watch and join in the theatrics of the Grandfathers and the Devil. A group of men play jarana tunes with old instruments (harmonica, trumpet, and wooden drum) normally kept in the old trunk in the sacristy, and the masked dancers dance a comic version of the jarana. The Grandfathers grab the Devil, throw him to the ground, and pretend to butcher him; the men gathered around make bids for the different cuts of meat. At midnight, the women and girls go back inside the church for the final novena for Saint Joseph. The Grandfathers change into white robes because "it is the New Year." The fighting between the Grandfathers and the Devil continues: the Devil's arms are wrapped around a long pole behind his back; two xi'ipals take hold of either side of the pole and run around in a circle making the Devil fall down from dizziness. When he gets back up, others spin him around again. A group of xi'ipals forms a circle with their hands around the Devil: he tries to push through the circle and they push him back in. By this time, the women and girls have finished the novena, and stand with lit candles at the door to the church, singing carols, blocking the Devil from entering the church as the mock battles continue in the courtyard. At 1 A.M., everyone takes a seat inside the church, while the singing of carols continues. The four padrinos of the saints place the image of the Christ Child in a crib into the crèche scene, symbolizing his birth. They carry the Holy Couple and their new child in a procession around the interior of the church, followed by the Grandfathers. All of the tamales brought by the women earlier in the day are then distributed in a t'ox. Since the tamales are generally made following the same recipe, the significance of the meal is not that of sharing different kinds of food but rather that everyone give with *ki'imak óolal* (gladness of the soul) and feed one another.

Early the next morning, the padrinos of the saints lead an all-day procession of the Niño Dios in his crib around the entire village. Beginning at the northern entrance to the village, and circling around all the roads to end up at the southern side, the entourage, including the padrinos, the three masked dancers, and assorted kids, stops at each house in turn (except those of hermanos). The different members of the household pay their respects to the Niño Dios by kneeling in front of him, crossing themselves, and saying a silent "Our Father"; into his crib, one of the adults places two candles and a bit of money or gives the padrinos two kilos of dried corn. The dancers, the padrinos, and the children are given equal amounts of candy, oranges,

and tangerines. By noon, the catechists and other x-ch'úupals join the procession, and at many of the houses, a full novena is offered for the Niño Dios. The procession proceeds from house to house until well after midnight.

On the morning of the twenty-sixth, the padrinos of the saints carry the Holy Family to the house that will sponsor the first of two gremios. Every católico household will offer help to one or both of the gremios. The preparation of the relleno is well underway. A jarana band appears around noon, and accompanies a procession around the village to gather up the *ramilletes* made by nine volunteers. The ramilletes are colored tissue-paper flags cut into designs representing flowers and placed on wooden sticks, bundled together to make tall, multicolored bushes, which are held above the head. The ramilletes are taken to the church as offerings to the Holy Family. The band then returns to the sponsors' house and plays music while the Grandfathers and Devil dance a comic jarana. The men digging the pib take off moments from their work to share beers and try to convince x-ch'úupals to dance with them. At seven o'clock, the sponsors lead their helpers in a procession with the band to the house of the couple that has agreed to sponsor a gremio for the following year. Ritualized handshakes and sharing of cigarettes and shots of rum mark the transfer of the ritual burden. The procession returns to the sponsors' house for a novena in honor of the Niño Dios.

At ten o'clock, the vaquería (the first night of a jarana dance) begins, and the jarana is danced in the sponsors' yard on a raised wooden platform or in the basketball court until two o'clock in the morning. Young people will have been talking about this night for weeks, since this is a chance to dance or steal a few words of conversation with the person who has caught their eye. The men may be off to one side sharing beers, some trying to coax their wives or x-ch'úupals onto the dance floor. Some xi'ipals lurk around the perimeter, and in chairs around the dance floor are chaperoning mothers, the x-ch'úupals, and all of the children old enough to stay awake and bear the chill of the December evening.

The jarana is a display of respect and respectability. The x-ch'úupals don their *ternos*, which are elegant, expensive, formal, embroidered dresses, worn specifically for dancing the jarana. Their hair is placed up in a bun, covered with a big red bow, and they wear white high-heeled shoes. Around their arms they elegantly drape a silk shawl, and the family's best gold necklaces, bracelets, and earrings are brought out for them to wear. The xi'ipals wear a formal costume of centuries past: a white guayabera shirt, white pants, Panama hat, a red bandanna hanging out of the right pants pocket, and white *alpargata* sandals (sandals made of hemp fibre) with thick wooden soles for thumping the dance floor. The jarana is danced with torso and neck erect, and head held high and straight. The dancers do not look one another in the eye or touch one another. The x-ch'úupal holds the ends of her shawl in a fixed position straight out in the air. The xi'ipal holds his left arm behind his back and his right one at his chest. The dance steps consist of stepping and thumping with hips and shoulders motionless, always with an air of dignity.

The final dance of the jarana is the "Dance of the Bull" (*u yóok'ot le tooro'*), another rite of reversal, in which respect is replaced with aggressiveness. The xi'ipal takes the role of the bullfighter and holds his red bandanna out like a bullfighter's cape. The x-ch'úupal takes the role of the bull, stomping with her heels and charging the xi'ipal, trying to knock him off balance. The audience laughs to see which of the x-ch'úupals can be the most aggressive. Xi'ipals and men judge who is the best (most aggressive) female dancer, and show their approval by placing their hats on her head. The successful female dancer knocks the xi'ipal off the dance platform and ends up with a pile of hats on her head.

The morning of the twenty-seventh, the pib is uncovered, and almost the entire village comes to feast and dance the jarana beginning at noon. A final novena is offered in the kuch couple's house; the kuch couple carries the Holy Couple and one of the padrinos carries the Christ Child back to the church. The kuch couple pays for a special mass, and finally, the flowers of the ramilletes are distributed all around and are taken home to serve as household decorations for much of the coming year. From 28–29 December, another couple offers a second gremio, with all of the same elements: relleno feast, processions and ramilletes, jarana dancing, and a final mass. A third gremio closes the Christmas season on 5–6 January (for the Epiphany, or the Visitation of the Wise Men).

In sum, the festivities for Niño Dios similarly both signify and orchestrate relationality. First, from a semantic perspective, the Grandfathers are "Our Grandfathers," at once the protectors of the Christ Child and the ancestors who unite the village in one ritual kin group. Also, the Dance of Abraham and Isaac and the Dance of the Bull, as rites of reversal, remind people of the sacred values of respect for the elderly and female submissiveness by theatrically displaying the opposite. In an indexical mode, other signs indicate to ritual participants that they belong to one group, including the collective

food preparation and commensality of the relleno feast and t'ox, the collective action of the novenas and masses, and the way in which the procession of the Niño Dios winds through the entire village, marking the space as a unified católico space. Finally, from a practice perspective, the festivities for Niño Dios put into practice idealized social relationships: people combine their goods and labors to feed one another and they enact the values of respect and respectability in the jarana dance. The more than two weeks of Christmas festivities thus provide yet another occasion for community cooperation and conviviality. Rather than simply representing a worldview of cooperation and community, these rituals constitute the network through which community relations take place.

Conclusion

This article has endeavored to demonstrate the utility of a practice approach to ritual. While semantic and pragmatic approaches privilege signs as read by actors and audience, a practice perspective attends to the kind of social relationships created and sustained through ritual practice. This practice perspective is especially useful for situations in which ritual activities are a major focus of social life and socializing; as such, the relations enacted in ritual have the potential to extend far beyond the moment of the ritual act. In Catholic communities in Yucatán, since ritual activities take up so much of people's free time and involve the collective efforts of people communitywide, the rituals are best understood as providing the setting for the formation and maintenance of relationships.

Católico discourses and ritual activities reinforce relationality and orchestrate community cooperation. Iglesia discourses configure the person as a social and physical being, whose spiritual well-being is intimately wrapped up with one's relations with others in this social and physical world. Semantically, certain symbols, such as the patron saint and the Grandfathers, signal to villagers that they belong to one collective group. Indexically, the general mode of collective action and cooperation of the rituals signify to participants that they constitute one group. Finally, the rituals oblige villagers to actually put into practice idealized social relationships: unity, cooperation, commensality, and the respect and respectability upon which civil society depends. These sacred events do more than represent the collectivity, they also constitute it: they bring together most of the village in peaceful, collective action. As such, the rituals constitute the network through which the community is realized.

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