THE CROSSROADS OF RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT:

THE IXIL REGION, EVANGELICAL RELIGION, AND RÍOS MONTT

by

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(Under the Direction of Pamela Voekel)

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how Evangelical Christians – logistically, financially, and theologically – aided the Guatemalan army's counterinsurgency campaign in the Ixil region in 1982 and 1983. By consulting newspaper articles, presidential speeches, governmental and non-governmental reports, along with a variety of other primary source documents from the United States and Guatemala, I argue 1) the Ríos Montt government turned to Evangelical Christianity to aid its anti-communist and neoliberal development programs in the Ixil region. And 2) U.S and Guatemalan Evangelical missionaries willfully embraced their role as "spiritual soldiers," legitimizing the Guatemalan army through theological teachings.

INDEX WORDS: Evangelical Religion in Guatemala, Catholic Church in Guatemala, Violence in Guatemala, Counterinsurgency, Neoliberal Development, Ríos Montt, Ronald Reagan.

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DEDICATION

To my mother, my father and my grandmother (Moe) for all their encouragement and support, and also to my future mother-in law, Rosa Montoto, for helping me complete the necessary research for this project. And most importantly, to my future wife and best friend for all of her insight and patience, thank you.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last 40 years there has been an unprecedented growth of Evangelical religion in Latin America. Rather than disappearing during a time of increasing modernization – as most scholars predicted – religious devotion has grown stronger.[1] As Talal Asad reminds us, the traditional "straightforward narrative of progress from the religious to the secular is no longer acceptable."[2] Theories associating modernization with secularization have lost their analytical value, particularly for the developing world.

Guatemala finds itself at the center of this religious resurgence. Instead of abandoning religion, Guatemalans have adopted new forms of expressing religiosity. In 1976, only 4.5 percent of the country's population was Evangelical. Ten years later, however, Evangelicals made up approximately one third of Guatemala's total population, the highest percentage in all of Spanish America.[3] How do we account for such astounding shifts in religious affiliation? Who or what has directed this change? And what kind of impact will Evangelical practices have on a region theologically, culturally, politically, and socially grounded in Roman Catholic and Amerindian traditions?[4]

By narrowing the analytical focus, "The Crossroads of Religion and Development" complicates traditional Evangelical narratives that have linked conversion to abstract structural

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1. Seminal works like, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, argue that as societies progress secular beliefs and institutions, like the nation-state, come to replace religious beliefs and institutions.
2. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, and Modernity*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 1.
3. Sheldon Annis. *God and Production in a Guatemalan Town*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 79; Virginia Garrard-Burnett. *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem,* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 162.
4. Virginia Garrard-Burnett, "The Third Church in Latin America: Religion and Globalization in Contemporary Latin America," In *Latin American Research Review* vol. 39, no. 3, (October 2004).

realignment and changes in the political economy. The story of conversion in Guatemala's Ixil region works to counter previous scholarship that has explained the spread of an undifferentiated Protestantism across an undifferentiated Latin America. In the Ixil region, the rise of Evangelical religion was directly tied to state-sponsored terror in the late 1970s and early 1980s.[5] By highlighting individual actors and regionally-specific dynamics, the Ixil paradigm proves that violence was indeed an important motivation for conversion; there was more at work than intangible structural forces. As will be shown, in the Ixil region, U.S. and Guatemalan authorities turned to Evangelical religion to 1) counter Catholic development programs and theological critiques of structural injustice and 2) to promote a new worldview, conducive to neoliberal developmental goals.

Religion has always run parallel to political and economic systems and as those secular realities transform, so too does religious practice. Most scholars would agree with that assertion, but would hesitate to connect state violence with contemporary religious conversion. This thesis challenges that scholarly disregard and adds "terror" as a determining variable for conversion studies. If believers reject political and economic change, authorities might seek to confront the dissenting faith. Political economies rely on cultural ideologies to sustain and support them and when a particular ideology no longer aids the political economy, those in power may attempt to weaken and replace that belief system with a new one.[6] In the Ixil case, religious practices either sustained or undermined elite-controlled agribusiness. By the mid-1970s, the Catholic Church in

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5. For a sample of works focusing on structural realignments and changes in the political economy, see Emilio Willems, *Followers of the New Faith*, (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967); David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990); Sheldon Annis, *God and Production in a Guatemalan Town*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); To follow the evolution of this literature consult, Reinaldo Román and Pamela Voekel's article, "Enchanted Once More: Popular Religion in Latin America," In José Moya (ed.), *Latin American Historiography*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

6. See Arturo Escobar's *Encountering Development:The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), for a better understanding of culture's relationship to political economy and development.

the Ixil region was denouncing the exploitative practices of the political and economic status quo. In response, the authorities went on the offensive and brutally attacked the local Church.[7] During Ríos Montt's presidency (1982-1983), the government intensified the campaign of religious persecution, and invited U.S. and Guatemalan Evangelicals to spiritually and logistically counter the efforts of the progressive Catholic Church. While Ixil Catholics constantly faced the threat of army reprisal, Evangelical Christians had free rein to operate and proselytize. In the conflict zone, the army and Evangelical missionaries even distributed Protestant identity cards to distinguish the two religious groups.[8] Unlike Catholics in the region, Evangelical Christians willingly embraced the army's struggle against political and economic reform. For their support, Evangelicals received a privileged position in Ixil society and were disproportionately spared from government violence. It was in that polarizing context that a record number of Ixiles converted in 1982 and 1983.

While this study will not discuss every possible motivation for conversion, it does reveal an important relationship between religious belief, counterinsurgency, and development. Moreover, in the Ixil region, coercion was the most important instigator of religious transformation. In 1981, a year before the rule of Ríos Montt, only 20 percent of the town of Nebaj was Evangelical. Two years later in 1983, during the heart of Ríos Montt's

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7. Pedro Gregorio, interview; Padre Bianchetti, interview; Padre Paco, interview; Brother Santiago Otero, interview; Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala. *Testigos fieles del evangelio*. (Guatemala City: Conferencia Episcopal, 2007). It is important to note that the Catholic Church in the rest of Guatemala did not necessarily agree with or partake in the same actions of the Church in the Ixil region. I will discuss this distinction in greater detail in chapter 1. The Catholic Church was not a monolithic organization, but varied from diocese to diocese, and from parish to parish.

8. Brother Santiago Otero, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; Pedro Gregorio, interview; Marcelino, interview; "Freedom of Conscience and Religion," *Organization of American States: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights,* (5 October 1983); "Government Courting of Church Making Progress," Secret Cable, Guatemala and U.S. (19 January 1984), In National Security Archive at George Washington University; *Guatemala: Never Again: REMHI,* 228, 242.

counterinsurgency campaign, 95 percent of Nebaj's population claimed to be born-again.[9] Such statistics do not entirely discount spiritual motivations; conversion cannot be universally explained by coercion. But as this case study demonstrates, some factors weigh more heavily than others, depending on local conditions. Connecting state-led terror to conversion might be less helpful for describing the growth of Evangelical religion in Guatemala City or in other parts of Latin America, like Brazil. Yet by documenting an explicit example, "The Crossroads of Religion and Development" creates a model for other scholars to consult, partially or wholly, for their own work. The explanatory value of a coercion-conversion model, for instance, might help complicate the history of Evangelical religion in Central America, but do little for analyses of northeast Brazil. Considering the complexity and diversity of Latin America, religious scholars should begin to develop "models" or "patterns" of conversion, rather than seeking out universal answers. This study is part of that "de-essentializing" project.

Recent seminal works on Evangelical Christianity in Latin America have dismissed the role of state-led terror and coercion.[10] In the Guatemalan literature, leading scholars, like David Stoll and Virginia Garrard-Burnett, have preferred to focus on the autochthonous nature of Evangelical growth. Guided by the turn to subaltern studies, Stoll and Garrard-Burnett argue that poor Guatemalans used Evangelical religion for their own spiritual ends. Rather than connecting religion to political positioning and economic power holders, they focus on individual devotion

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9. "La Santa Contrainsurgencia," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio* (January 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; David Stoll, *Between Two Armies In the Ixil Towns of Guatemala, (*New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 176-177.

10. For a sample of this literature see, Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?: The Politics of Evangelical Growth*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Amy L. Sherman, *The Soul of Development: Biblical Christianity and Economic Transformation in Guatemala*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Anne Motley Hallum, *Beyond Missionaries: Toward an Understanding of the Protestant Movement in Central America*, (London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1996); Luis Martínez-Fernández, *Protestantism and Political Conflict in the Nineteenth-Century Hispanic Caribbean*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

and the indigenization of religion. They explain that Evangelical religion was a spiritually attractive alternative to the Catholic Church and provided a useful cosmology for dealing with the modern milieu. "Out of body" prayer sessions and flamboyant church services seemed familiar to poor indigenes. Evangelical Christianity's theological and social focus on individuality also made sense in an increasingly "atomized" world. This thesis agrees with the gist of those conclusions, but suggests that self-interested elites also manipulated those very practices. In the Ixil region, in 1982 and 1983, Evangelical Christianity was forced upon the population rather than freely adopted.

Stoll also links the appeal of Evangelical religion to the failure of the Catholic Church. The success of Evangelical religion, he insists, stemmed from the Church's inability to address the changing contours of Guatemalan society. The Catholic Church's critique of structural injustice in the Ixil region was a mistake that alienated the Church's poorest followers. "The Crossroads of Religion and Development," reworks Stoll's somewhat disparaging analysis. Catholic doctrinal alienation was not a determining factor for the growth of Evangelical Christianity. Instead, it was the local Catholic Church's remarkable economic and social success that ultimately led to religious conversion. Because of the popularity of the Church's alternative development programs among the Ixiles, the Guatemalan army violently attacked Church leaders and dedicated parishioners. Most Ixil Catholics embraced the clergy's community programs and found renewed hope in the Church's theological critique of the capitalist system. Only when the army initiated a campaign of religious defamation and persecution did Ixiles convert to Evangelical religion in mass number.

The focus on subaltern agency and the failure of Catholic doctrine obscures as much as it reveals. While conversion as a spiritual or emotional act might operate on an individual basis,

there can also be larger, coercive players involved. "The Crossroads of Religion and Development" reinserts those actors into the story. In 1982 and 1983, spiritual devotion was often secondary to survival. Some Ixiles converted out of spiritual want, but many more converted out of fear. In her book *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem*, Garrard-Burnett explains conversion within a crisis/ solace/ adaptation model. She argues that crises, like exponential population growth and natural disasters, forced Guatemalans to seek alternative spiritual understandings for solace and to help them adapt to their new, difficult lives. Indeed, the crisis/ solace/ adaptation concept sheds light on why many Guatemalans converted. Garrard-Burnett and other historians, however, deny the government's explicit role in the process of religious transformation. They erroneously conclude that the Guatemalan government was not a determining factor.[11] "The Crossroads of Religion and Development" finds Garrard-Burnett's model valuable, but recognizes that in the Ixil case the authorities artificially created a "crisis," narrowed the avenues of "solace," and manipulated "adaptation" to fit their own political and economic objectives.

Outline

Chapter 1, "God and Development in the Ixil Region," provides a *longue durée* view of the contentious relationship between the Catholic Church and the Guatemalan state. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Catholic Church in the Ixil region distanced itself from its traditional allies, wealthy land-owners and the state. By the 1970s, the local Church was no longer a trusted ally of the authorities. Because Catholic leaders promoted alternative economic pursuits that emphasized community development over wage labor, the military government attempted to violently silence the local Church. As a consequence of calculated religious persecution, Evangelical Christianity began to make headway in the Ixil region.

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11. Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala*, 157.

In Chapter 2, “The Gospel of Counterinsurgency,” the state-led attack on the Catholic Church continues, but with a new element. In 1982, Evangelicals joined President Ríos Montt’s Beans and Guns counterinsurgency program and received exclusive rights to work with refugees – which, by that time, made up the majority of the region’s population. The Guatemalan government saw Evangelical missionaries as an important ally against revolutionary upheaval. While the army violently attacked Marxist revolutionaries and peasant supporters (the guns), Evangelical missionaries distributed housing materials, and food and medicine to refugees (the beans). At the height of the armed conflict (1983), Evangelical religion worked as a foil to Catholic progressivism and became a symbol of one’s allegiance to the army.

The final chapter, “The Shock Troops of U.S. Foreign Policy,” extends ideas laid out in chapter 1 and 2 and places them in an international context. U.S. neoconservatives and the Reagan administration shared the Guatemalan state’s fear of progressive Catholicism. While the Ríos Montt government worked directly with Evangelical missionaries, the White House encouraged U.S. Evangelicals to send logistical and financial support to the counterinsurgency campaign. Evangelical anti-communism and the theologically-rooted belief in individualism complemented the political and economic interests of both governments, U.S. and Guatemalan.

CHAPTER 1: GOD AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE IXIL REGION

On 28 November 1982, 700,000 Christian Evangelicals gathered in Guatemala City to celebrate the 100 year anniversary of the legalization of Protestant religion in Guatemala – at the time, the largest concentration of Evangelicals ever to assemble in the Western Hemisphere.[1] This massive show of support for Protestantism in Guatemala sent shockwaves throughout Latin America and the United States. How could a region and a country, spiritually and institutionally dominated for centuries by the Catholic Church, be the site of such an impressive Evangelical rally?

On that day, hundreds of thousands of onlookers crammed into Guatemala City's main plaza to hear the country's top officials proclaim their unequivocal faith in Evangelical Christianity. Pastors and politicians alike called upon the crowd to build a new nation based on biblical righteousness; a foundation, they argued, lost during the long era of Roman Catholic idolatry. Rally leaders Guatemalan President José Efraín Ríos Montt and Argentine Evangelist Luis Palau led the charge, urging Guatemalans to apply Evangelical principles to every aspect of society. The political and economic crisis plaguing the country would end, they intoned, only when Guatemalans had transformed the nation into the "first reformed [Protestant] nation in Latin America."[2]

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1. "Boletín de prensa: cruzada con Luis Palau," (3 January 1983) *Princeton University Latin American Pamphlet Collection: Church and Religion in Guatemala, 1974-1982*?; Shelton H. Davis, "The Evangelical Holy War in El Quiché," (March 1983) Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000. "Christian Evangelicals" refers to all Latin American Protestants, whether they are from traditional Churches like the Methodists or from Pentecostal or Neopentecostal Churches. Today, over two thirds of Protestants in Guatemala are Pentecostals or Neopentecostals.
2. Cristobal Vargas, "Guatemala: A New Jerusalem?" *Latinamerica Press* 3, (February 1983). In Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

The pairing of social and economic change with Evangelical religion was not a new phenomenon for Guatemalans. Exactly one hundred years earlier in 1882, President Justo Rufino Barrios invited Protestant missionaries to help jump start his own program of national development. Barrios and other nineteenth century liberal reformers equated "development" with the supposedly defining characteristics of "advanced" societies: industrialization and urbanization, technicalization of agriculture, private property, rapid growth of capitalist production, and modern educational, cultural, and religious values.[3] Within this framework, Guatemalan liberals came to believe that Protestant religion provided the spiritual foundation of modernity.[4]

Liberal leaders like Barrios claimed that modernization required that old social institutions and traditions (born in the colonial past) be disintegrated and replaced with a new set of social values and organizations.[5] The first step to a modern Guatemala thus was the dissolution of Catholic hegemony. Since the Spanish Conquest, the Catholic Church had been the moral and institutional guardian of the traditional social order, constituting the country's main obstacle to progress.

Protestant religion not only embodied modernity, but it also provided an important counterforce to the power of the Catholic Church. With both of these realizations in mind, President Barrios legally did away with Catholicism as the state religion and declared the freedom of worship for the first time in Guatemala's history. His administration also expropriated vast Church land holdings, closed down monasteries and schools, and deported

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3. Dennis A. Smith, interview; Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 4; Veronica Melander, *The Hour of God? People in Guatemala Confronting Political Evangelicalism and Counterinsurgency*, (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, 1999), 44.

4. See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Stephen Kalberg (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001).

5. Escobar, *Encountering Development* 4, 28. "Advanced societies" were equated with the United States and the nations of Northern Europe.

foreign clergy. [6] Government led persecution attempted to undercut the ideological and material influence of the Church. As the largest collective land holder in Guatemala and the foremost protector of communal agrarianism, the Catholic Church was viewed as one of the main barriers to capitalist production and private propriety ownership – two of the key principles of liberal development. [7]

The actions of nineteenth century liberals created the first space for alternative religious practice in the country and set the stage for the widespread Evangelical growth that occurred in the last quarter of the twentieth century. More importantly, though, was the precedent connecting "development," Evangelical religion, and Guatemalan politics. The liberal notion that Protestantism (Evangelical religion) represented modernity and societal advancement would animate later Guatemalan leaders. [8] Indeed, rally organizers in 1982 adhered to an updated body of liberal reasoning that once again marked the Catholic Church as the enemy of modernization. The antagonistic feelings that dominated the earlier liberal era (1871-1944) had resurfaced in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The goals of the Church had shifted over those hundred years (1882-1982), but it nevertheless continued to represent the antithesis of the government's vision for the

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6. Padre Paco, interview; Manuela Canton Delgado, *Bautizados en fuego. protestantes, discursos de conversión y política en Guatemala (1989-1993),* (Antigua, Guatemala: CIRMA, 1998), 79; North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), "The Salvation Brokers: Conservative Evangelicals in Central America" 18 (January/February 1984) El Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA); El Centro de Documentación de Honduras (CEDOH), "Boletín informativo especial," (March 1983), CIRMA; Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 10-14.

7. Padre Pedro, interview; Delgado, *Bautizados en fuego*, 82; The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, *Private Organizations with U.S. Connections in Guatemala*, (Albuquerque, New Mexico: The Resource Center, 1988), CIRMA; Ralph Lee Woodward, *Central America: A Nation Divided*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 102; Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala,* 13.

8. See Virgilio Zapata Arceyuz, *Historia de la obra evangélica en Guatemala,* (Guatemala City: Génesis Publicidad, 1982). It is important to note that nineteenth century reformers were looking at mainline Protestantism rather than the Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism that dominated the 1980s. Connecting Evangelical religion to modernity, however, was present during the promotion of both.

future. The growth of Evangelical religion would be inextricably tied to this contentious relationship between the Catholic Church and the state.[9]

The parallels between nineteenth century liberal reform and governmental policy in the 1980s would become all too apparent to the inhabitants of the Ixil region. Located in the northern part of the department of Quiché in the rugged Cuchumatánes Mountains, the Ixil region and its indigenous residents (Ixiles) remained relatively isolated throughout the colonial period. Their only contact with outside authorities had been through Dominican missionaries until Barrios' modernization plan reached the area in the late nineteenth century. In accordance with the liberal development program, the authorities confiscated Ixil communal lands and turned them into large privately-owned coffee plantations with the goal of producing for international markets. Most Ixiles attempted to defend their communal land practices, but were quickly overrun by the agrarian capitalist model imposed by Barrios' government.[10] Wealthy land owners, with the help of the national government, forced Ixil communities into a semi-proletarianized labor system. For several months out of the year, Ixil men worked on plantations for oppressively low wages, while the rest of the year they tended their own small plots of land. The system left Ixil communities in an extreme state of poverty and gave elite land owners in the highlands and on the pacific coast a cheap labor force for the cultivation of export crops, like sugarcane and coffee. [11]

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9. David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America,* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1991), 24. Martin explains that "perhaps the optimum conditions for Protestant expansion exist where the [Catholic] church has been seriously weakened but the culture not secularized."

10. Padre Bianchetti, interview; Miguel De León Ceto, "Las fuentes de poder del movimiento evangélico en Nebaj, El Quiché" (master's thesis, Universidad Rafael Landívar, 2006), 17; Diocesis del Quiché, *El Quiché: El pueblo y su iglesia*, (Santa Cruz del Quiché, Guatemala, 1994), 13; George Black, *Garrison Guatemala*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 82; Carol A. Smith, *Guatemalan Indians and the State: 1540 to 1988*, (Austin: University Texas Press, 1990), 82-90.

11. David Stoll. *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). 28-31; Benjamin N. Colby and Pierre L. Van den Berghe. *Ixil Country: A Plural Society in Highland Guatemala*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969). Ixiles had always been historically impoverished.

The 1877 agricultural law banning collective land holdings challenged the power of the Church and also the regional autonomy of indigenous communities. When the liberal government decided to suppress the Catholic Church, Ixiles lost their only ally in the fight against private property ownership and agrarian capitalism.[12] From 1871 to 1944, liberal economic and social policies reigned over the Ixil region and the rest of the country. Coffee and sugar production expanded, the institutional Church found itself marginalized, and indigenous laborers faced a situation of debt peonage and forced labor.[13] Although the Catholic faith continued to be at the center of local beliefs, the Church's institutional power had been broken. With the Catholic Church weakened and with the encouragement of the liberal government, Protestant missionaries entered the Ixil region for the first time. The missionaries, however, encountered fierce opposition from the Catholic populace. Evangelical missionary bases were setup, but few locals converted. Throughout the liberal era, the alliance between Protestants and liberal elites, as a result, remained mostly an urban one. Nevertheless, the door had been opened. Only after a series of reactionary and bloody events in the late 1970s would Evangelical missionaries finally make headway among the Ixil population.

With the end of the long liberal era and the overthrow of the last liberal dictator, Jorge Ubico, in 1944, it appeared as if the Catholic Church's relations with the state might finally stabilize and improve. The new government allowed clergy to engage in public matters for the first time since 1871, guaranteeing religious freedom. Initially cordial relations between the José

However, in the late nineteenth century under the liberal reforms, levels of poverty and landlessness were taken to new levels.

12. The reference to "controversial" is in relation to the Church's spiritual role in the Conquest of the Americas and its subsequent legitimizing of the oppressive Spanish colonial order.

13. Bruce J. Calder, *Crecimiento y cambio de la iglesia católica guatemalteca, 1944-1966,* (Guatemala: Estudios Centroamericanos, 1970), 153; Centro de Estudios Ecuménicos, "Boletín," (Mexico, 1986), CIRMA.

Arevalo government and the Catholic Church, however, soured rapidly.[14] When President Arevalo (1944-1950) and Jacobo Arbenz (1950-1954) refused to reverse previous anticlerical legislation restricting Church property ownership, the religious hierarchy grew increasingly belligerent. The window of affability had closed. After Arbenz's revolutionary 1952 land reform decree, Archbishop Rossell y Arellano adopted the growing Cold War rhetoric of the 1950s and allied the Church with conservative elements opposed to the newly formed progressive government. Lambasting the Arbenz administration as a communist conspiracy, the Archbishop hoped to provide spiritual legitimacy to the oppositional movement and consequently regain the Church's pre-liberal privileged position. The counterrevolutionary forces had promised to restore the Catholic Church's prominence in exchange for its religious blessing.[15] While the CIA and conservative Guatemalan elites organized a propaganda war and a dissident military force, the Church led an internal oppositional campaign. From January to March 1953, Church leaders moved the mythic Black Christ of Esquipulas around the country in a national pilgrimage against communist influences in the government. Archbishop Rossell y Arellano further legitimized the counterrevolutionary cause, publishing pastoral letters that instructed Catholics to join the struggle against international communism, an evil supposedly embraced by the current authorities.[16]

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14. Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944-1954,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 36-37, 48-49.

15. Greg Grandin, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 78; Calder, *Crecimiento y cambio de la iglesia católica guatemalteca,* 154; Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit: The Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999).

16. "La santa contrainsurgencia," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio,* (January 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000; Centro de Estudios Ecuménicos, (Mexico, 1986), CIRMA; Linda Unger and David J. Kalke, eds., "Becoming the Church: An Historical Overview of the Birth of the Guatemalan Church in Exile," Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000; Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope*, 212; Melander, *The Hour of God*, 52.

When the infamous 1954 CIA-backed coup against Arbenz finally came to completion and the new conservative government took control, the Catholic Church was promptly rewarded for its supporting role.[17] Immediately after the coup, the Archbishop wrote to coup leader and new president, Carlos Castillo Armas, on behalf of the Church:

> I send you warm greetings and fervent congratulations in the name of the nation which awaits you with open arms, recognizing and admiring your sincere patriotism. May our Lord God guide you and your heroic companions in your liberating campaign against atheistic communism.[18]

In return for such enthusiastic support and religious legitimacy, the government introduced various pro-clerical laws into the 1956 Constitution, including the reinstatement of the Church's right to own property and work in the field of education, privileges denied since 1871. The new Constitution also reopened the missionary field to foreign clergy, a decision that became particularly important in rural areas like the Ixil region. The government invited foreign priests into the countryside hoping that they would continue where the Archbishop and the Church hierarchy had left off – defending parishioners against communism and unquestionably supporting the conservative authorities. In the Ixil region and the department of Quiché, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (from Spain) and Catholic Action took up the calling. [19] The constitutional decree allowing an influx of foreign clergy, however, would be a decision that placed Church-state relations on a new dialectical path.

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17. For more information on the 1954 coup, see Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope* or *Schlesinger* and Kinzer, *Bitter Fruit.*

18. Qtd. in The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, *Private Organizations with U.S. Connections in Guatemala* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: The Resource Center, 1988).

19. Brother Santiago Otero, interview; Diocesis del Quiché, *El Quiché: el pueblo y su iglesia*, 37;

a. Calder, *Crecimiento y cambio de la iglesia católica guatemalteca,* 156-162; Jésus García-Ruiz, "Las sectas fundamentalistas en Guatemala," *Ciencia y Tecnología para Guatemala,* (año 2, abril 1985), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000; Woodward, *Central America*, 241; Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala,* 101; David Stoll, "Evangelicals, Guerillas, and the Army: The Ixil Triangle under Ríos Montt," *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemala Crisis*, ed. Robert M. Carmack (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 102.

By strengthening the presence of the Catholic Church in the Ixil region, the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart and Catholic Action would defend the area from communist intruders and Protestant missionaries. Their pastoral efforts deliberately put them in contact with the communities' most impoverished and vulnerable inhabitants, the semi-proleterianized labor force. Yet, newly arrived Spanish missionaries were unaccustomed to the poverty and injustice occurring in Quiché and were overwhelmed by how plantation owners and merchants treated Ixil workers.[20] As a result, missionary priests and nuns gradually replaced their strictly anticommunist sentiments with a more critical stance of the status quo. Over the course of a decade (1956 to the mid-1960s), missionary efforts evolved from simple self-help measures and religious training to social programs designed to create profound social and economic change.[21]

The desperate economic conditions arising all over Latin America reinforced and further radicalized the changing worldviews of Church leaders in the Ixil region. In the second half of the twentieth century, a rural-subsistence crisis engulfed the region, dramatically increasing the levels of poverty confronting peasants. The expansion of export agriculture and capitalist modernization, which liberal reformers had pushed for so long, had finally come to fruition. In Central America from 1950 to 1979, land devoted to export crops grew rapidly, while the population of landless peasants increased by 300 percent. As the majority of the population faced landlessness and deteriorating living standards, elites gained huge profits from agro-exports. With the consolidation of capitalism in the region, community ties dissolved and millions of people were denied access to land and other basic resources. The seeds of widespread discontent

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20. Black, *Garrison Guatemala,* 95; Stoll, *Between Two Armies,* 193.
21. Brother Santiago Otero, interview; Diocesis del Quiché. *El Quiché: el pueblo y su iglesia*. 49-58; Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?,* 192-194.

grew and social unrest spread. For those who doubted this troubled reality, the Cuban revolution and the radical changes that followed soon convinced them.[22]

In the Catholic Church, many began to realize that the Church's own survival depended on taking an active role in fighting the roots of discontent: poverty, misery, exploitation, landlessness, and so on. Between 1962 and 1965 at the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican (Vatican II), Church officials reintroduced dormant ideas of social justice in an effort to counter rising popular unrest. Latin American Bishops returned from Vatican II, endorsing political and economic reforms through Church doctrine. Following the example of Vatican II, a group of Bishops organized a conference in Medellín, Colombia in 1968 to devise a more regionally distinct plan to contend with the structural causes of Latin American poverty. From the meeting, the Bishops recommended that 1) priests should condemn the structures that perpetuate injustice; 2) one need not (and should not) passively accept injustice and; 3) the Church should promote the idea that the Kingdom of God should be brought into existence by people in this world. These proposals would be carried out, they concluded, by developing a "preferential option for the poor" and by renewing community spirit within local parishes.[23] The Bishops believed that popular, peaceful change could occur if the Church set a moral example by condemning injustice and promoting social reform.

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22. Bethany Moreton, *The Soul of the Service Economy: Wal-Mart and the Making of Christian Free Enterprise, 1929–1994* (PhD diss., Yale University, 2006), 356; Christian Smith, *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 9-10, 93; Melander, *The Hour of God*, 77.

23. Fernando Bermúdez, *Historia de la iglesia católica: diócesis de San Marcos* (Guatemala: Católica Kyrios, 2006), 170-177; "Guatemala, 'A New Way of Life:' The Development Poles," *Guatemalan Church in Exile* 4, no. 5 (September/October 1984); "La santa contrainsurgencia," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio,* (January 1983); Phillip Berryman, "Base Christian Communities and the Future of Latin America," *Month Review* 36, no. 3 (July-August 1984). All in Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000; *Guatemala: Never Again! REMHI, Recovery of Historical Memory Project; The Official Report of the Human Rights Office, Archdiocese of Guatemala*. (Markyknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 204.

The Medellín recommendations met mixed reviews and split the Latin American Church into opposing camps. Thousands of priests and nuns refocused their work to concentrate on the poorer communities of Latin America, while many conservative, high-ranking clergy denounced such actions and continued to justify the old system. In Guatemala, the divisions fell along diocese lines.[24] Church authorities in Guatemala City demonized the ideas circulating out of Medellín. The diocese of Quiché, on the other hand, wholeheartedly adopted the recommendations and integrated them into their localized projects. [25] The initial reactions of foreign clergy to the terrible conditions affecting the inhabitants of Quiché (and more specifically the Ixil region) found comfort and inspiration in the progressive ideas arising out of Vatican II and Medellín. In the late-1960s, the Guatemalan Church was rocked by division. Yet in Quiché – far away from the Capital and the influence of the Church hierarchy – the diocese embraced a new social doctrine and developed its own distinct pastoral effort.[26]

The Ixil town of Nebaj became of one of the major centers for the implementation of the diocese's progressive ideas. Padre Javier, from the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart, organized an extensive lay leadership network within the community and encouraged the formation of cooperatives and other development programs. With the help of Catholic Action, Padre Javier and local lay leaders developed community projects to give Ixiles the opportunity to participate in more dignified and financially rewarding work. The Church offered an alternative to the inhumane system of seasonal wage labor, which forced three out of every four Ixil men to work

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24. In Guatemala there are fourteen different dioceses. See the Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, *Al servicio de la vida, la justicia y la paz* (Guatemala: Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, 1997).

25. *El Imparcial*, 30 September 1971; *La Nación*, 3 May, 1978; Brother Santiago Otero, interview; Father Paco, interview; Diocesis del Quiché, *El Quiché: el pueblo y su iglesia*, 53; Phillip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: Essential Facts about the Revolutionary Religious Movement in Latin America--and beyond* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987) 112.

26. "The Rise of the Religious Right in Central America." *The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center Bulletin*, (25 September 1987), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000; Diocesis del Quiché, *El Quiché: el pueblo y su iglesia*, 46.

on the distant costal plantations for terrible wages.[27] The diocese designed parish development programs to alleviate the plight of the poor and to economically unify the community against extortion.[28] Most importantly, the programs emphasized that communal efforts (not just individual ones) were the key to improving living conditions.

After purchasing several tracts of land for community projects, Padre Javier and a group of lay leaders led a cooperative program to raise sheep for the production of wool and meat. That project and a subsequent apple orchard plan met little success. The cooperative movement, however, had established a popular following among the Ixil populace. Cooperatives allowed community members to have a more active and equitable role in the production and marketing of the fruits of their labor. Earnings were equally distributed among participants and the work could be done fairly close to home. One participant remembered "the cooperatives gave the people a sense of possibility, creating a movement of empowerment among the poor and dispossessed."[29]

By the early 1970s, Padre Javier and other cooperative leaders had finally come upon an economically viable project for the community: beekeeping. At the time, there was a high demand for honey on the international market and beekeeping required minimal startup capital. For a community of landless peasants, honey production seemed like the ideal project. Everyday the bees flew out over the land of the plantation owners, collected nectar, and returned to their makeshift homes among the Nebaj community. In each village surrounding Nebaj, the community built a fenced-in shelter to store the beehives. Each *socio* or cooperative member was

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27. Projects included the building of new schools, basic health care, portable water projects, colonization projects, campesino leagues, various agricultural projects, and most importantly economic cooperatives. Black, *Garrison Guatemala*, 83.

28. Marcelino, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; Jim Burchfield, interview; Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, *Private Organizations with U.S. Connections in Guatemala,* 4; Blasé Bonpane, "The Church and Revolutionary Struggle in Central America," *CIRMA*.

29. Marcelino, interview; *¿Donde esta el futuro? Procesos de reintegración en comunidades de retornados* (Guatemala: La asociación para el avance de las ciencias sociales en Guatemala (AVANCSO), 1992), 29-47.

then allowed no more than two hives to guarantee the projects long-term economic and environmental sustainability. When the honey was ready, *socios* brought their harvest to Nebaj where it was pooled together and sold by the pound on the international market, mostly to Europe. To assure that everything went smoothly and that returns were distributed equally, the Nebaj parish formed a democratically elected central committee to oversee the entire process.[30]

The bee cooperative allowed its members to work near their homes, eliminating the need to travel long distances to elite-owned plantations. By 1978, a bee cooperative *socio* earned twice as much as a seasonal plantation laborer.[31] In no small way, the Church had developed a successful alternative economic program to the one promoted and controlled by the government and landed oligarchy. On the one side sat a large scale agro-export system sustained by repressive labor practices; and on the other a burgeoning economic project geared towards export, yet rooted in community development and equitable distribution. Embodied in this alternative Church-led project was an implicit and explicit critique of the dominant economic and social system. [32] Through cooperative projects and social doctrine, the Catholic Church in Quiché taught its parishioners to seek out the causes of their misery and find workable solutions.

Because of its success with cooperatives and other local development programs, the Church and its leaders in the Ixil region met resistance from those in power. The development projects promoted by the Church had reduced the number of wage laborers in the area; the cheap labor that land-owners required for the production of sugar and coffee. Thanks to the cooperatives, Ixiles had more control over their own economic destinies and no longer needed to

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30. Marcelino, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; Jim Burchfield, interview; Padre Bianchetti, interview; Pedro Gregorio, interview.

31. Jim Burchfield, interview.

32. Under President John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress Program, the Guatemalan military and USAID initially aided these Church-led cooperative projects. That support, however, dissipated as the years went on and as wealthy land owners recognized the personal economic losses brought on by the cooperatives. By the late 1960's and early 1970's, governmental support had turned into opposition.

seek out low paying wage work. Cooperatives threatened the very agro-export system that liberals imposed on the region in the late nineteenth century. Back then, the Catholic Church was the main opponent to the capitalist economy and now, one hundred years later, the Church was threatening the system again. The motivations for Catholic opposition to the capitalist system had shifted from a paternalistic need to maintain power to a heartfelt desire to aid impoverished Ixiles. Nonetheless, the government response was the same. While the Church hierarchy in Guatemala City maintained its alliance with the authorities, a brutal conflict between the rural Church and the state was on the verge of erupting. From 1956 to the mid-1970s, the Catholic Church in rural areas like the Ixil region had slowly moved away from its alliance with the military and landed elite and had become a thorn in the side of the capitalist-oriented government.[33] The Church's promotion of non-capitalist, communal agrarianism had upset the balance of power.

When armed guerrillas opposed to the government (the Army of the Poor, EGP) arrived in the Ixil region in the late 1970s, the landed elite and its allies found the necessary excuse to purge progressive elements within the Catholic Church. For years, the feelings of betrayal and disappointment among elites toward the clergy had been mounting; the resentment, however, had remained mostly submerged for most of the 1960s and early 1970s. That all changed when the guerrillas decided to carry out their first operation in the Ixil region, assassinating the owner of La Perla plantation, the "Tiger of Ixcán," in June 1975.[34] Overnight, the army moved into the Ixil region and the secret police began to kidnap local leaders from Nebaj and neighboring

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33. Centro de Estudios Ecuménicos (Mexico, 1986), *CIRMA*; Manuel A. Vásquez and Marie Friedmann Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion across the Americas*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 202.

34. Pastor Gabriel, interview; Vandveire, interview; Pedro Gregorio, interview; Black, *Garrison Guatemala,* 77; Melander, *The Hour of God*, 81. For an excellent first hand account of this event, see Mario Payeras, *Los Días de la Selva,* (Madrid: Editorial Revolución, 1984).

aldeas. One Peace Corp worker recalled that at night "you could hear the squeaky brakes of the old Toyota Land Cruisers [which were used by the secret police] and you knew someone was about to disappear."[35] Many of those who first went missing were specifically targeted because of their leadership roles in the Catholic Church and the cooperative movement. The military used the arrival of the guerrillas to remove any possible threat to the status quo.[36]

The guerrillas had entered the Ixil region after a failed revolutionary campaign in the eastern part of the country. Here in the highlands, they believed they could build a popular movement among the exploited indigenous population. Following in the footsteps of the Cuban Revolution and paralleling the oppositional movements developing in El Salvador and Nicaragua, they called for the redistribution of land and the improvement of campesino lives. Their ideas, like their revolutionary predecessors, were rooted in Marxist principles and their message quickly resonated with a population struggling to survive and ready for change.[37] A dedicated minority of Ixiles provided direct material support to the guerrillas, while the rest of the population (the majority) held varying degrees of ideological sympathy with the revolutionary movement. The guerrillas, as a result, were fairly free to roam the Ixil countryside throughout the 1970s. Within this network of support, many Ixiles came to view the guerrilla's revolutionary goals as analogous to the Catholic Church's mission. Both groups had called for the people to unite and work together against the problems of underdevelopment, and many believed that what the guerrillas proposed added weight to the ideas and projects already laid out by the Church. The authorities took the assumption to be an undeniable fact. Therefore, when the

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35. Jim Burchfield, interview; *Tierra, Guerra, Y Esperanza: Memoria del Ixcán, 1966-1992*, (Santa Cruz del Quiché, Guatemala: Diócesis del Quiché y REMHI, 2000), 33-36.

36. *¿Donde esta el Futuro?,* AVANCSO, 40-41.

37. Marcelino, interview; Pastor Andrés, interview; Vandeveire, interview; Delgado, *Bautizados en fuego,* 56; Melander, *The Hour of God*, 81; Sheldon Annis, *God and Production in a Guatemalan Town* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 5-6; Victor Perera, *Unfinished Conquest: The Guatemalan Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 59-89.

army went after supposed guerrillas, the Catholic Church found itself at the center of the attack. The majority of Catholic leaders in the Ixil region had maintained their commitment to improving the lives of the poor without directly helping the armed revolutionary movement. Church leaders insisted that "the guerrillas have their own project, while we as the Church have our own distinct program."[38] The military, however, was neither able nor did it desire to make the distinction. The arrival of the guerrillas gave the military the chance to kill two birds with one stone. Both were opposed to the current economic and social system, and thus both were equally punished.[39]

Church-state relations had come full circle. One hundred years ago, the Guatemalan government claimed that the Church was the enemy of capitalist modernization. By the late 1970s, the authorities viewed the Church in a similar vein. The killing of the Tiger of Ixcán in 1975 initiated a new era of Catholic persecution. The labels were different, but the philosophical conflict remained relatively the same. In the late nineteenth century, the liberal government labeled the Catholic Church as a "backward" enemy and subsequently persecuted the Church because of its guardianship of the old colonial order – a social order riddled with problems, yet opposed to the modern capitalist system. In the 1970s, the government and the military identified the Catholic Church as a "Marxist" enemy because of its critique of the status quo and its promotion of non-capitalist, community development.[40] Opposition to the capitalist system motivated government persecution on both occasions. The accusations that justified that persecution had changed in wording, but not in substance.

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38. Marcelino, interview.

39. Brother Santiago Otero, interview; Padre Bianchetti, interview; Pastor Andrés, interview; Interview with two Guatemalan priests, by Dorthee Soelle; "The Guatemalan Church's Option for the Poor" *Guatemala: A People in Search of Dignity* (Winter 1981), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; Judith N. Noone, "Guatemala: Mission in Situations of Violence," In *New Face of the Church in Latin America*, ed. Guillermo Cook, (Maryknoll, New York: American Society of Missiology Series, 1994), 169.

40. *La Nación*, 3 May 1978, CIRMA; Diocesis del Quiché, *El Quiché: El Pueblo y Su Iglesia,* 59.

From 1975 to 1980, army and secret police assaults against the guerrillas and the Catholic Church were consistent and selective. Rather than persecuting the entire town of Nebaj, the authorities carried out midnight raids, kidnapping and murdering important community leaders, particularly Church cooperative directors and lay leaders.[41] During these initial years of persecution, the army hoped to silence (not necessarily annihilate) dissident voices. The goal was to scare the Church and its leaders back into submission. The strategy had the opposite effect. Instead of silencing Church leaders, selective repression further polarized the situation. As guerrilla resistance mounted and the army presence expanded, pastoral agents stoically reported army-led atrocities to the rest of the country and the world. Most Church leaders peacefully challenged the oppressive authorities, calling for social reform and the end of army repression. Some lay leaders and even a few priests, however, decided to join the guerrilla ranks in response to the army's brutal campaign.[42] From their perspective (a small minority of the Church), peaceful change was no longer possible. Whether nonviolent or armed, resistance from Church leaders only grew stronger with the escalation of military violence. Inadvertently, the Catholic Church in the Ixil region had become a part of the revolutionary front, theologically justifying structural change.

The growing boldness of Church leaders was not entirely fatalistic. Events in Guatemala and the rest of Central America had convinced many that radical change was just around the corner. The guerrilla movement in Guatemala had expanded its constituency considerably and in Nicaragua and El Salvador revolutionary movements were on the verge of success. When the Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua in 1979, Guatemalans in the Ixil

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41. Marcelino, interview; Father Pedro, interview; León Ceto, *Las fuentes de poder del movimiento evangélico en Nebaj*, 34; "Informe especial: reconstruir con permiso el rey," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio,* (Junio 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000.

42. José Luis Chea Urruela, *Guatemala: La cruz fragmentada* (Costa Rica: DEI, FLACSO, 1988), 464; Diocesis del Quiché, *El Quiché: el pueblo y su iglesia,*146; Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala,*129.

region and other rural areas listened attentively to their radios and enthusiastically celebrated the victory.[43] Change in Guatemala also appeared imminent and the government was well aware of the explosive possibilities.

To counteract the rising tide of popular opposition, the army – under the orders of President Romero Lucas García – intensified its campaign of repression. Between 1978 and 1981, army operations transitioned from selective to widespread acts of violence. Professionals, teachers, students, and union activists, who spoke out against the government in Guatemala City and other urban areas were the first to bear the brunt of the stepped-up counterinsurgency campaign.[44] Next on the list was the rural Catholic Church. As one of the last spaces for the freedom of expression, the Catholic Church was promptly under heightened attack. In Quiché and the Ixil region, the army machine-gunned the homes of priests and nuns, claiming that the Church was an organizational base for the guerrilla movement.[45] Political slogans such as, "Campesinos, don't be fooled by the lies of the Communist Priests," became commonplace in the towns and aldeas of the Ixil region.[46]

The army spread the misconception that Church leaders were synonymous with communist subversives. These official accusations justified the persecution of pastoral leaders and warned other members of the community to distance themselves from the progressive Church. Anyone who wished to gain the favor of the military simply had to agree that "the

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43. Vandeveire, interview.

44. For a good study on the urban movement, see Deborah Levenson-Estrada, *Trade Unionists Against Terror: Guatemala City, 1954-1985* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994). By 1979, the number of workers participating in open protest had decreased dramatically because of government repression.

45. Brother Santiago Otero, interview; Marcelino, interview; La Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, "Boletín," (24 July 1980), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

46. "Maryknoll Order Delivers Document of Army Atrocities Pre and Post- Coup of March 23," *Confidential Cable, United States Embassy, Guatemala*, (22 April 1982), National Security Archive.

priests were guerrillas."[47] In Nebaj, the army accused Padre Javier of guerrilla activities and threatened to kill him unless he left the country. All around the department of Quiché, priests and lay leaders disappeared and turned up dead in the streets. During the years of the worst violence (1978-1983), the army and security forces killed as many as 20 priests and 500 lay leaders in Quiché alone. But rather than back down, the diocese continued to condemn the army and the oppressive social and economic order.[48] Bishop Juan Gerardi, head of the diocese of Quiché, repeatedly confronted the military authorities and on one occasion told the regional military commander:

> You are the ones who kill; you are the enemies of the people. We have to be with the people; therefore, we are on the opposite side of you. As long as you don't change, there can be no dialogue and we won't be able to establish a bridge of communication nor will we be able to form any agreements between the two of us.[49]

By 1980 the violence against the Church reached unprecedented levels throughout the diocese. The fear of kidnapping, torture, and murder weighed over the head of every pastoral leader. Priests and laypersons reported that Church members had to bury their bibles and other religious objects. If the army found a religious with such possessions, they were accused of being a guerrilla and could face execution. Not even Bishop Gerardi was immune from the violence,

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47. Pastor Andrés, interview; *Institute for Policy Studies Resource,* (July 1982, Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

48. Pedro Gregorio, interview; Padre Bianchetti, interview; Padre Paco, interview; Brother Santiago Otero, interview; Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala, *Testigos fieles del evangelio*, (Guatemala City, Guatemala: Conferencia Episcopal, 2007), 175-324; *Mártir de la paz: Monseñor Juan Gerardi Conedora, 1922-1998.* (Guatemala City: Guatemalan Archbishop's Humans Rights Office, 1998). For a first hand account of the army's campaign against the Church and the Ixil people, also see Ricardo Falla, *Masacres de la selva: Ixcán, Guatemala (1975-1982).*

49. Diócesis del Quiché, *El Quiché: el pueblo y su iglesia,* 153; Spanish version: Ustedes son los que asesinan; ustedes son los enemigos del pueblo. Nosotros tenemos que estar con el pueblo; por lo tanto, estamos al lado opuesto de ustedes. Mientras ustedes no cambien, no puede haber diálogo, no se puede establecer un puente de comunicación, no puede haber acuerdos entre nosotros y ustedes.

narrowly escaping two assassination attempts on his life.[50] Although the Church in Quiché maintained its commitment to the people, it paid a heavy price.

Church leaders were now in the middle of a full-blown attack and were left with two options: exile or martyrdom. With the violence and religious persecution reaching new levels everyday, Bishop Gerardi ordered all Catholic workers to evacuate the diocese as an act of denunciation and to save the lives of religious workers. As the priests reluctantly abandoned their Churches, the army quickly moved in and turned Church buildings into army barracks and torture centers. The military occupation was pragmatic, but more importantly it symbolically represented the army's victory over the Catholic Church.[51] In Nebaj's Church, the army stole sacramental valuables and setup a machine gun in the bell tower.[52] The site of the church became a feared place among the locals. People went into the Church and were later found mutilated and dead in the street or in the river.

Despite the violence, some local lay leaders chose to stay in the region and form small decentralized prayer groups among the frightened population.[53] With the diocese's former leadership in exile, the government and army over the next three years (1980-1983) directed a campaign of co-optation and murder against the remaining Church leaders. The army's persecution of Catholics did not stop with the departure of the official Church, only worsening in 1981 when the army initiated a brutal "scorched-earth campaign." In the Ixil region and Quiché,

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50. Santiago Otero, interview; Padre Paco, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; "Statement on Central America, Issued in the Name of the U.S. Catholic Conference," (19 November 1981); Shelton H. Davis, "Guatemala: The Evangelical Holy War in El Quiché." Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

51. The army's occupation of a Catholic Church was also pragmatic because the Church's location in the center of town and the fact that the Catholic Church was often the largest architectural structure in the area. However, these reasons do not detract from the symbolic meanings that accompanied those actions.

52. Padre Pedro interview; Pastor Andrés interview; Phillip Berryman. *Stubborn hope: Religion, Politics, and Revolution in Central America*. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994). 124. Stoll, *Between Two Armies*. 170.

53. These small prayer groups often became apart of the Catholic Charismatic movement. For more information on the Charismatic movement see David Stoll's *Between Two Armies*.

the army had succeeded in displacing the Catholic Church as the region's main power holder.[54] One story still told by many Ixiles is emblematic of this turn of events. In the town of Chajul, a religious sculpture located in the center of town depicted the image of Jesus Christ with two angels by his side. When the army entered the town in 1980, soldiers denigrated the monument by dressing the two angels with army uniforms and positioning wooden guns in the angels' hands to point at the image of Christ. The symbolic message was clear. The army was now in control, even the Son of God was under its authority.[55]

In the context of the army's campaign against the Catholic Church, Evangelical religion finally began to find a place among the Ixiles. By 1980, to be Catholic was to risk being associated with the guerrillas. Evangelical religious practice, on the other hand, did not provoke such suspicions. At that time, the authorities characterized the Evangelical minority as being anticommunist and supposedly apolitical, far removed from the radicalism of the Catholic Church. A decade before the violence arrived in 1969, two Methodist missionaries counted only 139 Evangelical converts in the entire Ixil region, not even one percent of the area's population. By 1981, the number of Evangelical followers had grown exponentially, accounting for over 20 percent of the Ixil population.[56] A number of initial Evangelical converts abandoned the Catholic faith, disgruntled by the Church's decision to take an active role in social reform. The majority of Ixiles, however, fled to Evangelical Churches for spiritual solace in the absence of the persecuted Catholic leadership. Indeed, Evangelical membership provided a measure of physical safety that

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54. Pastor Pedro Bernal, interview; "Maryknoll Order Delivers Document of Army Atrocities Pre and Post- Coup of March 23."*Confidential Cable, United States Embassy, Guatemala*. (22 April 1982); Conferencia Episcopal de Guatemala. *Testigos fieles del evangelio*. (Guatemala City, Guatemala: Conferencia Episcopal, 2007), 175-324; *Guatemala: Never Again!: REMHI*, 47.

55. Padre Pedro, interview; Pedro Gregorio, interview.

56. Pastor Andrés, interview; Pastor Pedro Bernal, interview; "La santa contrainsurgencia." *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio* (January 1983). In Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; Stoll, *Between Two Armies*, 176-177. In 1978, the Ixil population was estimated at 85,000 inhabitants. According to these figures, the Evangelical population would have increased from roughly 139 to over 17,000 people.

the army denied to Catholic parishioners. The growth of Evangelical religion in all of Guatemala reflected a similar pattern. In 1976, only 4.5 percent of the Guatemalan population claimed to be Evangelical. Ten years later – toward the backend of the era of violence –Evangelicals made up approximately one third of Guatemala's total population, the highest percentage in all of Spanish America.[57]

The Guatemalan government's persecution of the Catholic Church also explains the rise of Evangelical religion. Liberal reformer, Justo Rufino Barrios, first allowed Protestant missionaries into the country to break the hegemony of the Catholic Church in an effort to fuel capitalist modernization. Those first arrivals and their converts remained a tiny minority until the 1970s. Only when the Catholic Church faced a new, more violent wave of government-led persecution did Evangelical religion gain a substantial following. Granted, the denominational affiliations of Guatemalan Evangelicals had shifted over those one hundred years from traditional Churches, like the Presbyterians and Primitive Methodists, to a new genre of Evangelical religion embodied in Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal practices.[58] Still, the rise of Protestantism – whether traditional or Pentecostal – paralleled and relied on the volatile relations between the Guatemalan state and the Catholic Church.

Because of the Catholic Church's objections to agrarian capitalism, it found itself at constant odds with the government. As the armed conflict intensified in the late 1970s, the Church's defiance became intolerable to the increasingly vulnerable authorities.[59] At first, Evangelical conversion, particularly in areas like the Ixil region, appeared to be an inadvertent

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57. Annis, *God and Production*, 79; Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala*, 162.

58. Dennis A. Smith, interview; Heinrich Schafer, *Entre Dos Fuegos: Una Historia Socio-Política de la Iglesia Presbiteriana de Guatemala*, (Guatemala City, Guatemala: CEDEPCA and Skipjack Press, 2002), 57-58.

59. There are numerous instances of Church authorities speaking out against capitalism, but this one – from the Guatemalan Bishop's conference - seems to summarize the Church's sentiments quite nicely. "The hoarding of consumer products, with a view toward making profits, is a sin which cries out to heaven and admits to no justification whatsoever." *Communiqué from the Guatemalan Bishop's Conference*, 27 January 1990. In Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

consequence of the government's campaign of persecution and defamation. The Catholic Church in rural Guatemala had become the enemy of the state, and Evangelical religion filled a spiritual void. When José Efraín Ríos Montt took power in March 1982, however, the government adopted a more explicit role in the promotion of Evangelical religion. Rather than just attacking Catholicism militarily, the authorities promoted an alternative faith. That decision, in combination with the Catholic persecution that occurred from roughly 1975 to 1982, directly led to the impressive 700,000 strong Evangelical rally that took place in November 1982. Like Justo Rufino Barrios, Ríos Montt and his government believed that Protestant religion (in all of its forms) would encourage and sustain the modern capitalist society that they desired; the very system that the Catholic Church resisted. As a nineteenth century liberal, Barrios viewed the Catholic Church as an obstacle to the process of capitalist modernization. Rios Montt as a twentieth century "neoliberal" similarly reasoned that Catholicism inhibited the development of a modern capitalist society. But unlike Barrios and his other predecessors, Rios Montt intertwined Evangelical religious promotion with a brutal counterinsurgency campaign – resulting in shocking waves of conversion in 1982 and 1983. The roots of that genocidal campaign directed by Ríos Montt and the religious persecution that accompanied and preceded it, can be traced back to the competing visions of development that shaped Catholic Church-state relations for most of Guatemala's post-colonial existence.

CHAPTER 2: THE GOSPEL OF COUNTERINSURGENCY

"Who kidnapped my brother? The army! Who killed my father? The army! Who burned down our house? The army!"[1] As Pedro retold the tragic events of his youth, his personal story took on a disturbingly representative quality. In 1982, while he and his father were away working on one of Guatemala's many Pacific Coast plantations, the army kidnapped his oldest brother Francisco. Like most leaders in Nebaj's Catholic Church in the early 1980s, the army tagged Francisco a communist subversive. He had worked as a translator in the local parish, interpreting Padre Javier's homilies from Spanish into the local indigenous language: Ixil. Because of his role as a communicative bridge between Padre Javier and non-Spanish speaking Ixiles, Francisco had become an important figure within Nebaj's community and thus a military target.[2]

As soon as Pedro and his father, Gregorio, heard of the disappearance, they rushed home from the coast. Weary of losing another son, Gregorio sent Pedro – who was 12 years old – to live with friends in the aldea of Soloché. Not long after, the army burned down the family home in Nebaj and issued a string of death-threats to Gregorio. Pedro's father, nevertheless, refused to give up his position as a leader in Catholic Action, a commitment that would soon cost him his life. Only a few months later, the army executed Gregorio, accusing him of guerrilla activities.[3]

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1. Pedro Gregorio, interview; Marcelino, interview.
2. The overwhelming majority of Ixil men were bilingual because of their need to communicate with Spanish-speaking plantation owners and merchants. Many Ixil women, on the other hand – who were often relegated to domestic work and carrying for household subsistence plots – did not speak Spanish. See Benjamin N. Colby and Pierre L. Van den Berghe, *Ixil country: A Plural Society in Highland Guatemala* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).
3. Pedro Gregorio, interview; Marcelino, interview; Padre Pedro, interview.

While Pedro awaited the end of the violence in Soloché, his mother and two older sisters stayed in Nebaj. Angered by the death of their loved ones and fearing for their own lives, the three women came to accept the army's view of the conflict and blame the Catholic Church for the ongoing bloodshed. A deep resentment of the Church's role in politics, reaffirmed by persistent military attacks against lay leaders, compelled Pedro's remaining family to seek refuge in an Evangelical church in 1983. Pedro's sisters and aging mother found comfort and safety within their new religion. At the time, Catholics in Nebaj practiced their faith in constant fear of army reprisal. Evangelical Christianity, on the other hand, had become the favored religion of the occupying military.[4] Along with the majority of Evangelicals in the Ixil region, Pedro's mother and two sisters developed a strong allegiance to the army; his oldest sister would later marry an army officer. When Pedro returned home the following year (1984), he discovered a community in disarray and a divided family. While Pedro retained his Catholic faith during his time in Soloché, the rest of the family in Nebaj had accepted a new religion and a new outlook on the world. This, he painfully recalled, was "the fruit of war."[5]

The story of Pedro's family is indicative of a larger trend that took place throughout the Ixil region. Conversion to Evangelical religion followed closely behind the army's persecution of the Catholic Church.[6] Both Ixil men and women flocked to Evangelical churches during the worst years of violence (1978-1983). This process of religious transformation, however,

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4. Padre Paco, interview; Pastor Andrés, interview; Santiago Otero, interview; David Stoll, *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 5-7; Victor Perera, *Unfinsihed Conquest: The Guatemalan Tragedy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 86-89; Veronica Melander, *The Hour of Go? People in Guatemala Confronting Political Evangelicalism and Counterinsurgency* (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, 1999).

5. Pedro Gregorio, interview.

6. Pastor Andrés, interview; Pastor Mynor Herrera, interview; Padre José Luis, interview; Manuela Canton Delgado, *Bautizados en fuego. protestantes, discursos de conversión y política en Guatemala (1989-1993)* (Antigua, Guatemala: CIRMA, 1998), 79; *Guatemala: Never Again! REMHI, Recovery of Historical Memory Project; The Official Report of the Human Rights Office, Archdiocese of Guatemala* (Markyknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999); Stoll, *Between Two Armies,* 310.

accelerated when José Efraín Ríos Montt seized the presidency in March 1982. In less than a year, the number of Evangelicals in Nebaj increased from 20 percent to over 95 percent of the population. Pedro's family was swept up in this wave of terror and conversion.[7] A fundamental change in army tactics had hastened the process of religious conversion in the Guatemalan highlands, particularly in the Ixil region. Under the new administration of Ríos Montt, the army explicitly promoted Evangelical religion as an alternative to the Catholic faith. Conversion was no longer just an inadvertent consequence of violence against Catholic opponents.[8] Beginning in the spring of 1982, the Guatemalan government turned to Evangelical religion as a counterinsurgency tool and cultural aid to capitalist development. Evangelical religion, they reasoned, would replace the Catholic Church as the Ixil region's cultural foundation, adding spiritual weight to the counterrevolutionary cause and priming the region for a modernized political economy.

On the eve of the military coup that brought General Ríos Montt to power, Guatemala's political and economic elite searched for a new strategy to crush the growing revolutionary movement. By 1982, the leftist guerrilla army consisted of over 6,000 armed soldiers and attracted anywhere between 250,000 and 500,000 unarmed supporters. In less than six years (1976-1982), guerrilla forces grew from a few dozen dedicated individuals to a broad-based popular movement. The army attempted to violently rout the opposition; yet radical discontent continued to spread. During the previous administration of Lucas García Romero (1978-1982), the government mistakenly presumed that it could destroy the guerrilla front and strengthen its

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7. "La santa contrainsurgencia," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio*, (January 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000; Pastor Pedro Bernal, interview; Pastor Andrés, interview; Pedro Gregorio, interview; Melander, *The Hour of God,* 236; Stoll, Between Two Armies, 176-177.

8. Santiago Otero, interview; Miguel De León Ceto, *Las fuentes de poder del movimiento evangélico en Nebaj, El Quiché*, (master's thesis, Universidad Rafael Landívar, 2006), 34; Thomas A. Sinclair, "Putting Our Faith in Rulers," *The Other Side* (February 1983), Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

own authority exclusively through state terrorism. Anyone who spoke of structural change or reform was quickly met by state violence.[9] In highland areas like Nebaj, the army initiated a "scorched-earth campaign," and made no distinction between civil society and subversion in an effort to wipe out both peaceful and armed opposition. Supposedly apolitical social sectors, like Evangelical churches, encountered less repression than others; though no one was entirely safe. Within the "scorched-earth campaign," the Catholic Church was at the center of army's attack because of its commitment to social justice and non-capitalist, communal development. Army violence against civil society and particularly the Catholic Church further radicalized the armed conflict. Many of Nebaj's residents chose to join the guerrillas up in the mountains rather than deal with the insecurity of army occupation.[10] Unprovoked army brutality in fact mobilized revolutionary resistance "far more successfully than any leaflets distributed by leftists."[11] The murder of outspoken community members and Catholic leaders scared some Ixiles into silence, but for the most part had the opposite effect – adding fuel to the revolutionary cause.

State terror matched by growing socio-economic stratification threatened the very survival of the Guatemalan political and social order. The Lucas García administration's sole focus on fighting the guerrillas left the national economy in shambles and destroyed what remained of the government's moral authority, domestically and abroad. Army-led human rights

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9. "Background Information on Guatemala, Human Rights, and U.S Military Assistance," *Institute for Policy Studies Resource,* (July 1982), Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; Canton Delgado, *Bautizados en fuego*, 57; Jennifer Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 39; Joseph Anfuso and David Sczepanski, *Efrain Rios Montt: Servant or Dictator? The Real Story of Guatemala's Controversial Born-Again President* (Ventura, California: Ventura House, 1983), 126. In February 1982, the four leftist guerrillas groups operating in the country joined ranks to form the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) – a serious challenge to the current government. For an overview of this period of heightened violence, see Daniel Wilkinson, *Silence on the Mountain: Stories of Terror, Betrayal, and Forgetting in Guatemala* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004).

10. Pastor Andrés, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; Marcelino, interview; Sharon, interview; Stoll, *Betweeen Two Armies*, 99, 103; Sarah Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare*: *The Politics of the Christian Right* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 165.

11. Marcelino, interview.

violations alienated the Guatemalan government at home and in the international community. Not even the United States Congress would maintain its support for the counterinsurgency campaign.[12] Moreover, the recent Sandinista victory in Nicaragua (1979) and the ongoing Marxist revolutionary struggle in El Salvador compounded the Guatemalan government's difficulties. The Guatemalan state, along with the rest of Central America, faced the worst crisis of legitimacy since the mid-twentieth century.[13]

On 23 March 1982, a group of young military officers (aware that the unrestrained violence had worsened the political and economic situation) led a coup against Lucas García's handpicked protégé and appointed Ríos Montt and two other army officers to head a temporary Military Junta.[14] The Junta would collectively rule until the excesses and abuses of the previous administration had been corrected and democratic elections could be safely held. That ruling principle would be short lived. Ríos Montt promptly took control and dissolved the three-man rule, declaring himself president in June 1982.[15] Most observers assumed that the coup was simply a "political facelift" designed to destabilize the increasingly popular guerrilla movement. Serious change, however, followed in the coup's wake.

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12. José Efraín Ríos Montt, *Informe al pueblo de Guatemala* (Guatemala: Tipografia Nacional, 1983), 7; William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United Status in Central America, 1977-1992* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 387, 391; Peter Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of U.S- Latin American Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000). The U.S. government first cut off military aid to Guatemala in 1977 during the Carter administration. Congress withheld direct funding, despite the pleas of President Ronald Reagan, until 1983.

13. Sheldon Annis, *God and production in a Guatemalan town* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 6; Melander, *The Hour of God*, 146; Anfuso, *Efrain Rios Montt: Servant or Dictator,* 120.

14. *El Imparcial*, 24 March 1982; José Efraín Ríos Montt, "Libertad: expresión de una responsabilidad: 23 de marzo de 1982," *Mensajes del presidente de la republica: General José Efraín Ríos Montt*. (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional de Guatemala, December 1982), 5; Ríos Montt, *Informe al pueblo de Guatemala,* 7.

15. "Recomodación en el gobierno militar: Ríos Montt unifica mando," *Infopress centroamericana* (10 June 1982) El centro de investigaciones regionales de mesoamérica (CIRMA); "Trienta meses de gobierno militar," *Infopress centroamericana*, (24 June 1982), CIRMA.

The new government laid out a National Security and Development Plan to address "the deteriorating political, economic, psychosocial, and military stability."[16] In a 14 point program, they explained how they broadly planned to overcome the challenges confronting the nation. Points five, six, and ten of the program are particularly telling:

> 5. To achieve the establishment of a nationalistic spirit and to create the foundations for the participation and integration of the different ethnic groups that make up our nationality.
>
> 6. To achieve the recovery of the national economy under a free enterprise system, in accordance with the controls required by the national situation.
>
> 10. To strengthen national integration by efficiently using the cooperation of other countries and international organizations.[17]

Instead of just going after the revolutionary movement militarily, the new government would promote the necessary conditions to restore order and create a unified Guatemala. Scorched-earth tactics against the guerrillas continued yet were coupled with a vigorous social and economic program to win the hearts and minds of the Guatemalan people, one in which Evangelical religion would take an active role.[18]

Modeled after strategies employed by the U.S. military in the Philippines and later in Vietnam, the Guatemalan government combined civic action with military operations to suppress internal rebellion. In Guatemala, this counterinsurgency philosophy took shape in Ríos Montt's program, Frijoles y Fusiles (Beans and Guns). While military operations expanded and integrated local militias (the guns), the army forcibly resettled civilians into development poles where relief

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16. "Bulletin: Security Plan to Supplement the Fourteen Point Program," (April 1982), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000; *El Día*, 3 June 1986.

17. "Military Junta News Conference," *Transcript from cadena de emisoras unidas*, (6 April 1982), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000.

18. Ríos Montt, *Informe al Pueblo de Guatemala,* 68; "Background Information," *Institute for Policy Studies Resource,* (July 1982), Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; "Regional Reports Mexico and Central America RM-82-04," (30 April 1982); Nancy Peckenham, "A Report to the American Friends Service Committee," (December 1983), Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; Anfuso, *Efrain Rios Montt: Servant or Dictator,* 20.

officials distributed food, medicine, and education (the beans). In this way, the army removed villagers from any possible guerrilla interaction and cultivated social and cultural practices needed for national unification and "pre-development."[19] The Committee for National Reconstruction directed this civic component and invited government and nongovernmental organizations to aid their efforts.[20]

While the army and the Committee for National Reconstruction implemented the Beans and Guns program in areas like the Ixil region, Ríos Montt and his administration led a national propaganda campaign to regain the public's trust. In April, the government passed a decree prohibiting the dissemination of news about political violence. All information concerning the armed conflict had to come directly from the presidential office and as a result "reports of massacres on peasants disappeared from the newspapers."[21] The personality of Ríos Montt flooded the airways, spearheading a media campaign that emphasized moral reform over political and economic restructuring. He regularly proclaimed:

> The peace of Guatemala does not depend on weapons, it depends on you sir, on you ma'am, on you little boy, on you little girl. Yes, the peace of Guatemala is in your heart, once peace is in your heart, there will be peace in your house and peace in society.[22]

As the army killed civilians and resettled survivors into model villages, the president reminded victims that the real cause of violence and poverty came from within. The calls to moral reform worked to subvert revolutionary claims of structural injustice.[23]

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19. Ríos Montt, *Informe al pueblo de Guatemala*, 68-69; "Chronology of Ríos Montt," *Washington Office on Latin America* (30 March 1982), Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), "The Salvation Brokers: Conservative Evangelicals in Central America," vol. 18. (January/February 1984); Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala*, 153; Melander, *The Hour of God*, 147.

20. Harris Whitbeck, "Programma de ayuda a las victimas de la violencia en el Altiplano (Antigua, Guatemala: Sept. 1983), Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

21. "Todo el país bajo estado de sitio y limitaciones a la prensa," and "Gobierno impone prohibiciones adicionales a la prensa," *Infopress centroamericana*, (8 July 1982); *Guatemala: Never Again!: REMHI,* 228.

22. Ríos Montt, "Libertad: expresión de una responsabilidad: 23 de marzo de 1982," *Mensajes del presidente de la republica: General José Efraín Ríos Montt*, 9-10.

Ríos Montt eschewed a strictly military path to counterinsurgency. As the first born-again Christian president in Guatemala, many elites welcomed Ríos Montt's fundamentalist religious beliefs to counter the critical stance of the progressive Catholic Church. In his rhetoric and actions, the influence of Evangelical religion weighed heavily. Every Sunday, he gave a nationally televised sermon, explaining that the country's troubles had arisen because of the public's disregard for the power of Jesus Christ.[24] He argued that Guatemala's problems were spiritual rather than structural. On the first day of his presidency, he appointed two elders from the church that he attended, the Church of the Word, to be personal secretaries to the President. He also handed out a slew of other cabinet and governmental posts to Evangelicals, including the position of chief counterinsurgency advisor. It was no secret that religion had a strong role in Ríos Montt's political decision-making.[25] He explained to the public that his ascendancy to power came from "the power and the vote of God" and that "the only way to change a nation was through God's spirit."[26] On an almost daily basis, he reminded Guatemalans that "violence

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23. Ríos Montt, "Guatemala merece el sacrificio de todos, 3 de octubre de 1982," *Mensajes del presidente*, 133; Ríos Montt, "Consolidar la familia, consolidar la sociedad, 30 de abril de 1982," *Mensajes del presidente de la republica, 38;* Ríos Montt, "Tenemos que llevar a cabo la reconciliación, 11 de abril," *Mensajes del presidente* de la republica.

24. Joseph Anfuso, "Special Report: The Coup in Guatemala," *Radiance Monthly* (May 1982); "Informe especial: reconstruir con permiso el rey," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio* (Junio 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000; Anfuso, *Efraín Ríos Montt: Servant or Dictator*, 153; Melander, *The Hour of God*, 119.

25. James Jankowiak, interview; Mynor Herrera, interview; Pastor Gabriel, interview; "Testimonio del Rev. Mario Carillo Ortiz, pastor evangelico de Guatemala," *Polemica*, CIRMA; The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center's *Private Organizations with U.S. Connections in Guatemala* (Albuquerque, New Mexico: The Resource Center, 1988), 24; The Church of the Word elders appointed as the Personal Secretaries to the President were Francisco Bianchi and Alvaro Contreras Valladares; *El País*, 16 May 1983; *El Proceso* 25 October 1982, Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; Anfuso, *Efraín Ríos Montt: Servant or Dictator*, 83. In November 1982, Ríos Montt initiated an anti-corruption campaign, which he named Project David after the biblical figure. The slogan for the campaign, "I do not steal, I do not lie, I do not abuse," became the symbol for his political party, the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG). The party's symbol, the infamous blue hand with three fingers, denotes the three tenets.

26. "Boletín: La iglesia del verbo pide que se ore por el hermano Efraín Ríos Montt," (31 February 1983), Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; "The Central America Storey: God's Army is on the March," *Deeper Life* (Jan 1983), Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; Jorge E. Monterroso, "Guatemala: Protestantismo y Religion de Estado," CIRMA.

and subversion would not change things…. God, sitting in his throne, had the sole power to transform the world."[27]

Ríos Montt's incorporation of Evangelical religion into his administration was based partly on personal beliefs. The national climate, however, also made it politically pragmatic. By 1982, Guatemala's Catholic Church overwhelmingly condemned the counterinsurgency campaign. As army massacres escalated, Catholic clergy and lay workers grew increasingly outspoken. In reaction, the authorities intensified the persecution of Catholic leaders, particularly in the Ixil region. In a deeply religious country the divide between the Catholic Church and government officials threatened the institutional legitimacy of the state. How could one rule without the blessing of God? Ríos Montt's Evangelical style worked to counter Catholic critiques. While progressive Catholic leaders denounced the government, a strong following of Evangelicals led by Ríos Montt worked to offset criticisms with their own theological view. Although not all Evangelical churches joined in the legitimizing efforts, not a single Protestant denomination publicly rebuked government action.[28] While mainline Protestant churches, like the Presbyterian and Methodist Churches, quietly kept their distance from Ríos Montt and his counterinsurgency campaign, a number of Neo-Pentecostal and Pentecostal churches embraced the new Evangelical role within politics. From their perspective, the new government provided an opportunity to escape the hegemony of the Catholic Church and "save more souls."[29] Many Guatemalan as well as U.S. Evangelicals saw it as their Christian duty to help "brother" Ríos Montt in his struggle against communist subversion. In the first week of Ríos Montt's rule, Reverend Pat Robertson flew down from the U.S. with a TV crew from the Christian

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27. "Boletín de prensa: cruzada con Luis Palau," (3 January 1983), *Princeton University Latin American Pamphlet Collection: Church and Religion in Guatemala*, 1974-1982.

28. Dennis A. Smith, interview; Pastor Gabriel, interview; Padre Julio, Barrios.

29. Bruce Alhberg, interview.

Broadcasting Network to recruit U.S. dollars and missionaries for the born-again president. Other conservative U.S. Evangelical groups, like Youth with a Mission and Campus Crusade for Christ, sent millions of dollars in assistance and thousands of missionaries to help build a "reformed" Guatemala.[30]

In the Ixil region, where the army committed the worst human rights violations, the political alliance between Evangelicals and the government took a full form. The region became a counterinsurgency laboratory where terror, Evangelical religion, and development programs worked in unison. As a former guerrilla stronghold, the army made it its mission to wholly win over the area materially and psychologically. The Beans and Guns program was promptly implemented and Ixiles were enlisted, often coercively, to work with state officials and liaisons. The army forced every Ixil male between the age of 15 and 60 to serve in civil defense patrols, which operated as auxiliaries to traditional army brigades.[31] Under the threat of death, the army pressured civil patrol members to commit some of the worst atrocities of the conflict. In more than one instance, the authorities captured an alleged subversive and then commanded patrol members (in ritualistic fashion) to take turns stabbing the unarmed victim. The logic followed that if Ixiles bloodied their hands fighting alongside the regular army, they could never return to the guerrillas.[32] Civil patrols, in combination with conventional military units, operated as the "guns" component of the revamped counterinsurgency effort.

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30. James Jankowiak, interview; Mynor Herrera, interview; Mike Kadera, interview; Sharon, interview; David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 182; Manuel A. Vásquez, and Marie Friedmann Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion across the Americas* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 200-201.

31. Pastor Andrés, interview; *Guatemala: Never Again! REMHI,* 119; Victoria Sanford, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 140-144. In 1982 and 1983, there were approximately 900,000 Guatemalan men between the age of 15 and 60 serving in the civil defense patrols; nearly 80% of all men in the highlands participated.

32. Pastor Andrés, interview; *La Prensa Libre*, (8 November 1983), Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; *Uno Masuno* (March 22 1983), NIB, Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; In the *La Prensa Libre*, Rigoberto Ramirez Zepeda (Army Chief in Santa Cruz Chinuatla)

In the patrols, Evangelicals became principal leaders. In early 1982, a pastor named Nicolás Toma helped organize the first civilian militia in the Ixil area. A U.S. Evangelical missionary present at the time later commented on the event, saying:

> The believers, led by Pastor Nicolás, have taken desperate risks and aligned themselves with the national army. Civil Patrols have been organized and given arms. The incredible result has been the eradication of guerrilla revolutionary forces from the Cotzal area![33]

From that time on, Evangelical pastors and their followers controlled the majority of leadership positions within the patrols.[34] While the local Catholic Church condemned the use of civilians, individual pastors recruited Ixiles to participate in the military operations, claiming that "he, who resists the authorities, resists God."[35] Because Catholic leaders in the Ixil region refused to offer their support, army officials looked to Evangelical pastors to lead and spiritually legitimize the civil patrols.

Those Ixiles who resisted conscription faced an uncertain future. The army set up training camps for uncooperative or allegedly dangerous civilians. In the camps, Ixiles were tortured, psychologically broken, and then released (if lucky enough) to serve in the patrols.[36] Lucas remembered his own harrowing experience. He was a lay leader in Chajul until the army kidnapped him in the middle of the night. During his subsequent imprisonment, he received electric shock treatments and regular beatings. After about two months, though, army officers

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commented, "No one is obligated to join the civil patrols, but if someone refuses to participate, he is investigated to see if he has ties with those groups which disturb the public order." Investigation could often include torture and/or death.

33. Qtd. in David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?,* 198.

34. Sharon, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; Padre Bianchetti, interview; Dennis A. Smith, interview; Phillip A. Berryman, *Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics, and Revolution in Central America* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994),119-120; Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala*, 151. In her book, Garrard-Burnett discusses a survey conducted by Alianza Evangélica that reveals that a disproportionate number of Evangelicals held leadership positions in local civil patrols.

35. Pastor Andrés, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; Padre Bianchetti, interview; Sheldon Annis, *God and Production in a Guatemalan Town* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 8.

36. Marcelino, interview; Lucas Mendoza, interview; Padre Bianchetti, interview; Padre Pedro, interview.

explained, "we made a mistake; we know you're not an insurgent."[37] To make up for their error, they offered Lucas a job working for the military, an influential municipal post in Chajul. Following his release, Lucas also joined the local branch of Ríos Montt's church, the Church of the Word.[38]

In the Ixil region, the army reserved government posts and leadership positions almost exclusively for Evangelical followers.[39] Conversion became a symbol of one's allegiance to the army, and a tool for survival and social mobility. At a rally in the town of Cunen (which is just south of the Ixil region), army Capitan Mario López declared that the "army, [Evangelical] religion, and the government have united in the struggle against the guerrillas." Just following that declaration, López chastised the local Catholic Church, stating that the "priests are the ones who put these thoughts [of revolution] in the peoples' heads. They participated in the subversion."[40]

Evangelical Christianity's most imperative role, however, emerged in the model villages. As the army continued its scorched-earth tactics and destroyed entire towns and aldeas, survivors were moved into "development poles," i.e. model villages. In government-controlled resettlements, relief organizations and the army exercised control over the daily activities of refugees in an effort to rework Ixiles into army supporters and adherents of capitalist economics. Each Ixil head of household, for example, was provided their own plot of land to grow export crops and learn the value of private property. The authorities were committed to destroying "the culture of corn," in an effort to force Ixiles to become full participants in the world economy.

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37. Lucas Mendoza, interview; I have no reason to doubt Lucas' story: he showed me the scars from his experiences that are on his back, ribs, and chest.

38. Lucas Mendoza, interview.

39. Pastor Pedro Bernal, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; Pedro Gregorio, interview; Marcelino, interview.

40. "La santa contrainsurgencia," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio* (January 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000.

Coronel Djalma Domínquez, spokesman for the Guatemalan army, told reporters "we are teaching the people [in the model villages] that they should not plant any more corn."[41]

Working with the army in the model villages was the Foundation for the Aid of the Indian Peoples (FUNDAPI). The Evangelical organization – established by the Church of the Word, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, and the Carrol Berhorst Development Foundation – was an autonomous branch of the government's Committee for National Reconstruction. In the Ixil region, FUNDAPI and its Evangelical missionaries supplanted official Committee personnel and became the dominant relief supplier.[42] FUNDAPI and the army worked hand in hand. Bruce, an Evangelical missionary still working in Guatemala, reminisced that "the army secured the Ixil area so that we [missionaries] could work!"[43] The army flattened what remained of civil society and FUNDAPI helped reconstruct it in accordance with the counterinsurgency blueprint.

Harris Whitbeck, a member of the Church of the Word and the president's chief counterinsurgency advisor, invited the three Evangelical groups to join together in early 1982 to assist the government's security and development program in the highlands.[44] A FUNDAPI document, distributed in the United States to raise funds for the organization, explained its close relationship with the Ríos Montt administration:

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41. Ejército de Guatemala, *Polos de desarrollo* (Guatemala: Editorial del Ejército, 1985), 57, CIRMA; Padre Bianchetti, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; "Guatemala, 'A New Way of Life:' The Development Poles," Guatemalan Church in Exile, (September-October 1984), Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

42. Pastor Andrés, interview; James Jankowiak, interview; Padre Bianchetti, interview; "Informe especial: reconstruir con permiso el rey," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio* (Junio 1983); Cristobal Vargas, "Guatemala: A New Jersusalem?" *Latinamerica Press* (3 February 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

43. Bruce Alberg, interview.

44. David Stoll, "Evangelicals, Guerillas, and the Army: The Ixil Triangle under Ríos Montt," *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemala Crisis*, ed. Robert M. Carmack, (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 100. Whitbeck was a former Marine and had supposedly high-powered connections in Washington D.C.

> The Foundation's directorship has felt the government's favorable attitude toward the organization…. [allowing] FUNDAPI to utilize its expertise and resources to do for Guatemala what Nehemiah did for Jerusalem: rebuild by 'royal permission.'[45]

Another FUNDAPI document used to engender financial support added:

> FUNDAPI is a program where Churches and States work together to meet the needs of Guatemala's highland Indian people. Guatemalan corn and beans; American dry peas, powdered milk and flour; and World Relief donations of corn all transported through our Foundation, as the notice on the sack says: 'In the name of the Lord.'[46]

FUNDAPI used food to lure Ixiles out of the mountains and into the development poles.

The government and FUNDAPI established a mutually beneficial accord. FUNDAPI could evangelize among the Ixil refugees by "royal permission" in exchange for logistical and financial assistance.[47] According to Bob Means, director of fundraising for the Church of the Word, missionaries had exclusive rights to supply social services in the model villages "for one purpose and one purpose alone – as tools to open up their minds and hearts so that they might receive the gospel of Jesus Christ and accept him as their personal savior."[48] Control of relief programs provided missionaries with the opportunity to preach the word of God. At the same time, the presence and support of "God's agents" bestowed spiritual legitimacy to the counterinsurgency campaign.

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45. Qtd. in Melander, *The Hour of God*, 227; Letter to Wilbur Wacker from Paul Townsend, "The Foundation for Aid to the Indigenous People: A Service Arm of International Love Lift," (3 January 1983). All of the following quoted FUNDAPI documents are held at the Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Townsend had been working for the Summer Institute of Linguistics before his work with FUNDAPI. Note: International Love Life was the name given to the fundraising wing of the Church of the Word and FUNDAPI in the United States.

46. Qtd. in Melander, *The Hour of God*, 228; Letter to Wilbur Wacker from Paul Townsend, "The Foundation for Aid to the Indigenous People: A Service Arm of International Love Lift."

47. Rachel Garst and Tom Barry, *Feeding the Crisis: U.S. Food Aid and Farm Policy in Central America* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 232.

48. Qtd. from an interview in *Radiance Magazine*, "Love Lift Update: Expansion, Growth, Change," *International Love Lift Team Newsletter*, (1982), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000.

Besides food aid in the model villages, FUNDAPI missionaries distributed medical supplies and administrated public education through the third grade.[49] The Ríos Montt government willingly outsourced a diverse set of projects to Evangelicals. A FUNDAPI representative explained:

> The mayors and even the army have asked FUNDAPI to help in extending the infrastructure of roads and airstrips in the Ixil area…. the Lord has provided a D-7 caterpillar through a generous donation from a church in the States.[50]

With the government's stamp of approval, Evangelicals controlled more than sixty model villages in the highlands by 1983.[51]

There was no neutrality about the distribution of relief aid. As FUNDAPI and Evangelical missionaries operated and proselytized freely, the government denied Catholic relief organizations, like CARITAS, entrée into the model villages. Army soldiers violently confronted Catholic leaders, blocking Church efforts to serve Ixil parishioners. The government had branded the Catholic Church in the department of Quiché a subversive organization. Evangelical missionaries, on the other hand, moved in and out of the conflict zone as they pleased. The army provided military escorts and Huey helicopters to missionaries; all the while, Catholic Churches served as army barracks and torture centers.[52] As if the religious distinction were not obvious enough, FUNDAPI missionaries passed out Protestant identity cards, so Ixil Evangelicals could differentiate themselves from the rest of the population. Witnesses reported that the cards

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49. "Love Lift Update: Expansion, Growth, Change," *International Love Lift Newsletter*; "Informe especial: reconstruir con permiso el rey," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio* (June 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000.

50. Qtd. in Melander, *The Hour of God*, 227; Letter to Wilbur Wacker from Paul Townsend, "FUNDAPI's Needs for Infrastructure Expansion in the Ixil Area," (3 January 1983).

51. "Freedom of Conscience and Religion," *Organization of American States: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights,* (5 October 1983).

52. Bruce Alhberg, interview; Pastor Andrés, interview; Pastor Pedro Bernal, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; Brother Santiago Otero, interview; "Love Lift Update: Expansion, Growth, Change," *International Love Lift Team Newsletter* (1982); "La santa contrainsurgencia," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio* (January 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000; Deborah Huntington, "God's Saving Plan," *NACLA* (January-February 1984), CIRMA; "Freedom of Conscience and Religion," *Organization of American States: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights,* (5 October 1983); Stoll, *Harvest of Violence*, 177.

functioned as a sort of "laisezz-passer." The army often excused Ixiles, whom possessed the cards, from interrogation and harassment.[53]

The counterinsurgency campaign persisted, yet there were significant changes. A Pastor in Nebaj bluntly summarized the new situation: "for us Evangelicals, things got a lot better. However, if you weren't an Evangelical, things got worse. There was a change in 1982 when Ríos Montt came to power."[54] The government looked to Evangelical religion to draw a clear line between opposition and support, and as a deliberate consequence, many Ixiles converted to Evangelical Christianity to escape army violence and receive desperately needed social services. To be Catholic was to risk being considered a guerrilla, while to be Evangelical signified one's supposed neutrality or alliance with the military.[55]

Conversion was instigated in large part by the government's contentious relationship with the Catholic Church in the Ixil region. The Church's commitment to non-capitalist development and its unwavering critique of government reform or lack thereof had come to a boiling point by the time of Ríos Montt's presidency. The local Church's progressive policies triggered a divisive conflict with upper-class Guatemalans, whom controlled the state apparatus and thrived on the existing political economy. In that context, wealthy Guatemalans in positions of power (including Ríos Montt) turned to Evangelical churches for support. The Catholic Church, arguably the most important cultural institution in the Ixil region, would no longer accept the political and economic order. Without the Church's support, the Guatemalan state found itself in

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53. Brother Santiago Otero, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; Pedro Gregorio, interview; Marcelino, interview; "Freedom of Conscience and Religion," *Organization of American States: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights,* (5 October 1983); "Government Courting of Church Making Progress," Secret Cable, Guatemala and U.S. (19 January 1984), In National Security Archive at George Washington University; *Guatemala: Never Again: REMHI,* 228, 242.

54. Pastor Andrés, interview.

55. Padre Paco, inteview; Prospero Penados del Barrio, Archbishop of Guatemala, "La iglesia catolica en Guatemala, signo di verdad y esperanza," Pastoral Letter, 1989; Stoll, *Between Two Armies*, 178; Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala,* 151; Berryman, *Stubborn Hope*, 120.

a dangerous position.[56] The authorities had two choices 1) either completely overhaul the current Ixil political economy to regain the trust of struggling peasants and the Catholic Church or 2) weaken and replace the Ixil region's traditional culture and institutions and seek new cultural legitimizers (in this case, Evangelical religion). The Ríos Montt administration opted for the latter.

Rather than holding to popular [mis]conceptions of Protestant apolitical-ness or neutrality, Evangelicals followers in the Ixil region were decidedly polemical.[57] Evangelical religion, principally the Neo-Pentecostal and Pentecostal versions, sanctioned the views of Guatemala's elite. While mainline Protestant Churches, like the Presbyterian Church, maintained cordial relations with the Catholic hierarchy, Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal Churches regarded the Catholic Church as a historically "corrupt and bloated institution."[58] They, for instance, refused (and continue to refuse) to consider Catholics "Christians." Many Evangelicals saw the government's attempt to purge the Catholic Church from rural society as a righteous endeavor. The Ixil region, which Catholics had defended against evangelization for over a century, was finally open to their missionary efforts.[59] Evangelical organizations, like FUNDAPI, wholeheartedly supported the government's "communist" mislabeling of the Catholic Church in the Ixil region. If there were anything that incensed Evangelical missionaries more than progressive Catholicism, it was atheistic communism. Combining the two made it easy for

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56. Pastor Gabriel, interview; Vandeveire, interview; Jean-Pierre Bastian, *Breve historia del protestantismo en América Latina* (Mexico City: Casa Unida Publicaciones, 1986). See Chapter 1 of my thesis for a detailed discussion of the Catholic Church's development projects and how it in turn came head to head with the Guatemalan State.

57. James Jankowiak, interview; Mynor Herrea, interview; Mike Kadera, interview; Padre Paco, interview; Padre José Luis, interview; Brother Santiago Otero, interview. Both the Catholic Church and the Guatemalan government mistakenly argued that Evangelicals were apolitical, however, for different reasons. The Catholic Church viewed Evangelical neutrality as a pejorative trait – a sort of stick your head in the hole and escape the realities of the world mentality. The government, on the other hand, argued that Evangelicals fulfilled the proper role of religion within modern society – outside of politics. The reality of Evangelical inaction or action, however, was considerably more complicated. Silence or conformity during a time of injustice is in itself a polemical act.

58. James Jankowiak, interview.

59. Mike Kadera, interview; Sharon, interview; Else Cuchet, interview.

Evangelicals to rationalize their participation in the counterinsurgency campaign. An Evangelical missionary explained in 1983:

> [A]n extraordinary opportunity now exists for the country of Guatemala to become a shining light in the midst of the turbulent darkness in Latin America, a vibrant alternative to the rising tide of Marxism-Leninism in that region, and a glorious testimony to the reality and truth of Jesus Christ.[60]

Missionaries working in the model villages were overwhelmingly from the U.S. and adhered to an East-West Cold War mentality. Evangelizing failures in communist countries, like China, had instilled in them that Marxist-Leninism (or Maoism) was no friend of the missionary cause. Evangelical anti-communism reinforced the army's campaign against "Marxist subversion" and created an ideological wedge between Ixil converts and the guerrillas.[61] Ríos Montt's church, the Church of the Word, followed this line of reasoning and argued that if Marxism won in Latin America it would mean that "Satan was going to try to discredit the [Evangelical] church."[62] In the minds of Evangelicals, U.S. styled democratic-capitalism was the only acceptable political-economic system. Private property and entrepreneurialism, they intoned, were the keystones of modern civilization. Collectivism, on the other hand, would only lead to a totalitarian society.[63] This overtly polemical worldview, which was preached to Ixiles during the distribution of relief aid, complemented the security and developmental desires of the Guatemalan state. Ríos Montt's economic plan – which called for foreign investment, export-geared industrialization, agribusiness, and maquiladoras – would flounder without the protection of private property. It was well known that Ríos Montt and his main economic adviser, Manuel Ayau, were staunch followers of Pinochet's neoliberal program. Since the Catholic Church in the Ixil region had

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60. Qtd. in Shelton H. Davis, "Guatemala: The Evangelical Holy War in El Quiché," (March 1983), the Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

61. Dennis A. Smith, interview; "Love Lift Update: Expansion, Growth, Change," *International Love Lift Team Newsletter* (1982).

62. James Jankowiak, "Special Report: Update Nicaragua," *Radiance Monthly* (Gospel Outreach: Eureka, CA, 1979), Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

63. James Jankowiak, interview; Sharon, interview.

rejected free market economics, the Guatemalan government created a closed circuit (i.e. model villages) for the production of a culture more in line with capitalist thought.[64]

Evangelicals provided the state with a needed ally against the progressive Catholic Church and the growing revolutionary movement. A representative from Ríos Montt's administration told New York Times reporter Ray Bonner that the Guatemalan government had asked for neither military nor economic aid from the U.S. government because of generous financial support from Evangelicals.[65] More importantly, though, Evangelicals "sanctioned, defended and proselytized for a policy that can only be described as genocidal."[66] Evangelical Christianity became the cultural underpin of the army's re-conquest of the Ixil region. By 1983, the community of Nebaj – which had previously been overwhelmingly sympathetic to the guerrilla cause – had transferred its support to the Guatemalan army. This shift in allegiance followed on the heels of religious conversion.[67]

The diverging historical memories of contemporary Ixiles confirm the polemical possibilities of religious affiliation. Today, Catholics in Nebaj consider the rule of Ríos Montt as one of the bleakest moments of the region's history. Ríos Montt is remembered as a "monster" and perpetrator of genocide: "he killed and assassinated thousands of innocent people and burned many Ixil communities."[68] Evangelicals, however, remember Ríos Montt as a hero. An Evangelical pastor recalled that "I felt a huge relief when Ríos Montt entered the presidency.

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64. Ríos Montt, *Informe al pueblo de Guatemala,* 68; "The Rise of the Religious Right in Central America," The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center Bulletin, (25 September 1987); Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project*, 29; "Informe especial: reconstruir con permiso el rey," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio* (June 1983).

65. *New York Times*, 20 May 1982; José Efraín Ríos Montt, "A quien interese," (26 July 1982), the Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1962-2000.

66. Larry Birns, director of the Washington-based Council of Hemispheric Affairs, quoted in *San Jose Mercury News*, 29 August 1983, (NIB); Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare*, 165.

67. Marcelino, interview; Pedro Gregorio, interview; Padre Paco, interview. Padre Bianchetti, interview; León Ceto, *Las fuentes de poder del movimiento evangélico en Nebaj, El Quiché,* 40.

68. Pedro Gregorio, interview.

First, there was a change in my heart. I said to myself: now things are going to improve!"[69] Ixil Evangelicals claim that Ríos Montt was "a miracle for Guatemala."[70] When questioned about the brutality of his administration, they (in direct contradiction to historical consensus) respond that "Ríos Montt did not commit genocide. He is a good Christian."[71] Evangelicals in the region still defend Ríos Montt and his actions.

Catholics and Evangelicals in Nebaj hold drastically different interpretations of the revolutionary conflict. While Catholics are adamant that the revolution and Catholic progressivism were dissimilar movements, they remain sympathetic to the guerrilla cause and hold the army responsible for the terror.[72] Evangelicals could not view the situation any more differently: they contend that the guerrillas, rather than the army, persecuted the Ixil community. "The guerrillas held the people [Ixiles] against their will in rebel encampments and killed thousands of innocents."[73] A popular story told among Evangelicals in Nebaj epitomizes this reversal of culpability. As the story goes:

> Tomas, an Ixil Evangelical in the guerrilla-controlled aldea of Salquil, had a vision in his sleep. In the apparition, Tomas saw himself directing the villagers past the rebel defenses via a previously unknown path. The following night, Tomas sought out the mysterious trail and led 200 followers to escape the oppressive yoke of the revolutionaries. The guerrillas, however, discovered the attempted exodus and pursued Tomas and his group along the narrow path.
> Yet, suddenly out of nowhere, two howitzer rounds landed in between the guerillas and the fleeing Evangelicals. Blinded by the dark and frightened by the possible army attack, the rebels fled back to Salquil, allowing the villagers to safely reach the nearby army encampment. When Tomas later explained his story at the army camp, he soon realized that a group of soldiers – who were cleaning their weapons that night – had accidentally

69. Pastor Andrés, interview.

70. Pastor Pedro Bernal, interview; Sharon, interview; Else Cuchet, interview.

71. James Jankowiak, interview; Mynor Herrera, interview; Sharon, interview; Mike Kadera, interview; Pastor Pedro Bernal, interview; Else Cuchet, interview; Pastor Andrés, interview; Higinio Asicona, interview.

72. Padre Paco, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; Marcelino, interview; Pedro Gregorio, interview; Padre Bianchetti, interview; Brother Santiago Otero, interview. This view is also held by the majority of scholars studying the Guatemalan civil war and has been confirmed by human rights reports. In his book, *Between Two Armies*, David Stoll attempts to revise the traditional view and lay more of the blame on the guerrillas.

73. Pastor Andrés, interview; James Jankowiak, interview; Mynor Herrera, interview; Mike Kadera, interview.

> fired the two shots. It was now certain: God had intervened on their behalf and safely delivered them into the hands of the lord's protective army.[74]

The validity of this story is certainly questionable. Nevertheless, how Ixiles choose to retell the past is revealing in itself. At present, Catholics remember the army as "the architect of genocide." In total contrast, Evangelicals villainize the revolutionary movement and hold up Ríos Montt and the army as heroic saviors.

Historical memory has also seeped into enduring political reality. In August 1983, just 16 months into his presidency, an assemblage of high-ranking military officers overthrew the Evangelical president. Their justification: Ríos Montt converted the government into the "Government of the Word;" meaning the president had disregarded the principle of the separation of church and state.[75] The internal coup, however, would not be the end of Ríos Montt. His Beans and Guns program had brought the highland population back under government control, derailing the revolution's momentum. Because of those counterinsurgency successes, the authorities felt comfortable enough to hold democratic elections two years later in 1985, officially ending the long era of military rule. For that, many Guatemalans (many of whom are Evangelical) consider Ríos Montt the strongman who restored order.[76]

From 1983 until the present, Ríos Montt and his political party, the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG), have been major power brokers in the Ixil region and on the national scene. Despite a constitutional accord banning former coup conspirators from becoming president, Ríos Montt has managed to run for the position on three separate occasions (1990,

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74. Sharon, interview. The version of the story that appears here was told by Sharon, a Summer Institute of Linguistics translator in Nebaj.

75. "Derrocado Ríos Montt: incertidumbre posterior se mantiene," *Infopress centroamericana*, (11 August 1983); *New York Times*, 9 August 1983; Mynor Herrera, interview; Schirmner, *The Guatemalan Military Project*, 29.

76. Bishop Molina Palma, interview; Pastor Andrés, interview; Higinio Asicona, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; Pastor Pedro Bernal, interview; Sharon, interview; León Ceto, *Las fuentes de poder del movimiento evangélico en Nebaj, El Quiché,* 16.

1995, and 2003). In 1990, political analysts predicted that Ríos Montt would have won the election were not for the constitutional provision blocking his appointment. Though he never personally regained the presidency, Ríos Montt carried two of his Evangelical protégés to the nation's highest post.[77] In the 1990 election, he swayed a majority of Guatemalans (68 percent) to vote for Jorge Serrano Elías, a fellow Evangelical and former state council member during his former administration. That same year, 22 Evangelicals won positions in the National Congress (which, at the time, sat 80 representatives). Ríos Montt has also held his own congressional seat since 1990 and in 1994, Congress appointed him president of the unicameral legislature. In 2000, Ríos Montt helped carry another Evangelical ally into the presidency, Alfonso Portillo Cabrera. All of those political victories relied heavily on an Evangelical voting block loyal to Ríos Montt.[78]

The legacy of counterinsurgency and religious conversion has also reshaped politics in the Ixil region. In the two years following the end of Ríos Montt's rule, the Evangelical population of Nebaj dropped from 95 percent to approximately 37 percent. Identifying oneself as an Evangelical no longer guaranteed one's safety, and therefore many Ixiles abandoned the faith.[79] The remaining Evangelical population in Nebaj, however, maintained a commitment to Ríos Montt and the local FRG. Along the windy road leading into Nebaj, the FRG's party symbol (the three fingered blue hand) can be found everywhere. Indeed, FRG politicians, whom are mostly Evangelical, disproportionately control the majority of municipal posts in the region. When Padre Pedro arrived in Nebaj in 1994, the Judge, the Mayor, the president of the Town

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77. "Campaña electoral al rojo vivo," *Infopress centroamericana*, (7 June 1990); Efraín Ríos Montt, *Mi defensa: caso Ríos Montt vrs. estado de Guatemala* (Guatemala: Serviprensa centroamericana, 1991), 18; *New York Times*, 25 May 2003 and 30 July 2003.

78. Thomas Joseph Metallo, *The Sword of the Spirit: Pentecostals and Political Power in Guatemala* (PhD diss., University of Miami, 1998). 7; Vasquez, *Globalizing the Sacred*, 200; Melander, *The Hour of God*, 212.

79. Stoll, *Between Two Armies*, 176-177.

Committee, the manager of electricity, and the minister of education were all Evangelical Christians. In neighboring Chajul, a similar religious monopolization of power has occurred. In 1982, Ríos Montt sent Tomas Asicona to Chajul to be the town's "Counselor to the State" and to establish the local branch of the Church of the Word. Tomas and his family have subsequently dominated local politics; an Asicona family member has been elected the Mayor of Chajul almost without fail since 1983.[80]

In short, Evangelical religion operated as a counterinsurgency tool during the armed conflict, tipping the war in favor of the Guatemalan government. But more than that, it restructured national and local politics. Evangelical religion did not wholly supplant the Catholic Church as the Ixil region's cultural foundation. Nevertheless, Evangelical beliefs added (often divisively) new political, cultural, and economic perspectives into rural society. Ixiles remain divided about the armed conflict's legacy and how best to overcome the resulting poverty. Those disagreements hardened during the era of Ríos Montt.

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80. Padre Pedro, interview; Higinio Asicona, interview; Padre Bianchetti, interview.

CHAPTER 3: THE SHOCK TROOPS OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

In March 1982, the Reverend Pat Robertson flew down from the U.S. with a TV crew from the Christian Broadcasting Network to interview Guatemala's newest leader. Robertson later recalled the meeting, saying:

> I found him to be a man of humility, simplicity, impeccable personal integrity, and a deep faith in Jesus Christ. I knew in my heart that Ríos Montt offered the people of his country – indeed the people of all Latin America – a true alternative between the oppression of corrupt oligarchies and the tyranny of Russian-backed communist totalitarianism.[1]

With its first born-again president in charge, Guatemala became a rallying point for Evangelicals in the U.S and Latin America.[2] On his 700 Club TV show, Robertson instructed viewers to pray for Ríos Montt and to send millions of dollars in assistance to the Guatemalan government. Indeed, prominent Evangelicals such as Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority, Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ, Loren Cunningham from Youth with a Mission, and even Billy Graham rallied around the new Evangelical leader.[3]

In Guatemala's Ixil region, where the civil war raged, the Ríos Montt government integrated Evangelical religion into its counterinsurgency campaign. While the army violently confronted Marxist guerrillas and peasant supporters, Evangelical missionaries provided relief aid to the survivors of army massacres. Within government-run resettlement camps (known as

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1. Pat Robertson, "Foreword," In *Efrain Rios Montt: Servant or Dictator? The Real Story of Guatemala's Controversial Born-Again President,* (Ventura, California: Ventura House, 1983), x.
2. Evangelical missionaries had already been operating in the country in relatively small numbers since the 1880's. After a devastating earthquake in 1976, that number increased precipitously as Pentecostal and Neopentecostal missionary organizations flooded into the country. In 1982, evangelizing efforts grew to new levels when a new wave of international Evangelical organizations and missionaries arrived to help the Ríos Montt government in its counterinsurgency/reconstruction campaign. See Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem* for a good overview of this process.
3. *New York Times*, 20 May 1982; Donna Eberwine, "Evangelicals and Guatemala: To Ríos Montt, With Love Lift," *The Nation,* 26 February 1983; Veronica Melander, *The Hour of God?: People in Guatemala Confronting Political Evangelicalism and Counterinsurgency*, (Uppsala, Sweden: Uppsala University, 1999), 171.

model villages or development poles), U.S.-funded Evangelical organizations, like the Foundation for the Aid of Indian Peoples (FUNDAPI), distributed food, medicine, and education to refugees. The army and Evangelical missionaries worked hand in hand to win over the Ixil population.[4] In Evangelical Christianity, the Guatemalan government had found a needed ally against revolutionary upheaval. While countless observers argued that Ríos Montt was "a diabolical dictator, who, in the name of God, initiated the first campaign of genocide in modern Latin America,"[5] Evangelicals stood by the president, proclaiming him "the next best hope for Latin America."[6]

Just sixteen months into the new administration in August 1983, an internal military coup ousted the born-again president. Guatemalan Catholics and human rights advocates let loose a sigh of relief. The mainstream press reported Ríos Montt and his violent crusade as an isolated case of religious fanaticism, supported by only a few Protestant sects. The media's narrow interpretation, however, was far from the truth. The brief alliance between the Ríos Montt government and Evangelicals, particularly Neo-Pentecostals and Pentecostals, was part of a larger political-religious movement. In the 1980s, the field of religion became an important element within a renewed Cold War struggle, reshaping political and social realities throughout Central America. More than a religion, Evangelical religion represented an ideology with serious political, social, and economic implications. U.S. President, Ronald Reagan, and his counterpart, Ríos Montt, took full advantage of those religious possibilities to reinvigorate

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4. Padre Pedro, interview; Pedro Gregorio, interview; Marcelino, interview; Sharon, interview; "Freedom of Conscience and Religion," *Organization of American States: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights,* (5 October 1983); See Chapter 2 for a more detailed discussion of the alliance between Evangelical missionaries and the Guatemalan army in the Ixil region.

5. "La santa contrainsurgencia," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio*, (January 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000; *New York Times*, 3 November 2003. In a list of phenomena meant to illustrate how Latin American reality is more fantastic than anything found in fiction, Gabriel García Márquez included in his acceptance speech for the 1982 Nobel Prize a reference to the dictator Ríos Montt, who, he argued, committed genocide in the name of God.

6. Bruce Alhberg, interview.

counterrevolutionary operations and to promote neoliberal development in the Guatemalan highlands.[7]

When international human rights organizations and the media labeled Ríos Montt and his administration as "perpetrators of genocide," President Reagan responded, "frankly I'm inclined to believe they've been getting a bum rap."[8] When Ríos Montt came to power in 1982, Reagan pressured Congress to lift the 1977 ban on military aid to the country. Continuing reports of human rights violations, however, compelled Congress to uphold the restriction. Reagan and the White House were undeterred. They regarded Guatemala as the "big domino" and the linchpin of their anti-communist Central American strategy.[9] Efforts to convince U.S. legislators that Guatemala deserved military assistance doubled. In the meantime though, White House officials sought alternative means for the implementation of their foreign policy. In April 1982, a month into Ríos Montt's presidency, the CIA budget for Guatemala increased by 2.5 million dollars and the White Office began to court grass-roots support for its new ally.[10]

Reagan was elected to the presidency in 1981 promising to restore the United States' global preeminence. Since the Vietnam War, antimilitarism had dominated U.S. political culture,

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7. Sarah Diamond, "Holy Warriors," North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA): Report on the Americas, (September/October 1988); "The Rise of the Religious Right in Central America," The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center Bulletin, (25 September 1987); "Religión y democracia: la ofensiva neoconservadora," Le monde diplomatique en español, (January 1984), El Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (CIRMA); Manuel A Vásquez, and Marie Friedmann Marquardt, *Globalizing the Sacred: Religion across the Americas*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 220; Sarah Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare*: *The Politics of the Christian Right*, Boston: South End Press, 1989); Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism*, (New York, Metropolitan Books, 2006), 121-158.

8. National Archives and Records Service, Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, Ronald Reagan, 1982, "Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters on the President's Trip to Latin America December 4, 1982," (Washington DC: Western Standard Publishing Company, 2001).

9. "Inminente ayuda militar de Estados Unidos," *Infopress centroamericana*, 6 May 1982; "Nuevas masacres en poblados del altiplano," *Infopress centroamericana*, 27 May 1982; Dario Moreno, *U.S. Policy in Central America: The Endless Debate*, (Miami: Florida International Press, 1990), 113-116.

10. "EUA muestra sus cartas para Centro América," *Infopress centroamericana*, 14 April 1983; "Management of Public Diplomacy Relative to National Security," Unclassified, National Security Decision Directive, Text of NSDD 77, (14 January 1983), National Security Archive at George Washington University; Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop*, 223; Sarah Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States*, (New York: Guilford Press, 1995), 218.

culminating in the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976. Carter premised U.S. foreign policy on détente, the reduction of East-West tensions through negotiation and the acceptance of ideological pluralism. He reduced or banned military aid to dictatorships in Latin America, including Guatemala, and claimed that the U.S would no longer support anti-democratic governments.[11] The 1979 Sandinista revolution, which overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, succeeded in part because of Carter's unwillingness to back the oppressive regime. Revolutionary movements in El Salvador and Guatemala also garnered strength from the more reserved U.S. role. Yet, many Americans were not ready for such diplomatic tolerance. To them, Carter's policies seemed weak and ineffectual. Reagan swore to overcome the disease of U.S. weakness and overturn the policies of his predecessor, whom Guatemalan elites had come to call "Jimmy Castro."[12] Reagan reasoned, "I don't think that you can turn away from some country because here and there they do not totally agree with our conception of human rights."[13] Under his watch, the White House would revive the Cold War and argue that Marxist nationalist movements in Central America were really the exploits of "Soviet puppets." According to Reagan's senior foreign policy advisor, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Central America was now "the most important place in the world for the United States."[14]

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11. Cynthia J. Arnson, *Crossroads: Congress, The President, and Central America, 1976-1993*, (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 53-54; William M. Leogrande, *Our Own Backyard: The United States in Central America, 1977-1992*, (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 53; Veronica Melander, *The Hour of God*, 168.

12. William M. Leogrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 57; Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop*, 125; Sarah Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare*, 165; Jennifer Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence called Democracy*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 161. Leogrande writes that when Reagan won the White House, Central American rightists rejoiced. A leader of Guatemala's National Liberation Movement (MLN) recalled "When Reagan won, we celebrated in Guatemala just like New Year's Eve, with mariachis, marimbas, and firecrackers."

13. Qtd. in William Leogrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 58.

14. Qtd. in Peter Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of U.S- Latin American Relations*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 182-183. The revolutionary movements in Central America were rooted in Marxist political philosophy, but were nationalist in character. They were not simply the actions of "soviet puppets." To understand the White House's take on supposed Soviet intervention in Latin America, see Bruce D. Larkin's edited

U.S. Evangelicals shared the White House's fear of weakness. They too connected anti-militarism at home with ongoing crises abroad. From their perspective, the counterculture movement of the 1960s had infiltrated mainstream politics and culture, consigning the U.S. to a path of spiritual and institutional collapse. Robertson and other Evangelical leaders exclaimed: "America, the once mighty world power, has been defeated in Vietnam; outwitted and outmaneuvered by Soviet expansion in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; and humiliated by terrorists and fanatics around the globe."[15] Something had to be done, they argued; and, like Reagan, they called for the return of military and material aid to anti-leftist, repressive governments. Known broadly as the New Christian Right, Evangelicals vowed to redeem America's greatness.[16]

In June 1982, the White House held a special briefing to encourage Christian Right organizations to privately support the new Ríos Montt regime. Evangelical leaders jumped at the idea. The meeting was led by OAS ambassador Williamm Middendorf and attended by Church of the Word elder and Ríos Montt advisor Francisco Bianchi, Reagan advisor Edwin Meese, U.S. Interior Secretary James Watt, U.S. Ambassador to Guatemala Frederick Chapin and U.S. Evangelicals leaders – Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and Loren Cunningham.[17] At the heart of the discussion was how U.S. Christian organizations could help the Guatemalan government in its struggle against supposed "atheistic" revolutionaries. The White House's hands were

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collection, *Vital Interests: The Soviet Issue in U.S. Central American Policy*, (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1988).

15. Pat Robertson, *America's Dates with Destiny*, (Nashville: Nelson, 1986), 269.

16. Mike Kadera, interview; Bethany Moreton, *The Soul of the Service Economy: Wal-Mart and the Making of Christian Free Enterprise, 1929–1994,* (PhD, diss., Yale University, 2006), 355; Greg Grandin. *Empire's Workshop*, 144- 150.

17. Donna Eberwine, "Evangelicals and Guatemala: To Ríos Montt, With Love Lift," *The Nation,* 26 February 1983; Veronica Melander, *The Hour of God*, 171; Sarah Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare*, 165.

officially tied because of Congressional opposition and public protest at home.[18] There was, however, nothing stopping the private pursuit of U.S. interests. Meeting participants agreed that U.S. Evangelical organizations would aid Guatemala's counterinsurgency campaign – logistically, financially, and spiritually.[19] William J. Murray, an Evangelical activist and chairman of the Religious Freedom Coalition, summed it up: "Let's face it, food and medicine have become political tools, and we're the ones willing to use them against the evil of communism."[20] Evangelical organizations would distribute humanitarian aid in army-run refugee camps to neutralize the revolutionary capacity of indigenous communities, like those in the Ixil region.

Evangelicals provided an important counterforce to "peace Christianity" in the U.S. and Central America. After Vatican II (1962) and Medellín (1968), a small yet outspoken segment of the Catholic Church had begun to critique structural injustices created by capitalism and U.S.-backed military repression. Many Catholics in the U.S. and Central America, who had previously supported anti-communist efforts in Latin America, had moved away from an accommodating posture.[21] A number of mainline Protestants in the U.S. also joined progressive Catholics in their more critical stance. Combined, the two religious groups led a powerful movement against

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18. For domestic opposition to Reagan's foreign policy, see Christian Smith, *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

19. Ana María Ezcurra, "La ofensiva neoconservadora de los grupos reaccionarios de los EE.UU," (April 1982), CIRMA; "The Rise of the Religious Right in Central America," The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center Bulletin, (25 September 1987); "The Contra's Chaplains," NACLA: Report on the Americas, (November/October 1988); It is important to note that the Reagan administration made it easier for Evangelical groups to receive USAID funding and receive tax exemptions for their humanitarian efforts in Guatemala. Religious entities were also exempt from certain financial disclosure requirements.

20. Qtd. in Greg Grandin, *Empire Workshop*, 156.

21. Bruce J. Calder, *Crecimiento y cambio de la iglesia católica guatemalteca, 1944-1966,* (Guatemala: Estudios Centroamericanos, 1970), 154; "La santa contrainsurgencia," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio*, (January 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000; Linda Unger and David J. Kalke, eds, "Becoming the Church: An Historical Overview of the Birth of the Guatemalan Church in Exile," Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000; Melander, *The Hour of God*, 52. In 1954, the Catholic Church was one of the major allies of the U.S. when the CIA helped overthrow the Arbenz government, which was labeled a pro-communist government.

hawkish policies and encouraged public skepticism of White House plans for Guatemala and the rest of Central America.[22]

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the U.S. government gradually started to view the Catholic Church in Latin America as an adversary to its political and economic interests. After touring the region in 1969, Nelson Rockefeller reported that "the Catholic Church has ceased to be a trusted ally for the United Status and no longer could guarantee stability on the continent."[23] The report did not overtly recommend that Evangelicals counter the efforts of the Catholic Church, but it did allude to an emerging schism. As more clergy and lay leaders working in Latin America adopted "liberation theology" tenets, U.S. conservatives grew increasingly nervous. In 1980, a group of policy analysts, known as the Santa Fe Committee, proposed that:

> U.S foreign policy must begin to counter (not react against) liberation theology as it is utilized in Latin America by the 'liberation theology' clergy……Marxist-Leninist forces have utilized the church as a political weapon against private property and productive capitalism by infiltrating the religious community with ideas that are less Christian than Communist.[24]

Most of the document's authors, including the future ambassador to Costa Rica, Lewis Tambs, were awarded mid-level posts in the Reagan administration. The best way to address opposition rooted in Christian principles, White House officials later intoned, was to counter spiritual critiques with one's own set of religious values. Evangelicals provided that service to both the

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22. Dennis A. Smith, interview; Christian Smith, *Resisting Reagan: The U.S. Central America Peace Movement*, 135-140.

23. "Guatemala, 'A New Way of Life': The Development Poles." Guatemalan Church in Exile, (September-October 1984); David Ryan, "Option for the Poor: Liberation Theology and Anti-Americanism," *Anti-Americanism in Latin American and the Caribbean*, ed. Alan L. McPherson, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2006), 222; David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant? The Politics of Evangelical Growth.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 34; Peter Smith, *Talons of the Eagle: Dynamics of U.S- Latin American Relations* Smith, 159-160.

24. Lewis A. Tambs and the Committee of Sante Fe, *A New Inter-American Policy for the Eighties*, Washington, DC: Council for Inter-American Security, 1981), 20.

U.S. and Guatemalan governments.[25] An Evangelical missionary, who followed the call to the Ixil region, remembered "we couldn't afford to surrender the political arena to the religious left. We had to defend those principles that are America."[26]

On the home front, the White House encouraged the Institute for Religion and Democracy (IRD) to lead a propaganda war against "leftist" U.S. Christian groups. The Institute claimed to be "non-partisan and non-political," yet categorized the Central American movements as "Soviet-inspired." The IRD tried to define the parameters of legitimate Christian thought and argued that U.S. churches supporting progressive religious organizations in Central America were automatically funding the Soviet invasion.[27] In an article in *Reader's Digest*, the IRD asked readers, in mongering-fashion, "how are they spending the money from your church?"[28] The IRD and its followers promoted their own conservative brand of Christianity to offset U.S. religious groups advocating structural reform in Central America. By claiming neutrality, the organization encouraged a set of ideals specific to capitalism. While progressive Christians argued that to be a good Christian one had to combat the larger causes of inequality, Evangelicals attacked "leftist" religious interpretations and defended capitalism as an ethical system.[29]

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25. William M. LeoGrande, *Our Own Backyard*, 54-55; Jesús F. García-Ruiz. "Las sectas fundamentalistas en Guatemala." In *Ciencia y tecnología para Guatemala,* (April 1985); "Informe especial: reconstruir con permiso del rey." Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio (June 1983), Guatemalan News and Informatin Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

26. Mike Kadera, interview.

27. Sarah Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare*, 148-155; Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop,* 146.

28. Qtd. in "Religión y democracia: la ofensiva neoconservadora," In *Le monde diplomatique en español*, (January 1984), In CIRMA.

29. Padre Paco, interview; Padre Bianchetti, interview; James Jankowiak, interview; Sharon, interview; Deborah Huntington, "God's Saving Plan," NACLA: Report on the Americas, (January/February 1984), CIRMA; Ana María Ezcurra, "La ofensiva neoconservadora de los grupos reaccionarios de los EE.UU," (April 1982), CIRMA; Veronica Melander, *The Hour of God,* 194; Members of conservative Catholic organizations, like Opus Dei, also supported the IRD's claims. However, Evangelicals made up the overwhelmingly majority of IRD followers.

In Guatemala, Evangelicals went beyond partaking in ideological battles and worked directly with the national army. During Ríos Montt's Frijoles y Fusiles (Beans and Guns) counterinsurgency program, U.S. and Guatemalan Evangelical missionaries managed the Beans component. Youth with a Mission, Campus Crusade for Christ, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, Gospel Outreach, Friends of the Americas, and numerous other U.S. and Guatemalan-based Evangelical groups participated in the program. While army operations expanded and integrated local militias (the guns), civilians were forcibly resettled into development poles where Evangelical missionaries provided essential social services (the beans). With the government's approval, Evangelicals controlled more than sixty development poles, i.e. model villages.[30] In the Ixil region, FUNDAPI's privileged role allowed missionaries to pair humanitarian aid with evangelization efforts. As a result, a wave of Ixiles chose to convert to Evangelical Christianity in 1982 and 1983. In the town of Nebaj, only 20 percent of the population was Evangelical before the initiation of the Beans and Guns program (1981). By 1983, however, 95 percent of the town claimed to be born-again. Religious solace was certainly part of the motivation for many Ixiles to convert. Nevertheless, the rapid process of conversion in a formerly 99 percent Catholic community pointed to the overwhelmingly influence of coercion.[31]

30. Efraín Ríos Montt, *Informe al pueblo de Guatemala*, (Guatemala: Tipografia Nacional, 1983), 68-69; "Freedom of Conscience and Religion," *Organization of American States: Inter-American Commission on Human Rights,* 5 October 1983; "Informe especial: reconstruir con permiso del rey," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio*, (January 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000; "Chronology of Ríos Montt," *Washington Office on Latin America* (30 March 1982), Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala*, 153.

31. "La Santa Contrainsurgencia," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio* (January 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; David Stoll, *Between Two Armies In the Ixil Towns of Guatemala, (*New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 176-177. Virginia Garrard-Burnett in her seminal work, *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem*, presents a crisis/solace/adaptation model to explain these other motivational factors.

While the army persecuted Catholic leaders and prohibited them from entering the model villages, the government granted Evangelicals free rein to operate and proselytize. Like their progressive counterparts in the U.S., Catholic leaders in the Ixil region condemned the brutal counterinsurgency campaign. For that, the army murdered over 20 priests and 500 Catholic lay leaders in the Ixil region and the larger department of Quiché during the height of the armed conflict.[32] Evangelical missionaries and Ixil converts, however, viewed the campaign in a different light and were therefore protected. Evangelicals living and working in the Ixil region accepted the black and white Cold War mentality espoused by both the White House and the Ríos Montt administration. They also viewed the revolutionary struggle as a "Soviet conspiracy."[33] FUNDAPI missionaries explained to Ixil parishioners and U.S. supporters that "today the domino theory is again entering the political arena… the new concern is Central America, and the dominos are already falling."[34]

After the fall of China to communists in 1949, Evangelical missionaries adopted anti-communism as an article of faith. The Far East and particularly China had been at the center of missionary activities, but when Chairman Mao and the Communist Party took power, foreign missionaries were banned from working in the country. Evangelicals came away from that failed experience certain that Christianity was inherently anti-communist.[35] Thus, when Reagan revitalized the Cold War struggle in Central America, Evangelicals were determined to support

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32. Padre Pedro, interview; Padre Paco, interview; Diocesis del Quiché, *El Quiché: El pueblo y su iglesia*. (Santa Cruz del Quiché, Guatemala, 1994), 147-157.

33. Bruce Alhberg, interview; Sharon, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; Pastor Andrés, interview; Marcelino, interview.

34. James Jankowiak, "Special Report: Update Nicaragua," In *Radiance Monthly,* (June 1979), Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

35. Dennis A. Smith, interview; James Jankowiak, interview; Mike Kadera, interview; For further reading on Evangelical missionaries in China, see Kevin Xiyi Yao, *The Fundamentalist Movement among Protestant Missionaries in China, 1920-1937*, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2003).

his crusade. A fundraising letter addressed to churches in the U.S. revealed how Evangelical missionaries, working in Guatemala, merged Christianity with anti-communism:

> God's miracle in Guatemala has opened a door of unprecedented opportunity to all of us. He has put us in a position of having to spend considerable time and effort contacting Christian leaders and pastors throughout the United States to unite them in a vision of hope for Guatemala. The door he has opened to the Christian leaders in this country is our opportunity to serve them and ultimately contribute in establishing unity in the body of Christ.
>
> I want you to realize how strategic Guatemala is in relationship to the United States and this hemisphere. Please prayerfully consider what is being said in the enclosed letter from Representative Jack Kemp – a Christian man, in our government, who realizes our efforts are vital to this country. If Guatemala falls, what then? – Mexico? Wouldn't you agree that we really don't have much more time to unite? This [donation] will bless Guatemala and show the world that when a nation turns to God, and God's people unite – his marvelous plan is fulfilled.
>
> [End note:] Nicaragua is becoming a Marxist model of oppression and hatred. The battle for El Salvador is still a brutal one. Guatemala is our opportunity to demonstrate God's alternative in this struggle for freedom.[36]

Guatemala had become a chosen site for the pairing of evangelization and anti-communism. U.S. Evangelicals also supported anti-communist military operations in El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. In El Salvador, John Steer, an Evangelical missionary for Paralife Ministries, preached to Salvadoran troops that "killing for the joy of it was wrong, but killing because it was necessary to fight against an anti-Christ system, communism, was not only right, but a duty of every Christian."[37]

Within anti-communist missionary zeal resided strong nationalistic sentiments. Michael Lienesch explains:

> Evangelicals are especially conscious of Christ's commission to carry their faith to all the ends of the earth. As conservatives who subscribe to a strongly nationalistic brand of

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36. Carlos Ramirez, "Bulletin: International Love Lift," (September 1982), In CIRMA.
37. Qtd. in Sarah Diamond, "Holy Warriors," NACLA: Report on the Americas (September/October 1988), CIRMA.

> patriotism, they think of America as holding a parallel political responsibility to bring law and liberty to other lands.[38]

In the nineteenth century, missionaries used their faith to legitimize and promote the United States' push for political and economic control in the American West and around the globe in places like Hawaii, the Middle East, China, and Africa.[39] Likewise, in the second-half of the twentieth century, Evangelicals encouraged U.S. political and economic hegemony in Central America. They argued that the U.S. bore the responsibility to reform not only itself, but also the rest of the world.[40] For them, the U.S. represented the "city on a hill," the "righteous empire," and the "leader of the free world." Evangelicals, allied with Reagan, taught U.S. cultural and economic principles – like free trade, anti-communism, and individualism – during their work with the Beans and Guns program. They wholly believed that the American way, was the best way.[41]

Evangelical missionaries have historically flocked to areas vital to U.S. political and economic interest. Central America was no exception.[42] Youth with a Mission, for example, established a training school for exiled Nicaraguan youth in Guatemala, called Strategic Missions for Strategic Nations. At the school, students were taught with a textbook titled "The

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38. Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety and Politics in the New Christian Right*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 195.

39. *New York Time,* 24 September 1899; *New York Times*, 11 March 1899; Arthur Power Dudden, ed., *American Empire in the Pacific: from trade to strategic balance, 1700-1922,* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate/Variorum, 2004); Ussama Makdisi, Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the failed conversion of the Middle East, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

40. Michael Lienesch, Redeeming America, 197; Deborah Huntington, "God's Saving Plan," NACLA: Report on the Americas, (January/February 1984).

41. Mike Kadera, interview; Deborah Huntington, "God's Saving Plan," NACLA: Report on the Americas, (January/February 1984); "La santa contrainsurgencia," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio* (January 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

42. Mike Kadera, interview; Bruce Alhberg, interview; Sharon, interview; Michael Lienesch, Redeeming America, 197; Jesús F. García-Ruiz, "Las sectas fundamentalistas en Guatemala," Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000. In an interview, Sharon explains that since communism has been defeated in Central America, many of her missionary friends have begun to work in Cuba. To see how U.S. missionaries have promoted U.S. interests in other regions in the world, like the Middle East, see Melani McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media, and U.S. Interests in the Middle East*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

King is Calling You Back to Nicaragua" written in the first person by Jesus Christ. In the book, Jesus asks readers, "will you let me prepare you for going home to Nicaragua? ..... Just men, ruling in the fear of God, are needed in every area of Nicaragua's government."[43] While the CIA funded an illegal war against the Sandinista government, Evangelical missionaries spiritually prepared the next wave of anti-communist, anti-Sandinista fighters. Evangelicals carried out similar educational and psychological programs with refugees in the Guatemalan highlands. Missionaries, working with the Ríos Montt government, made no attempt to distinguish between relief aid, evangelization, anti-communism, and U.S. devotion.[44]

Intertwined within the promotion of U.S. interests was a theological justification of free market economics. The Reagan administration argued that in the end "trade, not aid" would solve the developing world's problems. The White House claimed that the free market was both the end and the means of reform. Individual entrepreneurialism, reinforced by deregulation, the privatization of public enterprises, and the opening up of markets, would lead to the development of poorer countries like Guatemala.[45] Ríos Montt followed this neoliberal line of reasoning and believed it was his government's duty to make the nation safe for free trade and development.

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43. "The Rise of the Religious Right in Central America" In the Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center Bulletin (25 September 1987). In Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000.

44. Sharon, interview; James Jankowiak, interview; Padre Paco, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, "Private Organizations with U.S. Connections in Guatemala," (Albuquerque, New Mexico: The Resource Center, 1988), 24; "The Central America Storey: God's Army is on the March," *Deeper Life* (January 1983), Guatemalan News and Information Bureau Archive, 1963-2000; Joseph Anfuso and David Sczepanski, *Efrain Rios Montt: Servant or Dictator? The Real Story of Guatemala's Controversial Born-Again President*, (Ventura, California: Ventura House, 1983); Many Evangelicals also reportedly worked closely with the CIA. In a 1975 article in *Christianity Today*, Overseas Crusades -- a major missionary organization based in California -- reported that virtually all of its personnel were debriefed by the CIA. Likewise, in Mexico, locals complained that Summer Institute of Linguistics translators were "assets" of the CIA. See Sarah Diamond's *Spiritual Warfare* for more information.

45. The President's National Bipartisan Commission on Central America reported that "What is now required is a firm commitment by the Central American countries to economic policies, including reforms in tax systems, to encourage private enterprise and individual initiative, to create favorable investment climates, to curb corruption where it exists, and to spur balanced trade. These can only lay the foundation for sustained growth." *The Report of the President's National Bipartisan Commission on Central America*, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1984), 64. See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) for more on Reagan's economic policies.

This "economy of free choice," however, had to be secured through the repression of individual rights and the eradication of alternative economic pursuits. The Ríos Montt administration violently crushed unions and peasant cooperatives, while at the same time it privatized state industries and public utilities and exempted foreign companies from labor and environmental laws.[46] The World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, funded and controlled largely by the U.S. government, loaned the repressive regime 170 million dollars in 1982 to carry out these neoliberal reforms. This, of course, was all done at a time when Congress refused to meet Reagan's demand for the restoration of military aid.[47]

The World Bank, the Reagan government, and the Ríos Montt administration buttressed neoliberalism as a sort of "science," simply the way things should be. Yet in reality, neoliberal development – couched in terms of humanitarian goals and the preservation of individual freedom – sought to provide a new stranglehold on Guatemalan resources. Arturo Escobar explains that "a type of development was promoted which conformed to the ideas and expectations of the affluent West, to what the Western countries judged to be a normal course of evolution and progress."[48] Guatemalan elites shared these Western expectations. They, like many former colonial elites, were more closely aligned with the economic interests of the imperial

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46. Efraín Ríos Montt, *Informe al pueblo de Guatemala*, (Guatemala: Tipografia Nacional, 1983), 68; Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 58; Bethany Moreton, *The Soul of the Service Economy*, 356. David Harvey defines "neoliberalism" as the application of a political economic theory, which proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

47. "Política norteamericana se revierte; masiva ayuda vendrá," *Infopress centroamericana*, (21October 1982).

48. Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development,* 26, 59.

power (in this case the U.S.) than with the needs of their country's impoverished majority.[49] The trick then was convincing the rest of Guatemala that free trade was the answer to their troubles.

In the Ixil region, indigenes and the Catholic Church had resisted state-imposed economic restructuring. The neoliberal economic model was not solely a material entity ready to put in place. It was also a cultural product in need of acceptance and normalization. Political murder in the late 1970s and early 1980s had tried to clear the way for the institutionalization of the neoliberal free market system.[50] State violence was not only motivated by ethnic and racial hatred. Instead, the authorities used "pedagogic violence" to eliminate oppositional economic worldviews, which ethnic and religious identities helped to indicate. Bethany Moreton argues that "on the mass graves of the eighties, Central America's depoliticized economics of the nineties was built."[51] In the case of the Ixil region, the authorities (both U.S. and Guatemalan) took the process of depoliticization and economic reorganization a step further. Mass murder was accompanied by the introduction of new cultural codes embodied in Evangelical Christianity. Before the violence arrived, the Catholic Church and local indigenous belief systems had emphasized communal land use and small-scale farming. Within this more traditional economic model, reciprocity and the distribution of wealth were highly encouraged. These practices naturally worked against the individual accumulation of wealth, the foundation of neoliberalism. To nullify these communalistic economic beliefs, the army responded with violence and invited Evangelical missionaries to religiously and culturally solidify the new economic system.[52]

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49. Vandeveire, interview; Pastor Gabriel, interview; Padre Paco, interview. William I. Robinson, *A Theory of Global Capitalism: Production, Class, and State in a Transnational World,* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

50. Marcelino, interview; Padre Pedro, interview; Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development*, 60; Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop*, 193.

51. Bethany Moreton, *The Soul of the Service Economy,* 403.

52. Penados del Barrio, "Cristo Ayer, Hoy y Siempre," Mensaje Pastoral de la XXIV Asamblea del SEDAC a las Iglesias y Los Pueblos de América Central y Panama, CIRMA; Rob Rader, "Guatemalan

Evangelicals believed that individual financial success and Christianity were not only compatible, but desirable. Evangelical leaders in the U.S. and Guatemala preached that capitalism was the chosen system, "part of God's plan for his people."[53] Pastors regularly proclaimed that "God wants all of our wallets to be full of money."[54] They theologically embraced the idea that spiritual salvation rightly accompanied economic success. The wealthiest were the most blessed. Thus, if one wanted to earn God's blessing, they had to work hard and make more money. The "gospel of prosperity," which interpreted material prosperity as evidence of God's favor, was premised on the supposed omnipotent power of free will, the ability to succeed as long as one maintained faith in God and worked hard. The Church of the Word described this mindset:

> It is not then, a question of good or bad circumstances, but of our individual response to whatever circumstances we face….. I believe the most important factor in our achievement of these goals may be the individual awareness that we – you, me, and each and every one of us – are the ones ultimately responsible for the outcome of our own lives… As we respond to life with the proper attitudes and understanding – *not excusing ourselves or accusing something or someone else for our problems* – God will transform us into living epistles of His nature…. we and we alone are the ones ultimately responsible for seeing that this takes place.[55]

This view differed greatly from that of the Catholic Church. Catholic clergy and lay leaders, particularly in the Ixil region, explained that without structural reform (regardless of one's individual abilities) poverty and misery would persist. Wealth in Guatemala, they argued, was not necessarily a sign of hard work, but more often of corruption and greed.[56] As Catholics, one

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Evangelicals: Depoliticization and Agents of Change," CIRMA; Sheldon Annis, *God and Production in a Guatemalan Town*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 102.

53. Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America*, 107.

54. Pastor José Castellanos, sermon; Pastor Gabriel, interview.

55. Joseph Anfuso, "You are Responsible," *Radiance Monthly* 2, no. 3 (May 1979), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000.

56. Padre Pedro, interview; Padre Paco, interview; Brother Santiago Otero, interview; Marcelino, interview. The progressive Catholic Church supplied modernity's victims with an ethical critique of capitalist forces arrayed against them. For the classic work on peasant resistance to modernity, see James Scott, *Weapons of the Week: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987).

priest explained, "We have an obligation to share wealth rather than accumulate it."[57] Evangelicals, on the other hand, defended material accumulation and its supporting economic system. A popular allegory told among Guatemalan Evangelicals encapsulates this stance:

> Like crabs in boiling water, Catholics try to keep individuals from improving their lives. When crabs are placed in boiling water and one tries to escape, the others pull him back down into the boiling pot. This mentality was developed in the Catholic Church and has impeded the country's economic development.[58]

The progressive Catholic Church spoke of a corrective economic ideology, where communities worked together to lift their poor brothers and sisters out of poverty. They claimed that if community relief indirectly frustrated the monetary aspirations of a few wealthy individuals, it was worth the sacrifice.[59] Evangelicals, in contrast, spoke of a forward-thinking economic mentality, rooted in individual responsibility. They called upon believers to be independently accountable for their economic conditions. Poverty was not caused by structural problems, but by individual sin. If Guatemalans gave up drunkenness, infidelity, wife beating, gambling, and so forth, they too would escape economic hardship.[60] While Catholics leaders in the Ixil region demanded economic redistribution and the end of class exploitation, Evangelicals argued that attempts to distribute wealth were based on an incorrect understanding of society. One missionary, who was active in the Beans and Guns program, reasoned that "collectivism would only lead to a totalitarian society…governments couldn't distribute [wealth] equally because in a week all the money would return to those who had it in the first place."[61]

Catholic leaders in Guatemala have characterized Evangelicals as politically and socially "disconnected." Padre Paco, with the Episcopal Conference of Guatemala, asserts that

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57. Padre Paco, interview.
58. Else Cuchet, interview.
59. Padre Paco, interview; Brother Santiago Otero, interview; Vandeveire, interview.
60. James Jankowiak, interview; Mynor Herrera, interview; Mike Kadera, interview; Bruce Alhberg, interview; Sharon, interview. This theological view mirrors the outlook of many conservatives in the United States.
61. James Jankowiak, interview; Manuel A. Vásquez, *Globalizing the Sacred*, 209.

"Evangelicals have chosen to ignore the political and social problems of the outside world."[62] This rather common critique, though partially true, bases itself on a theological misunderstanding. An "escapist or apolitical" ideology would fail to account for why so many participated in the counterinsurgency campaign. Critics correctly highlight Evangelical religion's disregard for the structural causes of poverty; nevertheless, Evangelicals maintain a grounded understanding of reality. Evangelical religion has declared that the most important goal in one's life was developing a *personal relationship* with Jesus Christ – intrinsically nourishing a sense of individuality. Since religion can never be entirely removed from one's everyday existence, the notion of individualism, for many Evangelicals, has become an ideological crux for navigating the material world. Just as individuals bore the responsibility for their own spiritual salvation, they were also accountable for their own material well-being. [63] Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal Evangelicals have embraced and further articulated this societal and spiritual worldview, urging followers to use religion as a lens for interpreting their individualized roles in modern society. For them, there was not a dividing line between the spiritual and material; the political economy and religion were one in the same.[64] Evangelicals, like secular proponents of neoliberalism, ultimately held the individual responsible.

Evangelical theology, transferred into the realities of Ixil life, reinforced counterinsurgency and free-market developmental goals promoted by the Reagan and Ríos

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62. Padre Paco, interview.

63. James Jankowiak, interview; Pastor Gabriel, interview; Bruce Alhberg, interview; Higinio Asiciona, interview; "Boletín de prensa: cruzada con Luis Palau," (3 January 1983), Princeton University Latin American Pamphlet Collection: Church and Religion in Guatemala, 1974-1982; Sarah Diamond, "Holy Warriors," NACLA Report on the Americas (September/October 1988), CIRMA; David Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 13, 232; Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America*, 99; Roger N. Lancaster, *Thanks to God and the revolution: Popular Religion and Class Consciousness in the New Nicaragua* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 111.

64. Linda Kintz., *Between Jesus and the Market: The Emotions that matter in Right-Wing America*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 7; Talal Asad, Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, and Modernity, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 185. Asad explains that "the experience of religion in the 'private' space of the home and school is crucial to the formation of subjects who will eventually inhabit a particular public culture."

Montt administrations. Because Evangelical missionaries collaborated with the army, while Catholic leaders struggled to survive, Ixiles flooded into Evangelical churches. Within this new religious setting, many Ixiles underwent a process of reacculturation that favored the authorities' political and economic objectives. In Evangelical churches, the army no longer had to worry about religious condemnations or the sanctioning of non-capitalist economic pursuits.[65] Missionaries, along with the Guatemalan government, taught followers that the cause of misery came from within. On TV and radio, Ríos Montt preached that "we, that is you and me, have a great responsibility to our fatherland and what is needed is not heroes from revolutions of the past, but a revolution within ourselves."[66] Evangelical teachings reaffirmed this governmental perspective, arguing that "the personal transformation of the individual was the only way to transform society."[67] If Ixiles wanted to bring peace to their community, they had to find peace within themselves; state-directed political and economic reform was not the solution. In short, this idea of internal spiritual reform instigated a process of "social atomization," which worked to subvert claims of structural injustice.

The town of Nebaj, which was once mostly sympathetic to the revolutionary cause, turned its support over to the army by end of Ríos Montt's presidency. A multiplicity of factors motivated this shift in allegiance. Legitimate fear of army reprisal, along with the revolutionary movement's inability to protect supporters, profoundly influenced the decisions of community members.[68] Evangelical religion, however, made it easier for Ixiles to accept army rule. There was no moral contradiction. Catholic dogma, concerned with the structural causes of poverty,

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65. Padre Pedro, interview; Pastor Andrés, interview; "Informe especial: reconstruir con permiso del rey," *Iglesia guatemalteca en el exilio*, (January 1983), Guatemala News and Information Bureau Archive 1963-2000.

66. Qtd. in Joseph Anfuso. *Efrain Rios Montt: Servant or Dictator.* 153.

67. James Jankiowiak, interview.

68. Marcelino, interview; Pastor Pedro, Bernal; Pedro Gregorio, interview; Higinio Asiciona interview; See David Stoll, *Between Two Armies* for more on the guerrillas' inability to protect their supporters.

made it extremely difficult for Ixiles to align themselves with the oppressive authorities. Evangelical doctrine about individual responsibility and anti-communism, on the other hand, psychologically prepared Ixiles to embrace the goals of the counterinsurgency campaign.[69]

The alliance between U.S. Evangelical missionaries, Ixil converts, and the army was a counterinsurgency success. By the end of 1983, the revolutionary movement had lost popular support among the Ixiles and the army had regained control of the region. Evangelical religion played a fundamental role in that victory. The neoliberal development plans that accompanied violence and conversion, however, did little to change Ixil standards of living. The White House and the Ríos Montt administration had assumed that Evangelical respect for the capitalist system would promote economic development.[70] In the end though, neoliberalism and the supposed economic merits of Evangelical Christianity failed to fuel productive growth in the Ixil region, or for that matter in Guatemala. The belief that God wanted individuals to work hard and become rich had no real positive impact on community development. Instead, neoliberal economics and Evangelical religion hardened existing class structures.[71] Mario, a member of the Church of the Word in Nebaj, recalled: "I have worked hard all my life, finding work here and there, but I'm poor. I know this is God's plan for me…. [and] I accept my fate and thank God that my wife is still alive and that none of my children are dead."[72] Rather than questioning the factors that led to his poverty, Mario accepted his fate as God's plan. He worked off and on for a road construction

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69. Enrique Dominquez, "The Great Commission," NACLA Report on the Americas (January/February 1984), CIRMA; "The Rise of the Religious Right in Central America," The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center Bulletin, (25 September 1987); Greg Grandin, *Empire's Workshop*, 152; Veronica Melander, *The Hour of God*, 177; David Stoll, *Between Two Armies*.

70. Ríos Montt and Reagan were not alone in thinking that Evangelical religion would promote development. A number of scholars have argued the same thing. For a sample of this literature, see Emilio Willems, *Followers of the New Faith*, (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1967); Sheldon Annis, *God and Production in a Guatemalan Town*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987); Amy L. Sherman, *The Soul of Development: Biblical Christianity and Economic Transformation in Guatemala*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

71. Pastor Gabriel, interview; Dennis A. Smith, interview; Padre Paco, interview

72. Mario, interview.

company as a low-wage laborer. When the company finished a project, Mario would be laid off and left without an income for months on end. His economic survival was at the whim of private, often foreign, companies. He passively waited to be hired, fired, and then rehired. Within Mario's understanding of his plight, his lack of job security had nothing to do with larger economic issues, at least partly a reflection of his religious beliefs. The fact that Guatemala's deregulated economy allowed private companies to take advantage of people just like Mario never came into consideration.[73] While the Catholic Church in the Ixil region denounced injustice and instructed its parishioners to question the system, Evangelical churches taught followers to internalize economic misery.

As Evangelical religion worked to silence the cries of many of the poorest Ixiles, the community's wealthiest found renewed legitimacy. Enrique and Ricardo Arenas Barrera, the sons of the "Tiger of Ixcán," converted to Evangelical religion after the guerrillas murdered their father and continued to run the family plantation in authoritarian fashion. While workers received appalling wages, the brothers invited the army and U.S. Evangelical missionaries to use their plantation as a base for the Beans and Guns program. The Arenas brothers were not the only wealthy landowners to convert.[74] Rather than condemning exploitative practices, Evangelical churches (Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal ones) spiritually legitimized the economic activities of the wealthy. How could one criticize the wealth of another, if it were a sign of God's blessing?[75]

The brand of Evangelical religion that missionaries introduced into the Ixil region had its most recent origins rooted in U.S. political and economic culture. But that did not mean that

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73. Mario, interview.

74. "Solidarismo vrs movimiento capital," In Infopress centroamericana (21April 1988); "Solidarismo: una alternativa al capital." In Infopress centroamericana, (30 June 1988).

75. Pastor Pedro Ramirez, sermon.

Ixiles became carbon copies of U.S. Evangelicals, if such a thing even exists. In the Ixil region, Evangelical religious services were often carried out entirely in the native language (Ixil), while women church members wore traditional traje. Indeed, the deep ritualism and extravagant prayer sessions that went along with church attendance seemed to mesh well with indigenous belief systems.[76] Instead of recreating a picturesque Protestant world of wage laborers and westernized Guatemalans, Evangelical Christianity adapted to local realities and worked to construct a new cultural hybridity. Indigenous and Catholic traditions were mixed with new Evangelical notions of individual salvation and economic prosperity. From both ends, old and new, foundational practices were disregarded, reconfigured, and preserved to fit the needs of Ixil followers. The result was a religious practice that was neither strictly global nor local.[77] Nonetheless, the hybrid spirituality that developed ultimately bended to new political and economic realities created by the imperial core: the U.S and the Guatemalan elite.

Today, the streets of Nebaj are lined with small shops, hotels, and vegetable-trucks owned by Evangelical pastors and church elders. Colorful signs declaring, “God blesses this shop,” or “a gift from God,” are posted on the windows of privately owned stores and vehicles. At first glance, this might appear to be a sign of growing prosperity. Further consideration, however, shows that these few examples of individual economic initiative, surrounded by extreme poverty, points to something drastically different. One Evangelical missionary, who has reflected on the issue, explained that the “personal relationship with God motto has become too personal.”[78] Individuals strive for their own wealth, without ever reaching out to their neighbors,

76. Pastor Pedro Ramirez, sermon.
77. Manuel A. Vásquez, *Globalizing the Sacred*, 199, 221; David Martin, *Tongues of Fire*, 232.
78. Bruce Alhberg, interview.

who continue to suffer. Evangelicals "claim that the poor are poor because of personal problems…. it's not their responsibility to help them."[79]

Throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s, Guatemala's economy averaged a 4 percent per annum increase in GDP, a relatively impressive growth rate in comparison to other Latin American and developing countries.[80] Why then is Guatemalan society still one of the most socially stratified in the world? Extreme poverty has always existed in Guatemala, but over the last two decades the gap between rich and poor has widened tremendously. In 1996, the United Nations reported that Guatemala's national per capita income was over four times higher than the average income of the poor, the vast majority.[81] Neoliberal reforms, encouraged by the Reagan administration and initiated during the rule of Ríos Montt, have had a heavy hand in adding to the disparity between growth and equity. Within this process, the role of religion cannot be discounted. Advocates of neoliberalism relied on Evangelical religiosity to win over Ixil hearts and minds to the idea of the free market.[82] In communities, like the Ixil region, Evangelical religion legitimized neoliberal economics and consequently social stratification. It is no coincidence that Guatemala, one of the most socially stratified nations in the world, has also the highest percentage of Evangelicals in all of Spanish America.[83] Both extremes of the economic spectrum have turned to Evangelical religion to accept and make sense of their place (s) in society.[84]

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79. Bruce Alhberg, interview.

80. Megan Beckett and Anne R. Pebley, "Ethnicity, Language, and Economic Well-Being in Rural Guatemala," (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2002).

81. New York Times, 15 July 1996.

82. Bethany Moreton, *The Soul of the Service Economy*, 352-409; Pamela Voekel and Bethany Moreton, "Vaya con Dios: Religion and the Transnational History of the Americas," History Compass, 5/5 (2007).

83. Sheldon Annis, *God and Production*. 79; Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala*, 162.

84. See Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). The role of Evangelical religion in the lives of rural Guatemalans parallels Michael Taussigs' discussion of how rural and urban workers in Colombia and Bolivia make intellectual sense of the capitalist world in which they live; a world in which they no longer control.

Since 1954, the Guatemalan government has been one of the strongest allies of the United States and has operated as a laboratory for U.S. anti-communism and neoliberal economic restructuring. During the presidency of Ríos Montt, the lines connecting the dots between social stratification, counterinsurgency, Evangelical religion, neoliberal development, and U.S. foreign policy can be easily rendered. When Spanish conquistadors invaded Guatemala in the mid-sixteenth century, they brought with them Catholic priests to convert the Mayan peoples. The cross conquered a continent for Spain and formed the cultural underpinnings of a Hispanicized New World. In the modern era, the Ríos Montt administration – aided and abetted by the U.S. government – used Evangelical religion to form the basis of a pro-U.S. neoliberal Guatemala. Catholic missionaries promoted Catholicism to advance the interests of God and country. Evangelical fundamentalists, in similar fashion, served as the grassroots arm of U.S. neo-colonialism. In the early 1980s, the neoliberal wave of exploitation had begun and, like former imperial projects in Latin America, religion was an accompanying force.

CONCLUSION

As the history of conversion in the Ixil region demonstrates, religion can still operate as a weapon of state power. Evangelical Christianity did not necessarily precede or follow the development of a neoliberal political economy in the Ixil region; instead, it accompanied it. The two emerged simultaneously and mutually reinforced one another, creating a full package religious/socioeconomic character, which the Guatemalan state constructed and controlled for its own interests. As the army regained control of the region, refugees accepted not only a new political and economic worldview, but also a new brand of religion.

The long and contentious relationship between the Catholic Church in the Ixil region and the modernizing Guatemalan state had come to a breaking point. By the late 1970s, Church leaders refused to embrace the political and economic status quo. While the state demanded that its citizens be disciplined wage laborers, the progressive Church preached community development and the end of class exploitation. From within the Catholic Church, that preeminent institution of conservatism, a small, yet influential group of clergy and lay leaders developed a forceful critique of the worldly abuses of elite power and privilege. The department of Quiché, which included the Ixil region, was one of the few strongholds of this progressive Catholic minority. Removed from the conformism of the Church hierarchy in Guatemala City, clergy and religious workers articulated a reformist role for religion within the Ixil region's political economy. Their efforts to replace political and economic exploitation with a redistributive cooperative-based system, however, met heavy resistance from plantation owners and the state. Because the local Church taught parishioners to question the system, the state led a campaign of

terror and defamation against Church leaders and dedicated followers. The growth of Evangelical religion was a direct consequence of this clash between the Catholic Church and the state over whether religion would have a conformist or reformist role within Ixil society.

In 1982, under the rule of Ríos Montt, the Guatemalan government began to work with Evangelical relief organizations to counter the efforts of the progressive Catholic Church. During the counterinsurgency campaign, the army chose to make no distinction between Catholic leaders and communist subversives. Both threatened the economic and social order, and thus both were equally punished. State violence was not just directed at ethnic and racial groups as some scholars have argued. Instead, the authorities used “pedagogic violence” to eliminate oppositional economic worldviews, which ethnic, racial, and religious identities helped to indicate. Within the campaign of terror, the state realized it needed an alternative religious ideology to counterbalance the social and economic teachings of progressive Catholicism. Catholic leaders, they argued, were indirectly and directly legitimizing the revolutionary movement. The Guatemalan government responded to that threat by incorporating Evangelical religion into its counterinsurgency campaign and its development programs. Evangelical Christianity, they reasoned, would challenge the Catholic Church as the Ixil region’s cultural foundation, adding spiritual weight to the counterrevolutionary cause and priming the region for a modernized neoliberal political economy.

The initiative to create a new bond between religion, and political and economic control in the Ixil region was also part of a broader, international movement. In the 1980s, Evangelical religion became an important element within a renewed Cold War struggle. If progressive Catholics were the ideological allies of redistributive structural reform, then Evangelical Pentecostals and Neo-Pentecostals were the “spiritual soldiers” of capitalist development and

anti-communism. While the Ríos Montt government worked directly with Evangelical missionaries, the Reagan administration encouraged U.S. Evangelicals to send logistical and financial support to the Guatemalan government to secure U.S. political and economic hegemony in the region.

State terror and religious conversion accompanied the development of the Ixil region's neoliberal economy. As the counterinsurgency campaign cleared the way for neoliberalism, Evangelical religion worked to sanctify and legitimize one's participation in the new political and economic order. In no small way, conversion was a symbol and mechanism of state-led re-acculturation. Religious transformation and terror actually worked together to advance political and economic reorganization.

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