

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Dissertations and Theses

City College of New York

2018

**Evangelical Dictatorship Driving the Guatemalan Civil War:
Reconsidering Ríos Montt, the “Savior of La Nueva Guatemala”**

Miho Egoshi
CUNY City College

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cc_etds_theses/733

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).
Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

**Evangelical Dictatorship Driving the Guatemalan Civil War:
Reconsidering Ríos Montt, the “Savior of La Nueva Guatemala”**

Miho Egoshi

The City College of New York

The Study of the Americas

Professor Martin Woessner and Professor Susanna Rosenbaum

May 29, 2018

Table of Contents

Introduction...2

Disaster Evangelicalism after the 1976 Earthquake...12

Televangelists' Influence on the U.S. Government's "Culture Wars"...24

From Counterculture to Fundamentalism: The Transformation of the Jesus Movement...33

Evangelical Dictatorship: Ríos Montt, the "Savior of La Nueva Guatemala"...51

Evangelical Mission: To Support a "Brother in Christ"...83

Conclusion...95

Bibliography...113

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge Professor Martin Woessner and Professor Susanna Rosenbaum of The City College of New York for their passionate and insightful guidance. I also wish to express gratitude for my friends, especially William Collazo, Ayanna Richberg, and Flora Wu. They gave me generous help and encouragement all the time. Thank you so much.

Introduction

On the morning of February 4, 1976, a devastating 7.5 magnitude earthquake hit Guatemala. Twenty-three thousand people were killed and more than seventy-six thousand people suffered injuries. Within days, Protestant churches in the United States responded by sending disaster relief such as food, clothing, and medical aid to help suffering Guatemalans.¹ Churches not only sent material assistance, but they also sent missionaries. In this manner, the earthquake triggered an “evangelical expansion,” a spiritual bequest from the U.S. to a small, predominantly Catholic country in Central America in the midst of a long-lasting civil war. An assistant professor of history at Trinity University, Lauren Frances Turek states, “Ultimately, the extent and success of the evangelistic outreach that the earthquake triggered turned Guatemala into one of the most Protestant nations in Latin America, a transformation that had profound implications for Guatemalan society and politics.”² The 1976 earthquake marked a turning point in the Guatemalan Civil War, but not for the reasons we commonly assume.

The Guatemalan Civil War started in the 1960s and ended only in 1996. Many thousands more Guatemalans were killed as a result of the conflict than the 1976 earthquake. The Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) organized by the United Nations estimates that the number of persons killed or disappeared during it reached a total of over 200,000. As I will show in this thesis, evangelical efforts from the U.S. greatly influenced the course of the Guatemalan Civil War, especially during Efraín

¹ Lauren Frances Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ’: Evangelical Groups and U.S.-Guatemalan Relations during the Ríos Montt Regime.” *Diplomatic History* 39, no.4 (2015): 692.

² *Ibid.*, 693.

Ríos Montt's presidency, from March 23, 1982, to August 8, 1983. The CEH reported that more than 10,000 human rights violations and acts of violence were committed during this time, making it one of the most violent periods of the entire Guatemalan Civil War. CEH also concludes that 88.33 % of the identified victims of these crimes were of the Mayan peoples. Furthermore, CEH found that the state, with the help of state-sanctioned actors, was responsible for 93% of these human rights violations, while guerrilla activities accounted for only 3% of them. These facts suggest that state violence mostly targeted Mayan peoples, who are amongst the most poor in Guatemala.

Ríos Montt was the first "born-again" Protestant president of Guatemala. He was a member of the Church *El Verbo*, which is associated with the Gospel Outreach organization based in California. Furthermore, his dictatorship was supported politically and financially by various Pentecostal churches in the U.S., which were tightly connected to Ronald Reagan's administration. My research examines how Christian evangelicalism gained increasing political power in the U.S. as well as how American-born evangelicalism entered Guatemalan social life after the 1976 earthquake and became a powerful ideology, one which served to intensify state violence against Mayan peoples during Ríos Montt's dictatorship.

Guatemala is typically thought of as a predominantly Catholic country. But in recent decades, Protestant, and specifically evangelical, faiths have made inroads into Guatemala's social and spiritual fabric. As previously mentioned, the biggest catalyst for Protestantism's rise was the devastating earthquake that struck Guatemala in 1976. According to the survey data collected by San Carlos

University in Guatemala in 1989, evangelical efforts, such as sending material assistance with the missionaries, helped expand the Protestant population in the country by 14 percent between 1976 and 1978, and by 42 percent between 1978 and 1982. By 1982, over 22 percent of the total Guatemalan population belonged to a Protestant church.³

Reflecting on the class structure and historical context of Guatemala, it must be pointed out that Mayan peoples have suffered from institutionalized discrimination since the colonial era. As many scholars have argued, “The Guatemalan state has existed since its inception to promote a racist ideology that legitimates and empowers ladinos and others (including the planter class and foreign interests) at the expense of the indigenous peoples.”⁴ Guatemala is a predominantly agrarian country. Its products—sugar, cotton, and bananas, for example—are in great demand in international markets. But the accumulation of capital produced by such markets has been controlled by the elites, who view indigenous peoples as little more than an impediment to their financial interests. Since the colonial era, Oscar Roland Sierra Pop argued, a majority of the Guatemalan population has been deprived of their lands by a minority.⁵

The Mayan peoples in Guatemala have been economically, socially, and culturally marginalized before the Guatemalan Civil War, but during the war it reached a historical peak with what

³ Ibid., 695.

⁴ Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala Under General Efraín Ríos Montt, 1982-1983* (Oxford Scholarship Online, 2010), 15.

⁵ Oscar Rolando Sierra Pop, “The Church and Social Conflicts in Guatemala.” *Social Compass* 30, no. 2-3 (1983), 318.

amounted to the attempted eradication of Mayan peoples and their cultures. The CEH states: “Aggression was directed against elements of profound symbolic significance for the Mayan culture, as in the case of the destruction of corn and the killing of their elders. These events had a serious impact on certain elements of Mayan identity and disturbed the transmission of their culture from generation to generation.”⁶ As an ultimate act of racism—an act of cultural genocide, in fact—the Guatemalan army attempted to destroy Mayan communities by desecrating the spiritual representation of Mayan identity, and denying it to future generations. A professor at the University of Texas at Austin, Virginia Garrard-Burnett states, “[t]he sharp focus of violence on Mayan people during the early 1980s has given rise to the phrase ‘the Mayan holocaust.’”⁷ It is in this context that the thesis of paper is that there was a complicit relationship of religion and politics in the Guatemalan Civil War that was supported by American evangelicals. This relationship influenced the President of the U.S. and President of Guatemala and led to the Mayan holocaust. In the following pages, I will examine how Christian activism became increasingly conservative and gained political influence in the U.S. before it was then exported to Guatemala, where it eventually influenced the Ríos Montt regime. I will show how conservative evangelicals in the U.S. were mobilized for national politics before Ronald Reagan came into power, and how their influence eventually shaped the Ríos Montt regime.

⁶ The Commission for Historical Clarification. *Guatemala: Memory of Silence, Tz’Inil Na ‘Tab ‘Al: Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification, Conclusions and Recommendations*. (Guatemala: CEH, 1998), 30.

⁷ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 7.

Throughout most of the twentieth century, much of U.S. Christian activism had been informed by a reform-minded, tolerant, and liberal outlook.⁸ At a certain point, however, this began to change, and a distinctly conservative strain of evangelical belief emerged. The rise of Gospel Outreach is a case in point. Gospel Outreach is the mother church of *El Verbo*, the church to which Ríos Montt belongs. Both churches are politically very conservative, but Gospel Outreach grew out of the Jesus Movement, a countercultural phenomenon that swept across the U.S. in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. The Jesus Movement resonated with free-spirited, countercultural Americans, including the Beat Generation and, later, the hippie movement, which faded by the mid-1970s. It is important to understand why, and how, a seemingly tolerant, liberal variant of Christianity transformed into such a conservative ideology. What was once a theology associated with hippies had transformed and was used by a dictator this is responsible for authorizing atrocities. How did the movement of “love and peace” in the U.S. become associated with the rise of the Christian Right. Guatemala provides a case study in which it is possible to view the implications of how the Jesus Movement underwent a dramatic transformation in connection with the rise of the Christian Right, which includes influential televangelists Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell. In doing so, I hope to reveal the process by which evangelicals became politicized in the U.S. and how they became complicit with Ronald Reagan’s administration, which through its backing of Ríos Montt fostered and supported the Mayan genocide.

⁸ Ibid., 159.

Evangelicals increased their religious and political presence in Guatemala first by participating in the reconstruction efforts after the 1976 earthquake, then by infiltrating the Guatemalan educational system, which influenced the nation's politics. Evangelicals had considerable help, both from the U.S. and Guatemala. U.S. evangelicals, with their connections to the Reagan administration, had gained political capital, which allowed them to offer support to Guatemalan elites who backed the repressive policies of the Ríos Montt regime. This was in opposition to some parts of the Catholic Church, which sided with the poor. In a radical departure from the previous 500 years of Catholic teaching, liberation theology, by 1976, had put the some aspects of Catholic theology at odds with goals and aspirations of the conservative elite in Guatemala.

As for the connection between the Catholic Church and politics in Latin America, it is worth pointing out that even after the independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century, “the Catholic clergy enjoyed considerable political authority.”⁹ In the second half of the twentieth century, this authority was challenged by a new Catholic movement for the poor, liberation theology. Peruvian priest and theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, who is the chief advocate of liberation theology states:

The theology of liberation attempts to reflect on the experience and meaning of the faith based on the commitment to abolish injustice and to build a new society; this theology must be verified by the practice of that commitment, by active, effective participation in the struggle which the exploited social classes have undertaken against their oppressors.

⁹ David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?: The Politics of Evangelical Growth* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990), 25.

Liberation from every form of exploitation, the possibility of a more human and dignified life, the creation of a new humankind—all pass through this struggle.¹⁰

Liberation theology aimed to encourage the Catholic Church to engage positively in politics on behalf of the marginalized poor. In this regard, it had an affinity with Marxism, but its influence was limited in Guatemala. As Garrard-Burnett argues:

Unlike neighboring El Salvador, in Guatemala, the Catholic Church at large, led by a conservative archbishop, never endorsed Liberation Theology. And, unlike in Nicaragua, Liberation Theology attracted few influential members of the native clergy in Guatemala. On the other hand, many foreign priests, who made up the great majority of Guatemalan's clergy, embraced Liberation Theology with enthusiasm.¹¹

Even though liberation theology was a small, unofficial sect within Catholicism, the fact that liberation theology in Guatemala was largely supported by foreign clergies must have troubled the government, which perhaps explains the strong suspicion displayed by the government toward Catholic Churches in the rural highlands. For some in the army, the foreign priests too easily embraced communist guerrillas influenced by foreign revolutionary forces. This suspicion intensified counterinsurgency campaigns not only against guerrillas but also against Catholic Churches located in the highlands.

In addition, class politics were at play as well. As anthropologist David Stoll points out:

¹⁰ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation (15th Anniversary Edition)*(New York: Orbis Books, 1988), 174.

¹¹ Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 128-129.

“Liberation theology was certain to antagonize conservative Catholics in the middle and upper classes, the pillars of the church in former times, and especially military officers.”¹² In the Guatemalan class structure, liberation theology was regarded as a rebellion against the ruling class, including the army officers who were mostly conservative Catholics. These class considerations likely exacerbated the bloody persecution against Catholic Churches in Guatemalan highlands.

It was in this context that evangelical faiths found their way to Guatemala. *The New York Times* suggested saw it coming: “[t]aking advantage of the complacency of Catholic hierarchies, the shortage of Catholic priests and the church’s controversial activist stance, evangelical churches have multiplied over the past decade in Latin America.”¹³ Although liberation theology was a minority movement within the Catholic Church, the actions of the Guatemalan army and ruling elites suggest that, in the highlands, they thought that many priests were under its influence. The dysfunction of Catholic Churches did not help to refute the suspicions of the army.

The Recovery of Historical Memory Project (REMHI) suggests, “[t]here is no question that a sector of the Catholic church, inspired by liberation theology, played a crucial role in the cresting revolutionary movement in the late seventies.”¹⁴ Thereby, Catholic Churches were regarded as hotbeds

¹² David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, 38.

¹³ Marlise Simons, “LATIN AMERICA’S NEW GOSPEL,” *The New York Times*, November 7, 1982, <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/11/07/magazine/latin-america-s-new-gospel.html?pagewanted=all>

¹⁴ Archdiocese of Guatemala (REHMI). *Guatemala, Never Again!: Recovery of the Historical Memory Project, the Official Report of the Human Rights Office* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 225.

of guerrillas and were subjected to attacks. When Ríos Montt came to power, “the persecution of priests decreased at the same time that Catholic Action activists and catechists were bloodily repressed.”¹⁵

It is my hope that focusing primarily on the strain of evangelical belief that can be found in the Ríos Montt regime may serve as a foundation for further research in these other areas. I aim to identify the mechanism by which religion intensifies political violence when it is connected with dictatorship, a phenomenon that, sadly, extends well beyond the case of Guatemala. By focusing on the development of evangelical rhetoric both in U.S. and Guatemala, I hope to show how it was used to justify mass killing in Guatemala. This will clarify how American evangelical belief supported the military objectives of the Ríos Montt regime.

In this thesis, the first section will clarify how the 1976 earthquake became a catalyst in the importing of American-born evangelicalism into Guatemalan society, which ultimately found political influence. The second section will explore the emergence of evangelicals in U.S. society and politics before and during the time of the “culture wars.” It also examines how U.S. evangelical rhetoric described and interpreted communism’s expansion in Central America. This section shows how evangelicals were mobilized as a powerful political force in the United States. Led by televangelists, like Jerry Falwell, to support Republican candidate Ronald Reagan, who maintained a strong anticommunist position, evangelicals played a crucial role in transforming elections. For example, they helped bring Reagan a landslide victory in the presidential election of 1981. The third section examines

¹⁵ Ibid., 240.

how a freedom-worshipping, counterculture-created Hippie Movement transformed into a kind of political fundamentalism via the Jesus Movement. By drawing upon the example of influential evangelical thinker Francis Schaeffer, who claimed that Christian moral values should be reflected in national politics, this section will clarify how Schaeffer brought counterculture Christians and the political Right together, creating a coalition that supported Reagan administration. Building on this foundation, the fourth section explores the first born-again Guatemalan President Ríos Montt's dictatorship. I focus specifically on how he incorporated evangelical belief into Guatemalan politics. Examining his evangelical rhetoric, which he used to justify political violence, especially against Mayan peoples, reveals the deep religious and political connections between American evangelicals and Ríos Montt's regime. The fifth and final section looks deeper into this connection and shows how American evangelicals supported Ríos Montt's regime financially, more than even Ronald Reagan's administration had during the Cold War.

Disaster Evangelicalism after the 1976 Earthquake

As mentioned in the introduction, the massive earthquake that hit Guatemala in 1976 resulted in widespread damage to the country. Making matters worse, the Guatemalan government was virtually useless in the reconstruction required after it. Governmental inaction opened up a space for foreign aid to flow into Guatemala. In this section, I will clarify how the earthquake became a catalyst for the importing of American-born evangelicalism into the Guatemalan society, resulting in its increased political influence.

According to a novelist and scholar Arturo Arias, the central government was “practically incapacitated from responding to the emergency and the need for national reconstruction.” Therefore local assemblies “negotiated directly for aid with international agencies.”¹⁶ This desperation led the incapable Guatemalan authorities to allow the intervention of the U.S.-born Protestantism into Guatemalan society. This triggered the dramatic growth of Protestantism in the country, which up until that point had been overwhelmingly Catholic. But the tide was turning. In November 1982, three quarters of a million Protestants gathered in the capital to celebrate 100 years of Protestantism in Guatemala.¹⁷ By 1994 *El Verbo* church had grown to “an estimated 15,000 members in 25 congregations” across the country.¹⁸

¹⁶ Arturo Arias, “*Changing Indian Identity: Guatemala’s Violent Transition to Modernity.*” In *Guatemalan Indians and the state 1540 to 1988*, edited by Carol A. Smith, 230-57 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 243.

¹⁷ Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, 1-3, 189-190.

¹⁸ Pew Research Center, “Historical Overview of Pentecostalism in Guatemala Origins and Growth,” October 5, 2006, <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/historical-overview-of-pentecostalism-in-guatemala/>

In retrospect, the 1976 earthquake was a decisive turning point in the religious transformation of Guatemala. But that turning point hinged on practical matters more than doctrinal ones. Arias also points out that “[n]ational and international news reports showed that the houses destroyed were those with the weakest construction, and that the poorest Guatemalans, the Indians, were the ones who suffered the highest losses.”¹⁹ Housing is one of the most basic infrastructures of any nation and such images highlighted the systematic high inequality of Guatemalan society, especially for the marginalized Mayan peoples. In addition, as the government recovered from the shock the earthquake, “the army tried to monopolize all international aid in order to funnel it through their own channels, reselling that aid for profit.”²⁰ This is evidence of the corruption within the Guatemalan military, members of which filled their own pockets by taking advantage of their position. The earthquake thus exposed to the world the dysfunctionality, racism, and corruption of the Guatemalan government. A few years later, Ríos Montt campaigned against corruption by trying to “openly equate Catholicism” with it.²¹

In any case, much of the relief effort and reconstruction in Guatemala was mobilized by non-governmental actors. Shortly after the earthquake, Pentecostal churches and evangelical Christian groups in the U.S.,—such as the National Association of Evangelicals’ World Relief Commission, the Assemblies of God World Missions, and the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board—sent substantial

¹⁹ Arturo Arias, “*Changing Indian Identity: Guatemala’s Violent Transition to Modernity*,” 243.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Pew Research Center, October 5, 2006.

aid as well as missionaries to the suffering people of Guatemala.²² As a result of their efforts, “[e]vangelical growth increased from 8 percent a year before the catastrophe to 14 percent after it.”²³ This was not the first time contributions by Protestant churches in the U.S. were sent to Guatemala. But whereas “the first Protestant missionaries had arrived in Guatemala in 1882, only about 7 percent of the population belonged to a Protestant or evangelical church prior to the 1976 earthquake.”²⁴ In addition, Garrard-Burnett suggests, although Protestant missionaries from mainline denominations such as the Presbyterian Church and Central American Mission had made great efforts to build hospitals, schools, and clinics in Guatemala for over a century, few Guatemalans converted to Protestantism before the mid-1960s.²⁵ Regardless of a long-lasting devotion to support Guatemalan society, mainline Protestant churches failed to increase their membership in the country until the earthquake struck. As Swedish scholar Veronica Melander explains, “[t]he earthquake and the successive flow of foreign organizations and money were thus significant factors behind the opportunity for churches to expand their operations to more extensive areas of Guatemala, and to acquire more members for the churches.”²⁶ This is an important fact because the earthquake marks how a natural disaster became a catalyst for American evangelical intervention in a foreign country.

²² Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ,’” 692.

²³ Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, 12.

²⁴ Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ,’” 695.

²⁵ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 132.

²⁶ Veronica Melander, *The Hour of God?: People in Guatemala Confronting Political Evangelicalism and Counterinsurgency (1976-1990)* (Uppsala, Sweden: Swedish Institute of Mission Research at Uppsala University, 1999), 74.

One week after the earthquake, an influential American evangelist toured the most devastated areas. That was Billy Graham. After World War II, Billy Graham, then a fundamentalist, “attracted enormous crowds to his revival. In the 1950s he became a celebrity, well known in Washington.”²⁷ Graham espoused a theology of religious revival. It was one that had distinctly political overtones. One scholar describes it as “Revival of souls for the revival of the nation. His theory of political change was straightforward: saved souls lead to a saved nation.”²⁸ Billy Graham connected individual salvation with national salvation. His words provided his audience “with a politics that emphasized personal morality and individual responsibility.”²⁹ Such notions are commonly shared by evangelicals: social ills are attributed to a lack of individual morality and responsibility, not to politics. Such a belief was the cornerstone of Ríos Montt’s political philosophy.

Mass destruction and miserable conditions so overwhelmed Billy Graham that he sent large shipments of food, medicine, and clothing. Invoking ideas of theodicy and providence, he also suggested that the disaster “could serve a greater purpose and turn out to be a blessing, as the ‘tears shed by Guatemalans may be the way to reconciliation with God.’”³⁰ Graham recognized the earthquake as a potential catalyst for a mass conversion to evangelicalism.³¹ This recognition could be called “disaster evangelicalism,” a term adapted from Canadian journalist Naomi Kline’s *The Shock Doctrine*:

²⁷ Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 5.

²⁸ Daniel Hummel, “Revivalist Nationalism since World War II: From “Wake up, America!” to “Make America Great Again!”” *Religions* 7, no.11 (2016): 1.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ,’” 693.

³¹ Ibid.

The Rise of Disaster Capitalism (2007). Evangelists' attitudes toward the disaster in Guatemala overlapped with the policy plans of global capitalists, who intended to reconstruct not only the infrastructure of a disaster-stricken country, but also the broader social systems of developing countries. Poverty-stricken areas suffering from confusion due to the aftermath of a natural disaster or political turmoil made natural targets for global capitalists and neoliberals.

American evangelists took advantage of the tragic situation in Guatemala. They pushed Guatemalans to convert to evangelicalism by insisting that the earthquake was a sort of "punishment" from God. This idea, that the earthquake represented "God's punishment," did have an appeal to some Guatemalans. A survey conducted shortly after the earthquake shows that nearly 80 percent of Guatemalan families believed that the disaster was either a sign of God's displeasure or a divine call for redemption.³² This belief resonated with evangelical ambition and contributed to the rapid growth of the Protestant church in Guatemala. It also coincides with the rise in violence during the Guatemalan Civil War, which was entering its sixteenth year.

According to Turek, "regardless of denomination, evangelicals shared a belief that they must engage in missionary work or evangelism to 'make disciples of all nations,' as Jesus commanded in his Great Commission to the eleven disciples at Galilee."³³ Premillennialists, such as Billy Graham, believed that "Jesus Christ will return personally and visibly, in power and glory, to consummate his salvation and his judgment' as described in the books of Mark, Matthew, Hebrews, Revelation, and

³² Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 133.

³³ Turek, "To Support a 'Brother in Christ,'" 693.

others.”³⁴ They read these Scriptures as prophecy and as evidence that evangelism must precede the Second Coming.³⁵ This interpretation was supported by Billy Graham’s International Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974, in which religious leaders gathered from 150 countries. “Delegates affirmed the usual biblical imperatives. Underlying their disagreements with liberal Protestants, they radically expanded the definition of the need for missionary work.”³⁶ Turek states: “Many Western evangelicals viewed global efforts to spread the Gospel as the most significant form of social action they could undertake as Christians.”³⁷ Based on this religious belief, famous evangelists and major para-church organizations delivered assistance as well as missionaries to Guatemala, which rushed to the cities and countryside to help the country rebuild and to plant churches at every opportunity.³⁸

This rapid expansion of Protestantism, mostly Pentecostalism, changed the religious and political landscape of Guatemala. As David Stoll claims, Catholic bishops even went so far as to denounce an “‘invasion of the sects’ that they attributed to a political conspiracy coordinated by the U.S.

³⁴ Ibid., 694. Premillennialism, according to Frances FitzGerald, is “the contrary belief that civilization is becoming more wicked so that God will intervene and subject civilization to a thousand years of tribulations before He comes again with his army of saints and destroys Satan and the earth” (FitzGerald 639).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, 73.

³⁷ Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ,’” 694.

³⁸ Ibid., 695. Parachurch organizations are “Christian, heavily evangelical Protestant, public charities focused on providing religious goods and services outside of any congregational or denominational sponsorship” (Scheitle, Dollhopf, and McCarthy, “Spiritual Districts: The Origins and Dynamics of US Cities with Unusually High Concentrations of Parachurch Organizations,” *Social Science History* 41, no. 3 (2017), 505).

government.”³⁹ These Catholic bishops may have recognized that evangelicals were deeply connected to political right in the U.S. As Garrard-Burnett points out, the percentage of Protestants constituted nearly a quarter of the overall population in 1980. The percentage was “much higher in rural areas, including the zone of conflict, where the repression of Catholics [by government] and overwhelming circumstances drove people to seek out new religious options.”⁴⁰ This means, in part, that Catholic Churches did not respond effectively to the religious and social demands of Guatemalans, especially those Mayan peoples suffering from destruction, poverty, and violence after the earthquake and during the civil war. This helps to explain why so many people moved toward Pentecostalism.

Also important to note is that the U.S. Pentecostal churches that delivered various kinds of aid to Guatemala were well funded. Their wealth attracted people to evangelical churches. Part of the church’s role, in the views of many of the rural poor, was not only to give spiritual consolation but also to provide material and social assistance, especially in a poverty-stricken country where government was ineffectual or unwilling to help them. Often, evangelical efforts were made on behalf of the poor in cities as well. This means that Pentecostal churches played a roll beyond religious expression alone. Protestantism became the basis for a new social network for the poor.

After the earthquake, Pentecostal churches often provided food, temporally housing, and short-term loan programs to help newly arrived migrants from rural areas.⁴¹ These programs would not

³⁹ David Stoll, *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 168.

⁴⁰ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 133.

⁴¹ Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala*, 123.

have been sustainable without the rich funding and support services that Protestant-run associations such as women's support groups, youth fellowships, and Alcoholics Anonymous. These groups provided "important supportive relationships, which helped newcomers to the city avoid the kinds of social ills most commonly associated with low-income urban migration."⁴² Generally, poor families newly relocated to urban areas tend to be socially isolated, which can result in problems such as alcoholism, drug addiction, domestic violence, and child abuse. Protestant institutions sought to address these issues and to build closer relationships, by creating a sense of community. In this way, Pentecostal churches and associations greatly assisted people in rural areas as well as new migrants in the cities. Furthermore, "[w]ith [evangelical churches'] insistence on sobriety and the inculcation of the so-called Protestant work ethic [such as diligence, faithfulness, and patience], conversion to Pentecostalism often led to upward social mobility."⁴³ It is uncertain how much can be attributed to the Protestant work ethic but some members did improve their economic condition.

In this way, Pentecostalism won the hearts and minds of people in both rural and urban areas by providing material and social support to them. As I will show, even though each Protestant sect has a different identity, "they share a ministry that promotes a direct, emotional relationship with God and a strong emphasis on individualism and self-improvement."⁴⁴ George Pixley, an American Professor of Bible at the Baptist Seminary in Mexico City, argues that there is a negative side to this:

We believe that the deep problems in Latin American society can only be solved if people

⁴² Ibid., 122-123.

⁴³ Turek, "To Support a 'Brother in Christ,'" 697.

⁴⁴ Simons, *The New York Times*, November 7, 1982.

organize and make structural changes. But the [Protestant] sects effectively undercut any political participation outside the church, like union activities. They demobilize people.⁴⁵

In over-emphasizing individual responsibility, in other words, evangelical theology can often hinder attempts at changing unfair social structures. This may in part explain how Ríos Montt's dictatorship claimed to help the people without actually changing any of the government's military policies, which repressed the poor people of the Guatemalan highlands.

Pentecostalism's promise of economic salvation was fulfilled only through theological salvation. From a more explicitly religious perspective, theologian Nestor Medina argues that "Pentecostalism helped people rebuild their lives and make sense of their reality through apocalyptic lenses. The Pentecostal message of the imminent coming of the Lord, war, suffering, and earthquakes as signs of the end times contributed greatly to people flocking to Pentecostal churches."⁴⁶ In other words, "the eschatological message seemed to fit the social and political context" that characterized the Guatemalan Civil War.⁴⁷

The idea that eschatology and providence go together, that divine intervention can be detected in natural disasters, such as earthquakes, has a long and well-documented history. Voltaire's *Poeme sur le disastre de Lisbonne en 1755, ou examen de cet axiom: Tout est bien*, is but one of the more famous and oft-studied critiques of this kind of thinking. Voltaire questioned the prevailing Enlightenment-era view that all things that come to pass, even pain, are in the end just, because they

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Turek, "To Support a 'Brother in Christ,'" 696.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

seemingly are in accord with God's will.⁴⁸ Voltaire rejected this view, finding it not only dangerous but a hinderance to positive change.

The eschatology that emerged after the Guatemalan earthquake was used to remove critical thinking toward social problems on the part of newly converted Protestant Guatemalan believers. This might have made them more obedient to the Protestant church and to government authority, by supporting suspicion of the critical analysis from academics and the free press on the immediate social and political upheaval happening in the country.

Remarkably, Pentecostalism spoke to immediate social and economic realities while also providing a bridge to older indigenous beliefs. Pentecostalism revolves around “baptism in the Holy Spirit, as manifested by faith healing, speaking in tongues, prophecy, and other manifestations of the miraculous.”⁴⁹ Its emphasis on “ecstatic expression and the experience of ‘unmediated personal relationship with God,’ drew immigrants in, yet it also blended syncretically with elements of indigenous spirituality that had persisted in rural villages.”⁵⁰ Syncretism made the Mayan embrace of Pentecostalism in Guatemala possible. But there was a difference between the urban and rural areas. As Turek argues “[a]lthough Pentecostalism spread quickly and became indigenized among rural Mayans, Pentecostal churches in the cities tended to retain an American character and bonds with counterparts in

⁴⁸ Edgar S. Brightman, “The Lisbon Earthquake: A Study in Religious Valuation.” *The American Journal of Theology* 23, no. 4 (1919): 506.

⁴⁹ Stoll, *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala*, 168.

⁵⁰ Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ,’” 697.

the United States, even as local leaders gradually took over from the original missionaries.”⁵¹ It may be that the rapid growth of evangelicalism in rural areas was due to the fact that Mayan peoples were brutally persecuted by the government. It may have been easier to evangelize Mayan peoples who had limited access to daily commodities, formal education, and spiritual consolation.

Evangelical beliefs and institutions found their way into the Guatemalan education system as well. *El Verbo* and its mother church, the California-based Church of the Word, which is sponsored by the Gospel Outreach organization, played a significant role in spreading evangelical beliefs in society by incorporating its “principles” an education system, advocated by *El Verbo*, that competed with traditional public schools. Along these lines, *El Verbo*’s leader, Carlos Ramírez ordained Ríos Montt as “the ruler” to lead Guatemala during this time of crisis. Their “Principle Education,” embraced and embodied by Ríos Montt, was based on the seven principles: “individuality, stewardship, unity and union, Christian Character, self-control, sovereignty of God, and planting and harvesting.”⁵² Teachers of *El Verbo* sponsored schools attempted to integrate these principles into everything they taught. For example, in a lecture about Mayan culture, “while praising the Mayans for some of their accomplishments, [teacher] argues that they lost their lands because they were not good stewards.”⁵³ As sociologist Susan D. Rose and writer Steve Brouwer argue, “[Evangelicalism] identifies social conflicts as individual problems, then provides individualistic solutions which discourage collective and

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Susan D. Rose and Steve Brouwer. “The Export of Fundamentalist Americanism: U.S. Evangelical Education in Guatemala.” *Latin American Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (1990): 47.

⁵³ Ibid., 49.

critical analysis at the structural level.”⁵⁴ We can say that an education based on such evangelical principles deprives students of the ability to think critically. Accordingly, it produces “desirable” people for those in authority to govern.

Because of a poorly funded public education system, evangelical education, which was better funded, took advantage of the earthquake’s aftermath to indoctrinate Guatemalans. Because of its emphasis on individual responsibility rather than social reform, evangelical beliefs was widely appealing to the Guatemalan ruling class. “The inequality and lack of opportunity created by the Guatemalan class structure provided fertile ground for evangelical schools to offer basic education.”⁵⁵ Most importantly, evangelical education’s emphasis on obedience to authority helped to turn eyes away from the civil war and the human rights violations against Mayan peoples in the Guatemalan highlands. As a result, by suppressing dissent it may have played a role in prolonging the civil war and contributing to the Mayan genocide.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 54.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 51.

Televangelists' Influence on the U.S. Government's "Culture Wars"

Imported evangelicalism from the U.S. transformed the religious, social, and political landscape in Guatemala. Before it could do so, it first had to find a foothold in the United States. In this section, I explore the emergence of U.S. evangelicals in U.S. society and politics, which foreshadows some of the ways in which they became influential in Guatemala. It shows us how religious beliefs can be mobilized as powerful political forces during a time when communism was viewed as the ultimate enemy of the U.S. In this context, the guerrillas in many Central American nations, many of whom were associated with communism, were viewed as enemies of Christianity. This view helped to change the reform-minded evangelicals into conservative anti-communists.

According to Garrard-Burnett, during most of the twentieth century, much of U.S. Christian activism had been fueled by a reform-minded, tolerant, and liberal outlook, which was influenced by theologians such as Walter Rauschenbusch and Reinhold Niebuhr, as well as the Christian activism of Reverend Martin Luther King Jr.⁵⁶ However, evangelicals and fundamentalists started to become increasingly concerned with secularism and the supposed moral decline of the 1960s. A professor at the University of West Georgia, Daniel K. Williams details their concerns: "[t]he sexual revolution, sex education, race riots, the counterculture, increases in drug use, and the beginning of the feminist movement convinced them that the nation had lost its Christian identity and that the family was under attack."⁵⁷ These "culture wars" led them "to unite with socially conservative allies, even if they

⁵⁶ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 159.

⁵⁷ Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5.

happened to be Catholic.”⁵⁸ Culture wars paved the way that evangelical belief intervenes in national politics.

The liberal, social justice strain of American Protestantism reached its peak with the election of Democrat Jimmy Carter to the presidency in 1976, but it was short-lived. Carter’s foreign policy which centered on human rights was based on a highly ethical conception of Christian charity. Carter was a “born-again” Christian president and his administration directly and openly acknowledged the influence of the president’s moral judgments and Christian values in the making of both domestic and foreign policy decisions for the first time in modern history.⁵⁹ Carter applied his liberal Protestant belief to policymaking. But Carter’s attempts did not bear fruit. “American conservatives labeled the morally estimable but politically maladroit Carter administration—a period marked by the worst energy crisis to date, severe economic recession, and the national humiliation of a hostage crisis in Iran—a debacle.”⁶⁰ Carter’s ineffective presidency, along with his liberal Protestantism, fueled a growing distrust of party politics, especially among evangelicals and Christian fundamentalists who valued traditional American moral values “were interested mainly in restoring laissez faire capitalism and fighting communism.”⁶¹ As a result, the Carter administration inadvertently brought about the decline of liberal Christian belief, which allowed the Christian Right to intervene directly into U.S. politics at a time when liberal Protestantism should have been ascendant.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 159.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, 53.

Influential televangelists were crucial in replacing liberal Protestantism with conservative Protestantism in the political arena. As Williams suggests, “evangelical leaders such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson saw that conservative Christians had the prominence to dictate the term of alliance to Republican politicians and force the Republican Party to begin paying attention to evangelicals’ stances on abortion, gay rights, and the ERA [Equal Rights Amendment].”⁶² Falwell and Robertson regarded conservative Christians as powerful political actors who could win culture wars as well as religious wars by bringing their conservative Christian values from the pulpit to politics. In addition, there were several factors behind the expansion of evangelicalism: the growth of Christian colleges, an increase in the number of highly educated evangelicals, cultural products based on apocalyptic prediction, and evangelical television networks.⁶³ The emergence of charismatic televangelists such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and Jimmy Swaggart also played a significant role in propagating a politicized evangelical message as well as raising funds.

Jerry Falwell was a Southern Baptist pastor and nationally known televangelist who broadcasted the weekly *Old-Time Gospel Hour* program from 373 stations across the country. He was also a leading figure in conservative evangelical circles, and his church was one of the largest in the U.S. In addition, he was a fund-raising genius who used direct mail and on-air appeals to collect more money each year than the Democratic National Committee.⁶⁴ Regarding Falwell’s theological and political position, historian Daniel Hummel defines Jerry Falwell as somebody “who succeeded [Billy]

⁶² Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 159.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 171.

Graham as the unofficial spokesman for evangelicalism in the 1970s.”⁶⁵ Jerry Falwell explained a new theory of revival and its relationship to politics in 1981: “to win divine blessing God cared less about individual souls and more about the principles that society was based upon. A nation may be full of unregenerate sinners[...], but if it upheld biblical principles it could remain God’s graces.”⁶⁶ This idea clearly shows how Falwell thought government should be based solely on biblical principles, which would bring about individual salvation. This recognition was shared with Ríos Montt, as I will show in later sections.

Falwell constructed his own media as well as fund-raising system, which enabled him to spread his doctrine and to obtain abundant funds simultaneously. Falwell described himself as “aggressively fundamentalist.”⁶⁷ He insisted that fundamentalism must be clearly distinguished from other conservative Christian movements for “its militant opposition to Liberalism.”⁶⁸ His moral position was anti-pornography, anti-abortion, and anti-homosexuality, which resonated with New Right politicians who espoused similar moral values.

Falwell launched moral campaigns to encourage his believers to boycott local stores that sold pornography, or to put anti-gay-rights initiatives on local ballots. Falwell was convinced that “a

⁶⁵ Hummel, “Revivalist Nationalism since World War II,” 2.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ In Frances FitzGerald’s characterization, a fundamentalist is “a member of a militant evangelical movement bent on combating Protestant liberalism and secularism. Most believe the Bible inerrant (or true in every detail) and claim to interpret it literally.” On the other hand, mainline Protestants are “Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Methodists and others who belong to churches that resisted fundamentalism and who are more or less theologically liberal. Some are politically liberal as well” (FitzGerald 638-639).

⁶⁸ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 160.

city-by-city, grassroots campaign could turn back the tide of cultural liberalism in the United States.”⁶⁹

Initially, Falwell emphasized that his religious commitments amounted to moral campaigns; he was reluctant to call for direct political involvement. Eventually, though, he recognized that his local campaigns had only limited success in bringing the country back to his fundamentalist morality. He therefore launched the Moral Majority in June 1979. It was, as historian Frances FitzGerald has suggested, “an organization designed to register conservative Christians and mobilize them into a political force against what [Falwell] called ‘secular humanism’ and the moral decay of the country.”⁷⁰

As Falwell put it: “We are fighting a holy war [...] this time we are going to win.”⁷¹ The Moral Majority was a political organization that represented the beginning of Falwell’s involvement in national politics. Furthermore, in September 1979, Falwell founded the Moral Majority PAC in order to raise funds for the campaigns of conservative Republican candidates. From this point forward, Falwell was “no longer merely a pastor; he was a professional lobbyist and political operative.”⁷²

As a political operative, Falwell expanded the scope of his preaching. In the middle of the Cold War, Falwell was convinced “communism was an impediment to global evangelism and satanic conspiracy that had to stop.”⁷³ In addition, communism was an affront to providence. Falwell believed strongly in American exceptionalism: “[t]he United States played a special role in the Lord’s plan for world history—not least by defending against communism—and if it was in decline, the

⁶⁹ Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 172.

⁷⁰ FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 291.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 175.

⁷³ Ibid., 45.

solution was to return to the God who had blessed America in former times.”⁷⁴

The inefficient Carter regime, conservative theologians argued, endangered the traditional moral values of the U.S. As we will see, Ríos Montt utilized similar rhetoric when he came to power in Guatemala. Ríos Montt shared this anticommunist position and emphasized the same traditional values heralded by American evangelicals. He famously stated: the most important human relationship “does not come from Communism nor democracy but that is of the family, the sharing of everything, the working for the community.”⁷⁵ Ríos Montt clearly rejected communism, but here he also seems to question Western democracy. Emphasizing the family as the core of all human attempts to improve the society, he tried to depoliticize his people. He did this by offering a religious narrative: “[a]s soon as you have peace in your heart, there will be peace in your house, and when there peace in your house, there will be peace in society.” Such beliefs, suggested by his church *El Verbo*, led to Ríos Montt’s authoritarianism by trivializing social problems, minimizing them as just individual or family affairs.⁷⁶

After Carter’s debacle, Falwell’s aggressive political attitude, which was based on his fundamentalist evangelical belief as well as his commitment to American exceptionalism, appealed to evangelicals. They strongly supported his politics and the politicians he endorsed.⁷⁷ Fear that the nation was

⁷⁴ Ibid., 176.

⁷⁵ Raymond Bonner, “Guatemala Leader Reports Aid Plan.” *The New York Times*, May 20, 1982. <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/05/20/world/guatemala-leader-reports-aid-plan.html>

⁷⁶ Ríos Montt, original text taken from “Tenemos que llevar a cabo reconciliación,” April 11, 1982. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt*. (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional. 1982).

⁷⁷ Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 177.

losing its morality and national prestige, mobilized evangelicals to assert, what they believe is their entitlement, to decide what is best for the nation.

Falwell mobilized his followers to vote for conservative Republican candidates. By the fall of 1980 Falwell claimed that “the Moral Majority had chapters in forty-seven states and had registered four million voters.”⁷⁸ However, Falwell’s “ability to mobilize a “moral majority” was more limited than he had expected.”⁷⁹ Frances FitzGerald points out that “[the Moral Majority] failed to attract Catholics or even a spectrum of conservative Protestants.”⁸⁰ Falwell never achieved his political ambitions, such as a coalition of Catholics, Jews, and Protestants, for example, or the acquisition of broader support from Baptists and other influential televangelists. In addition, “Falwell’s audience of 1.5 million comprised only a small fraction of the 20 million Americans who regularly watched religious television, and even they were reluctant to join the Moral Majority.”⁸¹ It could be said that evangelicals supported Falwell’s political position in principle, but they nevertheless refused to join his organization in great numbers. Still, in a larger context, he achieved his purpose in the end. As Williams points out, “One survey showed that more than 20 percent of Moral Majority supporters who cast their ballots for Reagan in 1980 had voted for Carter in 1976. More importantly, Falwell gave the Christian Right a national voice that it would not otherwise have had.”⁸² Falwell was unable to raise the Moral Majority to the national level with a coalition of different denominations, but he still helped to win

⁷⁸ FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 294.

⁷⁹ Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 177.

⁸⁰ FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 317.

⁸¹ Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 178.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 179.

votes for a new, powerful conservative Republican President—Ronald Reagan. The popular perception of the power of the evangelical Right was greater than its actual strength, perhaps, but few saw it that way at the time.

By the summer of 1980, prominent evangelicals such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, who differed from each other theologically, united to form the Christian Right's chief political coalition: the Religious Roundtable. This organization sought, as its founders claimed, "to take the nation back for the cause of Christ."⁸³ After failing to persuade Carter to change his stance on abortion and school prayer, members of the Religious Roundtable reached an agreement to support Ronald Reagan as a candidate for president.⁸⁴ In the press conference, Reagan said that "all the complex questions facing us at home and abroad' have their answers in the Bible."⁸⁵ This statement shows that Reagan supported the idea that both domestic and international political issues could find Biblical solutions. But this statement also reflects his political ambition. Reagan and the Religious Roundtable viewed each other as useful counterparts: Reagan needed evangelical votes in order to defeat Carter in the South, and evangelical leaders aspired to legislate controversial issues such as anti-abortion and school prayer. In Williams' estimation, "[w]hile Reagan distanced himself from the Christian Right's theology, he endorsed the movement's attempt to bring religion into politics."⁸⁶ In a press conference, Reagan even went so far as to urge "the biblical story of creation be taught in the public schools as an

⁸³ Ibid., 184.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 185.

⁸⁵ FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 313-314.

⁸⁶ Williams, *God's Own Party*, 191.

alternative to evolution.”⁸⁷ On the other hand, evangelical preachers timed their remarks to produce the greatest possible benefit for the Republican Party.⁸⁸ These evangelical efforts helped to bring about Reagan’s landslide victory, which in their opinion represented a victory for evangelicals as well.

It is often suggested that the direct cause of Reagan’s triumph in the 1980 election was the ineffectiveness of the Carter administration. Whatever the reason, the remarkable fact is that the presidential campaign of 1980 marked a turning point in U.S. political history. This presidential election represents the point when “fundamentalists and evangelicals would be united in supporting Republican presidential candidates; no Democrat since has won a majority of white evangelicals and fundamentalists support in presidential candidates.”⁸⁹ 1980 was the year that the Christian Right appeared on the stage of national politics for the first time as a force to be reckoned with.

⁸⁷ FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 313.

⁸⁸ Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 191.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 193.

From Counterculture to Fundamentalism: The Transformation of the Jesus Movement

This is the political and theological background out of which Gospel Outreach—the sponsor of Ríos Montt’s church *El Verbo*—emerged. *El Verbo* is one of more than 45 congregations in seven countries affiliated with Gospel Outreach, an evangelical Pentecostal church with its headquarters 270 miles northwest of San Francisco.⁹⁰ Gospel Outreach grew out of the Jesus Movement that swept the U.S. in the late 1960s and the early 1970s.⁹¹ The Jesus Movement resonated with freedom-worshipping counterculture Americans, including the Beat Generation and, later, the hippie movement, which faded away by the mid-1970s. According to reporting by *The New York Times*, Gospel Outreach represents:

dozens, possibly hundreds, of small sects that were set up by members of counterculture movement of the 1960’s, many of whom dropped out of conventional society, experimented with drugs, traveled, and in some cases gravitated to what became known as the Jesus movement.⁹²

An instructor at Wheaton College, Larry Eskridge adds further information about the countercultural scene out of which Gospel Outreach grew:

[the] counterculture had its origins in the antiestablishment, hedonistic attitudes of the ’50s Beat movement. Fed up with what they perceived as the sterile conformity and consumerism of postwar middle-class life, a sizable number of American youth began to drop out of the

⁹⁰ Robert Lindsey, “Church Denies It Has Political Goals in Guatemala,” *The New York Times*, August 14, 1983,

<https://www.nytimes.com/1983/08/14/world/church-denies-it-has-political-goals-in-guatemala.html>

⁹¹ Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ,’” 699.

⁹² Lindsey, *The New York Times*, August 14, 1983.

rat race of school and career to seek fulfillment through personal and communal relationships, drugs, sex, music, and esoteric spirituality.⁹³

According to this account, the counterculture movement represented a cultural and social revolution challenging the social and political establishment. This was very far from the conservative values of the evangelicals who came to prominence during the 1980 election.

The Jesus Movement was an evangelical Christian strain of the counterculture, which blossomed in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury district during the famed Summer of Love in 1967. But the Jesus Movement grew rapidly beyond the West Coast. Eskridge states that "similar manifestations of a hippieized Christianity popped up in the next two years—in Oregon, Seattle, Spokane, Fort Lauderdale, Detroit, Milwaukee, upstate New York."⁹⁴ Very quickly, the Jesus Movement could be found "anywhere that the counterculture and evangelical Christianity might rub shoulders."⁹⁵ The youths who joined the Jesus Movement were called Jesus People. According to historian Preston Shires, Jesus People thought, "Jesus was human, he was God, he was living love itself; and so, he was the perfect friend and true guide for a complete, authentic, and fulfilling life."⁹⁶ This description indicates that Jesus People sympathized with Jesus as a human who had struggled with all too human difficulties. This perspective toward Jesus was fresh and appealed to rebellious youths who sought spiritual

⁹³ Larry Eskridge, *God's Forever Family: the Jesus People Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 11-12.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Preston Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right* (Lincoln, Nebraska: Baylor University Press, 2007), 97.

fulfillment in a new, more personal mode of religious expression.

The counterculture and the new evangelical movements had a good deal in common. Shires claims that promoters of street evangelism (usually local church pastors) and street evangelists (usually parachurch ministries) who spread biblical grounded Christianity to counterculture youths “performed a function in the development of countercultural Christianity that was similar to the Beat’s contribution to the development of the counterculture in general.”⁹⁷ But what was street evangelism, exactly? As Shires puts it, street evangelism was “evangelization that took place outside of the regular churched context and in places frequented by youth. In its largest sense, then, the street might also refer to a campus setting as well.”⁹⁸ Evangelicals recognized that there was a spiritual and religious gap between rebellious youths and older generations, so they attempted to attract youths by creating a new type of Christianity. Shires describes how these street evangelists developed a countercultural Christianity in order to be accepted by rebellious youths:

By dressing casually, by confronting fellow youth one-on-one with a seemingly new spiritual message, by distributing tracts and newspapers presenting Jesus in popular style, by using the coffeehouse setting, with its rock’ n’ roll music and standup sensational testimonies, street evangelists created a new type of biblically focused religion that is best described as countercultural Christianity.⁹⁹

Street evangelists transformed Christianity by adopting the elements of youth culture, which

⁹⁷ Ibid., 113.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 112.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 96.

successfully attracted counterculture youths. But as Shires also points out, just as Allen Ginsberg had a link with an older generation outsiders or leftists, the pioneers of street evangelism also fostered a connection with older evangelical representatives. “They were the bridge,” he writes, “over which evangelicalism and countercultural Christianity could be joined.”¹⁰⁰ Street evangelists’ connections with older evangelical outsiders helped fill the religious gap between countercultural Christians and older evangelicals.

Street evangelists utilized various channels, such as coffeehouses and college campuses, in order to convey the gospel to young people. Among these channels, coffeehouses set up by street evangelists played a unique and important role in the Jesus Movement. Eskridge argues that “the biggest factor in the Jesus movement’s move into the mainstream of American youth culture during the early and mid-1970s was the widespread adoption of the coffeehouse as a focal point for meetings, Bible studies, concerts, and evangelistic activity.”¹⁰¹ The Christian use of coffeehouses as meeting places connected counterculture youth with evangelists. These were places where the concerns and troubles of young people could be addressed in an atmosphere that was “warm, friendly, understanding, joyful, loving, constructive, refreshing, spiritual, beautiful.”¹⁰² The coffeehouse became an alternative home that allowed youths to confess their concerns and feelings with ease.

At the time, there are several sects of evangelicals. Shires indicates that the street evangelists had a variety of denominational backgrounds: “fundamentalist, Pentecostal, new evangelical, and

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 113.

¹⁰¹ Eskridge, *God’s Forever Family*, 165.

¹⁰² Ibid., 166.

Charismatic.”¹⁰³ Whatever their background, though, “the street evangelists and their converts tended to develop a unified countercultural Christian message shorn of denominationalism that greater evangelicalism would ultimately have to come to terms with.”¹⁰⁴ This suggests that introducing counterculture youths to biblically grounded Christianity was prioritized more than emphasizing the differences between denominations. In other words, the evangelizing cause was not divided by doctrine. Gospel Outreach, under James Durkin’s direction, was a typical example of the how these evangelical churches developed:

the basic precepts of the church evolved: unquestioned acceptance of the Bible as the literal word of God; a missionary responsibility to reach out and carry the word to others; a decentralized with autonomous congregations and little distinction between clergy and laity; strong emphasis on family ties, and a Pentecostal liturgy similar to that of the Assembly of God, which includes the practice of speaking in tongues.¹⁰⁵

The most remarkable point here is that these church systems were simple and not so rigid, easily allowing new members to join. At the same time, the churches strongly encouraged members to engage in missionary work. These factors contributed to a swift increase in membership.

It is worth examining the strategies of some prominent representatives of the Jesus Movement to show how they succeeded in increasing their membership during this time. Chuck Smith

¹⁰³ Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 114.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Lindsey, *The New York Times*, August 14, 1983.

was “one of the first ministers to successfully bring hippies into a church.”¹⁰⁶ He had been raised a Pentecostal and was educated at Aimee Semple McPherson’s Lighthouse for International Foursquare Evangelism, where he was ordained in her International Church of the Foursquare Gospel.¹⁰⁷ However, he left McPherson’s organization because “he had tired of denominational politics and bureaucracy.”¹⁰⁸ Smith took on the pastorship of Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa in 1965, which was “the largest single embodiment of the developing Jesus movement in Southern California.”¹⁰⁹ Smith was “willing to adapt his church to the needs of people awash in pop culture. To expand the youth ministry, he even ventured to hire one of the beach hippies.”¹¹⁰ That hippie was Lonnie Frisbee.

According to Eskridge, Frisbee was an ardent Christian with an unmistakable flower-child appearance. Smith was impressed by Frisbee’s “love of Jesus and Spirit-filled personality” and asked him to preach at Huntington Beach and other local hippie hangouts.¹¹¹ Within two years, young people rushed to Calvary Chapel and the ministry there baptized some fifteen thousand converts in the nearby Pacific Ocean.¹¹² The influx of youth influenced the church’s worship style. Rock music was used, which “broke the establishment’s hymnal mode and allowed young people to convey contemporary messages.”¹¹³ Rock music became a new evangelical mode of expression, which mixed emotion and faith for young people. Shires explains the reason why Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa attracted youths

¹⁰⁶ Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 125.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Eskridge, *God’s Forever Family*, 68.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 126.

¹¹¹ Eskridge, *God’s Forever Family*, 70.

¹¹² Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 126.

¹¹³ Ibid.

so successfully: “[i]mportant to the evangelical-countercultural nexus was Smith’s personable, unaffected, and simple approach to ministry and pulpit, which young people accepted as proper pastoral behavior.”¹¹⁴ Shires also suggests that Calvary Chapel churches’ laid-back and warm-hearted worship style captured large numbers of baby boomers.¹¹⁵ Churches changed their style of worship in order to attract youth membership by tapping onto young people’s search for the new expressions as well as human connections in their spiritual quests.

Another successful evangelist was John Wimber, who was one of Smith’s early associates as well as a former rock musician. Wimber began a church, Calvary Chapel of Yorba Linda, California in 1977. Wimber’s ministry “emphasized the gifts of the spirit, speaking in tongues and healing and it also produced contemporary worship songs that emphasized the person-to-person relationship between God and believer.”¹¹⁶ Wimber’s church kept growing, and eventually he left Calvary Chapel group and joined Vineyard churches in 1982. Shires indicates the reason why Wimber’s church was successful: “Wimber had removed the ritualistic constraints found in traditional church services and turned worship time into something resembling a casual and pleasant ‘happening.’”¹¹⁷ Wimber lowered the bar of what constituted church activities as well as introduced the element of entertainment into worship. These elements had a lot in common with Smith’s church and were compelling not only for counterculture youths but also for older evangelical generation.¹¹⁸ Actually, according to Eskridge, by

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 127.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 128.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

the end of the twentieth century, Calvary Chapel and its offspring Vineyard churches became major forces within American evangelicalism even after the Jesus Movement faded away during the mid and late 1970s.¹¹⁹

In 1972, Campus Crusade's Explo'72 was held in Dallas, Texas.¹²⁰ Over eighty thousand young people came from across the nation "to worship, sing, and hone their skills in evangelism."¹²¹ The vast majority of participants were "between the age of 15 and 30."¹²² Shires insists "nothing was more indicative of this confluence of countercultural and evangelical experience than the success of Campus Crusade's Explo'72."¹²³ Explo'72 was the most symbolic event of the merger of the counterculture and evangelicalism. However, Shires also argues that in order for countercultural Christianity and evangelicalism to merge at the national level, "there needed be national evangelical spokesmen with powerful influence who would turn a kind eye toward the radical religious youth movement."¹²⁴ Influential evangelicals such as "Carl Henry, Francis Schaeffer, Billy Graham, and Pat Robertson helped make the new expression of Christianity more understandable and even acceptable to the larger body of evangelicals."¹²⁵ In addition, in speaking to Pope Paul VI, Ronald Reagan especially praised the Jesus Movement. He thought it demonstrated "how so many young people had simply

¹¹⁹ Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*, 265.

¹²⁰ Explo is short for the "spiritual explosion" (Hummel, "Revivalist Nationalism since World War II," 8).

¹²¹ Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 121.

¹²² Hummel, "Revivalist Nationalism since World War II," 8.

¹²³ Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 121.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 128-129.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 129.

turned from drugs to faith in Jesus.”¹²⁶ It was at this point that the Jesus Movement became a national, political force. Its influence on the president was undeniable, and this, more than the actual number of Jesus People, gave evangelical leaders political currency that resonated with many conservative politicians.

Among these nationally famous evangelicals, Francis Schaeffer was a representative Christian thinker who bridged counterculture Christians and the Christian Right. Schaeffer connected with “middle-class youth, even rebellious youth, in a way that few biblically grounded leaders did.”¹²⁷ Schaeffer relied on “national revival as the primary frame which promote mass political action in the 1980s.”¹²⁸ In 1955 Schaeffer and his wife Edith founded an evangelical community named L’Abri (the shelter) in Switzerland. The Schaeffers welcomed anyone, including university students, indigent travelers, unwed mothers, homosexuals, interracial couples, atheists, and Jesus freaks. They offered hiking, hearty meals, Sunday church services, informal seminars, and so forth.¹²⁹ Later, Schaeffer’s son Frank described his father as a “hip guru preaching Jesus to hippies.”¹³⁰ L’Abri became a destination for “young leftwing iconoclasts who wanted to ‘buck the evangelical establishment,’ as Schaeffer urged them to do.”¹³¹ Schaeffer shared an anti-establishment attitude with the Left, was a friend of minorities, but was always suspicious of government intrusion into the daily lives of people. He was especially doubtful of the Democratic Party’s penchant for supporting liberal causes with little or no justification in biblical doctrine.

¹²⁶ Hummel, “Revivalist Nationalism since World War II,” 13.

¹²⁷ Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 90.

¹²⁸ Hummel, “Revivalist Nationalism since World War II,” 11.

¹²⁹ FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 350.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 138.

By the late 1960s, Schaeffer had become “an internationally known Christian thinker and celebrated lecturer at American evangelical colleges. He sold 3 million copies of his twenty-four books in the United States alone, and his works were translated into twenty-one languages.”¹³² As previously mentioned, the U.S. underwent culture wars over sex education, gay rights, abortion, drug use and so on in the 1960s and the 1970s. Schaeffer showed empathy for counterculture hippies and criticized Christian’s conservativeness. At the same time, Schaeffer attacked liberals, too. He criticized “liberal spirituality for being inauthentic, a sham, for parading about in spiritual garb while being technocratic at heart.”¹³³ Schaeffer further insisted that “liberals curtailed liberties, especially the religious freedom of biblically grounded Christians.”¹³⁴ His greatest concern was that U.S. society had abandoned Christian values and that its politics was led by “secular humanism.” Ríos Montt, as we will see, shared this concern. He insisted that creating a better Guatemala requires a belief in a Christian God. On April 18, 1982, Ríos Montt said in his sermon on television: “you and I must have a reunion, we must have a reconciliation, we must feed the roots, the roots of a greater Guatemala which only happens when you renounce your interests and I renounce my pride, but it is achieved when you believe in God.”¹³⁵ This statement suggests that Ríos Montt thought that Guatemalan society had fallen away from God’s discipline. Ríos Montt thought society should be based only and absolutely on God’s principles.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 159.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ríos Montt, original text taken from “Tenemos que limpiar la casa,” April 18, 1982. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt*. (Guatemala: Tipografía Nacional. 1982). English translations by William Collazo.

Individuals had to obey God's rules by sacrificing their personal interests, otherwise, Guatemala would become a Godless society, ruled by arbitrary secular humanism.

According to Williams, the experience of living in a highly secularized European academic community convinced Schaeffer that modern philosophies such as existentialism and structuralism were "egregiously wrong." Moreover, Schaeffer concluded that "a Christian's basic intellectual assumptions differed radically from those of contemporary society and that Christians now lived as aliens in a world that no longer accepted biblical truth."¹³⁶ In the turmoil of culture wars, secular humanism became a symbolic term used by Schaeffer and his adherents such as Falwell to attack movements and political decisions that, they argue, divided public opinion, such as gay rights, feminism, and the legalization of abortion, which were all supported by liberalism. Intentional, or not, many evangelicals directly connected Schaeffer's criticisms to pertain to the perceived moral erosion of the social fabric of the nation. This mobilized evangelicals to participate in national politics in an attempt to recover Christian moral values.

Among several controversial issues, Schaeffer focused intently on was abortion. Williams argues that Schaeffer was "largely responsible for mobilizing evangelicals against abortion during the Carter Presidency."¹³⁷ With reference to abortion, Schaeffer argued that "Westerners, including Americans, had replaced God's moral standards with 'secular humanism,' which allowed people to make their own capricious moral rules or live by none at all."¹³⁸ To Schaeffer, approval of abortion meant that arbitrariness could be applied to the judgment of life and death. Schaeffer interpreted the rise

¹³⁶ Williams, *God's Own Party*, 139.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 139-140.

of abortion rights and the looming threat of legal euthanasia “as products of a ‘culture of death’ rooted in humanism.”¹³⁹ Schaeffer argued that politics should be conducted on the basis of absolute standards of truth, by which he meant Christian values, not arbitrary standards based on humanism.

Schaeffer produced books and films to convey this message, and he urged evangelicals to take political action. In 1979, Schaeffer and Presbyterian elder C. Everett Koop released a documentary film entitled *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* It describes the procedures of abortion and euthanasia in graphic detail. According to Williams, this film toured twenty American cities, but Schaeffer was disappointed at the audience response. Many did not share his strong anti-abortion position. Some church pastors hesitated to participate in a pro-life movement because it was highly controversial and seen predominantly as a Catholic issue. Still, some evangelicals who watched the film were often deeply moved, including Randall Terry, who later founded the militant antiabortion organization Operation Rescue.¹⁴⁰

Schaeffer’s works influenced Jerry Falwell, who started a pro-life campaign in 1978 with a nationally televised sermon, a book, and a fund-raising letter that focused on abortion after he had read Schaeffer’s articles about the issue. Falwell described Schaeffer as “‘one of the greatest men of my generation’ and a ‘man of courage.’”¹⁴¹ Schaeffer died in 1984, but ever since “many Christian right leaders have testified to the profound influence he had on their thinking.”¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Hummel, “Revivalist Nationalism since World War II,” 11.

¹⁴⁰ Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 155.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁴² FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals*, 8.

In the early 1970's, Schaeffer refused to work together with any particular political party. Ultimately, though, he came to support the Republican Party.¹⁴³ Shires provides two reasons for this: first, "Schaeffer found more receptive ears in the Republican camp."¹⁴⁴ For example, Schaeffer became friends with Representative Jack Kemp, a Catholic, pro-life, conservative Republican, and the future presidential hopeful, at the Press Club dinner in Washington D.C. in 1971. Kemp arranged for Schaeffer to speak to gatherings of conservative congressmen and senators and began Bible studies based on Schaeffer's writing.¹⁴⁵ Kemp organized opportunities for Schaeffer to convey his faith to Republican politicians in person. Even if they did not share Schaeffer's evangelical convictions, "certain conservatives were willing to accommodate their world view to that of the Schaeffers."¹⁴⁶ In this manner, Schaeffer became a conduit between conservative politics and evangelicalism.

Second, Schaeffer kept away from the Democratic Party because "he came to believe that committed and radical secular humanists, the diehard enemies of biblically grounded Christianity, had greater control over it."¹⁴⁷ During the late 1960s and early 1970s, organizations with anti-evangelical tones such as the National Organization for Women emerged and were openly supported by the Democratic Party leadership. Moreover, the Democrats believed in the legacy of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. For Schaeffer, this meant that "the Democrats were accommodationists with

¹⁴³ Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 160-161.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, Williams, *God's Own Party*, 141.

¹⁴⁶ Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 161.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

technocracy.”¹⁴⁸ For Schaeffer, this was an unpardonable offense. Schaeffer’s attitude toward the Democrats effectively placed them outside of evangelicalism’s worldview. Yet his attitude toward Republicans, on the other hand, placed them firmly on the inside. For many evangelicals, this was a clear endorsement of one political party over the other. This was a departure from previous behavior of evangelical leaders, who would focus on specific political issues only. In effect, Schaeffer is the author of the ideology that moved the entire evangelical cause into the Republican camp, where it has remained to this day.

A test of this new alignment came with president Carter’s position regarding abortion. Carter personally opposed it, but “he was committed to upholding national law and the Supreme Court’s decision in *Roe v. Wade*. He opposed an antiabortion constitutional amendment, as did 55 percent of Americans in 1977.”¹⁴⁹ During Carter’s presidency, evangelicals’ pro-life movement became increasingly active in response. Pro-life activists were “jubilant when Representative Henry Hyde (R-IL), a Catholic, gave them their first legislative victory by blocking federal funding of abortion.”¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, the White House “did little after 1977 to retain the support of abortion rights opponents [...] the differences between the two camps could no longer be ignored.”¹⁵¹ Moreover, Carter began promoting the ERA and endorsing the feminist movement. Even though Carter was welcomed by evangelicals as the first born-again president, whom they expected to carry out a Christian agenda, they came to conclude that Carter did not stand on their side in the culture wars. This

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 162.

¹⁴⁹ Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 153-154.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 154.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

was a great disappointment to evangelicals, but it was also a catalyst in their political mobilization. They began looking for a new president who would reflect Christian moral values in national politics. In this context, the early connections that Schaeffer pioneered through Kemp and the Republican Party paid dividends.

Data compiled in 2004 tells us something about the political trajectories of these new evangelicals. A survey was conducted of those who considered themselves a part of the Jesus Movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Asked about their “political identity prior to involvement with Jesus Movement,” 42% of total participants answered liberal, 27.2% moderate, 22.4% conservative, and 8.4% had no answer. Asked about their “political identity today,” 10.3% answered liberal, moderate 25.2%, conservative 57%, and 7.5% did not reply.¹⁵² This survey is evidence that the Jesus Movement successfully turned liberal-leaning counterculture youths into more politically conservative adults.

As a result, we might say that the culture wars led conservative Protestantism to triumph in the form of President Ronald Reagan, who opposed communism and supported evangelical moral concerns, such as, opposing abortion. As Shires argues, “Francis Schaeffer had correctly perceived the importance of the abortion issue for galvanizing biblically grounded Christianity. Indeed, the abortion issue replaced communism as the jumping off point for evangelical political activism in the late 1970s.”¹⁵³ The issue of abortion became the catalyst for mobilizing evangelicals to support the Reagan administration. Evangelical leaders were overjoyed when Ronald Reagan won the election. However,

¹⁵² Eskridge, *God's Forever Family*, 292.

¹⁵³ Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right*, 181.

within a year of his first inauguration, they came to be disappointed because,

Despite the high profile of leading Christian Right appointees, the Reagan administration remained committed to the moralists' domestic agenda in rhetoric only. Only the foreign policy front [...], Reagan's promises to fight Godless Communism were fulfilled many times over. But the administration made no serious efforts to outlaw abortion or reinstate school prayer.¹⁵⁴

“Let's Make America Great Again” was Reagan's slogan, which was meant to demonstrate the greatness of the United States to the world in the Cold War era. Reagan might have taken advantage of the abortion issue to get more evangelicals' votes to win the Presidential election, but, as president, he did not focus on morality as much as on the economy and foreign policy. As Stoll has argued:

In contrast to Carter's talk about the need for humility, Reagan emphasized America's power and greatness. In contrast to Carter's attempts to promote human rights and negotiate peace in the Middle East, Reagan campaigned for new weapons systems and promoted wars.¹⁵⁵

It is clear that Reagan's militant position toward communism was meant to show off the international presence of the United States. On Labor Day, 1980, just before the election, Reagan said:

This country needs a new administration, with a renewed dedication to the dream of America—an administration that will give that dream new life and make America great

¹⁵⁴ Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (Boston: South End Press, 1989), 64.

¹⁵⁵ Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, 53.

again. A growing economy and American exceptionalism.¹⁵⁶

In this way, Ronald Reagan prioritized economic issues and an anticommunist foreign policy based on American exceptionalism, all within a Christian set of values. In an instance of foreshadowing, Garrard-Burnett states, “[t]he inauguration of Ronald Reagan to the U.S. presidency in 1980 brought Central America to the forefront of U.S. foreign policy in a way that no region of Latin America had been since the early days of the Cuban Revolution.”¹⁵⁷ Although Francis Schaeffer was influential in ensuring that abortion became the most polarizing political issue for evangelicals, President Reagan was successful in attracting mobilized evangelicals to support his militant foreign policy in Central America, mostly by demonizing atheist communists as the enemy of Christianity. It can be said that Reagan was already predisposed to support Central American dictators like Ríos Montt. And it seems logical that Ríos Montt would ape Reagan’s approach to politics and demonize communist guerrillas in the same way, especially because Ríos Montt was a born-again evangelical who agreed with the prevailing evangelical logic uniting figures as different from each other as Reagan and Schaeffer.

Ríos Montt saw himself, first and foremost, as a Christian leader: “I am only a Christian—and a Christian is a honorable man of character who has respect for others and who carries out the Word of God. It is true I govern with Biblical principles. But Christian principles are also good legal principles.”¹⁵⁸ For Ríos Montt, political decisions were to be based on Christian principles, not on legalism or humanism, as he tried to apply Schaeffer’s logic to Guatemala’s situation in 1982. Ríos

¹⁵⁶ Hummel, “Revivalist Nationalism since World War II,” 12.

¹⁵⁷ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 145.

¹⁵⁸ Beth Nissen, “A Christian Soldier.” *Newsweek*, December 13, 1982.

Montt shared Schaeffer's belief that evangelical principles should be incorporated into national politics.

Nicaragua's leftist Sandinistas had taken power in July 1979, overthrowing the dictatorship of long-standing U.S. ally Anastasio Somoza. Subsequently El Salvador's Marxist guerrillas, the Frente Farabundo Marti Liberacion Naciocal (FMLN) launched their "'final offensive' to take the capital city of San Salvador in January 1980."¹⁵⁹ The rapid expansion of communism in Central America—a "backyard" for U.S.—enhanced the sense of danger of Americans. "The timing and convergence of these events—pending military triumph of the Far Left in Central America and the election of an ardently anticommunist president in the North—meant that the region would end up serving as the proxy venue for a final showdown of the Cold War."¹⁶⁰ Guatemala became the proxy venue of the Cold War too, but it was virtually a "hot war" that got less attention from international community than Nicaragua and El Salvador.

Ríos Montt understood that his most powerful supporters in the U.S. were evangelicals. Because evangelicals strongly supported president Reagan, evangelicals served as Ríos Montt's connection to the Reagan administration's foreign policy. President Reagan and Ríos Montt were bound to each other by a shared evangelical language, which provided support for the Guatemalan Civil War.

¹⁵⁹ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 145.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 145-146.

Evangelical Dictatorship: Ríos Montt, the “Savior of La Nueva Guatemala”

On March 23, 1982, a coup d'état was carried out by young military officers at the National Palace in Guatemala City to depose Romero Lucas García. The officers announced that they would put a military junta at the head of government, which was led by a retired general of the army headquarters, Efraín Ríos Montt, along with two other generals. Ríos Montt was asked to become the new figurehead president “with the permission of his young North American shepherds.”¹⁶¹ He accepted the offer. “‘I am trusting my Lord and my King, that He shall guide me,’ [Ríos Montt] declared at a press conference the night of the coup, ‘because only He gives and takes away authority.’”¹⁶² This statement invokes Ríos Montt’s evangelical authority as a dictator.

This section explores Ríos Montt’s dictatorship from March 1982 to August 1983. It focuses on how he incorporated evangelical principles into Guatemalan politics. By doing so, I hope to show how Ríos Montt’s “La Nueva Guatemala (the New Guatemala),” which was both “a political military project and a program for national redemption,” intensified terror, violence, and murder, especially against Mayan peoples in Guatemala.¹⁶³ According to Garrard-Burnett, as a born-again Christian, Ríos Montt “wanted nothing less than for the nation of Guatemala to be born again as well: from this emerged the project that Ríos Montt called La Nueva Guatemala.”¹⁶⁴ Ríos Montt attempted to reconstruct Guatemala based on an evangelical faith that took advantage of long-lasting political

¹⁶¹ Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare*, 164.

¹⁶² Joseph Afuso and David Sczepanski. *He gives - he takes away: the true story of Guatemala’s controversial former president Efraín Ríos Montt* (Eureka, California: Radiance Publications, 1983), 20.

¹⁶³ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 57.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

turmoil.

From the beginning of his presidency, Ríos Montt's philosophy was clear. Fellow Pentecostal Jorge Serrano Elías properly described Ríos Montt in the following way: “[f]irst, he is a military man. Second, he is a moral fighter.”¹⁶⁵ Ríos Montt had two missions: “a return to security and the defeat of the guerrillas, but at the same time, the government, so long associated with repression and corruption, had to reestablish its own legitimacy.”¹⁶⁶ Ríos Montt attempted to complete these missions based on a trinity of essential principles, which dovetailed with the rhetoric of evangelical right that became influential in the United States: “morality, order and discipline, and national unity.”¹⁶⁷ President Reagan used similar. On March 8, 1983, at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals held in Orlando, Florida, president Reagan stated; “I urge you to speak out against those who would place the United States in a position of military and moral inferiority.”¹⁶⁸ Reagan was calling evangelicals to support his foreign policy: “The real crisis we face today is a spiritual one; at root, it is a test of moral will and faith...[and] I believe that communism is another sad, bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages even now are being written.”¹⁶⁹ Reagan interpreted the rapid expansion of communism in Central America as a spiritual crisis, which reinforced Ríos Montt's understanding of anti-communism as moral issue. Both leaders were confident that communism could be defeated, and many evangelicals believed them.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 57-58.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 58.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida.” Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, March 8, 1983, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/archives/speeches/1983/30883b.htm>

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

On March 23, 1982, the day of the coup, Ríos Montt announced that he was “trying to revive values,” which was why he had “made a military move.”¹⁷⁰ Ríos Montt suggested that through the use of the military force he was trying to revive Guatemala’s lost values. In effect, Ríos Montt assumed power in the name of morality. This was dangerous, because for him solutions for social problems necessitated the use of the army: “social solutions, the big social problems that confront us” requires a military man to take power and lead the way.¹⁷¹ Ríos Montt believed himself to be a moral man, one who merely utilized military means in search of moral solutions. He wanted to create a new order in Guatemalan society. Ruling the nation was like building a house, and Ríos Montt thought of himself as the chief architect, working towards a “roof made of morality.”¹⁷²

In another statement, from April 25, 1982, Ríos Montt again identified himself as the savior of Guatemala:

Communism is clearly [...] working as an ideology, and that ideology is working to break values and it is saying: “Look at the one sent by God, Ríos, and he is now a pastor and all the problems he makes, he is the one breaking the values,” they say this without knowing God, and it is by the grace of that marvelous God which is precisely how I am talking with all of you.¹⁷³

¹⁷⁰ Ríos Montt, original text taken from “Libertad: Expresión de una responsabilidad,” March 23, 1982. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt.*

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ríos Montt, original text taken from “Ahora o nunca salvamos a Guatemala,” April 25, 1982. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt.*

Here Ríos Montt has identified communism as godless, and himself as a man of God. It is interesting to note that Ríos Montt did not identify himself as a general or even as the president. This created a connection between Ríos Montt and God that communist rebels cannot break or challenge. This is similar to the feudal system of monarchs, who connected their authority directly to God, not to a constitution or any earthly authority, such as the people. This way of thinking turned Ríos Montt into the embodiment of God's authority, the representative of proper morality and values. Ríos Montt's religious identity had him next to God, thus creating a twentieth century religious-political dictator.

One would think that the CIA or someone else in the US government would be suspicious of this kind of rhetoric from a Central American dictator, but because Ríos Montt was a Christian evangelical, such language was not only tolerated but accepted. Clearly, La Nueva Guatemala would not be a republic based upon the rule of law or the people. It would not be a democracy, but rather, a theocracy. To be specific, it was a Central American theocratic dictatorship, but because it was a Christian evangelical theocracy it was not seen as threatening by U.S. government.

The confidence Ríos Montt demonstrated at the beginning of his presidency appealed to Guatemalans who were fed up with rampant violence and governmental corruption. On June 5, 1982, he expelled the other generals and became sole president of Guatemala. The army aimed to establish a clearer and more stable leadership for Guatemala by replacing the president.¹⁷⁴ Ríos Montt's ascension to power was celebrated by the U.S. Christian Right "as a sign of divine intervention in Central

¹⁷⁴ Melander, *The Hour of God?*, 150.

America.”¹⁷⁵ Pat Robertson also blessed the first evangelical president of Guatemala:

In a country that had been noted for corruption, oppression, and violence, there was now joy and hope [...] 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 all Latin America—a true alternative between the oppression of corrupt oligarchies and the tyranny of Russian-backed communist totalitarianism.¹⁷⁶

This statement is full of half-truths. It is true that Guatemala had been suffering from corruption, oppression, and political violence since the colonial era. But Ríos Montt had his own brand of oppression and corruption. Ríos Montt could not bring joy or hope, nor could he be a “true alternative.” On the contrary, he spread terror and distrust throughout the country. He bears responsibility for human rights violations against Guatemala’s poor, specifically its Mayan peoples. It is estimated that 86,000 Mayan peoples were killed during Ríos Montt’s regime.¹⁷⁷ Despite Robertson’s compliment, the name of Ríos Montt would be engraved in history for its connection to so many atrocities in modern Latin America. Nevertheless, Robertson’s enthusiasm says something essential about what Ríos Montt’s tenure represented in terms of evangelical political theology. What Robertson’s enthusiasm conveys is the overlap between evangelical and CIA worldviews: both brushed aside the humanitarian cost of backing dictators so long as they agreed to fight the moral and political threat of communism.

¹⁷⁵ Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare*, 164.

¹⁷⁶ Anfuso and Sczepanski, *He gives - he takes away*, ix-x.

¹⁷⁷ S. Ashley Kistler, “Murder, Memory, and the Maya.” *Latin American Research Review* 49, no.1 (2014), 251.

Ríos Montt's origins may help to explain how he came to embrace the right tone, which endeared him to American evangelical leaders. Efraín Ríos Montt was born into a middle-class family in Huehuetenango on June 16, 1926. He became the eldest son among twelve siblings after his older brother died. His father was a shopkeeper and his mother was a homemaker who was the descendent of French immigrants to Guatemala. The family was not wealthy, but was highly respected in Huehuetenango nonetheless.¹⁷⁸ Ríos Montt's mother was Roman Catholic, but his grandmother was an evangelical, and she was "the only member of the family who could have been described as religiously zealous."¹⁷⁹

Ríos Montt joined the army at age sixteen. After he graduated from the Escuela Politecnica at age twenty-three, then entered the U.S.-run institute known as the School of the Americas (SOA). According to the website of SOA Watch, an independent organization that seeks to close the SOA, the SOA is:

a combat training school for Latin American soldiers, located at Fort Benning, Georgia. Since 1946, the SOA has trained over 64,000 Latin American soldiers in counterinsurgency techniques, sniper training, commando and psychological warfare, military intelligence and interrogation tactics. These graduates have consistently used their skills to wage a war against their own people. Hundreds of thousands of Latin Americans have been tortured, raped, assassinated, disappeared, massacred, and forced into refugee by those trained at the

¹⁷⁸ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 54.

¹⁷⁹ Anfuso and Sczepanski, *He gives - he takes away*, 31.

SOA.¹⁸⁰

Ríos Montt also studied at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, where he received special training in counterinsurgency tactics and irregular warfare in 1961, and at the Italian War College (1961-1962). After returning to Guatemala, Ríos Montt became President Carlos Arana Osorio's army chief of staff in 1970 and was promoted to general two years later. His career as a military man who attained the highest army rank and had abundant overseas experience, learning the latest in military techniques, made him an imposing figure within Guatemala even before he came into power.

Ríos Montt's rule was greatly influenced not just by his extensive military training, but also by his evangelical beliefs, which he gleaned from the church *El Verbo*, a neo-Pentecostal church that to this day is still associated with the California-based Gospel Outreach organization, founded in 1976. *El Verbo*, which began work Guatemala in 1976 when some of its members came to help after the devastating earthquake, "preaches obedience through prayer in its work with the impoverished Guatemalan Indians."¹⁸¹ At the time, *El Verbo*, was one of a growing number of fundamentalist groups active in predominantly Roman Catholic Central America; it was "planning several hundred members of fundamentalist denominations here to work with Guatemala's Indian and peasants."¹⁸² In addition, they began to provide regular Bible study meetings in the homes of middle- and upper-class residents

¹⁸⁰ SOA Watch, "What is The SOA?." Last modified March 14, 2018.

<http://www.soaw.org/about-the-soawhinsec/what-is-the-soawhinsec>

¹⁸¹ Raymond Bonner, "Guatemalan Junta's Chief Says God Guides Me." *The New York Times*, June 10, 1982,

<https://www.nytimes.com/1982/06/10/world/guatemala-junta-s-chief-says-god-guides-him.html>

¹⁸² Ibid.

of Guatemala City.¹⁸³ In this manner, *El Verbo* worked with both poor Mayan peoples in rural areas as well as rich middle-and upper-class residents in the capital in order to increase their membership.

Gospel Outreach is characterized by its belief in the promise of individual salvation, energetic worship, and the creation of a tight-knit community, all of which attracted not only Ríos Montt but also a number of other local residents, including prominent business and political leaders in Guatemala.¹⁸⁴ James Degolyer, a New Yorker who became an elder within *El Verbo*, said in a interview with *The New York Times*: “There is an amazing amount of guidance that the Bible gives kings, heads of state, in how they should rule.”¹⁸⁵ Degolyer also confessed that “he had spent five years as a hippie in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco before being ‘saved.’”¹⁸⁶ Degolyer is a typical example of that counterculture hippie who came to be a conservative Christian by encountering Gospel Outreach.

In 1977, Ríos Montt became a born-again Christian through Bible study meetings given by *El Verbo*. Turek speculates that Ríos Montt’s receptivity to evangelicalism stemmed from “personal setbacks linked to government corruption and the ongoing Guatemalan Civil War.”¹⁸⁷ These “personal setbacks” include Ríos Montt’s run for president on the Christian Democratic ticket in 1974. He lost the presidency even though he and his running mate won the majority of votes on a platform of moderate reform. In Turek’s estimation, “rampant electoral fraud at the hands of the extreme rightwing

¹⁸³ Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ,’” 697-698.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 700.

¹⁸⁵ Bonner, *The New York Times*, June 10, 1982.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ,’” 698.

Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional (MLN) party denied him his victory.”¹⁸⁸ After the election, the Guatemalan Minister of Defense assigned Ríos Montt to serve as a military attaché in Madrid, Spain in order to prevent him from posing a threat to Kjell Laugerud, whose triumph at the polls the MLN and sitting president General Carlos Manuel Arana Osorio had coordinated. These setbacks surely fueled Ríos Montt’s distrust and disappointment with electoral politics, which changed his direction religiously and politically.

When Laugerud’s successor, General Romeo Lucas García came to power in 1978, political turmoil in Guatemala was escalating. Under his regime, “repression became increasingly blind, random, and massive.”¹⁸⁹ Lucas García justified these outbursts of violence with “Cold War ideology, linking the guerrillas with Cuban Communism and characterizing guerrilla successes as progress toward to totalitarianism and an existential threat to the state.”¹⁹⁰ During Lucas’s regime, a symbolic incident occurred in Guatemala City, representative of the escalation of government’s repression against indigenous groups in particular. On January 31, 1980, “peasants from northern Quiché—mainly Uspantán but also the Ixil towns—had come to the capital to protest the kidnapping of relatives. To draw attention to their plight, they occupied the Spanish embassy.”¹⁹¹ The group peacefully occupied the Spanish Embassy. Nonetheless, Lucas García authorized a brutal response: he massacred the entire

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Jennifer Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), 18.

¹⁹⁰ Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ,’” 699.

¹⁹¹ Stoll, *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala*, 63.

group by burning them alive inside the Embassy.¹⁹² Many Guatemalans witnessed the incident through TV broadcasts and were visibly shocked. Lucas's regime's brutal repression thus provoked international condemnation and "further underscored the United States' decision to suspend aid to Guatemala, a sanction that the Carter administration had made earlier on the basis of Guatemala's abysmal human rights record."¹⁹³ State violence reached such a nadir that Guatemala came to be even more isolated by the international community.

Ríos Montt's overly enthusiastic biography, *He gives—he takes away* (1983), describes his bitter experience of the 1974 election and his subsequent exile in Spain, after he refused to join a coup as a young officer. It was painful when he was branded a coward.¹⁹⁴ Ríos Montt was separated from his family "when he was forced to leave the country, when he realized that his career might be hopelessly shattered."¹⁹⁵ Ríos Montt was mostly focusing on being a victim of shame. Hearing Ríos Montt's story, *El Verbo* church pastors Carlos Ramírez and Alvaro Contreras were "deeply moved"¹⁹⁶ Ramírez prayed, "Father, please heal our brother. Take from him this bitterness. Heal these wounds. Wash away the years of painful memory. Let Efraín be free so he can serve You with a clean heart."¹⁹⁷ Ramírez's prayer of consolation must have healed Ríos Montt's weary heart in an unprecedented way.

¹⁹² A Mayan activist and the Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú's father Vicente participated in the occupation and was killed too (Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 48).

¹⁹³ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 48.

¹⁹⁴ Anfuso and Sczepanski, *He gives - he takes away*, 90.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 91.

Ríos Montt has said “Until then I had been trying to reach God. But then God reached down to me and accepted me just as I am.”¹⁹⁸

In other words, his political ambition had ended in miserable failure, but was revived after he became evangelical. Indeed, he may have used his faith as a tool to reassemble his career in politics. It is possible that Ríos Montt truly meant that he felt religiously saved, but he easily connected his religious salvation with political success. Therefore, Ríos Montt was using his new religious identity to reinvigorate his political career.

For the church elders of *El Verbo*, Ríos Montt was an attractive celebrity in terms of “advertising.” Actually, they confessed that they “guarded themselves against the temptation to use Ríos Montt’s name and status for their own purposes, such as drawing more people to the church.”¹⁹⁹ But this seems like an “official” statement. In fact, one of the authors of Ríos Montt’s biography as well as the director of Gospel Outreach, Joseph Anfuso, emphasized that “the publicity given General Ríos Montt’s conversion had probably made it seem more successful than it was.”²⁰⁰ Their connection was tight long before the beginning of Ríos Montt’s presidency, but the church elders must have desired to increase their membership and enhance their presence by collaborating with Ríos Montt nonetheless. *He gives—he takes away* was published by Gospel Outreach, after all. So we ought not interpret it too literally. With this caveat in mind, though, the book can serve as a valuable primary resource when examining the intersection of *El Verbo*’s theology and Ríos Montt’s politics.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 87.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 92.

²⁰⁰ Lindsey, *The New York Times*, August 14, 1983.

One of Ríos Montt's first acts as president was to suspend the constitution and to appoint two ordained *El Verbo* elders, Francisco Bianchi and Alvaro Contreras, to specially created "ad hoc positions as 'secretary to the private affairs of the president' and 'secretary of the president of the republic.'"²⁰¹ Bianchi and Contreras were both native Guatemalans and their primary work was, as the official biography puts it, "to walk in covenant with Ríos Montt, to speak openly and honestly with him in a spirit of love, and always to keep before him the principles of Scripture."²⁰² According to a different source, *The New York Times*, "The President refers to them as 'my conscience,' and outside of the military they are regarded as the most powerful men in the presidential entourage."²⁰³ These men helped Ríos Montt to maintain his authenticity as an evangelical. This fact can be connected to Francis Schaffer's position that politics should be conducted on the basis of the absolute standards of Christian values, not the arbitrary standards of secular humanism. Ríos Montt often identified himself in precisely this way: "I am only a Christian—and a Christian is a honorable man of character who has respect for others and who carries out the Word of God. It is true I govern with Biblical principles. But Christian principles are also good legal principles."²⁰⁴ Ríos Montt recognized Biblical principles as the supreme political principles, the basis for all national politics.

Bianchi and Contreras kept playing pivotal roles in Ríos Montt's presidency until he was ousted by another coup on August 8, 1983. Their influence clearly stands opposed to the separation of

²⁰¹ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 57.

²⁰² Anfuso and Szczepanski, *He gives - he takes away*, 158.

²⁰³ Simons, *The New York Times*, November 7, 1982.

²⁰⁴ Nissen, *Newsweek*, December 13, 1982.

politics and religion, which is a fundamental principle of any democratic regime. But this was the least of the problems facing Guatemala at the time. Indeed, on April 15, 1982, Ríos Montt issued Executive Decree 9-82, which prohibited the dissemination of news about political violence. This was evidence that Ríos Montt would attempt something that he wanted to hide from people. In other words, he knew that military action in the Guatemalan highlands would invite criticism of his regime.

While Ríos Montt was enforcing news blackouts about military violence, he made sure to utilize mass media for his own ends. Within days of taking office on March 23, Ríos Montt began delivering television speeches broadcasted weekly on Sunday nights. They were his *discursos del domingo*, which were also known as “sermons.” Ríos Montt addressed his audience “about love, the family, abstinence from alcohol and other moral issues.”²⁰⁵ This meant to “establish the framework for a New Guatemala and, indeed, a new Guatemalan.”²⁰⁶ These programs were full of Ríos Montt’s evangelical moral discourse, which touched upon not only politics and the economy, but also matters of family life and health. Ironically, Ríos Montt often emphasized the importance of peace:

The peace of Guatemala depends on you, señor, on you, señora, on you, niño, on you, niña, yes, the peace of Guatemala is in your heart. As soon as you have peace in your heart, there will be peace in your house, and when there is peace in your house, there will be peace in society. Your tranquility and your peace, the peace of Guatemala does not depend on arms.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵ Bonner, *The New York Times*, June 10, 1982.

²⁰⁶ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 59.

²⁰⁷ Ríos Montt, original text taken from “Tenemos que llevar a cabo reconciliación,” April 11, 1982. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt*.

National security, it seems, depends only on the peace of the individual mind, even including the minds of children. Ríos Montt's rhetoric calls to mind Billy Graham's logic: "saved souls lead to a saved nation."²⁰⁸ Ríos Montt imposed the responsibility to maintain national security on individuals, not on government. Like Graham, he emphasized personal morality and individual responsibility in politics. In this message there is also a veiled warning, too: the last part implies that if you (Guatemalans) do not have tranquility and peace, then the government will resort to the use of arms to restore peace in Guatemala. Ríos Montt's logic was simple, even primitive, but that is precisely why it might have been appealing.

In his sermons, Ríos Montt called for the restoration of morality for individuals and families. At the same time, though, he expanded the meaning of the people's right to bring about order:

Poverty and ignorance are the fruits of moral disorder, economics and injustice, of anarchy and oppression. Misery and ignorance are the fruits of this family disequilibrium. Because of this it is important that the struggle against subversion, against ignorance and misery is a must, but it is not a monopoly of the state; it is also your own responsibility and right.²⁰⁹

Ríos Montt attempted to exempt the government from responsibility for social ills, such as poverty and ignorance. He emphasized the morality of individual and family to solve precisely these problems. Ríos Montt equated right with responsibility. This is a logical sleight-of-hand that was used to justify political

²⁰⁸ Hummel, "Revivalist Nationalism since World War II," 1.

²⁰⁹ Ríos Montt, original text taken from "Tenemos que llevar a cabo reconciliación," April 11, 1982. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt.*

violence at every level, because if the people refuse to live up to their responsibility, then the government can punish them.

After coming into power, Ríos Montt embarked on a campaign to turn the negative image of previous, corrupt governments into a positive image of the “government as champion and guardian of law and order.”²¹⁰ He sought to recover the trust and support of the people as soon as possible. On the night of 12 March 1982, Ríos Montt commanded “an end to the random and ubiquitous violence and decreed that there would be no cadavers on roadsides.”²¹¹ As a result of his order, “the next day, political murder in and around the capital dropped sharply.”²¹² *The New York Time* reported:

kidnappings and killings in the cities have declined dramatically and there is less repression of politicians, foreign correspondents and Roman Catholic priests. But diplomats, religious leaders and many Guatemalans assert that Government forces are killing more peasant Indians.²¹³

This indicates that Ríos Montt could suppress political violence in capital easily because of his authority within the city. But this may have masked an escalated battle between the army and communist guerrillas in the broader countryside, which continued the brutal policies of the previous regime.

On May 24, 1982, Ríos Montt announced an amnesty for all guerrillas and collaborators who turned themselves in by July 1. Before amnesty set in, Ríos Montt gave a sermon on April 18: “It

²¹⁰ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 61.

²¹¹ Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala*, 143.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ Bonner, *The New York Times*, May 20, 1982.

is very easy to define concepts of politics and philosophy, but to live in reality means that one's own interests be detached, and see how we want to make a Guatemalan society reality [...] from this Tuesday amnesty is in effect, and amnesty is the spirit of the law."²¹⁴ Ríos Montt continued: "But for that, you and I must have a reunion, we must have a reconciliation, we must feed the roots, the roots of a greater Guatemala which only happens when you renounce your interests and I renounce my pride, but it is achieved when you believe in God."²¹⁵ In these two passages one of which I have already quoted above, Ríos Montt is speaking to rebels and malcontents. He said that they should put aside their political and possibly economic interests and live in the real world. This likely meant that Ríos Montt believed that the demands made by these people were unrealistic. But Ríos Montt did not offer anything that might address the demands of rebels and others who were clamoring for reforms and change.

The second passage says that for amnesty to truly happen rebels and all those who protested or desired change, had to conform with the laws and express a common faith in God, in effect surrendering their interests and accepting a Christian God. This was not an invitation to negotiation, but actually a subtle ultimatum. Ríos Montt and the government would not change, but the rebels and protestors must change. Ríos Montt's religious identity made it impossible for him to compromise or negotiate because doing so would require that he also compromise his religious beliefs. This is a good example of how a person's religious beliefs can make it difficult for them to politically compromise

²¹⁴ Ríos Montt, original text taken from "Tenemos que limpiar la casa," April 18, 1982. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt*.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

when religious identity is combined with political identity. That is to say, religious faith was superior to anything else for Ríos Montt.

Although the amnesty seemed at the time like a peaceful strategy for restraining guerrilla activity, it proved to be but the prelude to a bloody counterinsurgency campaign in the Guatemalan highlands. Garrard-Burnett points out the pragmatic purpose behind this decision in terms of moral efficacy: “[a]s a symbolic gesture, the moral efficacy of the amnesty law was twofold: first, it provided an opportunity for the “prodigal sons” of the armed resistance to return themselves to their father’s house. At the same time, it offered a moral rationale for a “just war” against those who did not.”²¹⁶ By offering the amnesty, Ríos Montt could create the impression that he was a generous and fair leader and not a brutal dictator. According to this logic, he thus earned a kind of legitimate right to attack guerrilla groups who did not accept the amnesty. It was dubious morality in the service of purely military victory. Ríos Montt made another speech about the amnesty in his weekly sermon on June 20, 1982:

What I want to say is [...] the amnesty wants to offer pardon [...], it wants to pardon; the fatherland wants to pardon; it is extending its arm; your embrace, your lap that your children return to; homes await the presence of its members. We take advantage of the amnesty that wants to offer pardon. He that pardons is noble and the person who accepts it is a noble person; we make our patria something noble. We reconcile, we make our family the root of the country.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 69.

²¹⁷ Ríos Montt, original text taken from “No queremos prensa subordinada al estado,” June 20, 1982.

With such rhetoric, Ríos Montt played the role of the merciful father offering forgiveness to his rebellious sons—the guerrillas. Describing political problems as family affairs was his common strategy: it took serious political issues and trivialized them. At the same time, Ríos Montt could describe himself as the ultimate arbitrator—the only one who could unite a Guatemala divided by guerillas. In reality, of course, he made the divisions even worse.

Ríos Montt went from being a “merciful father” to a “furious father” towards the sons who did not accept his forgiveness. As he put it in his sermon of June 30, 1982:

Listen well, Guatemalans. We are going to combat the subversion by whatever means we want [...] totally just, but at the same time with energy and vigor [...] We are prepared to change Guatemala, we are prepared to do so with honesty and justice, peace and respect for those who are peaceful and respect the law, [but] prison and death to those who plant [the seeds] of criminality, violence and treachery.²¹⁸

Ríos Montt classified the people of Guatemala in two groups: people to be protected and people to be attacked. This logical duality does not allow for any grey zone. It is rooted in a moral discourse of saints and sinners, with no area in between. In fact, this sermon announced a campaign against “the subversives” entitled “Fusiles y Frijoles (Rifles and Beans or Bullets and Beans).” It was the first phase of a scorched-earth campaign, “Victoria 82,” which marked the most extreme violence that swept the country in the name of counterinsurgency. With it, the Mayan holocaust had begun.

Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt.
²¹⁸ Ríos Montt, original text taken from “Estamos dispuestos a que reina al honestidad y la justicia,” June 20, 1982. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt.*

As its name suggests, Fusiles y Frijoles consisted of two military strategies. The fusiles (rifles or bullets) represented “[t]he villages that the army assess to be sympathetic or supportive of the guerrillas are occupied, punished (either through the selective killing of individuals linked to the guerrillas or by the elimination of the entire population), and the fields, homes, and possessions of the villagers burned to the ground.”²¹⁹ While fusiles was a genocidal program, frijoles (beans) was, in essence, a forced re-education project. The villagers fleeing as refugees from the zones of conflict sought protection under the army’s control in model villages (resettlement villages) and development poles. Model villages and development poles were “high security areas built to serve as forms of population control—moving the displaced from camps into model programs—meant to ‘integrate’ the local indigenous population into both the anti-subversive fight and the ‘nationalist’ security and development project.”²²⁰ In other words, these villages worked as sites for the reorientation of Mayan peoples. It was there they would be remade as preferable citizens ready for the project of national unity, which Ríos Montt had emphasized in his evangelical preaching.

According to Garrard-Burnett, refugees were given Spanish courses, made to watch anticommunist films, and undertook lessons in patriotism. They were also forced to engage in ideological talks with tutors overseen by the military. At the same time, the army prohibited villagers from conducting traditional community rituals.²²¹ Thus, the army controlled peoples’ lives and minds in the rural highlands. But there was one important exception to this regimented existence: Mayan people

²¹⁹ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 20.

²²⁰ Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project*, 69.

²²¹ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 73.

were allowed to attend Protestant churches. They “formed freely in the model villages, a factor that in itself may account in part for the enormous increase in Protestant church growth, not only in the zones of conflict but all over rural Guatemala during this period.”²²² This fact shows that Protestantism functioned as one of the mechanisms used to promote the new idea of national unity: evangelical churches played a role in destroying Mayan culture as well as in infusing anticommunist ideology and patriotism into Mayan communities. All of this was based on Ríos Montt’s vision of La Nueva Guatemala.

The most remarkable element of the Fusiles y Frijoles campaign was the expansion of targets the military was allowed to pursue. *The New York Times* reported Ríos Montt’s response to a question about a massacre killed about 300 Mayan peoples in rural highlands: “The problem of war is not just a question of who is shooting. For each one who is shooting there are 10 working behind him.” His press secretary amplified this remark: “The guerrillas won over many Indian collaborators. Therefore, the Indian were subversives [...] Clearly, you had to kill Indians because they were collaborating with subversion.”²²³ This was the common justification for killing Mayan peoples. It hinged on equating them with guerrillas. On this issue, The CEH concluded:

[T]he State deliberately magnified the military threat of the insurgency, a practice justified by the concept of the internal enemy. The inclusion of all opponents under one banner,

²²² Ibid., 73-74.

²²³ “The Dirtiest War,” *The New York Times*, October 17, 1982, <http://www.nytimes.com/1982/10/17/opinion/the-dirtiest-war.html>

democratic or otherwise, pacifist or guerrilla, legal or illegal, communist or noncommunist, served to justify numerous and serious crimes.²²⁴

As a result of this stretched interpretation of the internal enemy, the target area of the army dramatically expanded, which accordingly led Ríos Montt to pursue further military action that resulted in the Mayan genocide.

Just who was the internal enemy, who were the subversives, Ríos Montt was so set on eliminating? Forensic anthropologist Victoria Sanford has argued:

the state originally identified individuals who directly challenged the state (such as opposition party leaders, student leaders and unionists) as subversives. As time went on, the category of “subversive” was increasingly expansive and included all who provided services to the poor and the poor themselves, which placed the Maya as the “internal enemy” in National Security Doctrine.²²⁵

The National Security Doctrine (DSN), which turned almost anyone into a potential subversive, was the cornerstone of Ríos Montt’s anti-insurgency agenda. As the CEH put it: “Anti-communism and the National Security Doctrine (DSN) formed part of the anti-Soviet strategy of the United States in Latin America. In Guatemala, these were first expressed as anti-reformist, then anti-democratic policies, culminating in criminal counterinsurgency.”²²⁶ In addition, the CEH concluded: “[d]uring the armed

²²⁴ CEH, *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, 22.

²²⁵ Victoria Sanford, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 251.

²²⁶ CEH, *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, 19.

confrontation, the State's idea of the 'internal enemy,' intrinsic to the National Security Doctrine, became increasingly inclusive. At the same time, this doctrine became the *raison d'être* of Army and State policies for several decades.²²⁷ The National Security Doctrine provided legitimacy to attack anyone who was thought to be associated with communism.

But why were Mayan peoples so frequently targeted as the internal enemy? Ríos Montt argued that Guatemala, as a country "broken up into 'twenty-two nations'—a reference to the nation's nearly two dozen indigenous languages—was lacking in any overarching sense of national identity or unity, consisting only of loosely articulated self-serving individuals and parochial ethnic clans."²²⁸ As previously mentioned, Ríos Montt's presidency was based on three essential elements: "morality, order and discipline, and national unity."²²⁹ For Ríos Montt and the ruling class of Guatemala, the existence of Mayan peoples was an "obstacle" to national unity. On this point, Sanford conveys the confession of an officer who had ordered and participated in dozens of massacres: "The Indian problem. Who can tell us what to do about it? They are ignorant. They are dirty. They don't even speak Spanish. We made some mistakes, but we had to terminate the guerrilla."²³⁰ Such thinking clearly shows that Mayan peoples were seen as inferior and subversive by military officers.

This racial prejudice against Mayan peoples in Guatemala has its roots in the colonial era. Mayan peoples, who have twenty-two sub-groups, make up about 60% of the Guatemalan population.

²²⁷ Ibid., 20.

²²⁸ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 70-71.

²²⁹ Ibid., 58.

²³⁰ Sanford, *Buried Secrets*, 201.

Mayan peoples are the discriminated majority while economic and political power is held largely by Ladinos. As Melander puts it, “A deep division separates the indigenous population, which identify themselves with the traditional Maya culture, and the Ladinos, which identify with the ‘white’ Western culture. Many Ladinos view the difference in terms of race and consequently despise the Mayas as inferiors.”²³¹ The Mayan population provides the plantations in the highlands and the Pacific coast with a large amount of the seasonal labor force needed for the harvest of crops like coffee. The rest of the year they cultivate their own subsistence crops on small plots of land called *milpa* (cornfields). The Pacific coast and the highlands are thus “integrated in a production system of *latifundios* (large cash crop estates owned by landlords) and *minifundios* (small subsistence crop farming).”²³² Mayan peoples are impoverished, and are forced to look for additional income. “The poverty of the Mayas consequently has a function within this system.”²³³

The Guatemalan economic and political elite to a large extent consists of descendents of European and North American immigrants, who have arrived in Guatemala during the last hundred years. Guatemalan society is characterized by mass poverty, large class differences, and ethnic division, all of which has its background in the Spanish Empire, with its system of control and exploitation of nature and people. However, “the maintenance of these structures has to do with developments after independence from Spain in 1821, basically the expanding agrarian capitalism and the efforts to create

²³¹ Melander, *The Hour of God?*, 42.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

Guatemalan nation-state.”²³⁴ After ousting Spanish rule, the United States came to dominate Guatemalan economy and politics. During Manuel Estrada Cabrera’s regime (1898-1920), the “banana empire” was established. At the center of monopoly was the United Fruit Company (UFCO), which was both the largest employer and the largest landowner in Guatemala. UFCO controlled Guatemala’s railway system and port facilities, which largely determined the Guatemalan economy.²³⁵

Under the presidencies of Juan José Arévalo (1945-1951) and Jacobo Arbenz (1951-1954), the Guatemalan government started a process of recovering control from U.S. economic domination. The 1950 agricultural census showed that “72 percent of the agricultural land in the country was controlled by slightly more than 2 percent of the farming units.”²³⁶ To redress this remarkable imbalance, after Arévalo’s moderate reforms, Arbenz launched a land reform to modernize infrastructure of the country. The Agrarian Reform Law decree 900 was implemented in 1952, which stated all uncultivated land belonging to properties larger than 672 acres should be expropriated. As a result, “about 500,000 of Guatemala’s 3 million inhabitants had benefited from the land reform.”²³⁷ Arbenz also undertook the construction of new roads and a new port on the Caribbean coast. In addition, Arbenz’s decided to legalize Guatemala’s Communist Party and purchased arms from Czechoslovakia, which fueled U.S. policymakers’ concern about communist influence in Guatemala. These threats

²³⁴ Ibid., 43.

²³⁵ Tim Steigenga, “Guatemala.” In *Religious Freedom and Evangelization in Latin America: The Challenge of Religious Pluralism*, edited by Paul E. Sigmund, 150-74 (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 155.

²³⁶ Jim Handy, “*The Corporate Community, Campesino Organizations, and Agrarian Reform: 1950-1954.*” In *Guatemalan Indians and the state 1540 to 1988*, edited by Carol A. Smith, 163-82 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 169.

²³⁷ Melander, *The Hour of God?*, 44.

provoked CIA-sponsored coup in 1954 to oust Arbenz. As a result, Arbenz resigned and his reforms ended.²³⁸ After the Arbenz administration, in a short time, “the new regime had covered up all tracks of the Guatemalan revolution and transformed the country to one of the most repressive and regressive states in Latin America. The land redistributed to landless peasants was taken back and given to its former owners.”²³⁹ Steigenga suggests that “Guatemala’s experiment with democracy and reform had come to an end. The next thirty years would be shaped by a succession of military dictatorships.”²⁴⁰ In this manner, the seeds of the Guatemalan Civil War were planted around the time of the demise of the Arbenz regime.

Among the many seeds of the war were racist beliefs about Mayan peoples and their perceived resistance to national integration.²⁴¹ Ríos Montt mobilized this perception and intensified it. He pursued the elimination of Mayan populations in order to build La Nueva Guatemala. Ríos Montt gave a symbolic statement about his position against communist guerrillas shortly after he took power: “The guerrilla is the fish. The people are the sea [...], [i]f you cannot catch the fish, you have to drain the sea.”²⁴² This statement clearly suggests that Ríos Montt aimed to exterminate guerrillas by converting their supporters even if it meant destroying the way of life of innocent Mayan peoples.

²³⁸ Steigenga, “*Guatemala*,” 155.

²³⁹ Melander, *The Hour of God?*, 46.

²⁴⁰ Steigenga, “*Guatemala*,” 155.

²⁴¹ Melander, *The Hour of God?*, 49.

²⁴² John Otis, “Efraín Ríos Montt, former Guatemalan military dictator charged with genocide, dies at 91,” *The Washington Post*, April 1, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/efrain-rios-montt-former-guatemalan-military-dictator-charged-with-genocide-dies-at-91/2018/04/01/545c9770-35d2-11e8-acd5-35eac230e514_story.html?utm_term=.d3da6ceefce2

Both the Lucas García and Ríos Montt regimes conducted counterinsurgency campaigns with mass killings against Mayan peoples, but their approaches were different. Lucas García's counterinsurgency campaigns called for "100 percent random slaughter."²⁴³ On the other hand, according to Jennifer Schirmer, Ríos Montt's pacification strategy included the military government's aid to loyal Guatemalans—the frijoles of the Fusiles y Frijoles campaign.²⁴⁴ The soft pacification of frijoles included the religious conversion of the indigenous people. This is where Ríos Montt saw an opportunity to involve American evangelicals in his "soft" strategies for the pacification of the indigenous people of Guatemala. Evangelical churches and schools were pathways for indigenous people to escape becoming part of the "total kill" aspect of Ríos Montt's counterinsurgency campaigns.

The most controversial system in Fusiles y Frijoles campaign was the use of civilian militias, known as PACs (Patrullas de Autodefensa). PACs consisted mainly of Mayan males who served in the patrols on a mandatory basis. Although civil patrols have a long history in the highlands, the PACs system "did not become widespread until April 1982, when Ríos Montt made the formation of civil patrols a centerpiece of his pacification program."²⁴⁵ In fact, by 1982-1983, PACs comprised "approximately 900,000 peasants between the age of fifteen and sixty years, representing nearly 80 percent of the male population in indigenous rural areas."²⁴⁶ The army intended to use PACs "to seal off communities from potential guerrilla penetration as well as remove the guerrillas from areas where

²⁴³ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 86.

²⁴⁴ Schirmer, *The Guatemalan Military Project*, 35.

²⁴⁵ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 99.

²⁴⁶ REHMI, *Guatemala, Never Again!*, 119.

they had already established a presence.”²⁴⁷ The PACs members were forcibly recruited and under the supervision of the military. “Many communities had no choice but to accept the organization of the civil patrols under threat that otherwise the army would eliminate them.”²⁴⁸ PACs worked as informers from inside the Mayan communities. This was the cruel element of PACs insofar as it destroyed the social bonds of Mayan communities from within, sowing distrust and terror in people’s minds. Garrard-Burnett points out that PACs were designed to provide “back-up support for the army in its military and counterinsurgency operations, using locals’ knowledge of terrain, language and the inhabitants to boost the effectiveness in the field.”²⁴⁹ As a result, the PACs system was extremely effective. “By isolating the guerrillas from their base of indigenous support and thereby weakening them nearly to the point of capitulation.”²⁵⁰ At the same time, the PACs system left the serious damage in Mayan communities, which continues to this day:

Without doubt, one of the most lasting effects of the civil patrol system was its effect on community cohesion, a consequence—perhaps unintended but perhaps not—that in either case helped to advance the government’s expressed goal of achieving *unidad nacional* [national unity] at the expense of indigenous and community identity.²⁵¹

This is different from what Ríos Montt had said about amnesty and his own experience with conversion. Ríos Montt only offered amnesty to those who abandoned their Mayan identities. In this regard, the PAC system

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ REMHI, *Guatemala, Never Again!*, 121.

²⁴⁹ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 101.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 102.

reflected the anti-Mayan suspicions of the ruling class. Ríos Montt never accepted Mayan identity as a morally equal compatriot alongside Christian, or evangelical identity, Ríos Montt's continued to believe that "poverty and ignorance are the fruits of moral disorder," which meant that it was the responsibility of Mayan peoples to submit to conversion in order to be saved.²⁵² When this did not work, Ríos Montt used force to make Mayan peoples convert; this was not problematic, because it was for their own good, he maintained. In this way Ríos Montt justified the PACs strategy, even though many Mayans communities suffered as a result of it.

Under the government's call for the national unity, Mayan peoples were forced to sacrifice their ethnic identity and the unity of the communities. The CEH concluded:

the massacres, scorched earth operations, forced disappearances and executions of Mayan authorities, leaders and spiritual guides, were not only an attempt to destroy the social base of the guerrillas, but above all, to destroy the cultural values that ensured cohesion and collective action in Mayan communities.²⁵³

This conclusion clearly admits that the essence of Ríos Montt's military campaign was a genocidal project aimed at eliminating both Mayan populations and their cultures under the dubious goals of achieving national unity. During Ronald Reagan's visit to Guatemala in December 1982, Ríos Montt confessed the difficulty of achieving national unity, which outsiders never understood: "Guatemala is a different kind of country, and we have to remember that we are 70 percent Indian, we have to live it and

²⁵² Ibid., 65.

²⁵³ CEH, *Guatemala: Memory of Silence*, 23.

we have to manifest it; if not, then the communists are going to destroy us.”²⁵⁴ He admitted the uniqueness of Guatemalan nation—the diversity of Mayan population—but he saw it only as a drawback, as something rather dangerous that attracts communism.

As a result of the rapid expansion of Protestantism in Guatemala beginning with the 1976 earthquake, by the early 1980s the Protestant population in Guatemala reached “nearly 30 percent and still growing, making it the most Protestant country in all of Spanish-speaking Latin America.”²⁵⁵ Rather than interpret this as a result of brutal military policy, some evangelicals took it such unprecedented growth as a sign of God’s special benediction and prophetic destiny for the long troubled country. They launched a church growth movement (known as *iglecrecimiento*) called “God’s hour for Guatemala,” and certain sectors of the Guatemalan evangelical community depicted Ríos Montt as the leader of this movement.²⁵⁶

The dramatic expansion of Protestantism, along with Guatemala having its first born-again president, made evangelicals think they were in a prophetic moment. This belief had an effect on Ríos Montt’s discourse: “his sense of his own prophetic role seemed to have been burnished by the *iglecrecientistas* [activists of the church growth movement]”²⁵⁷ He went on the record saying, “God gives power to whomever he wants, and he gave it to me.”²⁵⁸ Ríos Montt repeatedly emphasized that

²⁵⁴ Ríos Montt, original text taken from “Ahora que se acercan las festividades de Navidad,” December 12, 1982. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt*.

²⁵⁵ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 75.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 76.

²⁵⁸ Nissen, *Newsweek*, December 13, 1982.

he was a divinely anointed leader, somebody chosen for a difficult task. By mid-1982, he began to speak of “a unique covenantal relationship between a loving but angry God and every Guatemalan.”²⁵⁹

He stated:

God loves us, God loves Guatemala, God loves you, and those whom he loves he disciplines, he loves and he smites [golpea], so that you wake up and react and start to look for what truly matters, that you reconsider your importance, your humility, you reconcile yourself with him, your creator, with your king, with your Lord.²⁶⁰

With such language, Ríos Montt described God not only as the embodiment of love but also of strictness and judgment. In his discourses, God is generous, fearful, and powerful—all at the same time.

Ríos Montt appealed to narratives of salvation that hinged on obedience to God’s discipline. Such narratives were also used to justify any “punishment” (such as counterinsurgency campaigns) in the name of God. Ríos Montt gave the impression that he was a prophet sent to convey God’s discipline and vision to all Guatemalans. Among the principles—morality, order and discipline, national unity—most often used by Ríos Montt to justify the Mayan genocide, first and foremost was national unity. By this he meant something like a unified national identity, but his language was imbued with religious overtones. Ríos Montt persistently used the phrase “*hacer Guatemala* (to make Guatemala).” He said, “We are going to make [*hacer*] Guatemala, we make Guatemala, we make it [...] It will be grand, sovereign, and independent and when we have the strength, the consistency, and our own dignity,

²⁵⁹ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 77.

²⁶⁰ Ríos Montt, original text taken from “Dios nos hizo para manejar esta tierra,” September 26, 1982. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt*.

we will be Guatemalans.”²⁶¹ For Ríos Montt, Guatemala was a work in progress, one that only he could lead. Mayan peoples, represented a threat to the national unity Ríos Montt envisioned. For him, national cohesion and consistency had to be achieved by and through evangelical faith. By repeating the phrase “*hacer Guatemala*,” he attempted to imprint upon the people an image of national unity that was in keeping with Christian universalism.

For all his sermonizing, Ríos Montt often overlooked and covered up his own moral failures: In fact, he even used his sermons to obfuscate and rationalize his actions and that of the army:

However, we have also tried to believe in each Guatemalans, you should be aware of what really happens, we should not call ourselves deceitful, we are not lying, we are not stealing, we are not abusing; we are teaching, we are saying that the situations are critical, and this is a situation whose responsibility is yours and mine.²⁶²

In this statement Ríos Montt tried to refute the idea that he and the army were committing abuses and crimes. He did so by suggesting that the situation was not of his making. He tried to avoid taking responsibility for the civil war. Even though Ríos Montt said that responsibility was shared, he denied that he and his government abused anyone. In fact, Ríos Montt insisted that what he and his government were doing was actually a form of teaching, not abusing.

In another sermon, this one given on November 7, 1982, Ríos Montt even blamed the people

²⁶¹ Ríos Montt, original text taken from “El 23 de Marzo Exalta el Concepto Patrio,” July 18, 1982. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt.*

²⁶² Ríos Montt, original text taken from “Interesados en Superar esta Etapa Crítica,” October 10, 1982. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt.*

for demanding too much from the government:

The people have been wrongly taught; telling them for example, that the State has sufficient money and resources to cover all the needs of employment, and to satisfy all the needs of a housing and food and not only that it has these resources, but also has the large obligation to give work, homes and food, when citizens have no where to get them.²⁶³

Ríos Montt also blamed outsiders for the problems that gripped Guatemala: “here in Guatemala are many marginalized persons, there are sadly millions of persons that are not receiving the benefits of learning to be responsible, these are people that lately, listen well, lately have been taught by an enemy cunning and tireless, to demand their rights.”²⁶⁴

Ríos Montt’s religious ideas—his belief in personal responsibility and divine providence, for example—made him deaf to the demands of people clamoring for social and political rights. Because Ríos Montt believed that religious morality was more important than civil rights, he could dismiss people who do not subordinate themselves to his religious ideals because they were not learning what was proper for them to be good citizens. This made it easy for Ríos Montt to blame the people for wanting too much, for demanding rights or better jobs. The people should be content with whatever the government gives them. Ríos Montt wanted his subjects to stay in their proper place. This also meant that Ríos Montt did not see himself as having to answer to the people, but rather, the people had to answer to him.

²⁶³ Ríos Montt, original text taken from “Falta el Sentido de la Responsabilidad,” November 7, 1982. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt.*

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

Evangelical Mission: To Support a “Brother in Christ”

Ríos Montt was a capable image creator. In December 1982, he launched an anti-corruption campaign: Project David, named after the biblical king. He created a logo of “government as champion and guardian of law and order”: a blue hand with the thumb, index, and middle fingers extended against a field of white which symbolizes the pledge “I don’t steal. I don’t lie. I don’t abuse.” This pledge was demanded from all officials in order to eradicate corruption. According to Garrard-Burnett, “[w]ithin the city, the three-fingered salute became a signifier of order and stability, the visual and somatic representation of the New Guatemala.”²⁶⁵ *Newsweek* reported: “By next year, millions of the blue-hand symbols will appear on billboards, bumper stickers, pencils and postage stamps across the country.”²⁶⁶ Ríos Montt’s strategy successfully shaped and propagated his image as a “clean” president, which appealed to Guatemalans as well as to the U.S. government. This strategy helped draw support from evangelicals in the U.S. At the same time, the symbolic logo he created was quite effective to imprint Ríos Montt’s powerful leadership into Guatemalan minds.

The Guatemalan government received no overt military aid from the U.S. because the Carter administration suspended aid in 1977, due to the Guatemalan government’s continued violations of its citizen’s human rights. Actually though, the U.S. steadily supported Guatemala clandestinely, by delivering weapons and ammunition as part of \$8.5 million in financial aid through third-party proxies

²⁶⁵ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 61.

²⁶⁶ Mark Whitaker and Beth Nissen. “GUATEMALA; Beans-and-Bullets Politics,” *Newsweek*, December 13, 1982.

such as Israel and Taiwan.²⁶⁷ In December, 1982, Ronald Reagan visited Ríos Montt to negotiate the resumption of formal U.S. military aid to Guatemala—“beginning with helicopter parts for the airships that were most widely used in the counterinsurgency campaign to move troops into remote areas—in return for Ríos Montt’s pledge to force the military to impose greater discipline on its troops.”²⁶⁸ Offering helicopter parts to Guatemala was a controversial issue in the U.S. Congress. Ríos Montt explained that his plan was to use helicopter parts for “humanitarian work such as airlifting food to Indian farmers who have fled from their homes for fear of violence by subversive forces, transportation of brigades of doctors and social workers who provide services to refugees, and other comparable tasks.”²⁶⁹ Ríos Montt’s emphasis on using helicopter parts only for humanitarian efforts helped to assuage Ronald Reagan’s concerns over the issue. In addition, Ríos Montt claimed that human rights abuses such as massacres, kidnappings, and torture, which were reported by news media and human rights organizations, were being committed by guerrillas, not by the Guatemalan army.²⁷⁰ Despite abundant evidence to the contrary, Ríos Montt’s eloquence was all it took to convince Reagan. After meeting with Ríos Montt, Reagan was assured: “I know he wants to improve the quality of life for all Guatemalans and to promote social justice. My administration will do all it can to support his

²⁶⁷ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 147,150.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁶⁹ Turek, “To Support a ‘Brother in Christ,’” 711.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

progressive efforts,” he said.²⁷¹ In addition, when Reagan was asked about human rights violations in Guatemala he said: “I am inclined to believe they’ve been getting a bum rap.”²⁷² For Reagan and American evangelicals it was more convenient to believe Ríos Montt than the evidence.

It has been suggested that Ríos Montt might have received guidance from his church elders about how to present himself as a clean, powerful, reliable leader. Watching him on video, he seems to be fond of dramatic gestures, like a stage actor. He is also eloquent, inviting comparison to famous televangelists, including Billy Graham. Ríos Montt was charismatic and attracted a certain type of person, namely the obedient. But he could not win over everybody. Despite his “successful” meeting with Ronald Reagan, according to Garrard-Burnett, the U.S. Congress ultimately refused to resume aid to Guatemala.²⁷³

There is another fact to consider in this context. In January, 1983, the U.S. removed the arms embargo to Guatemala. This decision was based on an investigation, in which three delegations from the U.S. Congress visited Guatemala to see the level of respect for human rights in the country. While Democratic participants expressed dissatisfaction, Republican participants had a very favorable impression, probably because they did not visit Guatemalan refugee camps in Mexico. The result of this investigation was that the Republicans wanted increased cooperation with Guatemala, while

²⁷¹ Ronald Reagan, “Remarks in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, Following a Meeting With President Jose Efraim Rios Montt of Guatemala.” Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, December 4, 1982, <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/archives/speeches/1982/120482f.htm>

²⁷² Santiago Wills, “Did Reagan Finance Genocide in Guatemala?,” *abc NEWS*, May 14, 2013, https://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/News/ronald-reagan-finance-genocide-guatemala/story?id=19179627

²⁷³ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 158.

Democrats opposed it.²⁷⁴ This divergence of opinion stemmed mainly from the fact that Democrats and Republicans did not share a criteria with which to judge the situation properly, and also because their investigation was not sufficient. If they had observed the more devastated areas and heard directly from victims, they probably would not have supported Ríos Montt's dictatorship.

Attempting to explain why the Reagan administration ignored human rights violations against Mayan peoples as well as rising criticism from human rights organizations and media, Turek claims that "U.S. foreign policy makers and the Reagan administration cautiously embraced [Ríos Montt's] leadership, finding his religiously infused rhetoric moderate in comparison to previous regimes and his commitment to fighting the 'communist insurgency' encouraging."²⁷⁵ In other words, the Reagan administration prioritized Ríos Montt's counterinsurgency, which was based on Cold War ideology, as well as Ríos Montt's comparatively "clean" image, which was shaped by Christianity, over and above the protection of human rights.

It did not help that the U.S. government failed to collect proper information about the state of violence in Guatemala. As Garrard-Burnett indicates, "U.S. officials did not have a reasonably clear sense of the extent of the violence in the countryside and did not know 'who was doing what to whom.'"²⁷⁶ This reflects the priority that fighting communism in Latin America had over what was happening to victims during the Guatemalan Civil War. Also, there were fewer reports of human rights violations by humanitarian organizations and media coverage of the Guatemalan Civil War compared

²⁷⁴ Melander, *The Hour of God?*, 168.

²⁷⁵ Turek, "To Support a 'Brother in Christ,'" 707.

²⁷⁶ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 157.

to events surrounding the campaigns of the Sandinista of Nicaragua and the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front of El Salvador. The revolutionary movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador were viewed as more urgent threats to the U.S. As Melander points out, in January, 1982, the Reagan administration escalated its military support to Central America. The U.S. government prioritized support for the Contras in Nicaragua and counterinsurgency in El Salvador. The Reagan administration considered the Guatemalan counterinsurgency to be subordinate to those two countries' wars.²⁷⁷ Perhaps because budget, diplomatic efforts, and attention were spent more on Nicaragua and El Salvador, Guatemala remained slightly out of U.S. focus.

In the place of insufficient U.S. government support, Guatemala obtained a great amount of aid from evangelicals in the U.S. U.S.-based Pentecostal churches supported Ríos Montt's presidency both spiritually and financially. As *The New York Times* reported at the time, Ríos Montt's church, *El Verbo*, actively participated in his military project:

In Indian villages in the Quiche province, church members are helping the army with food distribution, part of the President's two-pronged counterinsurgency strategy of military and civic action. And, in California, the church is raising money to build several "cities of refuge" in the highlands to house thousands of Indians whose villages have been destroyed as a result of the army's "scorched earth" strategy.²⁷⁸

This is a great irony: church members helped to reconstruct Mayan peoples' lives, which had been

²⁷⁷ Melander, *The Hour of God?*, 168.

²⁷⁸ Simons, *The New York Times*, November 7, 1982.

destroyed by their “brother,” Ríos Montt. Indeed, *El Verbo*’s mother church, Gospel Outreach, founded a relief branch, International Love Lift, which was heavily promoted on Pat Robertson’s *700 Club*.²⁷⁹ It received and channeled economic aid to Guatemala from churches in the U.S. On September 1, 1982, *El Verbo*’s leader Carlos Ramírez described Ríos Montt’s regime as “God’s miracle in Guatemala” in his letter distributed by International Love Lift:

I want you to realize just how strategic Guatemala is in relationship to the United States and this hemisphere [...] if Guatemala falls, what then? Mexico [...] 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.²⁸⁰

This letter echoed the common rhetoric of the era. It played on evangelical fears that Guatemala might fall into the hands of communists, that it might be another El Salvador or Nicaragua. In addition, it suggested that Guatemala was still a country that could be saved from the contamination of communism, if only American evangelicals would get involved.

Ramírez urged American evangelicals to engage in reconstruction efforts in Guatemala to build La Nueva Guatemala under the name of God. Their donations would support evangelical principles and help in the fight against communism. Ramírez claimed that “Ríos Montt has deep feelings for his people, especially the Indians ‘who have been abandoned for hundreds of years.’”

²⁷⁹ Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare*, 165.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

Human rights have improved since Ríos Montt took office.”²⁸¹ We cannot take this statement literally. It is necessary to understand that the evangelical interpretation of human rights then was not the same as what we might define as human rights today. For example, in December 1982, a group of North Americans interviewed *El Verbo*’s pastor, who told them: “The Army doesn’t massacre the Indians. It massacres demons, and the Indians are demon possessed: they are communists.”²⁸² In other words, the slaughter of Mayan peoples is justified because they are demons who were equated with communists, which meant that they were outside the jurisdiction of human rights and could be rightfully killed. Theology came before policy. As Ríos Montt announced when he came to power, the foundation of his morality was based on his religious identity: “I am trusting my Lord and my King, that He shall guide me.”²⁸³ Ríos Montt protected human rights because he believed in God: “we are guaranteeing human rights,” he proclaimed in his sermons.²⁸⁴ His belief was a kind of talisman, it would not allow him to violate human rights. Of course, this suggests that Ríos Montt thought he could only be judged by God alone. In this light, Ríos Montt was, more than anything, a religious leader, the embodiment of God’s justice.

During this time, Ramírez was “meeting with church leaders and fellowship groups throughout the United States. He was promoting the image of Ríos Montt as the ‘hand of God’ at

²⁸¹ “Christians Beware! Donations You Give May Kill People,” *Akwasne Notes (1975-1989)*. Roosevelttown. December 31, 1982,

<https://search-proquest-com.cny-proxy1.libr.cny.cuny.edu/docview/220293013?accountid=9967>

²⁸² Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare*, 166.

²⁸³ Anfuso and Sczepanski, *He gives - he takes away*, 20.

²⁸⁴ Ríos Montt, original text taken from ““Libertad: Expresion de una responsabilidad,” March 23, 1982. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, General José Efraín Ríos Montt*

work.”²⁸⁵ Ramírez propagated Ríos Montt’s image as a savior of Guatemala as well as a merciful guardian for Mayan peoples—all in order to draw more donations from American evangelicals. In reality, Ríos Montt massacred or forcibly re-educated Mayan peoples who refused to be converted to Pentecostalism. Only converts were protected by the government based on a policy of “conditional” human rights. In this manner, Ríos Montt and Ramírez limited the concept of human rights, applying it to only those Mayan peoples who accepted evangelical faith and discarded their indigenous identity. Ramírez pleaded for financial help—as well as helicopter parts—from American evangelicals: “Our brother Efraín inherited a bankrupt country with an ill-equipped army which needs helicopter parts. I need ‘mercy helicopters’ to go out to the villages to help my brothers.”²⁸⁶ In this context, “brothers” signify not only government soldiers but also, supposedly, Mayan peoples. Ramírez emphasized the importance of helicopter parts being used for “good” purposes but which were also used in the massacres of Mayan peoples in mountainous area.

The public relations history of the Gospel Outreach in Guatemala has the “appearance of good, of fulfillment of a Christian commitment. This is what makes this whole project more insidious. The language is the rhetoric used by the Churches.”²⁸⁷ Ramírez connected the fear of spreading communism in Central America with evangelical missions. In doing so, he manipulated evangelical rhetoric to conceal the fact of mass killing of Mayan peoples. A warning—“Christians Beware!

²⁸⁵ “Christians Beware! Donations You Give May Kill People,” *Akwesasne Notes (1975-1989)*, December 31, 1982.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

Donations You Give May Kill People”—was issued by the newspaper providing indigenous people’s news, *Akwesasne Notes*, on December 31, 1982, which called for a boycott of International Love Lift. But the efforts continued. According to *The Nation*, as a result of evangelical efforts, on January 8, 1983, the day the Reagan Administration announced that it had ended the five-year ban on military aide to Guatemala, shipment “more than \$1 million worth of grain, clothing, medical supplies and building materials—not to mention 500,000 Spanish language Bibles” was sent for Guatemala.²⁸⁸ All of this cargo had been collected by “American Fundamentalists, for whom the survival of the Ríos Montt regime” was tantamount.²⁸⁹ Most of the Love Lift supplies were destined for refugee camps in the Ixil Triangle, located in a mountainous region that was formerly a guerrilla stronghold. The shipments were part of Ríos Montt’s “Bullets and Beans” [Fujiles y Frijoles] rural pacification program.²⁹⁰ In addition, while Robertson’s offer never came to realize, “it enabled Ríos Montt to convince the U.S. Congress that he would not seek massive sums of U.S. aid. Instead, he would rely on ‘private aid’ from U.S. evangelicals.”²⁹¹ This shows that the American evangelical movement was gaining in international influence and becoming a power within American foreign policy, thanks to both its unity and its abundant financial resources. For them, Ríos Montt arrived at just the right time. Investigative journalist Sara Diamond has shown how involvement in the Ríos Montt regime was important for American evangelicals ideologically and organizationally:

²⁸⁸ Donna Eberwine, “To Ríos Montt, With Love Lift.” *The Nation*, February 26, 1983.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare*, 164-165.

Mid-way through President Reagan’s first term, as Christian Right activists were realizing that some of Reagan’s promises—ending abortion, instituting school prayer, etc.—would not be fulfilled, the Ríos Montt period marked a turning point for the Christian Right. The Guatemalan experience, however vicarious, of a born-again Christian shepherding an entire nation reinforced a mentality within born-again circles that they could seize the reigns of power and install—by force, if necessary—a “kingdom of God on earth.”²⁹²

In other words, American evangelicals found a good way to fulfill their religious ambitions by supporting the Ríos Montt regime, which was attempting to reconstruct the nation based on Biblical principles while also fighting atheist communists. American evangelicals sought an outlet for their religious enthusiasm, which had not achieved in its goals with regard to domestic politics.

Lastly, to address the question of why such a large number of Mayan peoples converted to Pentecostalism during Ríos Montt regime, despite harsh oppression by the army, we must recognize that there may have been very practical reasons for the phenomenon. Garrard-Burnet has offered two of them. One is “membership in a Protestant church seemed to offer some promise of protection against being killed by counterinsurgency forces, which viewed Catholics, but not Protestants, as the internal enemy.”²⁹³ The other “reason behind conversion most certainly had to do with the message and emphasis of Protestant, and particularly Pentecostal, theology, which promised solace and peace and helped to reorder the lives of people whose families, communities, and psyches had been ruined by

²⁹² Ibid., 169.

²⁹³ Garrard-Burnet, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 136.

violence.”²⁹⁴ Under the Ríos Montt regime, Catholic Churches were considered hotbeds of leftist guerrilla activities and were subjected to scorched-earth campaigns that left many Catholic Action activists and catechists murdered. Mayan peoples in conflict zones were in danger if they were suspected to be guerrillas. Here is just one example: *The New York Times* reported on the experiences of Catholic nuns working in the highlands. “Indian women are now begging for ‘Ladino clothes,’ meaning non-Indian dresses,” they explained. These women were terrified “because their embroideries show what village they come from and, what’s more, these identify them Indians.”²⁹⁵ To be identified as Mayan was to be equated with guerrillas and to be attacked by the army. In this context, it is natural that such imminent danger may have led them to convert to Pentecostalism in order to protect their lives.

The second answer to the question of conversion offered by Garrard-Burnett suggests a more paradoxical perspective: evangelicalism, which funded violence and death, also provided solace and peace. I speculate that this duality might have presented Mayan peoples with a harsh choice: to chose either conversion to evangelicalism to heal the trauma it had helped to create, or to reject it and become even more victimized in the process. This is a brutal division that the Mayan people have had to endure ever since the cessation of the conflict. This tragic situation reminds me of the statement of Ríos Montt made to the people of Guatemala upon the start of the coup that brought him into power: “only He

²⁹⁴ Ibid.

²⁹⁵ Marlise Simons, “For 500,000 Guatemalans, the war comes home.” *The New York Times*, October 6, 1982, <https://www.nytimes.com/1982/10/06/world/for-500000-guatemalans-the-war-comes-home.html>

gives and takes away authority.”²⁹⁶ This is precisely what Ríos Montt did to the Mayan peoples, he took their “peace” and “solace,” and in return gave them his authority, as the savior of La Nueva Guatemala.

²⁹⁶ Anfuso and Szczepanski, *He gives - he takes away*, 20.

Conclusion

Ríos Montt was ousted from power on August 8, 1983, by another military coup led by General Óscar Humberto Mejía Víctores. Mejía Víctores was just as intolerant of the rebels. He stated, “Guatemala does not need any more prayers [...], just more executions.”²⁹⁷ By this time, “the guerrillas were very much on the defensive. The coup [which toppled Ríos Montt] restored the authority of the military hierarchy, most of whom were also fed up with his stern Protestantism.”²⁹⁸ Nevertheless, Ríos Montt’s evangelical dictatorship was unprecedented in the history of Guatemalan politics. Ríos Montt may have been seen as a failure by military leaders who thought his fanatical religious leadership a nuisance, but the havoc he brought about went far beyond this. For example, Ríos Montt’s leadership failed the Guatemalan economy and ruined it as well. As *Newsweek* reported at the time:

The beans-and-bullets campaign has helped strain Guatemala’s economy, which has traditionally been the strongest in Central America but is now suffering the worst crisis since the Depression. World prices for coffee, cotton and sugar are low, and the civil war has discouraged foreign tourism, once Guatemala’s fourth largest foreign-exchange earner.²⁹⁹

Ríos Montt’s regime attempted to build a new nation, “La Nueva Guatemala,” on the basis of evangelical principles. This never came to pass.

²⁹⁷ James Painter, “General Efraín Ríos Montt: Former Guatemalan dictator who got away with mass murder,” *Independent*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/efrain-Rios-montt-guatemala-dictator-dead-di-ed-age-genocide-mass-murder-a8284936.html>

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ Mark Whitaker and Beth Nissen, “GUATEMALA; Beans-and-Bullets Politics,” *Newsweek*, December 13, 1982.

Even worse is the fact that Ríos Montt's regime violated the human rights of the poor Mayan peoples of the Guatemalan highlands. Ríos Montt's regime never exhibited any intention of actually addressing the inequality that defined the Guatemalan economy. The system that had been largely dependent on global capitalists—and specifically upon the United States—continued. It perpetuated extreme inequality, and was predicated on the exploitation of Mayan peoples. This system may have nurtured sympathy for communist guerrillas since the demise of Jacobo Árbenz's regime, but Ríos Montt did nothing to change it.

In his attempt to combat communist guerrillas, Ríos Montt ignored the democratic process and used an evangelical rhetoric he shared with American evangelicals to justify his counterinsurgency campaigns. He organized and authorized the army to systematically eradicate people he deemed to be communist guerrillas, as well as their non-combatant sympathizers—mainly the Mayan peoples—by utilizing extreme violence, including attempted genocide. In short, Ríos Montt's dictatorship reflected, and took advantage of, Cold War ideological fears. It also mobilized long-standing racism against the Mayan population. Ríos Montt's evangelicalism, I have argued in this thesis, intensified both of these ideological campaigns. Furthermore, his dictatorship was supported by American evangelicals: it utilized their money and the support of their first president, Ronald Reagan.

During the American culture wars, American evangelicals asserted themselves against rising fears of losing traditional, Christian values. Evangelicals targeted global communism as an impediment to global evangelicalism. Televangelists such as Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson used their religious

influence to politically criticize liberal movements and secular humanism, including feminism and gay rights, which they described as enemies of morality and family values.

Another remarkable component of this story is how the Jesus Movement and the counterculture came together to forge a new form of religious expression that later channeled the political aspirations of evangelicals. Christian thinker Francis Schaeffer played a pivotal role in bridging this new evangelical expression with the Christian Right. Schaeffer recognized that anti-abortion sentiment, for example, could become the focal point of domestic politics. In fact, the abortion issue became a catalyst to mobilize evangelicals to support Reagan in the 1980 election. Schaeffer insisted that Biblical principles should be incorporated into national politics, an idea that found receptive ears in the Republican camp and built a strong connection with them.

Although Ronald Reagan advocated “Let’s Make America Great Again” to gain evangelical support during the election, he prioritized foreign policy more than domestic initiatives in order to boost the presence of the United States around the world. Ronald Reagan attempted to demonstrate the greatness of the United States to a world divided by capitalism and communism, but he regarded evangelicals merely as a source of votes, not necessarily as the holders of a doctrine to be applied to government.

But to evangelicals religious doctrine was indeed the basis of a profound political theology. They pursued it in whatever ways they could. The 1976 Earthquake in Guatemala became for them an opportunity to become more invested materially, socially, and religiously outside the United States. It

was also used politically at home to lobby the government to help Guatemala. As a result of these efforts, well funded American evangelicals made inroads into Guatemalan society, especially its education system, to indoctrinate Guatemalans. It was an opportunity for them to preach evangelical principles, which emphasized individual responsibility and Protestant eschatology. Unfortunately, this indoctrination often de-emphasized critical thinking about social ills, such as poverty. It did not teach the importance of social reform, but instead emphasized obedience to authority. As a result, evangelicalism in Guatemala may have contributed to the covering-up of human rights violations by the army, which accordingly prolonged the civil war and the suffering of the Mayan peoples.

Even after he was deposed, Ríos Montt retained a strong ambition to return to national politics. Several years later, as the country returned to an elected government, many Guatemalans complained of “street crime and corruption by traditional politicians. Their frustration opened the door for Gen. Ríos Montt,” who had founded his own political party, the Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG) in 1989.³⁰⁰ Ríos Montt’s party “stressed law and order and individual responsibility,” utilizing the same political-theological rhetoric he was so fond of when he was president.³⁰¹ But this time around Ríos Montt “refashioned himself as a civilian politician,” instead of a military leader.³⁰² Ríos Montt claimed that Guatemalans still needed the “clean and powerful” leadership that he had tried to provide before. Despite his involvement with genocide, Ríos Montt’s status as an evangelical, along

³⁰⁰ Otis, *The Washington Post*, April 1, 2018.

³⁰¹ Ibid.

³⁰² Phil Gunson, “Gen Efraín Ríos Montt obituary.” *The Guardian*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/02/gen-efrain-Rios-montt-obituary>

“[w]ith support from many of the Mayan regions that had been ravaged by his troops,” helped get him “elected to Congress in 1990.”³⁰³

Ríos Montt was supported by Mayan populations that embraced evangelicalism. It is possible that evangelical Mayans, because they were spared from the worst of the violence, may have accepted Ríos Montt’s arguments, which suggested that those who suffered from his policies were responsible for putting themselves at risk in the first place. But, even if many Mayan peoples did not believe this argument, they may have shared values Ríos Montt expressed during his dictatorship and his campaign. As I have argued, for Mayan peoples who converted to evangelical Protestantism, the indoctrination process resulted in political apathy. This apathy sometimes can be characterized by not voting, but more so by refraining from seeking solutions for social problems outside of a religious context. In other words, evangelical Mayans will vote in elections, but they will support the candidate that is the most evangelical, the one most in line with their values, regardless of the candidate’s past behavior. This is consistent with the strongly held evangelical doctrine of forgiving sin, especially if the person has accepted the evangelical concept of Jesus as their personal savior. This explains why evangelical Mayan peoples supported Ríos Montt, even though many of them were aware of the violence that he was responsible for. Ríos Montt was always careful to maintain his image as a saved evangelical Protestant.

As a member of Congress, Ríos Montt enjoyed immunity from prosecution. He tried twice

³⁰³ Otis, *The Washington Post*, April 1, 2018.

to run for president—in 1990 and 2003—but was blocked “by a constitutional clause that prevented anyone who had taken part in a military coup from becoming head of state.”³⁰⁴ Still, even though he never fulfilled his ambition of becoming an elected president, “he was for several years Guatemala’s most powerful politician behind the throne.”³⁰⁵ In comparison with former corrupt regimes, Ríos Montt’s image as clean, honest, and strong has endured for many evangelicals, even today. Ríos Montt’s image with evangelicals afforded him the privilege of not having to refute allegations of human rights violations, at least to his supporters. Ríos Montt has always maintained that he was just doing what needed to be done to save Guatemala. For evangelicals, even evangelical Mayan peoples who come from the places that suffered the most from his policies, Ríos Montt’s actions could be justified because he was trying to save them from an even great threat—communism. This, and the fact that he maintained good relations with evangelical leaders, allowed Ríos Montt to avoid publicly accepting blame for his roll in genocide

In spite, or perhaps because of his political failure, Ríos Montt became a capable image-creator. As Garrard-Burnett states, many people considered him “the embodiment of honesty, law and order, and national integrity.”³⁰⁶ But did non-evangelical Guatemalans buy this act? *Newsweek* reported on December 13, 1982: “The largely Catholic upper middle classes ridiculed Ríos Montt’s

³⁰⁴ Sofia Menchu, “Ex-Guatemala dictator Ríos Montt, plagued by genocide charges, dies.” *Reuters*, April 1, 2018,

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-guatemala-Riosmontt-obituary/ex-guatemala-dictator-Rios-montt-plagued-by-genocide-charges-dies-idUSKCN1H81GJ>

³⁰⁵ Painter, *Independent*, April 2, 2018.

³⁰⁶ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 9.

religious fervor, and even some of his own officers referred to him as ‘the ayatollah.’”³⁰⁷ This article suggested that Ríos Montt’s evangelical fanaticism was a source of both criticism and critique. On the other hand, Ríos Montt won popularity among “workers, businessmen and women, who welcome his frequent appeals for sobriety and fidelity.”³⁰⁸ In addition, many middle-class Catholics were joining new fundamentalist sects with the same values to which Ríos Montt most often appealed.³⁰⁹ Could there have been any other reason why middle-class Catholics chose fundamentalism? *Newsweek* indicated one:

In response to the papal mandate that Catholics must create “an option for the poor,” significant sectors of the Guatemalan clergy have become activists. As a result, many middle-and upper-class Catholics feel deserted by their church. “The church of the poor no longer speaks for the Catholics who have the misfortune to be rich,” complains one businessman in Guatemala City.³¹⁰

Middle-and upper-class Catholics, who were financially and socially more secure, were not pleased with being religiously marginalized. This antagonized their powerful religious aspirations. But it turned out that there was an option for the rich: fundamentalism. As a result, the rich became influential supporters of Ríos Montt’s regime.

The *Newsweek* article also suggested “The president has also won widespread support

³⁰⁷ Whitaker and Nissen, *Newsweek*, December 13, 1982.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Kenneth Woodward and Beth Nissen, “A Precarious Pilgrimage,” *Newsweek*, March 7, 1983.

³¹⁰ Ibid.

among growing numbers of middle-class Indians. The bourgeois Indians believe that Ríos Montt is committed to upgrading their second-class status.”³¹¹ Actually, Ríos Montt appointed ten Mayans to the 30-member Council of State. But there was a pragmatic reason for this. As Ríos Montt confessed, “Neither the Army nor the guerrillas can win without the support of the *Indios*.”³¹² Ríos Montt’s aim was to obtain support from middle-class Mayan peoples. However, Ríos Montt’s pragmatic reasoning did not accept these people as equals. Just as Ríos Montt described God as generous, but fearful and powerful, to those who humbly submit to Him, Ríos Montt was treating the new middle-class Mayan in the same manner: “‘If you are with us, we’ll feed you, if not, we’ll kill you,’ he famously told a crowd of indigenous Maya in July 1982.”³¹³ To the Mayan peoples who resisted Ríos Montt, he was wrathful, but to those who submitted to him, he was benevolent—so long as Mayan people remained in a subservient role. Ríos Montt maintained a strict dividing line between the ruling class, the Mayan peoples, and the internal enemy that should be eradicated.

After his time in the Congress came to an end, Ríos Montt was tried for human rights violations and genocide in January, 2013. He and his former chief of intelligence were charged with responsibility for massacres in 15 Ixil Maya villages, in which 1,771 unarmed men, women, and children were killed. After a five-month trial, Judge Yasmín Barrios said she was “completely convinced” of General Ríos Montt’s guilt. She sentenced him to 80 years in prison.³¹⁴ This was an

³¹¹ Whitaker and Nissen, *Newsweek*, December 13, 1982.

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ Menchu, *Reuters*, April 1, 2018.

³¹⁴ Stephen Kinzer, “Efraín Ríos Montt, Guatemalan Dictator Convicted of Genocide, Dies at 91,” *The*

epoch-making verdict, because “[i]t marked the first time that a former head of state had been convicted of genocide within his or her own country.”³¹⁵ However, Ríos Montt never admitted his systematic commitment to perpetrating genocide against Mayan peoples. He dismissed the Catholic Church’s approved report *Guatemala: Nunca Más! (Guatemala: Never Again!, 1998)* edited by Recovery of the Historical Memory Project (REMHI), a human rights report that began under the leadership Catholic Bishop Juan Gerardi, who was later murdered. Ríos Montt declared the report a version of history “written by losers.”³¹⁶ Ríos Montt claimed “he did not know what was happening on the ground, or that if there were atrocities, they were perpetrated by guerrillas or rouge troops.”³¹⁷ He further insisted, “I did not engage in genocide [...] I never authorized, never ordered an attack against a race, an ethnicity or a religion. I never did it!”³¹⁸ His opponents refuted him, saying: “[t]he army had sophisticated communications technology, and the way the massacres were carried out showed many common elements, that could only have come from a coordinated and centrally planned strategy.”³¹⁹ Despite convincing evidence that Ríos Montt was responsible for systematic efforts of brutal mass killing, torture, and rape against Mayan peoples, the conviction was later overturned. A retrial was scheduled and was under way in the early months of 2018.

But on April 1, 2018, during his retrial, Ríos Montt died, age 91. Numerous media sources

New York Times, April 1, 2018,

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/01/obituaries/efrain-rios-montt-guatemala-dead.html>

³¹⁵ Otis, *The Washington Post*, April 1, 2018.

³¹⁶ Painter, *Independent*, April 2, 2018.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ Otis, *The Washington Post*, April 1, 2018.

³¹⁹ Painter, *Independent*, April 2, 2018.

reported his death in conjunction with the brutal side of his dictatorship. Ríos Montt was described as a “born-again butcher” and as the “Pol Pot” of Guatemala.³²⁰ As *Reuters* pointed out, “[c]ritics likened Ríos Montt to other Latin American presidents who ruled with an iron hand, like Chile’s Augusto Pinochet and Peru’s Alberto Fujimori.”³²¹ It is true that Ríos Montt was a military man who shared a hard-line anticommunist position with them. However, at the same time, Ríos Montt was “a maverick politician, who did not fit the usual models for Latin America.”³²²

Ríos Montt’s peculiar, evangelical dictatorship was symbolized by his unique rhetoric. For example, he liked to say “a true Christian carried the Bible in one hand and a rifle in the other.”³²³ Ríos Montt was a military dictator who thought of himself as a divinely ordained president. Because his actions and policies were always explained within a self-assured, evangelical context, for Ríos Montt, there was no contradiction between God’s principles and brutal violence. Ríos Montt believed only his most loyal and fellow evangelical followers and God could judge his political decisions. This shows how willingly Ríos Montt utilized violence to accomplish his own interpretation of God’s mission to build “La Nueva Guatemala.”

This attitude indicates the danger of religious commitments in politics, especially when they are applied to military projects. An analysis by *The Herald* of the reasons which led to Ríos Montt’s ouster concludes that he was blamed by many business people for the bad economy and had so upset

³²⁰ Otis, *The Washington Post*, April 1, 2018.

³²¹ Menchu, *Reuters*, April 1, 2018.

³²² Painter, *Independent*, April 2, 2018.

³²³ Kinzer, *The New York Times*, April 1, 2018.

the military hierarchy with his religious leadership that the putsch against him was “headed by his own defence [sic] minister”³²⁴ But what is most telling is that many Catholics on all sides agreed that Ríos Montt’s “fervent Protestantism” aggravated the situation.³²⁵

After Ríos Montt’s dictatorship, American evangelical involvement in Central America continued. In fact, it increased. “America’s ‘Christian Right’ has emerged as a major religious and political influence in Honduras, forming the foundation for private, humanitarian aid to the Contra rebels and their families.”³²⁶ As was reported in 1987:

Private evangelical relief organizations, including Danforth’s \$3million-a-year program and William Murray’s \$3 million Freedom’s Friends operation report they have poured more than \$10 million in private aid into Honduras in the past two years. The aid helps local churches, refugees from Nicaragua and contra soldiers.³²⁷

The effects from the connection between Reagan-era Republicans and evangelicals continued after Ronald Reagan left office. During President George W. Bush’s administration, further efforts to spread the influence of American evangelicalism in Latin America, and elsewhere, were initiated by former Reagan administration official, Michael Horowitz. His efforts helped to begin a “grass-roots movement” that has “galvanized interest in global issues among America’s growing ranks

³²⁴ “Obituary - Efraín Ríos Montt, ruthless dictator of Guatemala,” *The Herald*, April 7, 2018, http://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/16143825.Obituary___Efraín_Ríos_Montt___ruthless_dictator_of_Guatemala/

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ Michael D’Antonio, “The Christian Right Abroad,” *The Alicia Patterson Foundation*, 1987 (updated April 11, 2011), <http://aliciapatterson.org/stories/christian-right-abroad>

³²⁷ Ibid.

of evangelical Christians.”³²⁸ George W. Bush was an even more pro-evangelical president than Reagan, because under the Bush administration many foreign issues that concerned evangelicals were pursued, including The North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004, the U.S. effort to end the Sudanese Civil War, in 2005, and increasing the funding for the Trafficking Protections Act in 2006.³²⁹ In 2006, as a result of President Bush’s support, the Council on Foreign Relation’s vice president and director of its Washington program, Nancy E. Roman, predicted that this pattern of activism by evangelicals was likely to intensify. “I think in general the Southern Baptist Convention and other organized groups of evangelicals have decided that really it’s important to engage politically and certainly in the foreign policy realm,” Roman said. “By sheer dint of the numbers, I think the evangelicals are having more of a measurable impact right now” than other religious groups.³³⁰ But there is a negative side to evangelicalism’s intensifying activism, because some prominent evangelical leaders, including Reverend Franklin Graham, son of Billy Graham, stated after the 9/11 attacks that Islam was a “very evil and a very wicked religion.”³³¹ Richard Land, head of the Southern Baptist Convention’s public policy arm, remarked in 2005 that “many evangelicals too easily equate radical Islamic jihadism with Islam,” yet he was unwilling to completely denounce what Franklin Graham had publicly stated.³³²

Many evangelicals still articulate a strong antagonism towards Islam, which seems to have become the

³²⁸ Peter Waldman, “Evangelicals Give U.S. Foreign Policy An Activist Tinge,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 26, 2004, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB108552288320121114>

³²⁹ Robert McMahon, “Christian Evangelicals and U.S. Foreign Policy,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 22, 2006, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/christian-evangelicals-and-us-foreign-policy>

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

new communism of the twenty-first century. Perhaps after the end of communism, evangelicals have moved on to another flash points, to other political-theological conflicts dividing the world politically and religiously.

The connections between evangelicals and government have deepened with the election of President Donald. J. Trump. His most important evangelical supporter is Franklin Graham, who has enthusiastically supported President Trump, even after many racist comments made by the president. Franklin Graham has said of President Trump: “I can’t think of anything mean he’s said. I think he speaks what he feels.”³³³

For his unwavering support, Franklin Graham has been rewarded by President Trump. He “is among the evangelical pastors who serve as informal advisers to Mr. Trump and Vice President Mike Pence.”³³⁴ As a result of this close association, “Mr. Trump has delivered for evangelicals on every issue — from abortion, to religious freedom to vowing to abolish the Johnson Amendment that inhibits churches from endorsing politicians.”³³⁵ As Graham puts it:

In my lifetime, he has supported the Christian faith more than any president that I know [...]

That doesn’t mean he is the greatest example of the Christian faith, and neither am I, but he defends the faith. There’s a difference between defending the faith and living the faith.³³⁶

³³³ Laurie Goodstein, “Billy Graham Warned Against Embracing a President. His Son Has Gone Another Way,” *The New York Times*, February 26, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/26/us/billy-graham-franklin-graham-trump.html>

³³⁴ Ibid.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid.

Even though, Franklin Graham recognizes that President Trump is not a good example of the Christian faith, he still believes that evangelicals should support President Trump because he “defends the faith.” This distinction between “defending” the faith and “living” the faith is the same as the one utilized by evangelical Mayan peoples who supported Ríos Montt when he returned to national politics. In light of these similarities, exhibited by evangelicals separated by culture and nearly forty years, I suggest that many evangelicals in the United States today are exhibiting a similar form of political apathy that the evangelical Mayan peoples exhibited when they supported Ríos Montt.

As I have argued in this thesis, there is a strain of evangelical belief that can be found in Ríos Montt that intensified political violence in Guatemala. This was supported by American evangelicalism. Both Ríos Montt and American evangelicals did not care about the violence against Mayan peoples, because both were concerned primarily with the conversion of the Mayan peoples to evangelicalism. Ríos Montt claimed that salvation is through God, but of course this meant only a Christian concept of God. Ríos Montt argued this was the only way to defeat communist rebels in Guatemala. Communists were also regarded by President Ronald Reagan and American evangelicals as being opposed to God and God’s values. Therefore, they agreed with this characterization of communism and fully supported Ríos Montt’s reasoning and his methods. Ronald Reagan and American evangelicals applied the same reasoning that Franklin Graham is using today, the one Ríos Montt used to “defend” the Christian faith.

This strain of evangelicalism, which Ríos Montt exhibited and American evangelicals supported, is characterized by intolerance towards non-Christians. Even though the 1976 earthquake in

Guatemala inspired American evangelicals to help the Mayan peoples, American evangelicals did not try to understand the complexity of the Guatemalan Civil War, in order to better help its victims. Instead, racism and economic inequality against the Mayan peoples were ignored and the Mayan peoples themselves were held responsible for their own salvation. This meant that the long history of racism and economic inequality against Mayan peoples did not matter for American evangelicals any more than it did for Ríos Montt. Both did nothing to relieve this form of suffering, unless the Mayan peoples first converted and became evangelical—especially Pentecostal. However, one thing we must bear in mind is that the conversion to evangelicalism did not always protect Mayan peoples from political violence. Garrard-Burnett points out, “the reality of Ríos Montt’s ‘war against the Antichrist’ in fact knew few religious boundaries, as the substantial number of Protestants who fled their villages or died at the hands of the army alongside their Catholic brethren.”³³⁷ This was because particularly traditional non-Pentecostal Churches.

While *evangélicos* in general did not share the same theological motivations as Catholics, some Protestants, particularly non-Pentecostals, did join the armed movement for religious reasons. This was especially true of activists from the historic churches—that is, the older missionary-based, non Pentecostal denominations—who, like Catholic radicals, could no longer see any option for social justice outside of revolution.³³⁸

Although their number was not many, some of them even joined the guerrilla movement. So the army

³³⁷ Garrard-Burnett, *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit*, 141.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 142

targeted some Protestant Churches as potential internal enemies as well. Still, “Protestants, taken as a group, suffered far less in the counterinsurgency than Catholics.”³³⁹ The fact that so many Mayan peoples who converted were less persecuted by the government may have strengthened the desire to convert. For poor Mayan peoples, it was probably the only nonviolent method—which did not cost money, or force them to leave their homes—for coping with the violence of the Guatemalan Civil War.

The legacy of Francis Schaeffer continues to affect the connections between evangelicals and politicians. Although Schaeffer is most often remembered for his argument that secular humanism is the enemy of Christian based intellectualism, it is his identification of abortion as the key issue that would galvanize evangelical political mobilization, which has had the most lasting influence. What emerged out of the culture wars is the search for key political issues that would unite evangelicals. This also led to identifying weaknesses in their opponents. Ríos Montt is a perfect example of how religious politicians have used key issues to unite support for themselves and demonize the opposition. Ríos Montt’s political theology was an early form of the political theology that is currently present in the United States. In conclusion, I suggest Ríos Montt’s political theology was more successfully implemented than Ronald Reagan’s, because Ríos Montt was able to impose more control over the education and indoctrination of the Mayan peoples, which includes his policy of genocide. Furthermore, Ríos Montt was able to continue as a politician, even after he was deposed by his own army, and avoid prosecution while he was a member of the Guatemalan congress. And still, Ríos Montt was supported

³³⁹ Ibid.

by the very Mayan peoples that his policy of genocide targeted. All of this Ríos Montt was able to do as a dictator, then later as a politician, without ever publicly apologizing for genocide.

It is my contention that to further understand the complicit relationship between dictatorship and religion, there should be more studies comparing Ríos Montt's dictatorship with other religious dictators and politicians. I believe this would give us different perspectives on the connection between religion and politics. I also think that such comparisons will help to reveal how the relationship between religion and politics in the Americas has developed or changed since Ríos Montt's dictatorship.

Because the Gospel Outreach was so instrumental connecting Ríos Montt to American evangelical support, study of other connections between religion and politics might also identify other religious organizations that have played the same role that Gospel Outreach played in Ríos Montt's dictatorship. Perhaps further study will be make clear how religious movements themselves have changed to become more political and, unhappily, more extreme. In this thesis I have attempted to identify some of those changes through the language and politics that Ríos Montt and Ronald Reagan shared. The transformations of Gospel Outreach and the Jesus Movement in the United States are examples of politicized religion. The changes they underwent were conservative and extreme, perfectly suited for conservative and extreme politicians like Ríos Montt and Ronald Reagan. But these changes had painful consequences for the Mayan peoples of Guatemala.

Caught in the crossfire of these conflicts where the Mayan peoples of Guatemala. They have been oppressed by rulers under the name of "their God" not "our God" from the colonial era to the

present. Until this changes, religion, like politics, will be little more than a survival strategy for the Mayan peoples of Guatemala. This may seem sufficient during cruel and heartless times, but instead of improving the lives of the suffering Mayan peoples it ensures their continued oppression.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Afuso, Joseph and David Sczepanski. *He gives - he takes away: the true story of Guatemala's controversial former president Efraín Ríos Montt*. Eureka, California: Radiance Publications, 1983.

Archdiocese of Guatemala (REHMI). *Guatemala, Never Again!: Recovery of the Historical Memory Project, the Official Report of the Human Rights Office*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999.

Pew Research Center, "Historical Overview of Pentecostalism in Guatemala Origins and Growth," October 5, 2006.
<http://www.pewforum.org/2006/10/05/historical-overview-of-pentecostalism-in-guatemala/>

Reagan, Ronald. "Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida." Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, March 8, 1983.
<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/archives/speeches/1983/30883b.htm>

Reagan, Ronald. "Remarks in San Pedro Sula, Honduras, Following a Meeting With President Jose Efraín Ríos Montt of Guatemala." Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, December 4, 1982.
<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/archives/speeches/1982/120482f.htm>

Ríos Montt, Efraín. *Mensajes del presidente de la República, general José Efraín Ríos Montt*. Guatemala: Tipografía National, 1982.

SOA Watch. "What is The SOA?." Last modified March 14, 2018.
<http://www.soaw.org/about-the-soawhinsec/what-is-the-soawhinsec>

The Commission for Historical Clarification. *Guatemala: Memory of Silence, Tz'Inil Na 'Tab 'Al: Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification, Conclusions and Recommendations*. Guatemala: CEH, 1998.

Articles

Bonner, Raymond. "Guatemala Leader Reports Aid Plan." *The New York Times*, May 20, 1982.
<https://www.nytimes.com/1982/05/20/world/guatemala-leader-reports-aid-plan.html>

Bonner, Raymond. "Guatemalan Junta's Chief Says God Guides Me." *The New York Times*, June 10, 1982.
<https://www.nytimes.com/1982/06/10/world/guatemala-junta-s-chief-says-god-guides-him.html>

"Christians Beware! Donations You Give May Kill People." *Akwesasne Notes (1975-1989)*.
Rooseveltown. December 31, 1982.
<https://search-proquest-com.cny-proxy1.libr.cny.cuny.edu/docview/220293013?accountid=9967>

D'Antonio, Michael. "The Christian Right Abroad." *The Alicia Patterson Foundation*. 1987 (updated April 11, 2011). <http://aliciapatterson.org/stories/christian-right-abroad>

Eberwine, Donna. "To Ríos Montt, With Love Lift." *The Nation*, February 26, 1983.

Goodstein, Laurie. "Billy Graham Warned Against Embracing a President. His Son Has Gone Another Way." *The New York Times*, February 26, 2018.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/26/us/billy-graham-franklin-graham-trump.html>

Gunson, Phil. "Gen Efraín Ríos Montt obituary." *The Guardian*, April 2, 2018.
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/apr/02/gen-efrain-rios-montt-obituary>

Kinzer, Stephen. "Efraín Ríos Montt, Guatemalan Dictator Convicted of Genocide, Dies at 91." *The New York Times*, April 1, 2018.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/01/obituaries/efrain-rios-montt-guatemala-dead.html>

Lindsey, Robert. "Church Denies It Has Political Goals in Guatemala." *The New York Times*, August 14, 1983.
<https://www.nytimes.com/1983/08/14/world/church-denies-it-has-political-goals-in-guatemala.html>

McMahon, Robert. "Christian Evangelicals and U.S. Foreign Policy." *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 22, 2006.
<https://www.cfr.org/background/christian-evangelicals-and-us-foreign-policy>

Menchu, Sofia. "Ex-Guatemala dictator Ríos Montt, plagued by genocide charges, dies." *Reuters*, April 1, 2018.
<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-guatemala-Riosmontt-obituary/ex-guatemala-dictator-Rios-montt-plagued-by-genocide-charges-dies-idUSKCN1H81GJ>

Nissen, Beth. "A Christian Soldier." *Newsweek*, December 13, 1982.

"Obituary - Efraín Ríos Montt, ruthless dictator of Guatemala." *The Herald*, April 7, 2018.

http://www.heraldscotland.com/opinion/16143825.Obituary___Efraín_Ríos_Montt___ruthless_dictator_of_Guatemala/

Otis, John. "Efraín Ríos Montt, former Guatemalan military dictator charged with genocide, dies at 91." *The Washington Post*, April 1, 2018.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/obituaries/efrain-rios-montt-former-guatemalan-military-dictator-charged-with-genocide-dies-at-91/2018/04/01/545c9770-35d2-11e8-acd5-35eac230e514_story.html?utm_term=.d3da6ceefce2

Painter, James. "General Efraín Ríos Montt: Former Guatemalan dictator who got away with mass murder." *Independent*, April 2, 2018.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/efrain-Ríos-montt-guatemala-dictator-dead-died-age-genocide-mass-murder-a8284936.html>

Simons, Marlise. "For 500,000 Guatemalans, the war comes home." *The New York Times*, October 6, 1982.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1982/10/06/world/for-500000-guatemalans-the-war-comes-home.html>

Simons, Marlise. "LATIN AMERICA'S NEW GOSPEL." *The New York Times*, November 7, 1982.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1982/11/07/magazine/latin-america-s-new-gospel.html?pagewanted=all>

"The Dirtiest War." *The New York Times*, October 17, 1982.

<http://www.nytimes.com/1982/10/17/opinion/the-dirtiest-war.html>

Waldman, Peter. "Evangelicals Give U.S. Foreign Policy An Activist Tinge." *The Wall Street Journal*.

May 26, 2004. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB108552288320121114>

Whitaker, Mark and Beth Nissen. "GUATEMALA; Beans-and-Bullets Politics." *Newsweek*, December 13, 1982.

Wills, Santiago, "Did Reagan Finance Genocide in Guatemala?." *abc NEWS*, May 14, 2013.

https://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/News/ronald-reagan-finance-genocide-guatemala/story?id=19179627

Woodward, Kenneth and Beth Nissen. "A Precarious Pilgrimage." *Newsweek*, March 7, 1983.

Secondary Sources

Arias, Arturo. "Changing Indian Identity: Guatemala's Violent Transition to Modernity." In *Guatemalan Indians and the state 1540 to 1988*, edited by Carol A. Smith, 230-57. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.

Brightman, Edgar S. "The Lisbon Earthquake: A Study in Religious Valuation." *The American Journal of Theology* 23, no. 4 (1919): 500-518.

Diamond, Sara. *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right*. Boston: South End Press, 1989.

Eskridge, Larry. *God's Forever Family: the Jesus People Movement in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

FitzGerald, Frances. *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017.

Garrard-Burnett, Virginia. *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998.

Garrard-Burnett, Virginia. *Terror in the Land of the Holy Spirit: Guatemala Under General Efraín Ríos Montt, 1982-1983*. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2010.

Gutiérrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation (15th Anniversary Edition)*, New York: Orbis Books, 1988.

Handy, Jim. "The Corporate Community, Campesino Organizations, and Agrarian Reform: 1950-1954." In *Guatemalan Indians and the state 1540 to 1988*, edited by Carol A. Smith, 163-82. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994.

Hummel, Daniel. "Revivalist Nationalism since World War II: From "Wake up, America!" to "Make America Great Again!." *Religions* 7, no.11 (2016).

Kistler, S. Ashley. "Murder, Memory, and the Maya." *Latin American Research Review* 49, no.1 (2014): 251-260.

- Kline, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. New York: Picador, 2007.
- Melander, Veronica. *The Hour of God? People in Guatemala Confronting Political Evangelicalism and Counterinsurgency (1976-1990)*. Uppsala, Sweden: Swedish Institute of Mission Research at Uppsala University (online), 1999.
- Rose, Susan D., and Steve Brouwer. "The Export of Fundamentalist Americanism: U.S. Evangelical Education in Guatemala." *Latin American Perspectives* 17, no. 4 (1990): 42-56.
- Sanford, Victoria. *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Scheitle, Christopher P., Erica J. Dollhopf, and John D. McCarthy. "Spiritual Districts: The Origins and Dynamics of US Cities with Unusually High Concentrations of Parachurch Organizations." *Social Science History* 41, no. 3 (2017): 505–32. doi:10.1017/ssh.2017.14.
- Schirmer, Jennifer. *The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998.
- Shires, Preston. *Hippies of the Religious Right*. Lincoln, Nebraska: Baylor University Press, 2007.
- Sierra Pop, Oscar Rolando. "The Church and Social Conflicts in Guatemala." *Social Compass* 30, no. 2-3 (1983): 317-348.
- Steigenga, Tim. "Guatemala." In *Religious Freedom and Evangelization in Latin America: The Challenge of Religious Pluralism*, edited by Paul E. Sigmund, 150-74. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999.
- Stoll, David. *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?: The Politics of Evangelical Growth*. Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990.
- Stoll, David. *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Turek, Lauren Frances. "To Support a 'Brother in Christ': Evangelical Groups and U.S.-Guatemalan Relations during the Ríos Montt Regime." *Diplomatic History* 39, no.4 (2015): 689-719.
- Williams, Daniel K. *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right*. New York: Oxford

University Press, 2010.