

## The Authority to Lead

There were those . . .  
who led the people by their counsels . . .  
and their inheritance [remains] with their children's children.  
—*Sirach* 44:3–4

The understanding of what constitutes a genuine  
native, indigenous leader is rarely found among  
conventional social do-gooders.  
—*Saul Alinsky*

**D**EMOCRATIC CONSTITUTIONS place power in the people's hands. That power might rein in powerful elites if enough citizens made good use of it. But few citizens make much use of it at all, and many of those who do use it stumble so badly that they give up. Their potential power is never actualized.

What kind of practice is it, then, to cultivate one's power as a democratic citizen and use it well? It is a *political* practice because it attends to shared human arrangements in light of concerns and judgments that are not always in harmony. It is a *social* practice because the ends it pursues and the means it employs involve building up human relationships of certain kinds. It is an *egalitarian* practice in the sense that it is open to anybody who wishes to master it and in the sense that it aspires to create a society in which no one is in a position to dominate others.

A practice can be egalitarian in this sense without eradicating all forms of authority and hierarchy. In a culture of democratic accountability some people hold high office and exercise the powers thus accorded to them, and some people serve as mentors or lead-

ers to others without holding office. Elites will always be with us. They rise and fall, but are unlikely to disappear. The question is how to tame and civilize them, not how to eliminate them. Grass-roots democratic organizations need leaders and work hard at identifying and cultivating them. The internal structure of such organizations is not anarchic. As a social formation democracy has more to do with structures of *earned and accountable authority* than it does with leveling.

Democratic action aims to create a society in which even bosses, generals, and presidents are held accountable to the rest. Holders of high office will always have power at their disposal, but in a healthy democracy that power can be held in check. What holds it in check is itself a kind of power. Ordinary citizens, by relating wisely to one another and to elites, are able to influence and contest decisions made on high. No society can free itself of domination unless citizens make good use of the power at *their* disposal. And citizens are likely to do that only if some of them acquire the moral authority to lead, represent, and advise their associates and only if those associates are prepared to acknowledge whatever moral and intellectual authority their leaders, representatives, and advisors have earned.

In this chapter I will examine what the resulting relationships are like, how they are built up, and what their effects are. The memory of one leader in particular personifies democratic authority as it is now understood throughout much of the Rio Grande Valley, but we would hardly do justice to the topic—or to her—if we merely called her *charismatic*, a term that more often mystifies than instructs. To have charisma in the original biblical sense is to possess a divine gift and exhibit its spiritual fruits in one's conduct. Modern sociological theories of charismatic authority apply the concept to persons capable of winning followers purely on the basis of their own gifts, but how authority of this kind is bestowed and exercised remains mysterious.<sup>43</sup>

I have no doubt that the strongest leaders of grassroots democratic groups are gifted in ways that contribute to their authority, but their gifts can be described. So too can the discipline of cultivating those gifts and matching the people who have them with the responsibilities of leadership. I want to take seriously the thought that the authority of a grassroots leader needs to be earned, that the sort of authority that such leaders ideally, or even typically, possess is not merely a matter of natural talents. And I want to warn against the temptation to wait passively for a great charismatic leader, like Sojourner Truth or Martin Luther King Jr., to follow.<sup>44</sup>

“Carmen Anaya never learned English,” Christine remarked. “But she would be the major speaker when we would have Mark White, who was then governor, come down. And she had this habit, she would put her hand on her hip and she would kinda shake her finger. She would be speaking Spanish to Mark White and he wouldn’t know a word, but he was afraid to look away. So he would be looking intently at her, and she would be going like this [wagging her finger].” On one such occasion White is reported to have said, “I don’t know what you’re saying but I know I’d better say yes.”

Valley Interfaith interviewed Carmen Anaya in 1998 and translated some of her recollections for a report to the Ford Foundation. In those remarks, she took pride in the material and spiritual transformation of the colonias. The colonia streets are now paved. The water is safe. Everyone has access to an adequate sewer system. More important, the people of the colonias now carry themselves with dignity. Valley Interfaith has brought about that transformation, she said, by serving as a “university” for the people. There is much to be learned in a university of this kind. It is no accident that the leaders of Valley Interfaith speak knowledgeably about the basic processes of the political system, many aspects of the law, the economics of the minimum wage, scripture, and the social teachings of the churches. But the central lesson being taught in Valley Interfaith’s public university, Carmen Anaya said, is

how to deal face-to-face with a politician and not humiliate ourselves or beg. We have the right to negotiate and tell him, "You are not our patron—you are our servant." This is very important. This is the most important point because through this organization we have brought accountability to these politicians. And I believe we have made them more responsible.<sup>45</sup>

Carmen Anaya had died before I joined a handful of organizers on a several-day tour of IAF activities in the borderlands of Texas, but I heard many people in Brownsville, McAllen, and Las Milpas speak of her. I also heard her spirit echoed in the voices of many others. Her willingness to stand up to mayors and governors in public settings had served as an example to people throughout the Valley. The current population of the area is 1.2 million, with 40 percent falling below the poverty line. The gap between rich and poor remains massive, but many of the poor no longer carry themselves in a posture of submission. They do not take themselves to be begging the rich for a handout. "What we regard as ours by right," according to moral philosopher Annette Baier, "is what we are unwilling to beg for and willing only within limits to say 'thank you' for."<sup>46</sup> It is appropriate, according to Carmen Anaya, to bow down and beg God for forgiveness, but not to bow down and beg CEOs and politicians for decent working and living conditions.

Donna Rodriguez is a teacher in Brownsville who once lived in a colonia known as Sebastian. The only employer in the vicinity at the time was a cotton gin that emitted pollutants. It became clear early on that a solution to the problem would be found, if at all, only at the state level. Donna was warned that she wouldn't be listened to in Austin. "We were terrified," she told me. This was why she was reluctant to get involved in the first place. Donna and other leaders were determined to get to Austin, but they had trouble finding money for the trip. State officials agreed to hold a hear-

ing in the Valley. The gin brought lawyers from Indiana, Michigan, and San Antonio.

"We had us," Donna said proudly. When it was time to negotiate, "we were able to tell them, 'This is our table. You go over there.'"

Here one sees a recurring IAF theme: the importance of meeting with governmental and corporate officials, at least on some occasions, in a space over which ordinary citizens exercise control. To be in charge of the meeting place and to be able to set the agenda of discussion are significant sources of empowerment. "They had maps," she continued. "They had data. I had no idea about this kind of stuff. But I was able to negotiate, because Valley Interfaith helped me get a voice." Donna was able to explain what the problem was, because it was part of her experience. "After that meeting we had so much fun learning. I'm still learning. Now, at my home, I have a sewer. We have paved streets. We have a park for our children. It's because we believed that we could get together and learn." When she is in the classroom, Donna teaches her students that they, too, have a voice, that they shouldn't be afraid of the wrong things or overwhelmed by fear, as she once was. One of the marks of leadership is courage.

Lupita Torres, another Brownsville leader, spoke to me in Spanish, with Elizabeth Valdez, the lead IAF organizer in the Valley, translating. For a long time, when others asked her to attend meetings, Lupita held out. "I am a very spiritual person. I didn't believe in politics. I didn't want to get involved." Finally, she gave in and attended a meeting, which was part of a parish development project that Elizabeth helped run. "I began to hear scripture stories that opened my eyes to think, 'This is what I need to be doing.' Before, I knew that there were a lot of needs in my neighborhood. We needed drainage. We needed lighting. We needed everything. But for me that was not the work that I was supposed to be doing. In the end, understanding scripture helped me understand my role."

Lupita recalled the day when Valley Interfaith took all of the politicians on a bus tour of the city. She asked the officials why the community was being charged for irrigation, since there was no farming going on. One official said that the charges had to do with taking care of drainage ditches. "I told him that the ditches aren't taken care of at all. They are full of weeds, people dump garbage in them, and sometimes, even bodies are found there. How are you cleaning the ditches, and we're paying all of this money?" She told the mayor that she wanted him to come to the neighborhood on foot, so he could see it and smell it. By the time the visit ended, officials had promised to pave the streets before the end of the month. "And so by the end of April, they were fixing the streets and putting streetlights in the neighborhood."

Another woman who admitted an initial reluctance to get involved pointed to Judy Vera as her role model, saying that the example of Judy's involvement had grown on her. How, then, did Judy get involved? "I was born in Brownsville," she told me, "and didn't know the Cameron Park colonia was located just outside the city limits next to a golf course. I was really shocked to see what the conditions were there, especially no water. How can people live without water? I asked a lady, 'Where do you take a bath?' And she told me, 'Well, when it gets dark you put up a tarp and get behind there and get a bucket and take a bath.' I thought I'd never do that. I'd be scared, you know, of animals. We worked real hard for water and sewer. If you saw the colonia then and you saw it now, it's different. You wouldn't recognize what it was when we started working on things there." It was the visual experience of conditions in the colonia, combined with the words of colonia residents, that motivated Judy to get involved. For some of those in her sphere of influence, however, it was Judy's exemplary conduct that moved them. Judy is *their* Carmen.

When Judy first got involved, the issues were unpaved streets, sewer systems, and lack of running water. When I visited Browns-

ville, however, the leaders were mainly talking about education, wages, job training, and health care. In each of these areas, Valley Interfaith had identified the community's concerns in the same way, by building up from one-on-one conversations to house meetings and research committees and eventually to programmatic proposals and accountability sessions. Stories about the original fights for decent conditions in the colonias continue to reinforce the sense that ordinary citizens have of their own agency. To hear the stories retold, even as a newly involved participant, is to be symbolically integrated into a group that has the capacity to achieve significant change and the moral authority to demand a hearing. It is also to affirm the desirability of overcoming the attitudes and habits of bowing and scraping in the presence of one's alleged superiors.<sup>47</sup> As our meeting in Brownsville drew to a close, Christine spoke of the stories of past victories as "construction with dead stones that you put in the ground" and build on. But the current leaders, she said, are "the living stones. Really our best achievement, I think, is the leaders."

Elizabeth later commented that one of the leaders who had spoken at the meeting in Brownsville, "the one with the rosary," was still undocumented. "None of her kids have papers either. She's almost at a 4.0 average. She did an internship at the capital, and the supervisor there said that when she graduated she wanted her to go work for her. [The supervisor] kept pushing her and pushing her, and she finally had to admit that she didn't have papers. And [the supervisor] said 'Well, we'll figure something out.' You don't have to be born in the U.S. to do the work of a citizen. You still have the responsibility. Father Jerry says she's involved in all sorts of organizations in the church. He says, 'You have been released from all your obligations in the church. All I want you to do is Valley Interfaith.' At the end she was the one leading the charge."

In a situation where many undocumented immigrants have become heavily integrated into the life of a community, as they have in Brownsville, Father Jerry's concept of a citizen applies to anyone

who has a share of responsibility for social and institutional conditions, regardless of whether the state grants that person the right to vote. The moral concept of a citizen can outstrip the corresponding legal category. Anyone who enters so deeply into a community's life that he or she is reasonably taken by others to be partly responsible for that community's arrangements is a citizen in the moral sense. Father Jerry was not being unreasonable in treating his parishioner in this way. Neither was she being unreasonable in taking it to be her duty to do the work of a citizen. It belongs to the work of other citizens, who already have the legally recognized right to vote, to bring application of the legal category into line with realities of social life in the borderlands.

Her supervisor, her pastor, and many members of her community treat the woman with the rosary as someone with a share of responsibility for communal arrangements. They recognize her as someone with the authority to make claims on others and as someone with the moral authority to lead.<sup>48</sup> When she speaks about her experiences, expresses her concerns, or offers reasons for a proposal, she is *entitled* to gain a hearing from others. Hers is one of the voices to be taken into account. In some cases, hers is a voice to which other members of the community *ought to defer*. This is what it means for her to have the authority of a leader, which in a citizens' organization must be earned by demonstrating the reliability of what one says. The authority of a leader is earned entitlement to deference. A citizens' organization without relations of authority cannot perform its representative functions. If the relations of authority within a citizens' organization are not earned in practices of democratic accountability, the organization lacks the very sort of authority it claims for itself in public settings.

When an organizer like Elizabeth goes into a community in search of leaders, the existing patterns of deference speak volumes. Which people in the community are already treated by others as reliable and wise, as well as courageous, just, and spirited? Alinsky



pointed out that authority relations within any given community tend to be patchy. Within a particular circle of associates, one person will have earned respect on some topics, but not on others. It is rare that one "stumbles across what might be defined as a complete leader—a person who has a following of forty or fifty people in every sphere of activity." There are not many Carmen Anayas. At the beginning of the organizing process, one typically finds "a large number of partial leaders or leaders of small groups and particularized aspects of their life." Most of these partial leaders "occupy the most humble roles in the community."<sup>49</sup> Their authority as leaders does not derive from an office or a title that they hold.

The organizer's work of leadership development therefore involves a number of distinct tasks. The first is to identify those who already possess an earned entitlement to deference on some topics. A second task is to widen the range of topics on which these "natural" leaders can speak with genuine authority. Another is to expand the scope of the groups that recognize that authority, thus expanding the influence of someone like the woman with the rosary beyond the circle of her immediate friends and family. Yet another task is to place leaders repeatedly in situations where what they say and do can be held accountable by other leaders and by rank-and-file members of the institutions they represent. This last task is essential, because it increases the likelihood that power being exercised on behalf the organization, in its external as well as its internal dealings, is grounded in *earned* attributions of authority. Ideally, those who come to hold office in the citizens' organization or who speak on behalf of the organization in a public setting have the moral authority to exercise the collective power that in those moments rests in their hands.

The case of Carmen Anaya shows that authority relations within a community are not exhausted by patterns of deference to living persons. All communities are shaped by traditions of some sort, which Alinsky defined as the "collective habits, experiences, cus-

toms, controls, and values of the whole group." In democratic politics, Alinsky wrote, "*the tradition is the terrain.*" It is a fatal error in organizing, he thought, to "indulge in the sterile, wishful thinking of liberals who prefer to start where they would like to begin rather than with actual conditions as they exist."<sup>50</sup> Most of the beliefs, values, and dispositions shared by any group, and taken for granted by default as the starting point of its reasoning on political questions, are acquired through acculturation.

By undergoing novel experiences, considering new evidence, or engaging in reasoning, we can call some of our cultural inheritance into question, reject received commitments, and adopt new ones. But the process of critical reflection would not be aided by confining ourselves to premises already certified by critical reasoning as sound. How, in that case, could one begin? Critical reasoning is itself dependent on a cultural inheritance. Imagining ourselves to be operating with a blank slate, on which we are free to inscribe the deliverances of pure reason, would be self-deceptive. Each of us gains access to a cultural inheritance in the first place by deferring to our elders on a range of matters that is too wide and too deep to be fully acknowledged. To be able to think critically is itself initially to be acculturated into practices of accountability of a particular kind, practices that permit us to call some things into question, but only while taking others, for the moment, as the default starting point of our questioning. So it is with the woman holding the rosary beads, with Carmen Anaya, and with thousands of others in the Rio Grande Valley. And so it is with the rest of us.

Most people currently associated with Valley Interfaith are Roman Catholics. They were raised to treat a particular ecclesial tradition as authoritative on matters of faith and morals. This tradition not only identifies scripture as a source of normative authority but also specifies what books belong to scripture and whose interpretive authority must be taken into account when reading it. The woman with the rosary beads began her moral and political journey

with these commitments in mind. Thinking back to the parish development program, Elizabeth Valdez remembered a session that had focused on Saint Paul's Letters to the Corinthians. The assignment was to write one's own letter, to play the role of Paul with respect to the contemporary church. "What would you tell Brownsville? And they posted their letters on the church. They did that, and they did the Beatitudes, to teach the qualities of leaders. They did the Road to Emmaus as a way to teach individual meetings. Everything was scripture oriented." This process of reading, discussing, and writing was a crucial turning point for the woman with the rosary, Elizabeth said. "In the end, she was like, 'We must do this. We don't have a choice. Why haven't you told us about this before?'"

One morning Elizabeth took me to meet with leaders from the McAllen area at Saint Joseph the Worker Catholic Church. After Father Alfonso Guevara welcomed us, Father Carlos Zuniga began the meeting with a reading from Psalm 44. "We commend ourselves to the Lord as we continue to live this day in the light of God's presence," said Father Alfonso. "We pray in God's name, Amen."

Ninfa Guerra described Valley Interfaith as "the conscience of the business community, in making sure that they don't forget the persons that are going to be affected by the policies they set." For a long time, Ninfa said, the Valley "has been known as a source of cheap labor. The chamber of commerce advertized our low wages and hard work as selling points. We decided we really had to change that culture if we wanted to make enough money to live on."

"Professor Stout," she told me, "you need to know that I'm very selfish. I do it because of what I'm learning. I like that I'm contributing to community, but most of us in here do it because it's developing us, as well, as individuals. I'm from McAllen. I was born here, raised here, and I want to die here. I love McAllen. But I didn't always like the politics. The story of McAllen is really interesting. For twenty years we had a mayor who ruled with an iron

hand. He hated organizers. He told us right up front. He also hated unions, the reason being that he made his money off the backs of the poor. And to tell you the type of person he was, he was placed in a committee that oversaw the use of pesticides in agriculture, and his response to why everyone was making such a big deal about pesticides was, 'Well, they're going to die anyway. So, what's the big deal, right?'"

Ninfa met with a similar response when dealing with other sorts of programs. Students enrolled in a training program to become dental and medical assistants came out making only six dollars an hour. When Valley Interfaith challenged that figure as inadequate, the medical establishment's response was that the market sets wages.<sup>51</sup> As Ninfa now sees it, wage levels are the product of the decisions made by everyone who participates in the market. Inaction on the part of workers and self-interested behavior on the part of CEOs were jointly responsible for low wages in the Valley. Organizing the working poor to challenge the CEOs is a way of participating in the market with open eyes.

At the beginning of the learning process, workers are inclined to defer to CEOs as authorities on all matters pertaining to the market. CEOs do tend to know more about the operations of markets than others do. The CEO's informational advantage derives both from prior education, the organizational resources of the corporation, and the ability to hire academic experts, including economists, to produce information of a certain kind. To level the informational playing field, the citizens' organization provides educational opportunities to those who participate in it and procures help from experts of its own. Paul Osterman, the author of one of the best books on IAF and a professor of management at MIT, has been especially valuable in contributing his expertise to Valley Interfaith. Ernesto Cortés deepened his own grasp of economics by spending the 1997–98 academic year as a visiting professor at MIT in the Department of Urban Studies and Planning. The seminars that Cortés

runs for organizers and leaders in the Southwest region are intended in part to provide ordinary citizens with access to information and expertise that has not been filtered through the biases of big business. Equal access to information and direct access to experts tend to democratize the distribution of intellectual authority.

The need for this sort of redistribution is underlined by the work in the economics of information for which Joseph Stiglitz, currently a professor of economics at Columbia University, won the Nobel Prize in 2001. Stiglitz and one of his associates demonstrated in a paper published in 1986 that an unequal distribution of information, such as that which typically puts workers at a disadvantage in relation to their actual or prospective employers, skews the ways in which markets operate, not least of all in the setting of wages.<sup>52</sup> Orthodox economic models that abstract from asymmetries of information suggest that the way to achieve higher levels of employment is to lower wages. The work of Stiglitz and others implied that abstraction of this sort has tended to produce policy advice that advanced the interests of those already benefiting from a high degree of access to information. IAF organizers have attempted to redress asymmetries of economic information directly through education, but also by giving considerable weight to the findings of economists who focus empirically on existing economies that are imperfect in various ways.<sup>53</sup>

IAF's practice of consulting experts of its own choosing when crafting its policy proposals is part of a worldwide shift in the distribution of information that has been underway for some time now. As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has argued,

A series of social forms has emerged . . . to create forms of knowledge transfer and social mobilization that proceed independently of the actions of corporate capital and the nation-state system (and its international affiliates and guarantors). These social forms rely on strategies, visions, and horizons for globaliza-

tion on behalf of the poor that can be characterized as “grassroots globalization” or, put in a slightly different way, as “globalization from below.”<sup>54</sup>

The network of organizers and citizens’ groups Ernie Cortés supervises is itself part of IAF’s national and international networks, which are themselves exchanging information with other similar networks around the world. Globalization from below represents a significant challenge to the authority-claims of many experts holding appointments at prestigious universities.

Appadurai has referred to globalization from below as “cellular democratization at work” and as an “exercise in capacity building.” The term *cellular*, as Appadurai employs it, contrasts with *vertebrate*. Cellular democratization involves the creation of relationships among citizens’ groups that permit them to be connected to one another and to exchange information without relying on a vertical, top-down, unidirectional model of authority. It is characteristic of cellular democratization that the groups involved in it do not feel bound to think of themselves, or to present themselves to others, as representatives of a national or international “movement” or as incarnations of a single idea or principle. In contrast with the “great progressive movements of the past few centuries,” cellular democratic networks tend to build “solidarity from smaller convergences of interest,” in “a more ad hoc, inductive, and context-sensitive manner.”<sup>55</sup> I am suggesting that Alinsky’s decision to found a *network* of citizens’ organizations can be viewed as a harbinger of this contemporary global development and that latter-day IAF groups can now be seen as part of a much bigger democratic transformation that affects authority relations of many kinds, including those that pertain to expertise and political legitimacy.<sup>56</sup>

It should not be surprising, then, that in tackling the issues currently on Valley Interfaith’s agenda, the organization has repeatedly drawn on the experience of other citizens’ groups elsewhere. IAF

has developed an approach to education known as “Alliance Schools,” which applies the basic democratic practices of face-to-face interaction, coalition building, and accountability within a school district. The “alliance” being constructed as a basis for successful education is meant to bring together parents, teachers, local businesses, and other constituencies into a collaborative and continuing exercise in problem solving and mutual accountability. The approach was first hammered out by COPS in San Antonio and later spread to many other communities that are part of the IAF network. Similarly, the job training program promoted by Valley Interfaith, which is known as the Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement (VIDA), is also modeled on a COPS program called Project Quest. The “living wage” campaign in McAllen took inspiration from an initiative in Baltimore by an IAF affiliate known as Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD).

Consuelo Maheshwari has been principal of Sam Houston Elementary School in McAllen since it became an Alliance school about fifteen years ago. “That’s when everything happened,” Connie told me. “We really became different people, as far as how we saw our role as teachers. Once we started with house meetings, we got to know the real issues of the community, the real issues the children were facing. We had students coming in our offices, saying that if they sell a package of cocaine, they can afford to buy a TV. We had children in very dire, horrible situations. When we started talking to the parents, they said, ‘We’re scared.’ Safety was one of the major issues they were concerned about. It was education and the safety of the children.

“We didn’t have a playground, and behind the school was where a lot of the drug dealings were going down. So then we brought community leaders into play: the city leaders, the chief of police, the commissioners, and the mayor. We started to have one-on-ones with them. And we started to have the teachers and the parents meeting with these individuals, talking about what the issues were

impacting the students. At that point, we also partnered with St. Joseph the Worker. So now we were a much larger force.

“I remember the first accountability session. After we had done the research, we all teamed together and we invited these key leaders—the mayor, the chief of police, the superintendent, the board members, and commissioners—to come in and talk. And the school was packed, to the point where I started to get calls from people, saying, ‘You know, Connie, I know your board members, and they don’t like it. They don’t like Valley Interfaith.’ That was a very good sign that they were starting to respect us and they were starting to be afraid. And sure enough, from that meeting, we got four more police officers assigned. The City of McAllen and the district partnered and made new streets all around the school.”

IAF organizers teach that it is crucial for a citizens’ organization to win recognition from the political establishment as a source of power and moral authority. Both the power and the authority are rooted in the organization’s ability to demonstrate that it is recognized by those it claims to represent as entitled to speak *for them* in public debate and at the negotiating table. Some degree of recognition of the organization’s representative status in the eyes of those being represented comes first. It emerges initially in one-on-one conversations, house meetings, and neighborhood walks, and is raised to consciousness when individual citizens who have engaged in these practices see each other coming together in public assemblies and accountability sessions, where what leaders say on behalf of those being represented can be tested against a shared experience of the interactions that informed the content of the group’s demands and publicly stated reasoning.

But public assemblies and accountability sessions must make the organization’s representative authority visible even to people who have not participated directly in the organization’s internal practices of consultation and decision making. The need to achieve this second sort of recognition dictates the initially strident tone of



many IAF public events. The organization must not only get the attention of public officials but must also give evidence that its constituent institutions and many of the people associated with them are prepared to resist those officials in publicly visible ways—in particular, in ways that might well cost those officials something, whether it be a policy they favor, the image of themselves they wish to project to the public, or the office they hold. In other words, the organization must make clear to public officials that it is a source of power capable of frustrating their own intentions. To achieve a relationship of mutual recognition with public officials and other elites in the broader political community, a citizens' organization has to put officials in a position of needing to negotiate with it.

"What we gained was a seat at the negotiating table," said Connie. "The other thing that happened was a change in us as teachers. We realized that the parents were the true teachers, because we learned so much from them as we walked the streets, as we partnered with them. We would meet with the commissioners, and it was our parents, like Rosa Gutierrez, who were the ones making the demands and understood the history of their area and the issues."

The organization's internal process of consultation also required potential spokespersons to earn their entitlement to speak for others in a particular way. This mainly entailed listening to and demonstrating an empathetic understanding of those they sought to represent. The internal participatory process permitted someone like Rosa Gutierrez, a parent, to be recognized as an authoritative spokesperson by others within the organization.

The transformations I have just analyzed are democratic in tendency. They involve earning recognition of one's representative authority from others on the basis of one's responsiveness to their experiences, concerns, proposals, and reasons. When the citizens' organization wins recognition from public officials, it constitutes itself as a legitimate counterpower over against those officials, not

only as an agent capable of frustrating an official's hopes and plans, but also as a group of citizens to whom the official owes an account of his or her decisions. The result is the formation of a public of accountability.

By constituting enduring publics of accountability, citizens' organizations can make the activity of holding officials responsible a perpetual, rather than merely episodic, affair. The same interactive process also increases the chances that citizens will vote and will inform themselves and one another about matters of public concern. Officials who are interacting with the leaders of an organization like Valley Interfaith quickly acquire the sense of being held accountable to citizens on a day-to-day basis.

It also becomes clear to all concerned, however, that those speaking for the citizens' organization can themselves be held accountable, both by the officials whose decisions they seek to influence or contest and by those for whom they claim to speak. A public of accountability opens up a zone of interaction within which officials and the spokespersons of citizens' groups hold each other accountable, while simultaneously being held accountable in various ways by the ordinary citizens being represented. The spokesperson who, acting on behalf of others, holds officials accountable in meetings of various kinds expects to be held accountable in turn by the ordinary citizens on whose behalf she speaks, as well as by the officials she addresses. Democracy resides in these relations of accountability.

"Basically," Connie said, "I'm from Las Milpas. It is one of the colonias. It's south of Pharr. I was born and raised there, and go back every chance I get. My father still lives there. My mother lived there. My mother organized there. I learned a lot from her."

"Who is your mother?"

"Carmen Anaya. My mother and the church are what got me involved. Until a few years ago, when she passed away, she was just

there every single day. Her presence was very much a part of Valley Interfaith, the church, and the community.”

Ernie Cortés is fond of quoting Jaroslav Pelikan’s distinction between tradition, as “the living faith of the dead,” and traditionalism, as “the dead faith of the living.”<sup>57</sup> Stories about Carmen Anaya are retold in part to reaffirm the shared values of Valley Interfaith, but they also serve as an example for a generation in search of guidance concerning how leadership is to be earned and exercised. The life presented in the stories is an example *of* democratic moral authority and an example *for* those who wish to acquire it.

A woman who acquires even a fraction of the moral authority Carmen Anaya had in the eyes of the wider community can meet with opposition and constraint at home. Some husbands put their foot down, and when they do, their wives have hard decisions to make. Elizabeth mentioned a man from San Juan parish. “His wife went to national IAF training, and he went berserk. He was going nuts without her and he asked her to come back.” She decided to keep the peace and accede to his wishes.

“That was one of the worst national training experiences I’ve ever had,” Ernie said. “I got so mad at her. ‘You know,’ I told her, ‘you let the men in your life hold you back: your father, your husband, your children.’” She remained somewhat involved after that but “never realized her potential.”

Renee Wizig-Barrios suggested that “the women seem to have been the strength of the leadership” in the Valley. Elizabeth agreed. Renee asked Elizabeth whether there has generally been “a *machista* reaction to that?”

“Rosa had to take Father Bart with her to go talk to her husband to be able to let her go even to Austin,” Elizabeth said. “She had a baby when she started getting involved, and her husband would hold her back.” Christine mentioned a woman who was the secretary at a church in San Antonio. “She could have been COPS presi-

dent. She was attractive, she was smart enough, but she just didn't make the commitment. Her husband didn't want her to do it, and she didn't challenge him."

These cases were memorable in part because they are less common than one might expect. It was Renee's experience, when she was organizing in El Paso, "that not only would the women change, but their marriages would change because of them becoming leaders. It would create real tension, but in the end it would create a transformation in that relationship."

On the last day of my tour through the Valley, Elizabeth, Christine, and Ernie introduced me to a number of the local leaders from Las Milpas. Elizabeth had posted some photographs on a bulletin board in a meeting room in a church there. Christine, fighting back tears at first and then shifting to laughter, identified a picture of Senator Hutchison on a walking tour of Elida Bocanegra's colonia, with the senator's pants rolled up comically above the ankles. Another picture showed the colonia roads at their muddiest. Next, an attorney was supposed to make a PowerPoint presentation on the colonias, but he had been held up in court, so Elizabeth took us through it. One of the slides depicted Carmen Anaya, standing near an outhouse, "speaking with her hands," as Elizabeth put it. In another, Mrs. Anaya and all of the other Valley leaders are standing behind the governor, witnessing his signature on a bill. "Carmen was pushing his hand, saying, 'Sign!'"

I heard a good deal from various leaders over the course of the next hour. One story illustrated a division between north and south McAllen. People on the poorer south side wanted tax money to go to El Milagro Clinic. Many people on the wealthier north side were saying, "Let the south side take care of themselves." One leader recalled a story from one of the house meetings that helped bridge the gap: "One lady had a maid from Mexico. She would go there on Sunday night, pick her up, and take her back on Friday afternoon. She paid her, what, fifty dollars, sixty dollars for the whole week?"

Well, this maid had TB and the family never knew. She was taking care of the newborn baby in this family. The baby developed TB in the spinal cord and died. So we are all connected." The story was vintage IAF. The moral was that the enlightened self-interest of relatively wealthy people in the United States overlaps with the interests of Mexicans. Intertwining lives disclose a common good.

Near the end of the meeting, the attorney who was supposed to have made the PowerPoint presentation arrived, apologizing for being late. Ernie asked him to identify himself. "I'm Eddie," he said.

"And who was your mother?" Ernie asked, prompting him to answer for my benefit.

"Carmen Anaya," Eddie said.