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CLAREMONT McKENNA COLLEGE

TRANSFORMING THE RELIGIOUS PARADIGM: A STUDY OF FEMALE OPPORTUNISM AND EMPOWERMENT THROUGH LATIN AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM

SUBMITTED TO

PROFESSOR GASTÓN ESPINOSA

AND

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BY

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FOR

SENIOR THESIS

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Preface

It is safe to say that my Catholic education and socially liberal upbringing were not the most conducive environments for understanding evangelicalism. While the born again experience and the idea of literally interpreting the Bible were relatively familiar concepts, I am not afraid to admit that my understanding of speaking in tongues and faith healing were somewhat biased. My desire to have a more legitimate understanding of Evangelicals has been the driving force of this thesis.

After four years of studying Latin America from an international relations and religious studies perspective, it has come to my attention that the stereotypes associated with this religious phenomenon are surprisingly wide-held. While Latin America's religious transformation seems somewhat omnipresent within academia, there seems to be less of an understanding of the individual conditions triggering conversion. In taking a micro-analytical approach to this topic, the thesis challenges many of the stereotypes associated with Evangelicalism in Latin America.

Considering the fact that the majority of evangelical converts are women, I thought that narrowing my research on the female conversion experience would provide a unique insight to understanding the entirety of this movement. The hybrid model of this thesis, which combines both the context and individual accounts of conversion, makes clear that evangelicalism is much more than a religious fad. Rather, evangelical conversion offers a type of women's empowerment that resonates what we in the U.S. might see as a type of feminist agency. While there remains a glass ceiling for women in Latin America's religious marketplace, even with these limitations, Evangelicalism offers

a net gain for many women in search of stronger families, sober husbands, healing, and new leadership opportunities in the church and society. The process of writing this thesis has erased any previous stereotypes and has provided me with a more full understanding of Latin American religious culture.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank Professor William Ascher. Over the last four years, Bill has not only advised me on several academic decisions but, perhaps more importantly, he has taught me the importance of challenging myself. Bill recognized my initial apprehension in the classroom and has subtly cultivated it into an academic persona I am proud to acknowledge, and for this, I am truly grateful.

I credit Profesora Maria Martinez for bringing to life the incredible and captivating world of Latin America. Profesora's irresistible quirkiness created an opportune environment that made learning the Spanish language exceptionally enjoyable. As my language skills progressed Profesora gradually exposed me to the greater perplexities of Hispanic culture. She has uncovered the magnitudes of ethnicity, race, and has taught me to embrace humanity. Put simply, Profesora Maria Martinez has changed the way I see the world.

I would also like to acknowledge Professor Roderic Camp, without whom I would have never arrived to this point in my academic career. Professor Camp's unmatched knowledge on the relationship between church and state in Latin America has fostered my persistent academic intrigue of the topic. Outside of the classroom, Professor Camp's hospitality and carefree demeanor exhibit the characteristics of a wonderful role model.

I would also like to thank Professor Darryl Smith who, within a minute of our first class together, threw everything I thought I knew about religion out the window. From exceptionally difficultly lessons of phenomenology to simply bizarre discussions of holy folly, Professor Smith has taught me to appreciate both the madness and the beauty of the

human condition. From his teaching I have learned to endure the inexplicabilities of the world and to not take anything life too seriously.

Last, but certainly not least, I would like to acknowledge Professor Gaston Espinosa. While I regret not having established a relationship with Professor Espinosa earlier in my collegiate career, I am unconditionally grateful for the role he has played in augmenting my understanding of the role of religion in our contemporary globalized world. In the midst of chairing the establishment of a new Religious Studies department and teaching upper and graduate level classes, Professor Espinosa selflessly accommodated and dedicated himself to taking on this thesis. Additionally, as one of the inaugural religious studies dual majors, I would sincerely like to acknowledge the astounding contributions Professor Espinosa has made to the creation of this important department. I speak for a number of other students when I say that Professor Espinosa has played a positively revolutionary role in my academic experience.

Finally, I owe the most special of thanks to my parents. Their unconditional love and support is something I am reminded of and appreciate every day. Their incredible dedication to the fulfillment of life is a constant source of inspiration.

Introduction

"Latin America is a Catholic region, but there's no reason to assume that this need always be so."[1]

From a contemporary international perspective, there are two truly global religious movements of enormous vitality. One is a resurgent Islam, the other Pentecostal Protestantism. What makes the growth of Pentecostal Protestantism so fascinating is the fact that it's transforming a region where the Catholic Church has for five centuries reigned supreme in its religious monopoly. While the first century of proselytizing in Latin America was relatively minute (constituting only 1 percent of the overall population in 1950), Pentecostalism began to show signs of its potential vitality in the 1960s and 1970s.[2] Evangelical conversion became more pervasive in 1980s, and by the early 1990s church membership included over 50 million followers (11 percent of the population).[3] Today there are over 90 million Protestants in Latin America, the vast majority of which are Pentecostal and Charismatic.[4] What seemed like a seemingly insignificant movement before World War II has grown to include thirteen percent of the entire Latin American population.[5] The six-fold growth of evangelicalism from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century has led many scholars like David Stoll to ask, "Is Latin America Turning Protestant?"[6]

A study completed in 1996, estimated that approximately 8,000 to 10,000 people were converting to evangelical churches every day.[7] It has been suggested that on an average Sunday there may be more Protestants attending church than Catholics in some Latin American countries. Within this same survey, it was estimated that by 2010 one of

every three Latin Americans might be Protestant.[8] The Catholic monopoly of colonial and early post independence times, and even the secure hegemony of the first half of the twentieth century, is now under threat in most countries.[9] Although the predictions of Catholicism's demise are still considered premature, these rates of evangelical conversion imply a transformation of Latin America so basic and fundamental that it deserves to be called revolutionary.[10]

Clearly, Latin America's religiosity is in flux. The 2006 figures from the World Christian Database indicated that Pentecostals now represent nearly thirty percent, or about 150 million, of Latin Americans of 560 million people.[11] This Pentecostal movement is characterized by being fast-growing, mostly lower class, and organized in a plethora of indigenous, autonomous, and completely independent denominations. Interestingly, membership is predominantly female. Of the 1,990 Pentecostal/Charismatic denominations and councils in Latin America, 1,767 are indigenous or led by Latin Americans themselves with no administrative ties to the U.S. Paying particular attention to the role of women in this movement, this thesis will seek a better understanding of Latin America's transforming religious paradigm.

Purpose and Research Questions

The overarching objective of this thesis is to understand why Latin Americans are switching to Pentecostal forms of Christianity. The primary question of this thesis analysis is why are so many Latin Americans converting to Pentecostal churches? The research in this thesis challenges macro-level analyses of evangelical conversion and looks for a more in depth understanding of this religious phenomenon. In an attempt to

unveil the enigmatic face of evangelicalism in Latin America, this study will identify some of the powerful motivations of conversion and evaluate how poor and working class evangelicalism alters the domestic and social lives of its members, especially women. My hope is that by paying a particular attention to gender roles, this thesis will reveal one of the unique appeals of evangelicalism in contemporary Latin America society.

Building off of this research, I question how the conversion experience changes according to gender? The major explanations of conversion – marginalization, deprivation (status and other), and even individual deviance – often exclude the issue of gender entirely, or separate the male and female experience from one another.[12] Within Latin America's traditionally segregated society, the household is considered to be the most important locus of social interaction between males and females.[13] Taking advantage of the more recent anthropological and sociological fieldwork studies like Elizabeth Brusco's Reformation of Machismo, this thesis will focus on the grassroots components of evangelicalism. This more personal approach will make clear how religiously affiliated decisions made in the "private realm" generates a greater positive social change for women in limited but nevertheless important ways. While evangelical codes of conduct reallocates many of the negative consumptions of machismo culture, it is my belief that there is a greater transcendent gender variable and set of reasons fueling female conversion to Evangelicalism. In the midst of Latin America's changing religious marketplace, the ultimate question this thesis is, what, if any, female empowerment and leadership opportunities arise from evangelical conversion? Insofar as evangelicalism serves to the needs of a growing number of Latin American women, this thesis will

measure the degree to which female engagement in church activities contributes to the power and attraction of Evangelicalism in Latin America This thesis is careful not to insinuate that evangelical conversion is sought after by women who are simply eager to gain access to a man's world, or that conversion helps them to overcome all of Latin Americas deeply embedded patriarchic values. Rather, my thesis asserts that in developing the leadership skills of women, evangelicalism realigns male and female values to become more focused on female needs in the public and private spheres and less on individual male machismo consumption of resources, and thus challenges normative gender subordination in Latin America.

Method and Approach

Understanding the grassroots components of Latin American evangelicalism is crucial to this thesis. In an attempt to depict evangelicalism most accurately, I have focused on specific case studies in Brazil and Colombia. These two countries have been selected because they represent two very different spectrums of evangelicalism in Latin America. Of Brazil's 192 million inhabitants, 61 percent identify as Roman Catholic and 29 percent identify as Protestants, 24 percent of which is Pentecostal or Charismatic. Although Brazil has largest number Catholic in the world (117 million), the percentage of Catholics has been dropping at an accelerating rate (89% in 1980 to 61% in 2006).[14] Of the roughly 50 million Protestants in Brazil, eight-in-ten identify as members of Pentecostal churches.[15] Large Churches like the Assemblies of God, Four-Square Gospel Church, and the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God have established evangelicalism primary via Pentecostalism as a powerful force in Brazil, with trademark

media empires, its own national soccer team, and significant political representation in all branches of government.

At the other end of the spectrum, evangelical churches in the Andean region are typically more modest. In Colombia, 91 percent of the 42 million citizens are Roman Catholic. In 2006, 5 percent of Colombians identified themselves as Protestant and 3.3 percent identified as Protestant Pentecostal.[16] However, it is important to note that estimates of the number of evangelical converts in Colombia are reasonably hard to obtain. The limited growth is due to the rise of the Catholic Charismatic movement, which claims upwards of 25 percent of Colombian Catholics. Due to the potential social risks that are associated with evangelical affiliation, churches rarely keep good records of membership.[17] Thus, the actual number might be larger than what has actually been recorded.

In light of these statistics, it appears as though Brazil and Colombia are witnessing two very different religious phenomena. However, as the case studies included in this thesis will reveal, the motivating factors and internal workings of the church are relatively quite the same. An examination of these parallels will allow the analysis portions of this study to transmit to the greater Latin American context.

What it means to be Evangelical

"Evangelicalism," which is a movement based on shared experiences, refers to a subset of Protestant Christianity that is distinguished by both doctrinal and practical characteristics rather than denominational affiliation. In short, Evangelicals are not limited to any one particular denomination, but rather are found in many denominations.

In Latin America, *evangélico* can refer to any non-Catholic Protestant. Despite the considerable array of denominations, missions, and splinter groups that argue over doctrine and styles of worship, they all share a common focus on personal conversion and having what they call a born-again relationship with Jesus Christ, based on John 3:3 where Jesus told Nicodemus that he "must be born-again to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." This experience unites and binds most Evangelicals together in a transdenominational movement in Latin America. In Latin America, most mainline Protestants, such as Lutherans, Baptists, and Presbyterians, along with the more theologically "radical" denominations, such as the Assemblies of God and Four-Square Gospel church in addition to virtually all of the independent Protestant churches, identify themselves as *evangélicos*. Thus, the vast majority of Protestants in Latin America fall under the evangelical category.

Even though there are three main varieties of Protestants – mainline, Evangelical, and Pentecostal – scholars often classified Pentecostal denominations under the Evangelical title, because they both stress conversion.[18] Historically speaking, Protestantism is best defined as a tradition distinguished by three beliefs, including (1) the complete reliability and final authority of the Bible, (2) the need to be saved through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, often experienced in terms of being "born again," and (3) the importance of spreading this message of salvation to every nation and person, a duty often referred to as the Great Commission.[19] Theologically, evangelicalism differs from mainline Protestantism by placing a greater emphasis on the literal interpretation of Scripture, the centrality of Bible over sacrament and creeds in worship, and the decentralized nature of the church. Organizationally, Evangelical churches are much

more decentralized than historic Protestant denominations, with little to no hierarchy above the local pastor.[20] Moreover, missionary commitment and the responsibility of each member to spread the faith also constitutes an important dimension of evangelicalism, some say the sine qua non of the movement.[21]

It is important to recognize that while all Pentecostals are Evangelicals, not all Evangelicals are Pentecostals. The key distinction that separates Pentecostals from other Evangelicals is the belief in the spiritual gifts and praying in tongues. Pentecostals believe that God, acting through the Holy Spirit, continues to play a direct, active role in everyday life.[22] They identify visible signs of the Holy Spirit (called "sign gifts") in one's life, through the speaking of unknown tongues (xenolalia and glossolalia), healings, working miracles, and exorcisms, among others. Pentecostals also differ from many conservative Evangelicals in their belief in the ordination of women in the ministry. Lastly, unlike the historic Protestant churches, which have appealed primarily to the middle classes, Pentecostalism in Latin America has grown most dramatically amongst urban and rural workers.[23]

Evangelicalism and fundamentalism have a complex relationship.[24] While there is some overlap (some evangelicals can be considered fundamentalists in doctrinal beliefs), evangelicalism is an older and broader tendency within Protestantism, while the "fundamentalist" label has applied to anti-modernist white Protestants, largely conservative Baptists and Presbyterians.[25] Evangelicals and Pentecostals are not normally classified as Fundamentalists because although they affirm the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith (i.e. deity of Christ, resurrection, virgin birth, inerrancy of the Bible

and Christ's second coming), they often have a more lenient understanding of these doctrines, and are not exceptionally opposed to modernity and engage in social action.[26]

Another relevant theme associated with religious transformation in Latin America concerns the word "charismatic." The "Charismatic Movement" describes the adoption of typical Pentecostal beliefs like the baptism on the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, and healing, within historic denominations. The term generally refers to Christians who have experienced, or are open to, the "in-filling" of the Holy Spirit but who are not members of classical Pentecostal denominations, such as the Assemblies of God. Charismatics usually Catholics, mainline Protestants, or non-Pentecostal Evangelicals (i.e. Baptists) who either: (1) describe themselves as "charismatic Christians," or (2) they describe themselves as "Pentecostal Christians" (but do not belong to Pentecostal denominations), or (3) speak in tongues at least several times a year but do not belong to Pentecostal denominations.[27]

In line with the breadth method of this thesis, I have adopted what I consider to be the most all-encompassing definition of what it means to be "evangelical" in Latin America. An Evangelical, drawing on Elizabeth Brusco's definition, "designates a religious movement and a group of believers who, despite developing significant differences among themselves over the years, manifest a number of common traits and share common identity vis-á-vis outsiders."[28]

Chapter Framework

The first chapter of this thesis focuses on three macro-level theories of evangelical expansion in Latin America: invasion from abroad, economic opportunism, and political

authoritarianism. Some scholars believe that forces external to Latin America, such as foreign missionary activity, and economic and political penetration, explain Evangelical growth. Other theorists observe the breakdown of traditional agrarian structures, industrial and migration growth, and social uprootedness, and propose that evangelical growth is correlated to socioeconomic changes within Latin America. This perspective suspects that economic incentives are a chief motivating factor for conversion. The political authoritarian explanation believes that evangelical ideology, more specifically Pentecostal ideology, uncomfortably supports authoritarian political regimes. Proponents of this theory argue that evangelical growth had been a result of a tactical Pentecostal efforts to whose open support of authoritarian regimes throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s garnered support. In a thorough assessment of these theories, this chapter will allude to the Catholic biases that often guide many critical interpretations. While these popular explanations do in fact reveal some degree of truth, I will argue that they are inadequate to explain why women convert because they do not take specific account of gender disparities of this religious movement.

Chapter two focuses on the role of the born again experience and its relation to evangelical conversion. Pentecostals strongly believe that good health is granted to those with good faith. Thus, divine healings, revelations, and exorcisms are considered a regular part of the religious experience. Recognizing the fact that not all conversion accounts are the same, this chapter calls attention to the underlying trends that relate to most individual experiences. The potential to be born again is not only appealing to those considering conversion and a fresh start to life, but it also a significant component of evangelicalism within Latin American culture.

The third chapter considers the role of the Bible in altering the lives of converts, especially women. For insiders, as well as outsiders, the identifying feature of evangelical religion is the centrality of the Bible in worship and their daily lives. A literal reading of the Bible not only dictates their beliefs, but strict moral guidelines and a code of personal conduct serves as a resource and vehicle for leadership development via small groups. My aim is to focus on how the evangelical faith is specifically tailored to the cultural realities of Latin America. Within this chapter, it will become clear that evangelical conversion is not simply a matter of changing one's religion label, but one's values and social ethics. In particular, this chapter will analyze how evangelical conversion, through an adoption of the ascetic strict ethical beliefs rooted in a literal interpretation of the Bible, empowers women to help alter the male perception of his familial obligations to be more in line with his domestic female counterpart. While Pentecostalism reinscribes other notions of patriarchy (i.e. male leadership of the home), this sense of agency and empowerment is nonetheless attractive to many women who grew up in the Catholic Church. Women in the Pentecostal movement can serve as pastors, bishops, directors, seminary professors, and can even run for political office.[29]

The forth chapter provides a detailed account of the leadership and structural components of evangelical churches. The included case studies provide a unique look at how evangelicalism adapts to the innate domestic characteristics and needs of women and creates an inviting social realm for female participation. Here, it becomes clear that the organization of evangelical church services and activities cultivates important leadership opportunities for women. This thesis suggests that this type of religious engagement

strengthens the evangelical movement and, perhaps more importantly, enhances the lives women in Latin American.

The final chapter of this thesis reviews many of the prevailing stereotypes concerning Latin America's changing religious marketplace and demographic. Following an application of evangelicalism adherence to Latin American culture this section will discuss how the notion of "progress" may pan out into the future of Latin America. It is my belief that domestic concepts of progress will not only have an immediate and positive effect on the home, but will eventually provide a significant route for women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or marginalized communities to achieve social and political visibility throughout Latin America.

[1] David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), xiii.
[2] Ibid.
[3] David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 50.
[4] Gastón Espinosa, "The Pentecostalization of Latin America and U.S. Latino Christianity," *The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 26 (Fall 2004): 262-292
[5] Barbara J. Fraser, *In Latin America, Catholics Down, church's credibility up, poll says.* [Online] Rev. june 23, 2005. Available: http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0503707.htm. [April 17, 2010].
[6] Stoll, Title.
[7] Brian K. Goonan, "The New Look of the Churches" *Latin American Press* 28, no. 35 (September, 1996): 2-3.
[8] Edward L. Cleary and Hannah Stewart-Gambino, *In Conflict and Competition* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992), 1-16.
[9] Paul Freston, *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Latin America* (Oxford: University Press, 2008), 13.
[10] Kurt Brown, *Evangelism and Apostasy: The Evolution and Impact of Evangelicals in Modern Mexico* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 4-5.
[11] Freston, 5.
[12] Elizabeth E. Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995), 9.
[13] Brusco, 5.
[14] Espinosa, 268-270. See Table 2.
[15] "Religious Demographic," *The PEW Forum* [Online] Rev. 2006 Census. Available: http://www.pewforum.org/world-affairs/countries/?CountryID=29.html. [April 17. 2010]. According to the 2000 Brazilian Census, 10.4% of the population belonged to pentecostal denominations, up from 5.4% in the 1991 Census and 3.3% in the 1980 Census. Census figures make clear that new pentecostal groups are growing rapidly. For example, the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God added 1.8 million new members between the 1991 and 2000 Censuses. This represents a six-fold increase in their share of the Brazilian population, from 0.2% in 1991 to 1.2% in 2000.
[16] "Colombia: International Religious Freedom Report 2004," *U.S. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.* [Online] Available: http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2004/35531.htm#.html. [April 17, 2010].
[17] Brusco, 14. SEPAL (*Servicio Evangelizador para America Latina*) verified in 1980 the existence of 190 established evangelical churches in Bogota. It should be noted that this figure leaves out the singlie largest evangelical sect, the Iglesia Pentecostal Unida de Colombia, as well as Seventh-Day Advents, and Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Mormons, because these groups are not part of the Colombian evangelical confederations due to serious doctrinal differences.
[18] Gastón Espinosa, *Religion and the American Presidency* (New York, Columbia University Press, 2009), 24-30.

[19] Mathew 28:19-20, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **[20]** and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

[20] David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?* (Berkley: University California Press, 1990), 3-4.

[21] Brian H. Smith, *Religious Politics in Latin America, Pentecostal vs. Catholic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 101.

[22] “Spirit and Power, A 10-Country Survey of Pentecostals,” *The PEW Forum.* [Online] Rev. October 5, 2006. Available: http://pewforum.org/Christian/Evangelical-Protestant-Churches/Spirit-and-Power.aspx. html. [March 25, 2010].

[23]Pablo A. Derios, “Protestant Fundamentalism in Latin America,” in *Fundamentalism Observed*, ed. Marty and Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 142-96.

[24] Freston, 5-8.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Espinosa, 28.

[27] “Spirit and Power,” *The Pew Forum*, paragraph 6.

[28] Brusco, 3.

[29] Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1995), 163-184.

Chapter One

> *"Blaming evangelical growth on the United States suggests a deep distrust of the poor, an unwillingness to accept the possibility that [Latin America] could turn an imported religion to their own purposes."*[1]

Religious conversion is the single greatest social process changing Latin America.[2] Many historians and social scientists who have been looking at religion in Latin America for the last twenty years agree on several developments: first, that the main religious shift has been from Catholicism to evangelical religion, and second, the major of converts have been nominal, indifferent Catholics.[3] Interestingly, the steady growth of evangelicalism has coincided with the serious rise of internal struggles within the Catholic Church. David Stoll accurately states, "What has flung open Latin America to evangelical Protestantism is the Catholic Church's inability to decentralize its system of authority."[4] In order to restore the unity of Catholic Church, and to make it more competitive within the religious marketplace, the Vatican has been insisting that greater emphasis be given to spiritual rather than political issues and to obedience to church authority.[5] Liberation Theology and the Base Communities, important from 1960s to the 1980s but now on the wane, were in part attempts to revitalize the Church in the face of new challenges. They met with remarkable success in some instances, but their impact has been limited to local bishops that sponsored them and because their growth has been limited to almost 3 million followers during its peak years in the 1980s.

This chapter will present some of the possible reasons for Pentecostal growth in light of Catholic retrenchment. When looking at some of the literature surrounding this

particular topic, it becomes clear that the growth of evangelicalism, like most other religious movements, cannot simply be looked at through a religious lens. It is more important to be aware of the social, cultural, political, and economic effects that influence and result from religious shifts.

Pertinent to this topic are the recent failures of the Catholic Church. At the 1992 Santo Domingo meeting, Pope John Paul II claimed that when "the faithful cannot find in their [Catholic] pastoral ministers the strong sense of God, [the poor] go to the sects seeking a religious sense of life."[6] This quote clearly exemplifies the Catholic concern for their weakening grip over Latin America's religious marketplace. David Stoll's study of Pentecostalism in Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Ecuador in the 1980s confirms a similar view. He believes that Catholic communities, using liberation theology techniques of community organization and political mobilization to achieve social justice, have frightened away many peasants in Central America, especially because these groups have been known to incur the wrath of the military.[7]

Other scholars who fall under the "failures of Catholicism" explanation suggest that Evangelical conversion is stimulated by a "hunger for a more personal spirituality not found in Catholicism."[8] This literature often critiques the centralized authority system, clericalism, and heavily rational theology still present in the Church. It is this dominant structure of teaching that distances Catholic bishops and priests from the popular culture and the poor.[9] Elizabeth Brusco's research on Evangelicalism in Colombia further supports the notion of Catholic rejection as one of the unifying factors of religious conversion. She writes, "The relative cohesion of the [Evangelical or

Pentecostal] movement can be viewed in part as an outcome of their status as renegades. In many respects evangelical religion in Colombia was and is an *opposition movement*.[10]

There are a variety of other explanations, in conjunction with anti-Catholic sentiments, given to the evangelical expansion. This chapter has categorized these concepts into three overarching groups: (1) invasion from abroad, (2) economic opportunism, and (3) legitimization of political authority. It is important to keep in mind that while there is a degree of truth to each theory, crediting Latin America's religious transformation to a single theory or trend is risky. This chapter will suggests that in order to fully understand evangelicalism in Latin America, one must take into account these theories along with a more personal approach in order to properly asses how religion influences the daily lives of its converts.

Invasion from Abroad

The "invasion theory" suggests that evangelical growth is attributed forces external to Latin America. Some evidence suggests that the United States, through increased missionary activity and economic and political penetration, has facilitated the rise of evangelicalism. As early as the 1940s, Catholic prelates in Latin America warned against the invasion of Protestantism from the United States as a plot to destroy Catholicism. The influx of U.S. Evangelical missionaries in the 1970s and 1980s confirmed these worries amongst Catholic officials in Latin America. North American missionary groups such as Campus Crusade for Christ, World Vision International, the Christian Broadcast Network, and Evangelists like Jimmy Swaggart, brought printed materials, food, clothing, medicines, and radio and television programs as a means of

spreading their message.[11] During the Cold War, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) used these missionary networks in countries such as Chile, Ecuador, Bolivia, and Brazil as a means of gathering information about grassroots movements that were potentially sympathetic to Marxism. Moreover, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was also channeling U.S. foreign aid to church-sponsored socioeconomic projects in several Lain American countries as bulwarks to stop the spread of communism.[12] While the U.S. Senate restricted CIA involvement with church personnel abroad in 1975, these limitations were not in effect for very long. As one of our country's more religious presidents, President Reagan loosened these restrictions in 1981. Amidst U.S. government efforts to block Marxism in Central America, Evangelical church groups in the United States raised private money (with behind-the-scenes encouragement of the White House) to further U.S. interests in the region. In his detailed account of the religious and political relationship during the end of the Cold War decade, Brian Smith explains that, "Evangelical groups channeled relief supplies to the Contras who were fighting the Sandinistas in Nicaragua and also brought in church money to Guatemala to assist in the government-sponsored resettlement of indigenous people into "strategic hamlets" where they would be out of the reach of both Marxist guerrillas and Catholic priests and nuns."[13] In addition to raising money, there is some evidence regarding mysterious "salary supplements" that were distributed to conservative Protestant pastors in Nicaragua from North American Christians with close associations to the U.S. government. Lastly, many scholars note that the preaching tone of American Evangelical groups was heavily laced with anti-communist and anti-atheistic rhetoric in such a way that suggested the United States promoted democracy and true Christianity.[14]

Clearly, the above information provides an ample amount of evidence in favor of the invasion theory. U.S. Evangelical groups, both in the United States and in Latin America, were highly visible supporters of U.S. interests throughout Latin America in the late twentieth century. However, it is important to question to what degree this collaboration was unique to Evangelical Churches alone and if was widespread.

There is in fact an equal amount of cogent evidence that reveals a strikingly similar relationship between the CIA and the Catholic Church in Latin America. Brian Smith explains, "It was not merely those with ties to Evangelical Christianity who were involved. Catholic clergy were cultivated as informants and some Catholic organizations received financial support…As late as 1987 it was reported that some of the programs supported by Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo in Managua, a staunch critic of the Sandinista regime, came indirectly from the CIA."[15] Over the course of the Cold War, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) could not be used in any country with a Marxist government, and it was sometimes tailored to promote U.S. anti-drug campaigns in certain areas of Latin America.[16] What is more is that during the Reagan years (1983-1984), USAID gave $234 million dollars to assist CRS in overseas activities, a considerably higher figure in comparison to the $31 million provided to the eight largest Evangelical aid agencies.[17] It is clear that the accusation that Evangelical growth was the result of foreign aid and interests is not true or at the very least incomplete because the Catholic Church also received similar types of aid.

It should also be noted that the majority of these criticisms are unsurprisingly made by Latin American Catholic clergy and Vatican officials who are intentionally overlooking, in the words of Brian Freston, the "vulnerability of their own Church to the

same charges."[18] Despite the foreign linkages explained above, there appears to be a more indigenous element of evangelicalism that has been able to sustain and thrive in the absence of invasive foreign powers. This helps to explain why out of the 1,991 Pentecostals and Charismatic denominations in Latin America, 1,767 are independent and indigenous. While the long term historical context of Latin America can be seen as being in the hands of the United States, it appears that the large-scale evangelical growth we see today has occurred independent of foreign controls.

Economic Opportunism

The second theological explanation argues that people convert for economic and social benefits. This theory also argues that the growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America is due to the dislocations and new communities they join caused by economic modernization and the shift of rural peasants to modern centers. They suggest that Evangelical conversion give members a new set of skills and attitudes that allows them to take advantage of new opportunities.[19] Many Protestant churches emphasize attitudes necessary for economic advancement, such as a greater commitment to a frugal life-style, avoiding public displays of material wealth, saving one's earnings, and limiting one's consumptions to necessities. They also – as we shall more fully explore later – prohibit spending money on alcohol, cigarettes, bars, gambling, and carousing.

However, sufficient empirical studies, examining the relationship between conversion and economic advancement, are not conclusive. For most converts, they do not see any direct upward mobility because Pentecostalism still has a negative social stigma especially around ruling elites and the highly educated. Rather, evangelicalism

helps them cope with their day-to-day struggles and also prevents hope that their condition will not worsen. In short, conversion does not guarantee significant advancement beyond one's preconversion economic level.[20] These arguments do not disregard the life-style improvements associated with religious conversion or as sociologists call it, switching, rather, they indicate that evangelical conversion does not normally promise automatic financial advancements in social mobility or employment.

In her study of Pentecostal congregations and Catholic base communities (CEBs) Cecilia Mariz finds little difference between Pentecostal and CEB members in their commitment to a work ethic, to savings, and to avoiding unnecessary consumptions.[21] Furthermore, reports from the World Bank (IBRD) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) have shown that the rate of increase in poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean jumped from twenty-seven to thirty-two percent between 1980 and 1989, a time in which Evangelical conversion was greatly increasing.[22] The overall number of people living below the poverty line (earning $2 a day or less in 1985 U.S. dollars) went from 170 million in 1986 to 183 million in 1989 to 266 million in 1990.[23] In light of such statistics, Guillermo Cook, a Methodist theologian expresses pessimism regarding the notion that Evangelical switching can be a significant step to overcoming poverty in the present economic situation of Latin America. He explains, "Although Protestants continue to appeal to the mystique of divinely ordained upward mobility, in actual fact, working-class and peasant Protestants are finding it necessarily more difficult to subsist, let alone to prosper."[24]

Moreover, many of these socioeconomic assessments are based on the assumptions that the type of modern economic development that is occurring in Latin

America will abide to the same trends witnessed by other 19th-century Protestant developments in England and the United States, with the Methodists.[25] The problem is that the religious, political, and macroeconomic conditions are quite different from those of eighteenth century England and nineteenth century North America. There were, however, a number of studies done in the 1960s that outline scenarios in which the Protestant work ethic would thrive. For example, in his research pertaining to democratic reforms in Chile and Brazil in the 1960s, Emilio Willems finds an optimistic correlation between the process of land and social reform and the work-oriented Protestant ethic.[26] Considering the fact that the capital-intensive industry was not nearly as widespread as it is now, and tariff barriers still protected labor-intensive manufacturing, this assumption seems reasonable provided its context. However, these conditions no longer exist in Latin America, nor do current economic strategies by governments facilitate their emergence in the foreseeable future.

In response to this contemporary reality, David Martin suggests that some of the successes discovered by Willems two generations ago will be multiplied now that Pentecostalism has grown so significantly since that time. Martin believes that Pentecostalism is breaking the "monopolistic Catholic culture" in Latin America, and is creating a "free social space" in which values of voluntarism, fraternity, and solidarity may provide a more powerful stimulus for socioeconomic development.[27] While Martin wisely notes that significant change is reliant on continued expansion over "two or three generations," his assessment has been criticized for not paying enough attention to Latin America's economic landscape. Currently, Latin America shares few economic similarities with Europe and the United States one or two centuries ago, or even with its

own economic situation thirty years ago. [28] Therefore, it remains unlikely that the cultural changes underway from Pentecostalism will lead to the same upward mobility for the poor in Latin America as other Protestant forms of Christianity did in England and the United States.

Legitimizing Political Authoritarianism

The third theory augmenting Evangelical growth suggests that Christian denominations in Latin America act as an authoritarian haven for social misfits. This approach believes that evangelical churches breed attitudes of dependency and gives open or tactical approval to right-wing political movements. While this particular body of literature is clearly more pessimistic than the previous theories, it is a wild-held theory. Some scholars believe that the Pentecostal churches share a similar ideology to authoritarian regimes and that they function as a paternalistic refuge from the secular world and as a result breed passivity and dependence.[29]

There are three sub-arguments underlying this position: (1) religious communities with hierarchal authority patterns are by nature antithetical to democratic values; (2) denominations that tend to be sectarian keep their members from participating in society-wide; and (3) Pentecostal denominations support and even promote authoritarian political regimes that mirror their own strict internal patterns of control.[30]

While the first argument may be true under certain conditions, it is important to remember that most churches are non-hierarchal. They tend to reject and criticize rigid hierarchal structure that has defined the Catholic Church for centuries. The Catholic Church in Europe (and later in Latin America) was extremely suspicious of democratic

governance up until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Support for this first argument is taken from the anticlerical tone of the many of the early European proponents of democracy and their attack on Church privileges in society. However, in the early part of the twentieth century, Latin American bishops (with support of the Vatican) came to see forms of democracy to be much more compatible with Christian values and protective of Church interests than emerging forms of Communism, Socialism, Fascism, and Nazism. The Vatican encouraged Catholic laity to form Christian Democratic parties in the 1930s and 1940s.[31] In several Latin American countries, these parties supported socioeconomic reforms that favored the poor and acted as moderate alternatives to the more extreme right and left.[32] Although Christian Democracy is not as politically competitive in Latin America today as it was a generation ago, Catholics continue to be supportive of democratic processes across the political spectrum with only a few rare cases supporting extremist movements.

Pentecostalism shares some of the characteristics of Catholicism in that pastors exercise strong leadership over their congregation and expect fairly strict allegiance to their doctrinal and moral teachings. There is however a very strong sense of community solidarity and affirmation of individual dignity that stands as a major authoritarian roadblock. Moreover, studies on the internal dynamics of Pentecostal communities indicate that pastor-disciple relationships, despite their hierarchical structure, can lead to creative initiatives by laity, including many nonministerial roles for women.[33] In so doing, this mentoring can serve as the de facto venue for leadership development. While the later chapters of this thesis will provide a much more detailed account of female leadership opportunities, one can begin to see that the evangelical system is not so tightly

controlled as to prevent the development of personal initiatives and new leadership roles even if they are ostensibly created to carry out evangelistic ministry.

Greater antidemocratic implications of evangelicalism stress the role these churches played in legitimizing authoritarian regimes throughout the 1960s and 1970s. Most notable cases include Brazil, Chile, and Argentina. In Chile, after the September 1973 military coup, many prominent Pentecostal pastors made public statements in support of the military, and in 1974, 2,500 Protestants enthusiastically welcomed General Pinochet at the "Protestant cathedral" in Santiago.[34] However, what many scholars fail to mention is that although some Pentecostal leaders supported Pinochet, the vast majority of parishioners voted for the progressive socialist candidates.[35] There is certainly room to argue that evangelical leaders could have been more outspoken against the violent crimes that affected many countries in Latin America at the end of the twentieth century. However, the role of the Catholic Church, especially the open involvement of clergy members in *Los Desparecidos* in Argentina, was equally lack-luster.

The authoritarianism theory also highlights a number of Pentecostal statements and sermons that tend to downplay of the importance of involvement in social and political organizations. This position assumes that improving relationships with friends and family is the preferable means of alleviating social injustices.[36] Rather than encouraging involvement in social and political organizations, evangelicalism is believed to put too great of an emphasis on the changing of individuals' personal spirituality and morality.

However, Cornelia Butler Flora's study of Pentecostals in Colombia in the early 1970s indicates that, found that evangelical congregations will not oppose groups they

see as acting for the best interests of their neighborhoods, and will participate in community events and councils to improve living conditions. They have also participated in water strikes, the protection of prisoners, and related events.[37] Now that military regimes have been replaced by democracies, some Pentecostal laity have becomes active in party politics as a way of addressing social issues more effectively. The Latin American Theology Fraternity (FTL) serves as a case in point. Whereas earlier continental-wide Latin American Conferences on Evangelization were feared to be making the same mistakes as Catholics (over involvement in social and political issues), FTL has avoided becoming associated with liberation theology and political activism. As a result, FTL now serves as an important bridge builder between the historic Protestant churches and new-age Pentecostals. This has ultimately provided a greater openness by some Pentecostals to listen to its message about the importance of Protestant public prophecy on behalf of justice.

Keeping in mind Protestant growth in previous decades, the revolutionary nature of today's religious transformation seems to reflect a different, and more popular religious phenomenon. When one examines the contours of evangelicalism in Latin America there are strong indicators that, despite its foreign linkages or other loose affiliations with the U.S., it appears to be a more indigenous movement whose growth and sustenance have taken a strong hold to the intrinsic elements of Latin culture.

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[3] Ibid.

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[6] Laurie Hansen, "Pope Strikes against Sects Wooing Latin American Catholics away from Church." *Catholic Herald* (1992).
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[13] Smith, 22.
[14] Pablo A. Deiros, *Protestant Fundamentalism in Latin America,* ed. Martin E. Marty and Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalism Observed* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 177-78.
[15] Smith, 23.
[16] Brian H. Smith, *More Than Altruism: The Politics of Private Foreign Aid* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 113-16.
[17] Stoll, 271-272.
[18] Bryan T. Froehle, "Pentecostals and Evangelicals in Venezuela: Consolidating Giants, Moving in New Directions," ed. Cleary and Hannah Stewart-Gambino *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 213-14.
[19] Emilio Willems, *Followers of the New Faith: Culture Change and the Rise of Protestantism in Brazil and Chile,* ed. Brian Smith (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 27.
[20] Bryan Roberts, "Protestant Groups and Coping with Urban Life in Guatemala," *American Journal of Sociology* 73 [Online] Rev. March 15, 2010. Available: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2775780.html. [May, 1986], 753-767.
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[22] Smith, 30.
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[24] Guillermo Cook, "The Genesis and Practice of Protestant Base Communities in Latin America," in *New Face of the Church in Latin America,* ed., (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 150-155.
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[29] Jean-Pierre Bastian, "Protestantism in Latin America." In *The Church in Latin America: 1492-1992,* ed. Dussel, 313-51.
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[33] Carol Ann Drogus, "Private Power and Public Power: Pentecostalism, Base Communities, and Gender." In *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America*, ed. Cleary and Stewart-Gambino, 1997. 59-61.
[34] Martin, 240-241.
[35] Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1995), 163-184.
[36] Martin, 258.
[37] Corneila Butler Flora, *Pentecostalism in Colombia: Baptism by Fire and Spirit*, (Cranbury: Associated University Presses, 1976), 87, 227.

Chapter Two

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'"

- John 3:3-7

The most fundamental Christian experience of all for Evangelicals is summed up in the expression, "being born again."[1] This immediate yet transformative experience with Jesus Christ initiates conversion and directs a person to embrace Christ as their companion, mentor, and only guide in life.[2] On an emotional level, the born again experience is one of the keys to understanding why evangelical conversion is so appealing to Latin Americas. In the Latin American context, conversion, through an intense and intimate acceptance of Christ as Savior, involves a total transformation of a person's identity and often radical reorientation of one's lifestyle.[3]

Evangelicals, most notably Pentecostals, in Latin America construct their personal history along the axis of their religious conversion. Members prescribe to the notion that their life history is divided into three parts: preconversion, conversion, and postconversion.[4] Without Jesus and the Holy Spirit, life before conversion is considered to be a life of sin and largely without a strong sense of purpose. Illness, in its broadest definition, is understood to be the consequence of the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and due to living in a world without Jesus.[5] Disease, domestic strife, and alcoholism are also believed to plague the quotidian lives of those who have not yet "accepted Jesus."[6] Evangelicals, place conversion at the center of their personal histories

because church affiliation signifies the recovery of spiritual, mental, and in some cases even physical health. In joining the evangelical church, converts are provided the means to renounce their problematic world in exchange for a life of spiritual and material well-being.

While the theories in the preceding chapter approached evangelical expansion from an abstract level at 30,000 feet if you will, this chapter seeks a more micro-analytical individualistic approach as a means of better understanding why so many Latin Americans are converting to evangelical Protestantism. Due to the personal nature of evangelical conversion, the born again experience will serve as the focus of this section. Case studies in this chapter draw on a variety of studies from Brazil and Colombia to show how the born again experience is not simply a mechanism of religious conversion, but also a phenomenological experience that inspires hope and yields immense change.

A Catholic Equivalent?

It is difficult to accurately understand the high rates of evangelical conversion in Latin America without taking into account what is happening within the Catholic Church.[7] Catholicism, as practiced throughout Latin America, does not demand personal conversion or transformation as a prerequisite for affiliation. The evangelical language of "being born again" or "accepting Jesus as personal savior," is alien to most Catholics.[8] In comparison to the potential of being born again, traditional Catholicism has been less successful in providing accessible, heart-felt spirituality and a practical coping mechanism for people burdened by the maladies of poverty, injustice, and social oppression. As a de facto state sponsored civil religion, the Catholic Church fails to

provide its members with an opportunity to recreate a society of greater human potential and dignity. The juxtaposition of Catholic base communities (CEBs) and Pentecostalism gives way to a better understanding of why conversion might be so successful in contemporary Latin culture.

Exemplary of the churches' disparity is their respective religious assumptions. Pentecostals and CEB members share the idea that religion is an actualization of God's plan for humanity. Religion is more than a simple relationship between human beings and God, and requires human acceptance of and engagement in God's plan. However, a clear distinction can be made in the way they conceive of divine healing. While Pentecostals find signs of God's blessings and spiritual salvation in the occurrences of everyday life, CEB members do not typically assume that miraculous events have any relationship to God's plan.[9] While under the influence of liberation theology, CEBs offered a radical critique of the social, economic, and political status quo. However, many scholars would argue that CEBs failed to address the afflictions of poverty at their most individual and personal level.[10] In other words, Catholicism seems to lack the transformative spiritual power that evangelical conversion has to offer. Thus, one can begin to understand that the potential to be born again, offers evangelical converts the unique ability to dramatically change the unsatisfactory aspects of their personal and public lives.

While Pentecostals are not afraid to speak freely about their experience with the supernatural or witness of a miracle, CEB members and other pastoral agents are hesitant to partake in these events. Cecilia Lorent Mariz, who has conducted ample research on the growth of Pentecostalism among the Brazilian poor, exposes the discontinuity of evangelical and Catholic perceptions of supernatural occurrences in a telling interview

with a CEB pastor. Mariz explains that due to a different concept of the living God, CEB pastoral agents avoid discussions of miracles and other supernatural events. Mariz recalls that "one CEB priest confessed how difficult it was for him when he was asked to bless a sick child in order to cure him, for he believed that his blessing would do little to solve his health problems."[11] While miracles and supernatural experiences are commonplace for evangelicals, this encounter is a clear representation of the more secular and rational worldview of CEBs. In line with the already formulated notions of the supernatural, evangelicalism appears to be a more inherent fit of Latin culture where folk healing via curanderes, brujas, and spiritists is a common practice. Despite the pastoral agents' intentions to incorporate and reinforce some of the values of the popular culture, there appears to be a lack of continuity between the CEB message and the values of popular Catholic culture. While this disparity certainly does not paint the entire picture, it nevertheless provides a more accurate understanding of why Pentecostalism has been so appealing. The evangelical adherence of the supernatural will prove to be one of the driving forces of contemporary conversion in Latin America. The following case studies will provide more detailed account of how the expertise of divine healing reinvigorates a person's faith and untimely leads to evangelical conversion. These personal accounts provide great insight in trying to understand why Pentecostalism is advancing so rapidly, especially in comparison Catholic base communities.

Born Again in Brazil

Home to the most rapid rates of evangelical conversion in Latin America, Brazil provides some of the most detailed accounts of being born again. According to the Censo

Institutional Evangelico, in the Rio de Janeiro metropolitan area, one new Protestant church is opened every two days.[12] Moreover, 91 percent of Brazil's evangelical converts are Pentecostal. Considering the emphasis Pentecostals place on the born again experience, this group may provide the best example of the transformative nature of evangelical conversion.

Despite Brazil's providing one of the leading models of global development, the country ranks among the highest nations of economic inequality, leaving few options for the poor to escape the harsh realities of poverty. While economic and social mobility are no guarantee to a good life, Pentecostal conversion encourages people to avoid self-destructive behavior, such as drinking, drugs, and gambling. Pentecostal opposition to pathological behavior and the secular worldview are very important in understanding how converts perceive their capability to overcome life's difficulties. This is not to suggest that religious conversion allows one to overcome poverty, rather, Pentecostalism seems to provide better coping mechanisms for enduring poverty better than other religions. More importantly, it stresses that one should work hard, be morally upright, and invest in one's family and community.

Unlike its major religious rivals, Pentecostalism promotes religious affiliation through conversion.[13] For most people who have been negatively affected by society the concept of religious affiliation as a "positive transformation of the nature and value of a person" makes sense.[14] It is important to note that illness and poverty do not serve as the preconditions for evangelical conversion, as upper class and healthy people also convert. Rather, these dynamics function as a lens of understanding how a series of interrelated events bring a person to conversion, or, "acceptance of Jesus." A closer inspection of this

path and its milestones will shed light on the dynamics of dramatic Pentecostal growth throughout Latin America.

While many scholars have questioned the economic motivations of evangelical conversion, other relevant literature provides a variety of personal anecdotes that reveal a personalized and spiritually driven inspiration to switch religions. The following two studies from of Cecilia Loreto Mariz on Pentecostalism in Brazil provide a firsthand account of the power of healing and the triggering of evangelical conversion. For Maria Jose, evangelical conversion was strictly a religious matter. From the difficult period of her husband's unemployment to her own struggles to pursue her career, Maria's life was wrought with struggle. After the death of her husband, Maria converted to Pentecostalism. Although Maria's family was fortunate to avoid economic crisis, she explained that when she became a widow, "[Her] soul cried out for something else." She claimed, "Sometimes it happens that a person has bread, clothing, but it is not happy. I was missing something…my soul was not happy."[15] Maria's Pentecostal conversion story stresses the deeply spiritual, rather than material, motives for switching religions. Conversion helped her keep what she had already attained but it also filled her empty life with happiness and with a greater sense of meaning and purpose.

The next story of Creuza is slightly different. In search of a better life, Creuza, along wither her husband and five children, left their small hometown in northern Brazil and immigrated to Rio de Janeiro. As is common with most men who struggle to find employment, Creuza's husband became an alcoholic. As if their family situation was not hard enough, Creuza became sick. Without the means of providing food for her family, Creuza had to beg. Humiliated and desperate, she made *promesas* to Catholic saints and

followed the advice of Afro-Brazilian Spiritists to find a job for her husband. Nothing worked. Creuza decided to make a vow to the God of the *crentes* (Pentecostal term for believers), "O God of the Believers, give my husband a job. Do not allow me to beg anymore and allow me to have enough to eat. If you give my husband a job, I will be a believer. I will not have my hair cut anymore, I will not wear makeup anymore, and I will dress only with long sleeves." The next day her husband got a job. Creuza did not see this as a mere coincidence, and kept her vow. Soon thereafter, Creuza reports that her health was restored. As a member of the Pentecostal church, she has learned how to read the Bible and also become a religious leader within her community. A few years later her husband also converted. Although Creuza's rather strict ethical behavior was instrumental in her economic success, it seems that Pentecostalism merely gave meaning and support to her previous abilities. In other words, Creuza became Pentecostal because she believed that her *promesa* to the crente God was responsible for her husband finding a job and health. Pentecostal conversion may have helped her overcome a crisis, but only indirectly helped her achieve her later achievements.[16]

Through an extensive series of interviews, Andrew Chesnut has also provided a considerable amount of detailed information regarding Pentecostal conversion. Of the people he interviewed in Belén, "the cradle of Brazilian Pentecostalism," Chesnut recorded that although only half (46.8 percent) of Pentecostal converts regularly spoke in tongues, and an over-whelming majority (84.7 percent) claimed that Jesus or the Holy Spirit had cured them of some type of aliment. The following copy of an anonymous letter published in the *Estandarte Evangélico* in February 2000 communicates the attitudes of many converts.

> When doctors here on earth tell us that the illness a person is feeling has no cure, that the only thing left to do is die, I want to say that there is a greater doctor than earthly doctors, who does not take away hope and who is ready to offer healing, salvation, liberty, new life, and all that we need. Just accept Him as savior, doctor, teacher, advocate, and master of your life.
>
> I was dying of uterine cancer. I spent ten years suffering when I wasn't a *crente* (believer). But I knew someone in the prayer circles was interceding for cancer patients. I then vowed to serve Jesus for the rest of my life if He cured me. He healed my immediately without needing operation.[17]

While we do not know much about the author of this letter, she gives us a clear impression that secular resources were of little help during her "ten years of suffering." In an attempt to overcome the desperation of her preconversion life, the woman turned to the supernatural, and gratefully accepted prayers of the Pentecostal church. The allusion of a "new life" in this letter exemplifies the most important element of divine healing. Failed by modern medicine and perhaps the saints in Catholicism, the woman made the promise to accept Jesus into her life and to become Pentecostal and born again in the exchange for her cure. While Catholic variations of divine healing may demand an act of ritual sacrifice for the granting of a miracle, the Pentecostal God commands the petitioner to convert, to turn away from the old world of sin (sickness), and focus on her spiritual and physical renewal. A health crisis, typically physical illness, leads the afflicted individual to accept Jesus and to be born again, to become a *nove criatura* (new creature).[18] Here, the promise of divine healing inspires faith often as a last resort. While the convert still continues to live within the same elements of his or her preconversion

world, the born again experience has renewed their perception of life and has generated a greater sense of power, dignity, and control.

The experiences of Maria, Creuza, and anonymous author show that by assuming the cognitive assumptions of the supernatural, evangelicalism has formulated a greater adherence to the popular culture of Brazil, where the supernatural is an accepted part of everyday life, especially for the poor and women. The fact that evangelicalism has been most successful amongst the poorer communities across Latin America provides greater evidence of this point. Taking into account the prevalent limitations of those living in poverty, one can better understand why the open invitation to be born again and the subsequent healing it purports to offer are attractive. Through a promise of salvation, evangelical conversion inspires people to renew and reorient their lives. The exceptional ability to generate hope, grounded in everyday life, has proven to be one of the most unique and appealing characteristics of Pentecostalism.

[1] Homepage, *Words of Hope*. [Online] Available: http://www.woh.org/word.html. [April 17, 2010].
[2] Ibid.
[3] Kurt Bowen, *Evangelism and Apostasy: The Evolution and Impact of Evangelicals in Modern Mexico*, (London: McGill-Queen's Press, 1996), 76.
[4] Ibid.
[5] R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (New Jersey: Rutgers university Press, 1997), Chapter 2. Chesnut notes: Illness, in its multiple forms, hampers millions of lives in both the urban and rural areas of Latin America. An expanded conception of "health," or lack thereof, includes both its physical and social manifestations. Health compromises the right to employment, fair wages, potable water, clothing, and education. It also includes the right to a nonaggressive environment; one that permits a life of dignity and decency. Thus, illness becomes a social malady arising from poverty, the inability to meet basic human needs.
[6] Chesnut, 51.
[7] Cecilia Loreto Mariz, *Coping with Poverty* (Philadelphia: Temple university Press, 1994), 11.
[8] Chesnut, 71-72.
[9] Mariz, 67.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12]Mariz, 1.
[13] Chesnut, 73.
[14] Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Peter Lang, 1987), 197.
[15] Mariz, 39.
[16] Chesnut, 79
[17]Ibid.
[18] Chesnut, 81.

Chapter Three

Rezando y la mano dando
(Praying and lending a hand)[1]

For Latin Americans, evangelical conversion is more than changing one's religious affiliation. Within this ubiquitously Catholic culture, conversion calls for a momentous transformation of a person's entire way of life. As the essential component of evangelicalism, the Bible provides the guidelines for this immense change. The Bible is not only fundamental to the conversion experience but it also distinguishes the beliefs and practices of evangelicalism. For insiders as well as outsiders, the identifying feature of evangelical religion is the centrality of the Bible in worship, in belief, and in dictating a code of personal conduct. While the born again experience often prompts this religious switching, Biblical interpretation endows the continued commitment of conversion. Keeping in mind the previous macro-level theories and the micro-level explanations of the born again experience and the transformative power of divine healing, this chapter will focus on the commitment to new ideological practices that accompany evangelical conversion.

The language and renaming of important evangelical terms in Latin America offers a primary example of how the Bible dictates a code of personal conduct for its believers. While the literal translation of *evangélico* means "gospel" (the story of Christ's life, crucifixion, and resurrection), an evangelical *creyente* (believer) will often think of the Bible when he or she refers to the time when *"conoci al evangelica"* (I first came to

know the Gospel). In light of the fact that many evangelical Protestants perceive Roman Catholic rituals to be meaningless; it is interesting to note that a praying evangelical would refer to himself as *orando*, while a Catholic would be described *rezando* (reciting by rote).[2] Perhaps a clearer linguistic indication of evangelicals' literal application of the Bible pertains to the distinction made between the celebration of the Eucharist. Whereas the Catholic priest celebrates *comunión*, evangelicals participate in *santa cena* (holy supper).

Owning the Bible

It is recognized that one of the attractions that evangelicals holds to potential converts is the accessibility of the Bible to individual members. The degree of this attraction is better understood considering the fact that the Bible was completely inaccessible to Latin Americans forty year ago. For earlier generations, reading and interpreting the Bible was not only perceived to be unnecessary in developing one's faith, but it was forbidden. Devout Catholics believed that in the wrong hands, the Bible was a dangerous and potentially evil document. Only those who were trained in its correct interpretation could have access to it. Bible reading and Bible owning by lay people was subject to severe sanctions by Catholic clergy.[3] Before evangelical conversion, it would be nearly impossible for laity to understand the Bible by themselves, and its truths could be revealed only through the doctrine and the explanation of the authorities of the Catholic Church.[4] The contemporary accessibility of the Bible makes possible an entirely new religious experience and level of agency and personal empowerment and leadership.

The purchase of a Bible is the first major commitment by those considering conversion. The discovery of the Bible and its truths figures prominently in the testimonies of believers.[5] Despite the fact that, as Catholics, many never owned or regularly read the Bible, a major concern for people considering conversion is often the difference between the Protestant and Catholic Bible.[6] Brusco reports that a number of converts had "purchased a copy of each version and spent a long time comparing them. They were gratified learn that the Protestant Bible was not full of heresies as the Catholic priests had claimed."[7]

Colombia presents some of the clearest examples of how an evangelical reading of the Bible can be utterly transforming to Latin Americans. Similar to being born again, in Brazil the impact of the Bible in the Colombian context is perhaps so conspicuous due to the tremendous power of the Catholic Church in the country. Elizabeth Brusco explains,

> In the past, and in contemporary Colombia to a very great extent, to be Colombian meant to be Catholic. No other alternatives existed – the religious affiliation was as much a birthright as was citizenship. To be human was to be Catholic. Excommunication meant not only damnation in the afterlife, but in the present life as well. Since church as society we unified, leaving or being expelled from one excluded you from the other. The enormous gravity of the step taken by early evangelical converts must be understood within this context.[8]

The above passage provides a general framework for understanding why evangelical conversion in Colombia, and the rest of Latin America, represents a radical break with their Catholic culture and a complete alteration of one's entire lifestyle. Keeping this

context in mind, the following sections will provide a detailed account of how and why the Bible distinguishes evangelicals apart from ordinary Catholic citizens.

Reading the Bible

The discovery of the Bible and its truths figures prominently in the testimonies of evangelical converts. Eager to understand how the Bible is utilized today, Daniel H. Levine turned to Colombia field research for answers. While in Cali, Colombia Levine questioned a neighbor about her experience with evangelical churches. She stated:

> Well, it's like this, we develop it this way. We all work to understand better, everyone, even me, because you know there are so many things a person doesn't know, right? The Bible. We read the Gospel and we study every little bit. And here we have people who have never known anything. They read it there, [in church] the priest reads the Gospel and that's that. Because he says a world of things people pay no attention to. But, here we try to explain things ourselves. We don't have them explained to us, but ourselves we draw it out. We discover what we think. It's not just the priest in the pulpit telling me not to sin, not to do this or that, to repent, because you know a person hears all that stuff and then goes home and forgets it all.[9]

Similar to the witness of divine healing, evangelicalism provides its members with the means to identify with the Bible in a way that is extremely representative of contemporary Latin culture. Every group meeting starts with a reading of the Bible, which is then discussed in relation to the current issues and concerns of the community. Levine is clear in explaining that the participants of his study are not fundamentalists searching for an inerrant guide to action in sacred scriptures. Rather, what they seek and

find are exemplary events, persons, and forms of actions and role models that make sense in terms of their own lives.[10]

Moreover, this new dimension of experiencing religion has produced a new and meaningful image of Jesus. For evangelicals, religion is more than a simple relationship between human and God; it requires human acceptance of and engagement in God's plan for not only their lives, but also society.[11] According to this religious actualization, Jesus no longer appears as a distant Lord, but rather as a real person, God in human form, who is living alongside the members of the community. Evangelicalism has provided converts with a Jesus who is more like themselves, a man who has suffered and therefore understands what suffering means. Levine recounts another conversation with a man who described the evangelical manifestation of Jesus within his community quite accurately. The peasant claimed, "We are like Jesus… Jesus was the first, he joined with people to see how they could get out from under. You can't separate the two things. Jesus came and celebrated, he got involved with people's problems. It's the same with us: a day's work always ends with celebration. The two things. So you see, Jesus is here with us, doing the same work."[12]

The ability to read and apply the Bible to one's own life adds to the evangelical appeal. Similar to the adept nature of faith healing, the evangelical interpretation of the Bible appears to be representative and fitting to Latin America's culture. Levine provides yet another firsthand account of this Biblical renewal.

> Well, you know, that's how it is, it's here in the marginal barrios you get the worst abuses. I don't know if you think it's the same everywhere in Latin America, but the way I see things, religion has been reformed, and I say reformed

> because they used to teach us that praying would solve everything, that praying was all you needed to satisfy God. But now the Bible makes us see things differently. Because even though it is true that praying is communication with God, you've also got to be committed to act along with your brothers and sisters.[13]

Again, it is clear how the evangelical interpretation of the Bible adheres to the individual lives of converts. The explicit mention of the reformative power of the Bible in his own life and its potential for Latin America represents the high degree of evangelical adaptability within Latin America. As was previously stated, the distinct potential to reinterpret the Gospel to be more aligned with the lives of individual members illustrates the appeal and strength of evangelicalism within Latin culture.

Living According to the Bible

Of the many personal conversion experiences presented in Brusco's dissertation, the conversion of Pedro, a native of El Cocuy, Colombia, accurately depicts both the functioning of the Bible and faith healing in the conversion experience. Pedro, and his wife Consuelo, are both members of the Trinitarian Pentecostal Church, a smaller Colombian evangelical church that is loosely affiliated with the Assemblies of God in Brazil. According to Consuelo, the Gospel has worked a miraculous change in Pedro's life. Before he converted, he was a cruel man who drank heavily, beat her, and was having difficulty supporting his family. Consuelo remembers, "When we were married we weren't Christian – we were unconverted. And then the home was a disaster area, because we didn't understand each other, there wasn't affection, there wasn't friendship, there wasn't love or anything. Everything was a disaster." As a result of Pedro's difficult

behavior, Consuelo decided to leave him. Brusco interestingly points out that Pedro's sister had already converted to evangelicalism. Pedro reported that when his sister spoke to him about the Gospel, he did not like it because he thought it was evil. However, things changed for Pedro while he was attending a service in his sister's home.

> I said to myself, well, out of decency I have to go and hear what those people have to say. And that night the Lord spoke to my heart and I saw the condition that I was walking around this world in. I acknowledged it, and I said to myself, the mistake of Catholic religion is that one isn't saved there. I said to myself, is that a religion? What happens is that in the evangelical church they teach one the Bible and they apply that to their lives, and in the Catholic Church they don't teach you the Bible nor do they apply it.[14]

After this experience, Pedro converted, and two days later Consuelo followed his lead. They now abide to the strict behavioral codes of Trinitarian Pentecostals. As a direct result of his conversion, Pedro is committed to a life free of alcohol, smoking, and fighting. He is now described as being more *domestically responsible* and he feels that he is now providing a proper testimony to his family and community. Pedro's conversion experience and commitment to the Bible projects two important themes. First, the positive life style following Pedro's new-fangled religious commitment demonstrates how the adoption of the Bible's strict moral teaching – and reinforced newfound church community, has a significant effect on the convert and the rest of the family. The three elements of machismo – drinking, womanizing, and aggression – have been transformed. Considering the domestic problems that typically arise from machismo practices, one can

see that evangelical conversion calls not only on women but also men to become more submissive and obedient.

Brusco argues that this "fosters positive male-female relationships within the family unit."[15] Second, the role of Pedro's sister in his conversion highlights yet another significant evangelical characteristic. Evangelical patterns of recruitment are a vital component to the religious transformation of Latin American.

"Evangelicals," which literally translates to "Gospellers," take the biblical injunction to preach the gospel to all nations as the fundamental tenet of their faith. The commitment to teach and spread the evangelical message is rooted in doctrine of "Great Commission."[16] The strict codes are motivated by the desire of the church members to "present a living testimony."[17] For example, Trinitarian Pentecostals, like Pedro and Consuelo, adhere to the strictest behavioral standards because they believe that their good behavior will attract other people in the community to their faith and churches. While this denomination may be perceived as being somewhat extreme it is interesting to see that Trinitarians are still intensely social in their orientation and eager to participate in community life as long as it is "wholesome."

Lastly, the high value placed on reading and learning among evangelical families is a result of the centrality of the Bible. As noted earlier, the Catholic hierarchy actively discouraged members from owning or reading the Bible, maintaining that such activity could only lead to a proliferation of misinterpretation of the sacred text. Among evangelicals, however, the "priesthood of all believers: exists not only on a doctrinal level but also is put into extensive practice and establishes an ethic of reading,

contemplation, and analysis that is clearly useful in orienting young members toward higher education.[18]

There appears to be a few significant ways in which the accessibility and encouragement to read the Bible has proven successful to evangelical growth. Dependent on its success, evangelical Conversion must serve the needs of individuals in specific social and cultural contexts of their lives. This has clearly been the case in Latin America. The success of evangelicalism in Latin America exemplifies the need for a new religion to better adhere to the specific social and cultural contexts of Pentecostal converts. A close examination of conversion, consisting of the born again experience and adaption of the Bible, reveals the ways in which the evangelical emphasis on the Bible and doctrine has been transformed into culturally appropriate and meaningful ethical guidelines for people in their day-to-day living.

[1] Daniel H. Levine, eds., *Religious Change, Empowerment and Power: Reflections on Latin American Experience* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1995), 27.
[2] Brusco, 20-23.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Elizabeth Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995), 17. See Chapter Notes 2. 3: "In Colombia the current Catholic attitude toward Bible reading is somewhat equivocal and varies from priest to priest. In a Catholic publication (Salesman, 1982) that criticizes the evangelicals strongly and enumerates the "errors" in their doctrine, the author gives definite if somewhat grudging recognition that evangelicals tend to have excellent knowledge of the Bible, and that this lack among Catholics is something that needs to be remedied…The Catholic hierarchy seems to recognize that if they are to compete successfully with the evangelicals, they must be willing to relinquish exclusive control by the clergy over the sacred text and make it accessible to the laity."
[5] Brusco, 16-17.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Daniel H. Levine, Interview, May 28, 1983.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Cecilia Mariz, *Coping with Poverty* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1994), 64-66.
[12] Levine, Interview, February 1, 1983.
[13] Levine, Interview, May 29, 1983
[14] Brusco, 62.
[15] Brusco, 118.
[16] Kurt Bowen, *Evangelism and Apostasy: The Evolution and Impact of Evangelicals in Modern Mexico*, (London: McGill-Queen's Press, 1996), 76.
[17] Brusco, 61.
[18] Brusco, 127.

Chapter Four

"La mujer es de la casa y el hombre es de la calle"
(The woman is of the house and the man is of the street)[1]

Evangelicalism in Latin America is opening up a new cultural and social space for marginalized groups as they experience the hardships and uprootedness of the industrial revolution. These new churches provide their members with networks of support for adaption and survival in new contexts of life. Evangelical communities are not simply a mirror of corporate cultural patters of the past, rather, they are renewing a sense of self-esteem in individuals, providing them with moral discipline, communication skills, and ladders for leadership inside the congregation.[2]

While the born again experience and applicability of the Bible serve as the main contributing factors to evangelical conversion, the home based structure of these churches serve as the underlying foundation of the entire religious movement. The spatial arrangement of evangelical churches in Latin America is more than a matter of poverty or convenience. It is an outgrowth of the continuing household basis of evangelical religion. The unique merger of church and household, both physically and abstractly, serves as yet another adherence of evangelicalism and Latin culture.[3]

While congregational services held in the *templo* involve the larger community, evangelical *cultos a domicilio* (services in the home) provide a safe and intimate space for members of the church to discuss real life issues. It is usually the case that members (almost always women) volunteer their homes for these meetings and take on the responsibility of leading prayers, Bible readings, and hymn singing. Before divulging into

an examination of how the unique structural components of evangelicalism bolster the lives of women in Latin America, it is important to take into account how traditional gender characterists have functioned within the domestic and social realms of Latin American culture.

Traditional Domestic Organization and Status Consciousness

Directing attention to gender hierarchies within domestic groups is one way to reveal "the social process through which individuals negotiate the relations that give form to households."[4] Studies of domestic organization in Latin America have generally suffered from an adoption of the consensus model of the household. Most studies are vague in their description of domestic groups, with men being dominant and women as submissive. Although the pattern is slowly changing, a high degree of sexual segregation and divergence between male and female goals and aspirations are still among the most salient features in Latin American domestic organization.

For most Latin American countries, women are engaged in income-generating activities, ranging from the formal to the informal sectors of society. If a woman is not engaged in some sort of money-earning activity she is still constantly thinking of various possibilities for securing income. The kinds of jobs available will depend on a woman's class and education; and the amount of time and energy spent on a job will often depend on her relationship to a man.[5]

As is the case in the United States, women who work full-time jobs do so while still maintaining the responsibility of running the household. Although professional-class women in Latin America may benefit from the availability of cheep domestic labor, for a

majority of women, the domestic work is left for the end of the day.[6] Regardless, the double burden in many cases explains a women's preference for male support as opposed to full-time employment.[7]

Also important in the domestic equation are the new trends of consumerism in Latin America. Compared to earlier generations, families today experience a relatively greater degree of material comfort. Consumer patterns have shifted in the direction of household-based items, such as refrigerators, microwaves, or televisions. Characteristically, these goods are significant because they reflect the consistent pattern of status acquisition that moves beyond the individual and focus more on the family or household. Thus, one can better understand why individual machismo consumption patterns, like drinking at the local *tienda de la esquina* (corner store), impinges on household based consumption patterns. These patterns are one of the many compelling reasons why women are initially drawn to evangelicalism, a religion that reigns in the excess of machismo.

Within the context of Latin American sex-role stereotypes women are also considered to be the morally superior partners in a relationship. This is perhaps one of the few strengths attributed to women within a gender system that is strongly prejudiced in favor of males. However, this moral edge may also function as yet another burden. It can be argued that in an effort to maintain their goodness or loyalty, women restrict their behavior, become submissive, long-suffering, and overly occupied to serving to the needs of others over themselves.[8] In short, the machismo characteristics of Latin America prove to be very demanding and difficult for all under its sway. Following conversion, machismo characteristics are tamed and the boundaries of public life (male) and private

life (female) are redrawn. This ultimately leads to a change in power positions of the spouses. This is not to suggest the women now have the power over men, rather by changing the "relative aspirations" of the man to be more in line with the woman, evangelicalism has the potential to mend a broken home.

Considering the unpopularity of Protestantism in earlier decades, there is certainly a correlation between Latin American development and evangelical conversion. In her study on evangelicalism in Colombia, Brusco claims that, "Modernization has brought about a breakdown of the articulation of male and female roles, with women segregated in a devalued private realm, and men identified with an extra household world regulated by the laws of machismo."[9] Sociological research shows that contemporary declines in peasant household production has led females to become more dependent on males as wage earners, which has ultimately amounted to a depreciating female role in the domestic sphere.[10] Interestingly, women make up the majority of evangelical converts in Latin America. Female converts in all denominations, all regions, all age groups, in rural and urban areas, and among migrants and non-migrants, outnumber male converts.[11] The striking predominance of female participation throughout the evangelical world stimulates great curiosity.

Cultivating Leadership and Feminine Communication

Evangelical in-home meetings offer a unique leadership opportunity for women on their own "turf" and a unique experience for church members who have experienced inequality in their lives. Through this distinctive outlets evangelicals develop social networks of mutual support.[12] Here, in these small group settings, members of the church

are provided with a space where they can feel comfortable to talk about problems they would otherwise not be able to discuss. This is especially the case for women, who are typically socially restricted by their domestic obligations. Participation in these intimate religious gatherings helps people to not feel ashamed of the problems they face in life.[13] Evangelicalism modifies people's perception of themselves by instilling what they often describe as a new sense of human dignity and worth.

For those with minimal power, namely the poor and women, participation provides an outlet in which to seek out and exercise leadership. Most successful evangelical churches in Latin America have a large number of active women's organizations. While the degree of activity and independence from the rest of the Church varies with each group, women's organizations carry out a number of primary functions, including, but are not limited to, evangelization campaigns, small group Bible studies, Sunday School teaching, fund-raising activities, social welfare work, and helping to lead the choir and/or worship. In Colombia, these *confraternidades de damas* (brotherhoods of ladies) are credited for taking on a majority of responsibilities of the church. Special weekly services for women are held by many churches, sometimes as part of the activities of the women's society and sometimes independent of them. Taking account of the diversity of these groups, Elizabeth Brusco finds that, regardless of denominational specificities, the women's midweek services were extremely popular and are well attended as the Sunday services.[14]

The following example is from a sermon produced by a woman in Colombia. It depicts the use two specifically and compelling female images, cleanliness and food, as a vehicle of religious engagement.

> We as Christians have the feed ourselves, sisters, because, some time ago (and I am still thin), I was completely malnourished. When I traveled to the United States, and the first doctor that I saw said to me, "Señora, I've never seen a person as thin as you – I think you must have tuberculosis." And I thought to myself, if that's what it's like for the body to be malnourished, what must the person be like who is malnourished spiritually? We are nourished – body, soul, and spirit. And our spirit must be completely nourished, fat, but if we do don't eat of the word of the Lord, if we don't nourish ourselves with it, we are going to be more malnourished than I was when I was sick.
>
> Really, speaking is an art. What we have to tell the world is short, small, but substantial. It's like food; it might just be a little bit, but it should be nutritious.[15]

This sermon is an example of how the content of evangelical religion explicitly appeals to the lives of women. Due to their intimate communal structure, evangelical churches are naturally able to pay much more attention to the topics that are close the hearts of its members. Moreover, because the laity is directly incorporated in the services, religious sermons properly adhere to the audience's primary frame of reference.

The *semana del hogar* (week of the home) is further evidence of how evangelicalism is relevant in the inherent lives of women in Latin America. This particular campaign is held at regular intervals of the year, and is intended to bring awareness to the topic of home and family through meetings and family oriented activities. Considering the centrality of family in a women's life, it can be understood that the heavy emphasis of family values and the restoration of happiness in the home, has had a great appeal to women, and for that reason has allowed the church to grow.

Rosalinda, an elderly women, and member of "Los Juanitos," illustrates female leadership opportunities that have resulted from her evangelical conversion. In her tearful interview with Elizabeth Brusco, Roslinda explains,

> The Juanitos also have prayer meeting's in people's houses. If you want to have a service in your home, they put your name on a list and it's announced in church. Sometimes it's just more convenient and comfortable to have the meeting in someone's house. The format of the service is basically the same as the *cultos* in church…
>
> I preached in church once. In order to prepare a sermon you start by praying. Then you go to the Bible. You don't sit and write it all at once, the inspiration comes to you bit by bit, as you're cooking, doing things around the house all day. The Holy Spirit guides you in terms of what to write down…. Some people have a real calling to preach, like Rubi, who gave the sermon yesterday… People from all different churches come to the Juanitos for the Liberation services, and from all different social classes. The Juanitos have started having special services on Thursday nights, special services of intercession to pray for the family…
>
> Religion is different from Christianity. Christianity is not a religion; it's an entire change in one's life. If there's not a change in your life, Christ hasn't entered it.[16]

Rosalinda's participation in the leadership opportunities of the Juanitos, exemplifies how evangelical churches seek direct engagement of their female members. In her very real account of the Juanitos meetings, Rosalinda points out that some of the women are better preachers than others. However, what proves most significant in this situation is the fact that within these personal groups women find the strength and inspiration to do things they would otherwise not have the opportunity to try.

Elevating the Status of Women

To effectively assess how the evangelicalism has fostered a growing female movement and leadership in Latin America, one must first explain what constitutes a "women's movement." While Latin America evangelicalism has radically altered some of the most resistant social and domestic roles, it has had no direct effect on legislation concerning women's rights. Insofar as evangelicalism has enhanced the lives of its female converts, it has done so within the bounds of traditional structures.[17] In her chapter "Analyzing Women's Movements," Maxine Molyneux provides a relevant distinction between two kinds of women's movements: those that are based on women's "practical interests," such as consumer movements, which are generally formed around some encroachment or women's ability to fulfill their traditional obligations; and those based on women's "strategic interests," which, like Western feminism, are aimed at revising the sex-gender system.[18]

The appeal of evangelicalism serving to the practical interests of women in Latin America is very clear. However, the tangible changes and improvements in the standard of living of women and children in dependent households are only a symptom or indicator of something much more remarkable that is happening. One outcome of evangelical conversion has been an alteration in the boundaries of the public (male) and private (female) lives. Characteristics typically associated with machismo have been exchanged. Aggressive violence, pride, self-indulgence, and individualistic orientation in the public sphere are replaced by peace seeking, humility, self-restraint, and collective orientation and identity with the church and home.[19] This is not to suggest that because of evangelical conversion, women obtain power over their husbands. In evangelical

households the husband may still be the ex officio head of the household, but his relative aspirations have changed to coincide with those of his wife, which have also changed to providing spiritual support and leadership at home and in the churches via evangelism and social outreach society. This is what makes the evangelicalism so powerful and successful in Latin America. By situating the home and family at the center of both women's and men's lives, evangelical conversion can be seem as means of revaluating and in a limited fashion leveling the relative participation of men and women in the private realm.

Now, united with their spouses by a common religion, these women experience the twin benefits of their own conversion and their partner's. However, in cases like Brazil, where the majority of Pentecostal women are either single or married to *incredulous* (unbelievers), who in the best scenarios respect the new order in the household imposed by their crente wife, and in the worst violently oppose their counterpart's demanding faith. How do women whose spouses have not become believers, or who have no stable relationship with a man, improve their domestic lives and uphold new moral codes of conduct?[20]

Beside the various church organizations that serve as women's support groups, female adherents draw on the ideological power of their faith to manage domestic discord. The women who are unable to "domesticate" their husbands are likely to divest from their conjugal relations to invest in their relationship with Jesus and their children.

Paradoxical to Brusco's position on evangelicalism bolstering the patriarchal model of family, Andrew Chesnut encounters female converts who have utilized Pentecostalism as a legitimate refuge from the dysfunctional household unit. Having been

abandoned by her husband over thirty years ago and left with four young children to raise on her own, Enedina Pires, a sixty-six-year-old Assembleiana from the barrio of Condor, stated that she wanted nothing more to do with men. Her words provide a case in point. "All my suffering, the tears that I shed because of him [her ex-husband], I turned over to Jesus. Jesus was the one who raised my children with me. He was always with me, helping me and supporting me."[21] Through praying, proselytizing, and singing, afflicted wives can escape from their indifferent or abusive husbands and are free to develop a relationship with Jesus. Such was also the case for Luiza Andrade, who sought refuge from her alcoholic and womanizing husband in the Assemblies of God Church in Brazil. She explained, "At church I forgot about the problems at home: my husband, children, drunks, sickness, and neediness. It's a different environment. I feel good there, and it gives me the strength to go back home and deal with problems."[22] Luiza perfectly sums up her decision to choose evangelicalism as a means of social escape in the following declaration, "Eu não troco o meu Jesus por nada" (I wouldn't trade my Jesus for anything).

What makes the evangelical movements so powerful and successful is that instead of trying to revolutionize the public realm, it quietly reorders the relative participation of men and women in the private realm. Through an implementation of practical resources, evangelical churches make their faith, and their benefits accessible for the average citizen, especially women. Being able to host services in the home, is not only convenient for the domestic lives of women, but it also creates an intimate space to bond with other women and comfortably discuss private problems they might be facing at home and in society. Furthermore, having the opportunity to practice public speaking is a

tremendously ground-breaking experience for women in Latin America. After generations of living a submissive culture, women, through evangelical conversion now have the means and mandate (Matthew 28:19-20) to start a new, more powerful life in their family and communities. Breaking the culture of silence comes as people learn words and acquire a newfound confidence to speak. It requires a supportive setting, like a home, where communities can discuss their issues without harassment.[23]

[1] Elizabeth Brusco, *The Reformation of Machismo* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1995), 82.
[2] Brian H. Smith, *Religious Politics in Latin America: Pentecostal vs. Catholic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 6-7.
[3] Brusco, 130-131.
[4] Brusco, 92-94.
[5] Brusco, 100-101.
[6] Evelyn Stevens, "Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo in Latin America," ed. A. Pescatello, *Female and Male in Latin America* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1773), 89-101.
[7] Brusco, 101.
[8] Brusco, 120.
[9] Machismo is the culturally constructed aggressive masculinity characteristic of the male role in Latin America.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Kurt Bowen, *Evangelism and Apostasy: The Evolution and Impact of Evangelicals in Modern Mexico* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 86-87.
[12] Cecília Lorento Mariz, *Coping with Poverty* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 140.
[13] Mariz, 142.
[14] Elizabeth Brusco, *Reformation of Machismo* (Austin: University of Texas Press), 133.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Brusco, 108-113.
[17] Brusco, 137.
[18] Maxine Malyneux, "Anaylzing Women's Movements," in *Feminist Vision of Development: Gender Analysis and Policy,* ed. Cecile Jackson and Ruth Pearson (New York: Routledge, 1998) 65-85.
[19] Brusco, 112.
[20] R. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 119-121.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Daniel H. Levine, eds., *Religious Change, Empowerment and Power: Reflections on Latin American Experience* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 1995), 34.

Conclusion

This thesis has challenged several prevailing stereotypes and theories regarding Catholic conversion in general and Pentecostalism more specifically. It challenges the notion that Latin American conversion is due to foreign pressure, economic desires, and political agendas. By looking at the type of people evangelicalism attracts and their motives of conversion, I argue that evangelicalism provides Latin Americans with a reinvigorated faith, and in so doing has generated hope within some of the most helpless individuals and communities. Moreover, evangelical conversion, through its morally strict codes of conduct, provides a more purposeful life to people, especially women, who are struggling to survive the socioeconomic hardships of Latin Americas developing world.

There are a number of studies suggesting that current religious trends in Latin America are a reflection of decades of foreign influence in the region. However, after taking a closer look at the contours of evangelicalism, there are strong indicators that suggest that despite the church's historical links to foreign powers, the growth we see today has taken place along self-sufficient lines.[1] While some of the larger Pentecostal Churches, such as the Assemblies of God, have developed significant transnational networks, these Latin American churches in Colombia and Brazil are also self-sufficient and require little financial outlay.[2] For Latin Americans, evangelicalism has become a truly indigenous movement. The effective grassroots operations of evangelical churches

have not adhered to the realities of Latin America social systems, but the spiritual message has significantly bolstered the lives of many individuals and communities.

As was made clear in Chapter Two, the evangelical emphasis on the spiritual gifts has proven to be particularly contagious within Latin culture. For the majority of communities whose social and economic opportunities are extremely limited, the possibility to be born again and gain a fresh start in life along with a sense of control and divine favor to overcome life's problems is not only viable, but it has also proven to be one of the most attractive elements of conversion. Of the many spiritual gifts, faith healing is perhaps the most exemplary practice of spiritual renewal. The unbiased (i.e. accessible to poor and women) nature of these cures offers immediate and seemingly comprehensive solutions to many of the individual problems Latin Americans face on a daily basis (God is with you always). Through the appeal and act of divine healing, evangelical conversion has been successful in inspiring hope and promise for a better life for millions of impoverished men and especially women looking for hope and empowerment.

Leonardo Boff, a former priest and Brazil's best-know voice of Liberation Theology openly credits Pentecostal churches for properly adhering to the necessities and realities of the people in the country. He quotes, "So many people leave and look for other churches, which have more populist language, and they are more welcoming and they allow for a sacred experience, an experience of God which is easier and more immediate."[3] Here, the intrinsic popularity of evangelicalism in Latin America becomes clear. The witnessing of God's power through the physical experience of faith healing signifies the popular acceptance of evangelical spirituality for men and women alike.

Thus, one can begin to see that explaining the religious transformation of Latin America according to theories of foreign invasion seems insufficient. Not only does the message of a new religion need to be relevant to its intended audience but the religion must also provide them with the forms of practice that fit into the on-the-ground reality of their circumstances.

Other popular theories of evangelical expansion tend to slightly exaggerate the economic and social benefits affiliated with conversion. The evidence provided in this thesis suggests there is no immediate economic or social benefit to conversion as the poverty rates remain largely the same and because there is still a very strong negative social stigma attached to converting to Pentecostalism in Catholic Latin America. This thesis also suggests that by associating people's motivations to material benefits and resource theory alone misrepresents and glosses over the other non-material benefits. The result is that scholars may inadvertently overlook the massive appeal of evangelicalism in Latin America.

As was made clear in the earlier chapters of this thesis, there is a correlation between evangelical conversion that has had a positive effect on household consumption patterns and gender dynamics. Brusco states, "no longer is 20 to 40 percent of the household budget consumed by the husband in the form of alcohol."[4] However, converts do not uphold the strict social ethics of evangelicalism for these consumption patterns alone. Instead, for converts in Latin America, biblically moral and social codes reflect a deeper sense of religiosity that designates the proper and improper types of consumption and boundaries and family and social interaction. Adhering to this spiritual dichotomy allows the traditionally divided male and female values to become more in sync and a

little more equitable. In this regard, conversion and the relative strict social and moral codes that come along with it actually result in a shift from male consumption patterns to female ones. Willems notes that, "most Latin American males would probably agree that the Protestant model of biblical ethics admirably fits their concept *of correct female behavior*."[5] Like the case studies of Maria and Pedro illustrate, biblical ethics do not specifically lead to capital accumulation, nor are there solid indicators that continued advancement will be positive beyond a minimal first gain.[6] Thus, this thesis asserts that evangelical religiosity depicts a spirituality that is accepted and embraced for it combined spiritual and material relevance in the lives of many Latin Americans. However, Latin Americans themselves would and have said that it's the spirituality of conversion and the radical change that it imparts in the family and society that drew them to Pentecostalism and has kept them there.

This thesis focuses on role of women because they serve as perhaps the most all-encompassing examples of the transformative nature and power of evangelicalism in Latin America. The evangelical community offers an emotionally supportive community that will listen to their pain, treat them with respect and seriousness, and do what little it can to help them cope and overcome their problems.[7] By strengthening the family unit itself by attacking some of the destructive patterns of behavior associated with machismo, evangelical communities uplift the dignity of women and children and can significantly reduce tensions and abuses stemming from the male neglect of their responsibilities.[8] This thesis asserts that by creating a safe space where religious teachings call on their listeners to bring about personal and social change in a way that is intrinsic to Latin American women, the evangelical movement has been able to attract the allegiances of

the masses and the women who care for them and that are growing restless to assert their own place, voice, and role in Latin American society in the future.

[1] Brian H. Smith, *Religious Politics in Latin America* (Norte Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 24.
[2] David Martin, *Tongues of Fire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 195-198.
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