

Living *como Jesús*:

Effects of the Evangelical Church on Women in Zunil, Guatemala

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Abstract

In this investigation, Quantitative and Qualitative data are used to analyze the influence of Evangelicalism in Zunil, Guatemala. Zunil is a small, mostly agricultural and very traditional Mayan town located slightly outside of Quetzaltenango (Xela), in the western Guatemalan highlands. Evangelicalism throughout Guatemala has recently seen a surge in conversions, especially among women. In this ethnography I examine how the Evangelical movement in Zunil differs from other Guatemalan towns, how the population of Zunil – particularly women – has reacted to the presence of Evangelicalism. By focusing specifically on one of Zunil’s seven Evangelical churches, Asambleas de Dios, I present an in depth view of why women first converted to this church, and how both gender roles and familiar relationships have changed since their conversions.

Introduction

February 10th, 2008, I packed my bags and moved into a small concrete block house in Zunil, Guatemala. During my three weeks in Zunil there were six deaths, two births, two weddings, a housewarming, and an elopement. With each event, both mourning and celebratory, I quickly became aware of the tremendous impact alcohol has on Zunil Catholics, and the role it plays in conversions to Evangelicalism. Two days into my stay the uncle of Ventura, a close family friend, passed away. This death was my initial sampling of the traditional Catholic drinking culture; drunken men and women stumbling through my home, missing work to stay home and drink, children absent from school because their parents are too intoxicated to send them, families missing meals because there is no one sober enough to cook, and young children running to the *tienda*¹ to purchase their parents beer. Alcoholism is the chief cause of death in Zunil, and Catholicism is the primary religion. The relationship between Catholicism and Alcoholism is widely recognized in Zunil by all religious sects, and the *testimonios*² of many Evangelical converts attribute their conversions to an escape from the alcoholism plaguing their lives. “I made a promise to my mom ‘Mom, I won’t drink anymore’. Then I made a promise to my dad, ‘Dad, I won’t drink anymore’. It wasn’t until I found the Evangelicals and made a promise to God, ‘God, I won’t drink anymore’, that I finally didn’t drink.” (Memphis, interview February 18th 2008). After living in a Catholic household that was intoxicated approximately 25% of my visit, I too can attest to the need for escape that many of Zunil’s Evangelical converts felt necessary.

Methods

¹ Store

² Testimonies; each Evangelical has their own well rehearsed testimony of how they found God. These testimonies are what the individuals share on a regular basis as they recruit new members to the church.

A large windowed box containing a crucifixion, a large caricature of the Virgin Mary, and surrounded by burning candles dominated the entry way of my new home. The Christ images hanging above my bed solidified my presumption that I was living with a traditional Catholic family. The family immediately embraced me, and showed interest in the work I intended to do in Zunil. Upon discovering that I was not Catholic, and then realizing that I wished to spend time with the Evangelicals, they were appalled. As Catholics they wished me nothing to do with the Evangelicals, and feed me the notion that no, there were no Evangelicals in Zunil. Receiving no aid from my family, I ventured out to discover if they did in fact exist. Through a variety of influential consultants, a basic componential analysis, and daily participation in an Evangelical church, I became acquainted with Evangelicalism in Zunil.

From February 10th to March 3rd, 2008, I conducted over 15 both formal and informal interviews throughout Zunil in order to attain information and personal views of Evangelicalism in Zunil, and how women have both played a role and been influenced by its presence. There are seven Evangelical churches in Zunil: Asambleas de Dios³, Iglesia de Dios, Iglesia Presbeteriana, La Betania, Ministerio Tierra Fuertes, Iglesia Dios Pentecostés Roca de Fuente, and Iglesia Evangélica Monte Calvario. My research was focused in Asambleas de Dios, and it was through this church that I met individuals and conducted interviews. Asambleas de Dios is the only Spanish-speaking Evangelical church in Zunil, and their pastor, Luis, is the only pastor in Zunil who is not originally from Zunil. It was due both to the use of Spanish, the regularity and frequency of service, and the proximity of the church to my home, that my research was centered in

³ Assemblies of God; The Asambleas de Dios in Zunil is a branch of a large international congregation. The congregation originated in the United States in 1916, and has a very zealous mission statement, with missions throughout the world. The headquarters for Asambleas de Dios in Guatemala is in Guatemala's second largest city, Quetzaltenango (Xela), only twenty minutes outside of Zunil

Asambleas de Dios. Although this small focus may have hindered my research on Zunil Evangelicals as a whole, every person with whom I spoke, reiterated that there is great similarity and reciprocity among all of Zunil's Evangelical churches.

Influential Consultants

Excluding four interviews that took place in the homes of the consultants, the majority of the interviews I conducted took place on church grounds. I began by making my contacts directly through the churches in Zunil. I first scheduled an interview with the pastor of Asambleas de Dios, Luis, and then made contacts through him; first with others working in the church, then followed by members of the church. In addition to Luis my most influential consultants were: Ana, a 55 year old women who was the first convert to Asambleas de Dios, Ventura and her husband Freddie who are both in their early 20s and grew up within Asambleas de Dios, Lupita, an 18 year old young woman who is the only evangelical in her family, Memphis, a *Ladino*⁴ man in his mid-40s who found the Evangelical church as an escape from alcoholism, and Irma, a 53 year old *comadrona*⁵, a long time member of the Evangelical church, and one of the few *Ladinas* in Zunil.

I also conducted several interviews with people not associated with the Evangelical church, including: the *Alcalde*⁶, my host family, two well-known *brujos*⁷, the catholic

⁴ A man born of non-indigenous descent; also known as *mestizo*

⁵ Midwife

⁶ Mayor

⁷ Witches; there are many people residing in Zunil who are recognized as *brujos*. The Evangelicals emphatically preach against all practices of *brujería*, and view it as an opposition to God.

chorus, and a revered natural healer and *ajq'ij*⁸.

Componential Analysis

With the information I gathered I completed several different forms of analysis in order to best interpret my data. My componential analysis consists of comparatively examining the different influences the presence of Protestantism has had socially. This has been done through simple questions in informal interviews with church members. In this analysis I analyzed Evangelicals and Catholics relations and compared different social components such as: dress, education, occupation, social prestige, and economic standing.

Although economic standing was a difficult component to objectively measure, I did so through observation of the families within the community, and by taking into consideration their dress. Although most all women in Zunil wear *traje*⁹, economic standing can be roughly determined by noting the condition of their *traje*, the condition and apparent cost of the sweaters they wear, and by looking at a woman's feet.

Traditionally, women in Zunil walked barefoot. Now, by looking at the cleanliness and condition of one's feet and footwear, economic class can be roughly determined. Once I gathered this data, I was able to analyze how women in each religion compare to women belonging to different denominations.

⁸ A Mayan priest, also referred to as a Mayan *sacerdote*. Many Mayan priests are known for their natural healing powers, and wide knowledge of natural herbs and remedies.

⁹ Traditional hand-woven Mayan dress consisting of two distinct components: the *huipil* (blouse) and *corte* (skirt).

Participation

The most important component of my study was my participation in the *cultos*¹⁰. Asambleas de Dios, unlike the other churches of Zunil, has *culto* at least once every day. I spent many hours sitting and observing *culto*, participating in song, and joining the members in their worship. This involvement not only formed a trust between myself and the member of the church, but it gave me an opportunity to be a silent observer, and make personal note of how gender roles and relations between the sexes play out, rather than only using data received subjectively through personal opinions.

Limitations

Throughout my study I encountered several limitations. The first methodological flaw was my limited time-frame. I only spent three weeks in the field, and had to work quickly to establish contacts and friendships. Due to my time limitation, I was only able to work within one of the seven churches in Zunil. I also ran into issues of literacy and common language. My lack of K'iché was a great limitation because the majority of the Zunil population speaks only K'iché, and it is especially difficult to find women who are able to communicate in Spanish. Although I did work briefly with a young girl who helped translate, the majority of my interviews were restricted to men and women who were able to speak Spanish. This limitation limited my data pool by both generation and education, seeing as how it is usually the younger generations and those with higher education who speak Spanish. I also found myself unable to conduct my intended written surveys, because the literacy rate is so low among women in Zunil that my data pool would have very biased. Another factor that may have played into the information

¹⁰ Directly translated, *culto* means “cult”, but in Zunil the term *culto* means an Evangelical service. When I first heard this term, it was used by my Catholic family, and I interpreted it to be a derogatory term, but it is in fact the term used by Evangelicals as well to mean “church service”

I collected, is my religion. I was regularly asked my religion, and each time responded that no, I was not Evangelical, but yes, I did believe in God. Although I do not believe this affected the accuracy of information I collected, I am certain it had an effect in the way in which people responded to and perceived me.

Body

Terminology

The first component to analyzing my data and comparing it to other published works is the identification and clarification of terminology. Each article I examined and used as theoretical basis for my own findings, all investigated “Evangelicalism”. Despite the same common thread of research, different terms are used for the same religion, and different sectors of the Evangelical religion are observed. Robert Carlsen, Virginia Burnett, and James Sexton all use the term Protestant, while Anne Hallum argues that the terms Protestant and Evangelical are equal in meaning, and therefore uses them interchangeably. The term most relevant to my research, is “Evangelical”. In Zunil the term “Protestant” does not exist, while “Evangelical” is widely recognized. Within the Evangelical religion, there are many different sects. These sects are represented by different Evangelical churches within Zunil. Hallum focuses on the Pentecostals as her main subjects, and states that the Pentecostals are the fastest growing sect of Evangelicalism in Guatemala due to their large amount of missionaries (Hallum 2003:168). The aggressive mission programs of the church are designed to establish self-supporting and self-propagating national church bodies in every country. The church that I worked within, Asambleas de Dios, belongs to an international sect that

originated within the Pentecostals in 1916, and identifies in Latin America simply as *Asambleas*¹¹ (2008: The General Council of the Assemblies of God).

Another term that must be identified in order to properly and comparatively analyze my data is the definition of what Amy Sherman identifies as “Cristo-pagan worldview” and Carlsen defines as folk-Catholicism. In Zunil the common term used to identify the “other” is *brujería*. Witchcraft is widely recognized as fact in Zunil, and its existence is never disputed. In Zunil, the religious options that exist are Evangelical, Catholic, or *Brujería*. The one group that no one recognizes but does exist, I am simply going to call non-religious. Therefore, the terms that I will be using throughout this paper that may differ from what author have used, are: Evangelical, *Brujería*, and non-religious.

Evangelical History

The Evangelical church has meant many different things for both Guatemala as a whole, and the women within who devote their lives to the church. Sexton, Carlsen and Hallum’s articles together paint a full image of how Evangelicalism has historically meant modernization and development in Guatemala, as well as explaining how its continued expansion throughout Guatemala has meant economic growth, increase in social support, and gender empowerment. Although the use of the Evangelical church as a tool for modernization and economical growth is acknowledge by all authors, there is a disagreement as to whether or not this role is both an idealization and an actuality. Although Carlsen’s main focus was not Evangelicalism, he discusses it as one of the bases to the political turmoil he was analyzing. Carlsen - like Sexton, Hallum, and Burnett - claims that although Evangelicalism was initially introduced into Guatemala as an effort by the government to instigate development comparable to the “Western

¹¹ Assemblies

World”, and halt Catholicism’s reign, his argument differs by claiming that Evangelicalism did not actually perform this role. His claims are substantiated by quantitative data suggesting that Catholics are more likely to own cars, be literate, and educate their children (Carlsen 1997:41). These claims are in direct opposition to Sexton’s research, based between San Juan Laguna and Panajachel, which neighbor Carlsen’s place of work: Santiago Atitlan. Sexton’s work suggests (through both quantitative and qualitative data) that Evangelicals are actually *more* likely to be literate and of a higher economic standing than Catholics because of their greater sense of personal participation, and a willingness to take on more and newer experiences (Sexton 1978:288).

Differing Results among Literature

My study takes place in 2008, over a decade after Carlsen’s study, and three decades since Sexton’s work was published. The difference in dates of when these two studies were performed in contrast to mine is very important. Although doubtful and in contrast to the growth of the rest of the country’s Evangelical movement, it is possible that since Sexton’s 1978 study, the achievements of Evangelicals declined leading into Carlsen’s 1997 study. I find this doubtful, and therefore attribute the different results to the relationship between Protestantism and the militaristic Guatemalan government. Burnett specifically pointed to the town of Santiago Atitlan as not having shared in general successes of the Evangelical movement due to the severe violence in the town, and the local communities’ rebellion against its leftist policies and political agreement (1989:132). Carlsen substantiates my belief with his data stating that the presence of the Evangelical church was utilized by the military to terrorize the people, thus creating a hostile relationship between the church and the people (1997:129).

I want to draw attention to these differing results, and the reasons for which Santiago Atitlan seems to have not embraced Evangelicalism as have the other rural towns of Guatemala, because my data and research shows that Zunil is also an anomaly. Although Zunil has many Evangelical churches, it is predominantly Catholic. Zunil never grew as strong as in surrounding towns – for example neighboring Almolonga which is predominantly Evangelical –, and even now their numbers are dwindling. Luis, pastor of Asambleas de Dios, attributes Zunil’s never strong, and now diminishing Evangelical population to the traditional culture and closed mindedness of Zunil. He believes that people are very attached to their tradition, seem to be performing economically well, and wish to go about life as they always have – meaning as Catholics or *Brujos*. Luis feels that it takes the people Zunil a very long time to learn how to trust, and he personally felt this mistrust when he first moved to Zunil in 1990. Luis also identified the extreme violence of the *Guerra Civil*¹² to be one of the reasons for Zunil’s mistrust. Currently, Asambleas de Dios has 79 members: 29 *miembros en propiedad*¹³, 30 *catecuminos*¹⁴, and 20 children (Luis, interview February 28th 2008). In addition to a small member base, regular attendance is also very low. On a weekday, attendance averaged 30 people, and weekends fared hardly better, with a maximum count of 46 attendees. Luis identified both of these numbers as being significantly lower than past counts, when on a Sunday he would have to pull out extra chairs in order to

¹² Civil War; lasting approximately 36 years and resulting in the deaths of over 400,000 indigenous peoples

¹³ Directly translated *miembro en propiedad* means a “correct” or “quality” member. In Asambleas de Dios, a *miembro en propiedad* is someone who has completed the four stages of confirmation – consisting of memorizing sections and proving yourself proficient in the bible – and has been baptized into the church. Once someone has become a *miembro en propiedad* they can begin to lead, speak, and *orar* in service.

¹⁴ Catechumen; explicitly defined as a person who is being taught the rudiments of Christianity. In Asambleas de Dios a *catecumino* is someone who participates in the services from their pew, and are preparing to become a *miembro en propiedad*.

seat over 70 people. During one of my last days in Zunil I spoke with a young *Ladina* mother named María. María and I conversed seated in the patio of her home, and while we talked her three-month old baby began crying in the background. After bidding her six-year old daughter to fetch the baby, María explained to me that she has been a part of *Asambleas de Dios* since she was eight, but that the demands of motherhood keep her from attending regularly (interview March 1st 2008). Luis blames the people of Zunil for not paying more attention to the Lord, and their lack of attentions to God. He believes that if people, like María, would attend regularly, their involvement would encourage and inspire others to join the church; returning their numbers to what they once were. Luis also sees the initial rejection and then painstakingly slow conversion rate as the reason that Zunil is significantly further behind in the Evangelical movement than surrounding towns, like Almolonga (interview February 26th 2008).

Another clear indicant of Catholic domination in Zunil is the location of the churches within the town. Zunil is both physically, and spiritually, centered around the Catholic Church (see Appendix A). The Catholic Church is built in the center of the town, with the population fanning out from there. The Evangelical churches are located along the outside of the town and distant from both Zunil's center and the majority of its population. Just as most Latin American towns were initially constructed by the *conquistadores*¹⁵, in Zunil the Catholic Church bells can be heard from every home. Although the loud broadcasting speakers of the Evangelical churches can also be heard through many parts of Zunil, the Evangelical music is not considered a keeper of time (as are the bells), but rather an annoyance, *una bulla*¹⁶, that keeps everyone awake at

¹⁵ Conquistador: the Spanish conquerors of the 16th century

¹⁶ Noise; meant as a derogatory term when used by non-Evangelicals

odd hours. Therefore estranging people rather than drawing them into service as are the functions of the Catholic bells.

History of Asambles de Dios in Zunil

The Asambleas of Dios came to Zunil in 1983 under the leadership of Riqueta Chinchilla, an indigenous woman from Xela. When Chinchilla first came to Zunil, there were already two Evangelical churches in the town: La Betania and Iglesia de Dios. Chinchilla only spent a little over a year in Zunil, before she left and passed the church on to Alicia Gramaho. Gramaho was also unable to *aguantar*¹⁷ the hatred and rejection of the town, and soon passed the church off to Mariana Orrasco, and then onto Blanca Narcisso. It was not until Luis came to the church in 1990 that Asambleas de Dios was able to retain a pastor. During these years, the town rejected Evangelicalism, and even resorted to violence as an attempt to expel them from Zunil. As I sat with Luis conversing inside the now nicely painted and well-constructed church, he recounted stories of rocks being thrown at both him and the pastors before him if they were even so much as to step out into the street. When Luis came to the church in 1990, there were only three women *miembros en propiedad* – one of which was Ana with whom I spoke – , and their children who attended his *cultos*. Luis lived in Zunil for seven years without any friends. Zunil refused to accept either him or the word of God he was preaching. In an interview with the *Alcalde* de Zunil, he did not acknowledge a presence of Evangelicals in Zunil until 1991, and then stated that around 1995 there was a fortification of traditional Mayan practices in an effort to push out the Evangelical churches (interview February 16th 2008). The first people in Zunil to accept Evangelicalism were the children. Luis is very fond of children, and fondly recalled times of when four or five children would come to visit him in the church, nervously

¹⁷ To put up with, to sustain

walking in for fear of what the town may do to them, and asking Luis if they, too, could learn how to read and write. It was for the children and these three faithful women, that Luis would hold *cultos* every Sunday for two hours. Over the years, Luis slowly formed relationships within the town through selling his onions – grown in the church garden – in exchange for people’s attendance at *culto*. These relationships, formed through exchange of goods, were what allowed Asambleas de Dios to grow. Asambleas de Dios, although in a current recession, now holds *culto* at least once every day, and has grown to a population of 89 members (Luis, interview February 26th 2008).

Economic Situations

Evangelicals are broadly stereotyped as having “higher success rates” than Catholics, and comparisons between Catholicism and Protestantism are abundant. Each of the authors I have discussed, have examined the differences between the two, and differentiated between the religions through measuring economic standings, literacy rates, motivation (i.e. occupation and education), and personality (through acceptance of fatalism or traditional beliefs) (Sexton 1978:280). Although the authors use different components in different ways, the common trend among the works is their discussion of whether Evangelicalism has provided converts directly with the tools to improve their lives through utilization of the above factors, or if it has rather provided encouragement and support for self-improvement. Both Sexton and Hallum argue that Evangelicalism aided personal growth in two main ways: by instilling a willingness to take on challenges, and a strong economic saving ethic (Sexton 1978:288, Hallum 2003:168).

Since Evangelicalism does not contain a *compadre*¹⁸ system it lends itself towards an atmosphere of personal improvement and self empowerment (Burnett 1989:139).

Carlsen also alludes to this economic sentiment, when he discusses the rejection of Evangelicals by traditionalists (1997:125). This attribute, noted by Hallum, Sexton and Carlsen, is what Burnett argues was the initial reason for the instigation of the Evangelical church in Guatemala, to motivate the people to rise out of poverty, and become more Western in their economic ideals (1989:132).

Although my research shows Evangelicals to be of both lower economic standing and education levels, I argue that Evangelicals do have a stronger work ethic than Catholics due to their faith in God to aid them in all challenges. I found that having come from the fringes of society, Zunil Evangelicals do not have as much wealth, tend to be less educated, and are not nearly as cemented in the community as Zunil Catholics. I also found that Zunil Evangelicals are less likely to have family members in the US, therefore eliminating a great source of income. I do agree with Burnett that Evangelicalism lends itself towards an atmosphere of personal improvement and self empowerment, because the Evangelical church preaches that God wants you to succeed. God want his people to succeed. This message so firmly ingrained into the minds of Evangelicals, gives them the confidence that in everything they undertake they will not fail. An Evangelical knows that they always have God aiding them, that they are never alone, and therefore work harder and have more success (in individual adventures) than someone who approaches challenges – in either work or personal life – with the notion that they may fail. This argument was so eloquently put by Freddie in a casual conversation outside Asambleas de Dios, when he told me that “God wants me to do

¹⁸ A system, or general expectation in Mayan culture, that consists of those who are wealthy aiding the less fortunate; it has been identified by Anthropologists as an economic levelling system.

well. God intends me to do well. How can I not do well if that was what God intended?” (interview February 17th 2008). The Evangelical converts of Zunil were once alcoholics, homeless, without food or income, or ridden with health issues. Through this, I found that the number one reason for conversion in Zunil was a search for health aid. The population from which the Evangelical church draws, has great “room for improvement” economically speaking, therefore creating more economic growth than Catholics, due to greater mobility range.

Acceptance and Rejection: Catholic Perceptions

Although the initial violence with which the Evangelical church was met has diminished, there are still a great amount of Catholics and those practicing *Brujería* who prefer not to acknowledge the existence and presence of the Evangelical church. At dinner one night my host father, Tomás, asked me if I had been to any of the Evangelical *cultos* and heard the *bullas*. When I responded that yes I had, and that I was awaiting an interview with the pastor Luis, Tomás nodded in recognition and told me that he knew Luis. I was very surprised that he knew Luis, because upon my arrival they had insisted there were no Evangelicals. When I asked my host father if he and Luis were friends, he thought about it for a while, and responded “*no, somos conocidos*¹⁹”. This response reflects what I found to be the present general attitude of Catholics towards Evangelicals. They are acquaintances; they know each other enough for a wave in the street, but not an exchange of greetings.

In addition to this sentiment of the general public, I also encountered to very different *cuentos*²⁰ from two young Evangelical converts. Carmelita’s nuclear family converted

¹⁹ No, we know of each other; acquaintances

²⁰ Stories

from Catholicism when Evangelical *oraciones* cured her ailing mother. After their conversion to the Evangelical church, the rest of their family remained Catholic and disowned them. Although they all remain living in Zunil, Carmelita's family has not spoken a word to her for six years (interview March 1st 2008). This *cuento* is greatly contrasted by the *cuento* Lupita shared with me. As a young 18 year-old woman, Lupita was the only person in her entire family who converted to the Evangelical church. Only 18 months ago Lupita converted in order to receive *oraciones* to cure her failing health. When I asked Lupita if her family had also converted, and how they had handled her conversion, she replied that "I am the only Evangelical in my family. Everyone else is Catholic. They don't mind that I converted, and I don't mind that they're still Catholic. We all still believe in one God and to us that is what matters. As long as we all believe in God it really doesn't matter what our religion is" (interview March 1st 2008). Although Lupita's sentiments in this matter differ greatly from all of the other *cuentos* I collected, they give light to another form of relations present in Zunil.

Women Converts

I, like Hallum, found the number one reason women join the Evangelical church to be due to the failing health of either herself or a family member. The main focus of Hallum's article is to specifically examine the role of women within the Pentecostal movement, and why it is that so many women are drawn to Pentecostalism. The common argument among published work is that women are drawn to Pentecostalism because Pentecostal theology discourages machismo, empowers women within their familiar settings, and provides a social network of support that is not offered in other religious settings. Hallum specifically defines and identifies these main facets as 1) health and healing, 2) resisting poverty, and 3) resisting machismo. Of the women that

Hallum interviewed, she found that 46% had converted to Pentecostalism because they found it the easiest, fastest, and most efficient way to receive aid during times of physical illness (either their own or that of a family member). The faith-healing that the Pentecostal church offered these women gave them the opportunity to join a communal network of support and prayer.

My research is in complete agreement with that of Hallum. I found failing health to be the number one reason for why women seek out the Evangelical church. Nearly every woman I spoke with recounted a tale of near death, until the Evangelical church performed *oraciones*²¹ for her. One of the most influential women I spoke with, and most touching *testimonio* I collected, was that of a 55 year-old woman named Ana. Luis mentioned Ana to me while recounting Asamblea de Dios' history in Zunil. Ana was the first convert to Asambleas de Dios in 1983, and she worked extensively with the Asamblea de Dios' first pastor, Riqueta Chinchilla, to establish and find a place for the church in Zunil. Sitting in two lawn chairs in front of the church before a Sunday *culto*, Ana presented to me her *testimonio*. She was very calm, humble, and self-assured. After telling me a particular touching detail of her story would calmly say "*Eso es todo. No es mucho, solo es mi testimonio. Solo es como vino a conocer a Dios*" [That is all. It is not much, it is only my testimony. It is only how I came to know God]. When Ana was 35, she became very ill. She went weeks without getting out of bed, and could not even care for her child, who was then only eight years-old. Ana visited the clinic in town, she visited the private doctor, and then she turned to *brujería*. She went to all of the *brujos* in town, they give her different medicines, and would *quemar*²² for her, but no one knew neither was wrong nor how to cure her. By this time Ana was very near death, and

²¹ Prayers

²² Directly translated *quemar* means "to burn", and is also the term used to denote a traditional Mayan ceremony, in which a sacred fire is utilized in prayer.

her mother came stay with her in her final days. As a final attempt, Ana's mother suggested they seek out the Evangelical pastor and ask if she could say some *oraciones* for Ana. When Riqueta arrived at Ana's home, Ana could not even get out of bed to meet her. Riqueta came to Ana and asked her if she believed in God, and Ana responded "si" [yes]. Riqueta then asked Ana where she believed she would go after death, and Ana responded "con Dios" [with God]. Riqueta then performed many *oraciones* for Ana, and told her she would keep her in her prayers. When Riqueta left, Ana fell asleep and didn't wake until the morning. When she woke up the next morning, she was able to rise out of bed. She felt herself, and knew that she had been cured. That same day, Ana was able to walk around her home just as she had been able to before her sickness. Ana knew that God had saved her, and that from there on out her path would be with the Evangelicals. Once, Ana strayed from her religion for a couple of months and fell ill again, but as soon as she returned to her *oraciones* she became well (interview February 28th 2008).

Ana's *testimonio* is one of many that details a sickness that cannot be righted until the sick accepts God, and receives *los oraciones* of the Evangelical church. In addition to Ana, there was Irma, Lupita, Carmelita, Lucy, and Juanita who all had equally as compelling *testimonios* of how God healed them from their illnesses while they were on their death beds. In the cases of Carmelita and Juanita, it was their mothers who were deathly ill until they found themselves in the Evangelical church. Carmelita and Juanita have now grown up in the Evangelical church, and their families also converted after the healing of their mothers.

Since I have found failing health to be the number one reason for conversions among women, it becomes quite obvious as to why the Evangelical church is predominantly female. In the majority of families throughout not only Zunil and Guatemala, but the world, it is the responsibility of the mother to care for the health of her family. Since women are responsible for the health of their families, they are the ones who seek out medical aid, and come upon the Evangelical church. In the case of Asambleas de Dios, the first three converts to the church were all women. Even now, the church remains predominantly female. On an average night of 30 attendees, there will be approximately 20-25 women, and the majority of the male population is made up of their young sons. Both Ana and Irma confirmed my suspicions, when they told me that as women, it is their job to recruit more women to the church. The men will recruit men, because the women find themselves unable to recruit men without receiving criticism for speaking and visiting a man alone. This means, that since there is already a significantly larger female presence, it will only grow exponentially from there, because there are very few men recruiting men. Luis also accounted for the larger female population, by saying that women in general are much more involved, and more devoted to God. Women care more about spreading the word and inviting more to join, whereas the men really don't do their part (interview February 28th 2008).

Changed Relationships

Having found failing health to be the primary reason women convert to the Evangelical church, my research shows that the resistance of machismo – including condemnation of alcohol and aggression –, shifting gender roles, and self-empowerment are all “perks” stemming from the theology preached in the Evangelical church, rather than being the intended goal.

In an interview with Freddie and his wife Ventura, these exact sentiments were expressed. We sat seated in the grass outside the church late one Sunday night, with the *culto*'s booming music streaming out, forcing us to raise our voices in order to hear one another. Their two year old daughter, Sarah, ran between us and the music, playing with her young friends, while Freddie and Ventura explained to me how their marriage was born in the church of Asambleas de Dios, and it was with the church that their marriage grew. Freddie and Ventura met as children in Asambleas de Dios, and married three years ago at age 18. Both of their families had come to the church when a sibling had fallen ill. They claimed that they were so lucky to be part of the church, and that fortunately, due to their relationship with God, their daughter Sarah had never once had more than a headache. "We always tell Sarah how wonderful she is. We tell her she is beautiful, we tell her she's intelligent, we tell her how much God loves her and how God wants her to succeed," Freddie told me. They believe this is why she has never been ill. The church has taught them that if you strongly believe in something, it will become true. Ventura told me that "the church has taught us to be moral. We know what is right and wrong. We know that it is wrong to drink, and that it is wrong to be angry. Jesus was a gentle man. Jesus was kind to women, he cured lepers, and he took care of children. He taught children, and he healed them. We know that the right way is the way of Jesus. That is why we are such moral people; we live *como Jesús*²³". These sentiments so eloquently expressed by Ventura explain the household change seen by Evangelicals after their conversions. Freddie later told me "of course, sometimes we argue, but then we bring our problems to God. And God helps us solve everything" (interview February 24th 2008). These statements are what have led me to argue that actual gender role changes in Evangelical homes are not too significant, but what main

²³ Like Jesus

changes that are seen in the homes of converts, are changes in the way spouses relate to both one another and their children. Men are never explicitly told to change their roles within the home, to take care of their children, to cook for their wives; and women do not begin making these demands, but instead relationships within the home become more involved and congenial as people begin to live their lives *como Jesús*.

Modeling one's life *como Jesús* was also expressed by Ana. During our interview I asked Ana how her relationships have changed since her involvement in the Evangelical church, and she responded that “before I became ill, and then later joined the church, I went with a married man. I had my child by him, and that was very wrong. I know that now. Ever since I became part of the Evangelical church, I stopped going back to him.” (interview February 28th 2008). In her case, the Evangelical church provided Ana not only with the *conocimiento*²⁴ that her previous life path had been “immoral”, but it provided her with self-empowerment and a sense of community and belonging that allowed her to be on her own, and without a man that was not good for her. Ana was very proud to tell me that “I left him. I left him, I lived in the church, and I myself worked to provide food for my son. I still work to buy food, and I take care of myself.” It was therefore the empowerment Ana received from God through the Evangelical church, that allowed her to make this self-sufficient life for herself. Luis also expressed that many times single women with many children came to the church to receive *oraciones* for failing health, and then remain within the church because it provides them with a new way of living (interview February 28th 2008). Living *como Jesús* is what empowers women, provides them with opportunity, and encourages them to lead economically stable and healthy lives absent of alcoholism, domestic abuse, and subordination.

²⁴ Knowledge

Conclusion

Although Zunil is an anomaly in that Evangelicalism is not a rapidly growing movement that has been embraced by the population, its influences are still in concurrence with other research published on the effects of Evangelicalism on women. Despite Evangelical's wide recognition as women-rights, anti-machismo movement, my research has shown – in agreement with works published by Hallum – that the Evangelical movement in Zunil has been propelled by converts seeking salvation from failing health, and that all changes in relation to gender have been an approvable outcome of Evangelical theology. Women are the main force of the Evangelical church in Zunil, because they are the ones responsible for the health of their children and families. Once women become part of the Evangelical church it then becomes their role to recruit more women to the church. Since the general population accuses a woman speaking alone with a man of promiscuity, women therefore recruit only women, causing the female percentage of the church body to grow exponentially.

Modernization and development were what the government intended for its people when it invited Evangelical missionaries into the country in the late 1800s (Burnett 1989:128). Now, over 100 years later, what has been achieved is a population of women who have become members of the church, are encouraged to live *como Jesús*, and have therefore now established themselves respectable, honorable, and proud lives absent of machismo and immorality.

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Appendix A

