

**Becoming Evangelical in Rural Costa Rica: A Study of Religious Conversion
and Evangelical Faith and Practice**

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Abstract

Almost daily emotional worship pours from a warehouse-sized evangelical church in the small rural community of Santa Cruz, Costa Rica. Within twenty years an evangelical presence has gone from virtually non-existent to standing alongside the Catholic Church in the area's religious landscape. Scenarios like this are going on throughout Latin America as evangelical faith has become firmly rooted in the region. In this thesis I provide another ethnographic research context to the growing body of literature focused on Pentecostalism/evangelicalism in Latin America. Like others addressing this dynamic, I explore the factors and motivations that lead people to become evangelical. I approach these questions with particular emphasis on the characteristics of evangelical faith as it is constructed and practiced during church services. Through participant observation during church services and interviews with practicing evangelicals in and around Santa Cruz, I highlight the relationship between the characteristics of an evangelical faith and the factors and motivations that lead people to seek it. To be religiously active in the manner of my informants requires deep commitment and is not a faith adopted and practiced lightly. Those who become evangelical and sustain the demanding practice are likely to seek it for spiritual solutions to difficult life situations.

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Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come into him, and will sup with him and he with me.

(Revelation 3:20 King James Version)

Chapter One: Introduction

A driving rhythm fills the room; voices grow in song, bodies are in motion and the music does not stop. Beside me a woman weeps and shakes in worship. She will do the same next service, just as she has done for years. The music finally settles into a soft accompaniment and the Pastor begins to pray with purpose and passion into the microphone. He invokes God's presence in cycles of adoration, submission and request. In this incantational style he goes on without pause for several minutes. On nights of special prayer services the microphone is passed around and people pray until their crying chokes out the words. It is 9:30 on Saturday night. The service started at 4:00 and will end around 11:00. Until this time, amplified sound will pour through the valley. This church, like other evangelical churches in Latin America, will become anonymous and ordinary after the service until the next one begins. The walls in the warehouse-sized building are bare. The only religious imagery, a painting of an open bible and landscape hangs above the stage and only a small decal above the doors marks its outward identity.

In the rural community of Santa Cruz, Pérez Zeledón, Costa Rica, with an estimated population of 500 people, a formidable evangelical presence makes itself known through almost daily worship. Within twenty years the evangelical community has grown, in a region firmly rooted in Catholicism, from virtually non-existent to a congregation at *Mision Cristiana Puertas Eternas* (Puertas Eternas) of around 100 people. Alongside this group, a significant number of evangelicals live in the area but travel to the market centre of San Isidro del General (San Isidro) to worship at one of the city's many evangelical churches. In this thesis, I focus on the motivations that led these individuals to become evangelical and the factors that influenced this

decision. To understand how an evangelical faith corresponds to the reasons people have to seek it, I explore the content of the faith and how it is constructed and practiced.

The religious landscape has not been the only locus of change specifically in Santa Cruz and Pérez Zeledón in general. The economy of Pérez Zeledón has long been centred around coffee production and its thousands of small-scale family farmers. Though coffee remains a central focus, over the last couple decades this has started to change. A dramatic drop in coffee prices in the early 1990s led people to seek alternative sources of income to become less dependent on coffee (Sick 2008). As a result, the uncertainty of the coffee market drove many to migrate in the 1990s and early 2000s and has changed the economic landscape of the region dramatically. Alongside dramatic socio-economic changes in the area, Puertas Eternas had shown up on the landscape. The interest in a potential connection between evangelical growth and socio-economic change in Pérez Zeledón was the impetus for my study. The dramatic growth of Pentecostalism/evangelicalism in Santa Cruz reflects the rapid spread of this form of Christianity throughout the globe. What started as an American revival in the first decades of the 20th century, amongst a group of predominantly marginalized individuals, has become a global force with an estimated 600 million followers (Anderson 2013: 2). The primary thrust of Pentecostal growth has been in the “global south”, specifically Africa and Latin America¹. Latin American religiosity has been monopolized by Catholicism since the Spanish and Portuguese began refashioning the region to their likeness in the 16th and 17th centuries². Only since the 1960s has the presence of Pentecostalism reached a position in Latin America’s religious landscape to bring into question Catholicism’s monopoly (Tombs 2008:312). During this time, Pentecostalism was growing amongst those most affected by dramatic changes to the social complexion of Latin America due primarily to urbanization. As a result scholarly attention on

Pentecostalism in Latin America has focused extensively on the relationship between social change, the resulting “anomie” and Pentecostal growth.

Studies have shown dramatic Pentecostal growth has subsided and may have reached its peak between the 1980s and 1990s (Cleary 2004; Gomez 1996). With the dust settling, scholars have questioned the centrality of the “anomie” thesis. Steigenga argues that the “instrumental” nature of conversion as a response to anomie should not be “reified”. He suggests conversion is both more complex than simply this notion can attest and not everyone who experiences “anomie” undergoes a conversion (2004: 79). Others, such as Stark and Smith, argue against the centrality of material deprivations, such as poverty or illness (Chesnut 2011: 169), leading to conversion. Instead they believe we need to consider the importance of “spiritual deprivations”, of “thwarted existential and moral desires” that lead to religious change (2010:2).

Pentecostalism in Latin America has drawn a significant amount of scholarly interest during the movement’s relatively recent growth and place in the religious landscape. My study adds to this body of literature in two ways. First, while most studies have focused on poor and marginal peoples in urban areas, I focus on conversion and practice among the rural middle class. Residents of Pérez Zeledón, Costa Rica, where I conducted my research, did not deal with the types of social dislocation associated with rapid urbanization that other scholars have discussed. Nor are they poor and marginal such as those commonly held to be emblematic of Pentecostalism. Santa Cruz, like the rest of the canton of Pérez Zeledón, is a relatively prosperous region (more discussed on this in Chapter Four). Second, I agree with Steigenga that too much a focus on the instrumental nature of evangelical conversion neglects the social complexity of religious decisions. Though I agree that the material conditions of daily life that influence a potential convert’s religious decisions need to be understood (many of my

participants did in fact seek out an evangelical faith as a way to confront and overcome difficult life situations), I argue that too much focus on these factors diminishes the role that religion actually plays in the process of religious change. On this point I draw from Lindhardt (2011) who argues that “the particular religious practices through which certain Pentecostal ways of relating to oneself and the social world are constituted” have been “under theorized” (2011: 223). Therefore, I take a multifaceted approach that focuses on what happens both inside and outside the church. I look at the relationship between the characteristics of evangelical faith and practice and the motivations and factors that brought people to become evangelical. I address how the elements of being religiously active as an evangelical allow believers to understand and overcome the challenges of daily life.

Organization of the Thesis

The thesis begins with a review of the relevant literature. Chapter Two presents the origins and basic characteristics of Pentecostalism, then an outline of the history of Protestantism in Latin America. I discuss evangelical faith and practice drawing from scholars who use a phenomenological framework largely inspired by Csordas (1993). I close the chapter by introducing Gooren’s (2010) notion of the *conversion career* which sees religious conversion as a multi-layered process, defined and influenced by numerous interrelated factors.

Chapter Three presents the methodology of my study. I discuss how I carried out my research and why this method was chosen to best answer my research questions. I explain how I chose my sample and its composition..

Chapter Four presents a description of the various contexts in which my research was situated. I move from the general to the particular to address the geographical, social and

religious contexts of my research. I present the history of evangelicalism in Santa Cruz, and the basic characteristics of how church services at Puertas Eternas generally unfold and compare this to other evangelical churches I visited.

Chapter Five presents an analysis of the data I gathered, focusing on the factors and motivations that led my participants to seek out evangelicalism. I present this material using the factors that Gooren suggests are crucial to understand how an individual moves through the *conversion career*. Gooren uses these factors to explain all levels of the *conversion career* such as moving from basic entrance to full-fledged membership, to eventual *disaffiliation*. For my purposes I use only those factors which illustrate how someone moves from the *preaffiliation* (not yet evangelical) to *affiliation* (becoming an evangelical believer). I focus on several important elements that influence a decision to seek evangelicalism, such as the role of family networks, a relationship to Catholicism and how individuals are exposed to evangelical ideas. From these factors, I move on to discuss the primary motivations my participants shared which led them to become evangelical.

Chapter Six goes in depth into the evangelical faith and practices of my informants. I explore how evangelicalism came to engage their attention and pull them towards it. Next, I explore how the faith confirms the individual's desire to follow the evangelical path. I close with a discussion on how evangelical faith is constructed and practiced and how this works to answer the needs people had which brought them to seek it.

In the conclusion, I address the relationship between the data presented in Chapters Five and Six. I argue that the motivations and factors that lead one to evangelicalism are only relevant when considered alongside how an evangelical faith corresponds to them. In this discussion, I

draw from Turner's (1995) concepts of *liminality* and *communitas* to frame how I see an evangelical faith as a type of perpetual liminality. I argue this concept is an effective way to understand what sustains an evangelical faith, and how this relates to why it was initially sought after.

Terminology

The common term Protestants of all denominations in Latin America use to describe themselves is "*evangélicos*" (Steigenga and Cleary, 2007: 6). My participants were no different and would interchange "*evangélico/a*" and "*Cristiano/a*". However most of the time they did not like to use terms such as these and preferred to call themselves "children of God" or "walking the Path of God". In this paper I use the common translation of *evangélicos* and refer to my participants as "evangelicals". I learned early on that the word religion, for evangelicals, is taboo and equated directly with the Catholic tradition. I was told on several occasions by my informants that evangelicals are misunderstood, as people think they practice a religion. As they would say: "It is not a religion but a relationship with God". I respect their position but it would be difficult to write this thesis without giving a name to what they practice. One woman did say they practice "*Evangelismo*", and this term is used by Gomez in his study (1996). On several occasions people used the word "*Pentecostalismo*" to describe their practice. I use the most appropriate English translations of these words, "evangelicalism"³ and "Pentecostalism", interchangeably to describe what my informants practiced.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In the global Christian landscape, Pentecostalism is still very young but has already made a significant impact on the global religious landscape. As a result, Pentecostalism has been a fertile subject of academic inquiry. The literature on Pentecostalism is as extensive and global as the movement itself. In this chapter, I present a survey of the literature which contextualizes my own research focus. I begin with a brief description of Pentecostalism, the history of Protestantism in Latin America and the eventual growth of Pentecostalism in the region. I highlight those scholars that address the connection between Pentecostalism and the dramatic historical changes that occurred throughout Latin America in the last century. What follows is a discussion on specific types of anomie, and how Pentecostalism has responded to those situations. Next, I shift focus and address more recent studies that focus on the faith as it is practiced. I conclude by presenting a model that connects the social and material factors with religious experience to create a more comprehensive picture of the evangelical believer.

Origin and Basics of Pentecostalism

Cartledge argues that giving Pentecostalism a specific origin is problematic. He does suggest, as others have, that the most important historical moment was the Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles, California, in 1906 (2012: 589). This movement had its roots in the Wesleyan Holiness movement that “stressed a post-conversion and post-sanctification experience called baptism in the Spirit, which was signaled or evidenced by speaking with other tongues” (*ibid.*).

The leader of the Azusa Street revival was William Seymour, who had been influenced by Charles Parham at his Holiness school seminary in Topeka, Kansas (Cox 1995: 49-50). Seymour,

an African American, was not allowed to participate in classes but Parham let him listen from outside through an open window. Seymour, inspired by this experience, brought these teachings to Los Angeles. Yet When Parham visited Seymour's congregation in Los Angeles he condemned the scene (Brahinsky 2012: 220). Though his motives are not entirely clear, Cox argues it was most likely a mix of what he saw as the "emotional excess" and "unseemly mixing of the races" (Cox 1995: 61). Seymour's congregation was a racial mix. Over time and due to growing criticism from other "white" preachers, many of Seymour's white congregation left to join these preachers, where Cox suggests they "would not have to be led by blacks[Seymour]" (62). These new "white congregations" later joined with other Pentecostal groups and formed the "Assemblies of God" which, though not entirely motivated by race, did first grow especially strong in areas of the United States that promoted racial segregation (*ibid.*). Today the Assemblies of God is the largest Pentecostal organization in the world.

Much like the movement's origins, Anderson admits it is difficult to define the character of Pentecostalism (2013:5). Yet he argues there are at least two salient features that link all varieties of Pentecostalism together: "an ecstatic *experience of the Spirit* and a tangible *practice of spiritual gifts*" (2013: 8 [emphasis Anderson's]). Along similar lines, Miller argues the central feature of Pentecostalism is religious experience and not "formal liturgy, creedal statements, or abstract theology" (2013: 10).

The word Pentecostalism comes from the biblical story of the day of Pentecost described in Acts, Chapter 2, where the Holy Spirit "descended" upon the Apostles and their followers. "They were all filled with the Holy Ghost [Spirit], and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4 King James Version⁴). Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians speaks at length regarding the "gifts the Holy Spirit" which hold a central place in

the Pentecostal belief system. These “gifts” are: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working of miracles, prophecy, discerning of spirits, diverse kinds of tongues, and interpretation of tongues (1st Corinthians 12:8-10). Paul does not discount the other gifts but places central importance on prophecy (1st Corinthians 14:2-4).

Along with the above mentioned “gifts”, the Bible plays an integral part in Pentecostal spirituality. It articulates experiences in church and its unquestioned authority guides the proper course of daily life. Anderson argues the Bible has been central to Pentecostalism since its origins. It is held to be “fully authoritative and taken literally...[and that]...[a]ll Pentecostal teaching is based directly or indirectly on biblical texts, and these are everywhere accepted in a precritical sense” (2013: 122).

Protestant Entrance and Growth in Latin America

Scholars have outlined three phases of Protestant growth in Latin America (Nelson 1984; Vasquez & Peterson 2008). The first phase began with Protestantism’s entrance into the region in the first decades of the 19th century. Its introduction came as nations gained independence from the Spanish crown. According to Koschorke, Ludwig & Delgado, these nations began to focus on “political liberalization, secularization and economic liberalization...[which led to] the ending of the colonial state church” (2007: 361). Due to these conditions and shift of authority “the spread of Protestantism became possible” (*ibid.*).

In the mid-19th century, Latin American countries felt immigration was an essential measure for “progress”. However, in most Latin American countries, non-Catholic worship was prohibited, which discouraged immigration. In 1852, the “progressive” Costa Rican leader Juan Rafael Mora Porras understood this problem and legalized free religious practice. Nelson quotes

Mora writing about the importance of immigrants in reshaping his country and the need to accommodate them.

Our primary need is the immigration of foreigners...without them we shall vegetate for a century in status quo...But the foreigner, before coming to our shores has many fears.... So then the first conditions for immigration are: freedom to work, freedom of industry, civil liberty, *freedom of worship*...Let us assure the foreigner the observance of his beliefs in the freedom of worship, the freedom of his heart to choose a wife. (Nelson 1984: 12-13[emphasis Nelson's])

During the 19th century Protestantism remained a marginal religion in Latin America (Martin 1990:50). Protestants were almost entirely immigrants from countries of northwest Europe and North America. In the early 20th century this changed as missionary initiatives to convert the local population picked up steam, as shown in the goal of the World Mission Congress in 1910 to promote “the evangelization of the world in this generation” (slogan cited in Peterson & Vasquez 2008:160). At this second phase of Protestant growth, missionary activities were primarily organized by Presbyterians and Baptists out of North America (Martin 1990:50).

Early literature argued that evangelical growth in Latin America resulted from mostly American missionaries who “externally imposed [Protestantism] on converts” (Steigenga 2001: 25). This interpretation is not without evidence as links between “missionary organizations, right-wing evangelicals in the United States, and the U.S. government” existed in an effort to “demobilize” those who may have adopted liberation theology (*ibid.*).⁵ American involvement was crucial in the early stages of mass evangelical growth in Latin America. However the foreign influence on Pentecostalism has become marginal with the strong presence of local independent church bodies (*ibid.*).

By the 1930s, the Protestant complexion had changed and the majority of believers were now native Latin Americans. This began the third phase characterized by local leaders of this milieu founding their own churches (Peterson & Vasquez 2008: 163). What began in the 1930s hit “hurricane force” (Martin 1990: 49) by the late 1960s. The Protestant population went from five million by the end of the 1930s to forty million by the 1960s (Martin 1990: 50). Both the number of Protestant believers and the type of Protestantism changed during that period. Traditional denominations brought by the immigrant populations and grown by early missionaries weakened as organically grown Pentecostal-style forms of Protestantism took off. For example, in Central America in 1936 Pentecostals made up just 2.3 percent of all Protestants; by the 1960s they were a third and by the 1980s they were over half the Protestant population (1990: 52). Peterson and Vasquez explain:

In many cases, these indigenous churches introduced local cultural dynamics that gave rise to national or Latin American expressions of Pentecostalism at odds with the doctrines, practices, and forms of organization instituted by foreign missionaries. (2008: 163)

With the Pentecostal tidal wave flush in the late 1960s, academic interest followed.

The Material Conditions of Evangelical Growth

Much has changed since the late 1960s in Latin America and much has stayed the same. The region has seen its share of civil wars, dictatorships, military coups, growth, decline, stability and struggle. Pentecostalism continues to grow, though at a less dramatic rate (Cleary 2004; Bowen 1996; Gomez 1996). Some scholars have preferred to frame the changing religious landscape of Latin America as a marketplace (Chesnut 2011, 2003; Gill 1998). Within this model Steigenga and Cleary see the “religious market” in terms of a “supply-side” and a “demand-side” of religious change (2007:14). The supply-side references the “historical factors

driving people to make new religious choices” (*ibid.*), whereas the demand-side refers to those processes of “modernization, urbanization and social change [that have acted as]...precipitating factors for individual and group religious change” (*ibid.*). In other words, changing conditions in Latin America have made alternative religious options available, while other factors have created the desire to seek these alternatives. Steigenga and Cleary acknowledge the criticisms of the religious marketplace analogy—that it reduces the intricacies and deeply personal nuances associated with religious change to simple “economic decision making” (2007: 15). Yet it remains, at least, a useful way to approach the intersection between the religious landscape and its social, historical and economic context.

Supply-Side explanations: the role of the Catholic Church. Central to the supply-side argument is the role of the Catholic Church that for centuries had monopolized the spirituality of Latin America. Scholars suggest several key elements that weakened Catholic authority and allowed Protestant Christianity to grow. Some highlight the effect of a sparse and mostly foreign clergy (Garrard-Burnett 2009; Martin 1990; Steigenga & Cleary 2007). Martin believed the disconnection between a “priesthood drafted from elsewhere” and the local community was detrimental to Catholicism’s strength in the region (1990: 58). This is important considering the majority of evangelical pastors are of the local community and can become pastors simply through divine inspiration and a gift with words.

Some show Catholicism’s own attempts at reform have influenced Protestant growth. For example, when the Second Vatican Council proclaimed Protestants not “heretics” but “separated brethren” it “inadvertently provided a means by which Catholics could expose themselves to other faiths without fear of losing their place in the kingdom of heaven” (Garrard-Burnett 2009: 196). Through this exposure, Stoll suggests, “[l]oyal Catholics who had never felt free to

associate with evangelicals were now visiting their services and finding out what they believed; some became converts” (1990: 31).

In another case, Catholic liberation theology played a role. The movement expressed a “mixture of popular theology with a political message of empowerment and social justice” (Patterson 2005: 16). However its negative consequences helped Protestantism grow. First it weakened church cohesion; the movement denounced Catholic authority and hierarchy and emphasized lay participation. This led to a separation between those in favor of liberation theology and traditionalists (Stoll 1990: 27-28). Second, the empowerment Liberation Theology proposed was not desired by everyone. Rather than material empowerment, like literacy, many still sought spiritual empowerment, which liberation theology, they felt, did not provide (Patterson 2005: 17). Lastly, when the lay person with the ability to preach liberation theology “bumped up against the low ceiling imposed by a priest insisting on his prerogatives, it was not unusual for the layman to defect to an evangelical group more appreciative of his abilities” (Stoll 1990: 36).

In general the Catholic Church became a type of “lazy-monopolist” (Steigenga and Cleary 2007: 15) which led disillusioned customers to try alternative products. As Patterson argues:

The Catholic Church rested on its laurels as the “sole provider” of religion in a marketplace and thereby became complacent. Into this sluggish religious environment, Protestant churches have provided an alternative that is spiritually meaningful, culturally relevant, and personally fulfilling. (2005: 24)

Latin America remains markedly Catholic, yet had it positioned itself differently during the same period that Pentecostalism grew dramatically, perhaps the latter’s presence would remain

marginal. Pentecostalism clearly found ways to engage people enough to pry them away from a tradition cultivated for generations. Catholicism played no small role itself in losing a significant part of its affiliates, while Pentecostalism has offered converts an engaging and locally sensitive religious option which many felt Catholicism no longer provided.

Demand-side explanations: direction in a chaotic world. Pentecostalism entered Latin America because of dramatic changes to the continent and continues to operate in a changing world. In this vein the demand side of religious change asks the questions: What brought people to become evangelical and what happened in the region that caused the breakdown of traditional forms of meaning? Understanding the connection between the faith and social change has been at the core of its academic study and continues to be fertile ground for debate. Scholars argue that conditions of modernization such as urbanization have caused dramatic change and led to the breakdown of traditionally available systems of meaning. Therefore individuals have sought alternative sources of meaning and hope to deal with the rapidly changing world around them: a position that evangelical Christianity has been available to fill.

Two foundational studies that approached the movement during its early dramatic growth in the 1960s were the work of Lalive D'Epinay (1969) and Willems (1967). Lalive D'Epinay, studying in Chile, and Willems, studying in Brazil and Chile, looked at how Pentecostalism effectively responded to the anomie induced by dramatic social changes. For Lalive D'Epinay, the most influential change that broke down traditional structures of meaning was urbanization. He writes:

The history of twentieth-century Chile is that of a *society in transition*...The population grows, and the rural areas, where agricultural techniques, lacking radical reform, are patently incapable of increasing productivity, expel the mouths it cannot feed toward the city...In this long process of chaotic and

painful transition there arises the marginal man, the man with no status, the man who cannot participate culturally, economically, or politically in the life or the institutions of the nation.

(Peterson & Vasquez 2008: 180-81[Lalive D'Epinay 1969])

It is these marginal people, Lalive D'Epinay argues, who are most susceptible to Pentecostal ideas because "Pentecostalism preaches a God who saves or in concrete terms, 'heals'" (*ibid.*). According to Cox, Lalive D'Epinay argues that this switch to Pentecostalism was not any new system but a continuation of traditional rural structures where "the old folk beliefs in miracles and supernatural intervention were simply being perpetuated under new auspices" (1995: 174). Evangelical pastors were not a new type of leader but carried on the tradition of the rural landowner. Pastors remained "on the right side of power" and offered not amelioration but insulation in "sanctuaries for the frightened masses, shelters designed to protect them from the assaults of modernity" (*ibid.*). Lalive D'Epinay believed the storm would pass and eventually the wave of Pentecostal conversion would lose strength and wash out.

Like Lalive D'Epinay, Willems speaks about the anomie caused by the break-down of traditional structures due to mass urbanization. However Willems takes his argument further and shows how Pentecostalism not only gives sanctuary but also a means towards upward social mobility. With this upward mobility, Willems (2008[1967]) argues, believers become progenitors of social change and not just passive victims to it. In this regard, Willems resurrects Weber's protestant ethic and argues:

[t]he practice of the Protestant virtues is conveniently rewarded by an emerging industrial civilization that promises a higher level of living to the thrifty, sober, industrious, and well educated. It makes sense to renounce expensive "vices" in order to afford better housing, better clothes... The economic significance of Protestant asceticism lies in the fact that it frees part of one's income for the acquisition of things that symbolize a higher level of living (2008:189[1967]).

The approaches of these two scholars remain relevant as others continue to tackle the dynamics between social change and evangelical growth.

A Religious Response to Daily Struggles

Scholars continue to frame evangelical growth against a background of anomie and focus on the conditions of daily life that create it. Here I examine the literature related to how Pentecostalism has responded to three interrelated conditions: poverty, substance abuse and domestic strife.

Some scholars still see evangelicalism as a faith primarily for the poor. Writing in 2004, Robbins reiterates Martin's 1990 definition of Pentecostals as "rural migrants to cities, people at the lower end of the social class scale, or rural stay-at-homes displaced from the center of their own worlds by social change" (2004: 123 [Martin 1990: 190–91]). This definition has not been without criticism. Smilde suggests this may be true but is misleading simply for the fact that most Latin Americans fit within this category (2007: 30). Whether or not the majority of converts are at the lowest rungs of the social ladder, scholars continue to focus on how an evangelical faith helps those in poverty to transcend or, at least, deal with difficult life circumstances.

In his 1987 study of Mayan Pentecostals in rural Guatemala, Annis looked at how a shift of worldview and the consequent shift in daily practices allowed converts to improve their lives. Though Annis cautions that conversions are too personal and complex to round down to an economic interest, he believes material factors are important, reaffirming the link between Weber's protestant work ethic and prosperity (1987: 85). He argues that Pentecostals can

improve their daily socio-economic situation by reimagining and changing their relationship to the traditional community.

Annis argues that being Protestant is “cheaper” than being Catholic. By becoming Protestant, his informants no longer have to pay the Catholic “cultural tax” (1987: 90). This cultural tax is the necessary “substantial investment of resources” in order for active involvement in “Catholic ceremonial life” (90) which include a myriad of monthly and annual Catholic festivals. Annis cautiously estimates this expense to be roughly a quarter of an average family’s income. He does not believe this is an entirely “bad investment” (97), as participation in these festivals strengthens “communalism” through the “subsumption of self-identity within community identity” (98). Yet from a more material Protestant perspective this cultural tax is entirely a poor investment, Annis argues, because this money could be spent to buy a decent plot of farm land (*ibid.*). This “change of priorities”, Annis suggests, articulates the way Protestants emphasize “personal over community wealth” (98). What becomes important is for the family to “advance” financially even if it fractures a relationship to the wider (traditional) community. This trade-off is justified because Protestants come to see these *fiestas* as sinful and promoting “vice” (98). On the one hand, families are able to save their money and potentially invest in something that will financially alleviate poverty, instead of spiritually or emotionally coping with it. On the other hand, it also liberates individuals (most likely men) from the bodily cost of these *fiestas* in terms of the vices they promote.

“Ritual intoxication” or at least the acceptance or even encouragement of alcohol consumption in Latin American Catholicism is well known. Research from contexts throughout the region has illustrated the connection between alcoholism and evangelical conversion. For example, Eber (2000) found that the majority of Mayan converts in an area of southeast Mexico

have been women who convert as a reaction to the alcoholism of their husbands ([Eber 2000] Sanabria 2007: 197).

Others have shown how substance abuse problems motivate a conversion and subsequently how Pentecostalism allows people to overcome these problems. For example, Smilde explores how people use Pentecostalism to improve difficult life situations in the poor neighborhoods of Caracas. One of these problems is substance abuse. Smilde argues that by becoming evangelical people construct a new relationship to their actions and this understanding, what he calls “imaginative rationality”, allows people to change their lives (2007: 52). For example, people come to see their substance abuse problems in “supernatural terms”—as the work of the devil—where God “takes control of the person and keeps dangerous influences at bay” (62). These individuals learn to see their past experiences as the “devil’s work” and are therefore able to transcend them with divinely inspired strength and guidance.

A third area where an evangelical works to confront difficult life situations is in domestic situations around marital and familial relationships. For example, Brusco explores the impacts of evangelical conversion on domestic situations in Colombia. She found that evangelical faith “reforms gender roles” and works as an “antidote to machismo, the emphatic masculinity so widespread in Latin America” (1993: 144.). Brusco shows that faith proposes a dramatically different mindset than the traditional *machismo* mentality. Evangelicalism “condemns aggression, violence, pride, and self-indulgence while providing positive reinforcement for peace seeking, humility, and self-restraint” (1993: 148). As a result gender roles in the household are “redefined”. The husband may still be the head of the household but his “aspirations have changed to coincide more closely with those of his wife” (*ibid.*). The commonly cited process for these familial shifts is that a woman will convert (women throughout Latin America make up the

majority of evangelical believers (*ibid.*) most likely in reaction to her husband's substance abuse and resulting domestic struggles (Miller 2013: 17). Then over time she will encourage and bring her husband to convert, and as he does, drastically changes his daily practices and this creates a stronger more egalitarian and open household. When men convert, Martin suggests, they "learn to be husbands...to show affection, to be trustworthy, and to exercise family responsibility" (2002: 100).

Barriers to Evangelical Conversion

With such focus on the dramatic growth of Pentecostalism in Latin America, little research has been done with those who leave the church or do not convert (Gooren 2010: 124; Gross 2012: 344-345). Of those who have focused on disaffiliation, Bowen found that by 1996 43% of those raised Protestant in Mexico left the church as adults (Gross 2012: 357). Cleary (2004), who surveyed research on evangelical disaffiliation, showed that similar rates of "apostasy" exist in Guatemala, Chile and Costa Rica. He argues that though evangelical Protestantism is the fastest growing religious movement, it may also have the most desertion (Cleary 2004: 52-53).

Gomez⁶ (1996) explores evangelical disaffiliation and constructs an image of the Protestant religious landscape of Costa Rica in 1994. Gomez argues that Costa Rican Protestantism hit its peak in the 1980's and that by 1991, according to a national census, more people had been Protestant, 12.1%, than those currently affiliated, 10.6% (1996: 10).

According to the data compiled by Gomez, the primary reason people left the evangelical church was because of their "own personal conduct" and inability to live up to the high moral standards the faith requests of its believers (58). Gooren echoes this point and argues that

“salvation sometimes proves less secure than people had originally hoped, the high levels of commitment and high standards of conduct are difficult to maintain” (2010: 129).

Others abandoned the faith due to pressure from non-evangelical family or friends. Gross, in his work with indigenous Pentecostals in Oaxaca, Mexico, highlights this dynamic which he calls the “social cost” of conversion. For Gross conversion moves in two directions: in one direction the new convert “radically changes” his or her relationship to “closest kin” and works to “modify their liaisons with their previous reference groups”, in the other, the traditional “reference group” works “to push ‘religious dissenters’... into the political and social margins of the village population” (2012: 345). Along similar lines, Smilde argues that most people who live with non-evangelical family do not convert, and if they do it is seen as “an embarrassment, a rebuke, or simply a loss” (160). Because of this social cost, both Smilde and Gross show that those who are most likely to convert and “stay converted” are those without these networks or who have weak family associations. For those who have moved away from their family of origin or if family relationships are weak or ruptured, repercussions of a conversion are negligible (Smilde 2007: 165). For Smilde, not only can family networks discourage a conversion, but they may also prevent it as well. He argues, “[m]embers of the family of origin provide social and cultural support in times of need and exercise a conservative influence, leading away from cultural innovation” in the form of conversion (2007: 158).

Gomez addresses the problems evangelical churches face to keep members. Through his polling of evangelical pastors, Gomez finds that many churches lack strategies to help new members in their “spiritual growth” (115). The pastors believe their inability to reach out to these people is the biggest reason people leave the church. Therefore the majority of pastors suggest the need to promote greater community in church between the leadership and the congregation

and between members. For new converts, it is essential to have this network of support to engage them with the faith and to continue their spiritual journey. Gomez writes:

The [church] members recognize that the communion and personal experience with God are the origin of their spiritual foundation. The data also confirms the importance of a healthy congregational life that includes the personal encouragement and help on the part of other members, leaders or family members. For a high percentage of evangelicals, the atmosphere of love in which they feel accepted is of the utmost importance. (1996: 124[translation mine])

An evangelical faith can respond to difficult situations and provide a spirituality that re-orientates a person's relationships and lifestyle. Yet there are factors both inside and outside the church that influence religious change. Smilde and Gross describe the role of family to either impede or criticize a conversion. Yet this may become less a factor if a congregation can compensate for the sense of support and belonging a person's family of origin previously provided.

Because of Pentecostalism's noted ability to alleviate difficult life situations, scholars have focused on material conditions as the primary motivations for conversion. Recently, however, this focus has been criticized as it neglects the more spiritual aspects of the faith. These scholars instead argue against the notion that "religious effects cannot have religious causes but must always be the result of underlying material concerns" (Stark and Smith 2010: 9). Stark and Smith argue that "people will pursue or initiate supernatural solutions to their thwarted existential and moral desires" (Stark and Smith 2010: 12). They base this argument on the fact that more than just the poor and marginal are Protestant. For example, Stark and Smith address survey data from 18 Latin American countries on Protestant affiliation, gathered by a Gallup World Poll in 2007-2008. They show there to be an even distribution of Protestants in these

countries across various socio-economic groups which vary by income range (poorest to richest), education (levels of education), gender, age, location (rural/urban) and health.

Constructing Evangelical Faith and Practice

In this section, I address how evangelical faith and practice define and give rise to the type of life changes I spoke about in the previous section. First will be a discussion of evangelical ritual, what it is and what it does for the believer. Second I look at the role that evangelical doctrine plays in creating these emotionally charged environments.

A common source of inspiration in the study of religion, especially for those studying ritual, has been the work of Victor Turner, and his notions of liminality and *communitas*. For Turner, rites of passage exemplify these notions; for example, the recognized time when an individual transitions from youth to adulthood. He draws primarily from people who have ritualized the natural process of aging. The individual is first brought out of childhood and onto a “liminal” threshold of “ambiguous and indeterminate” (Turner 2008: 327) identity, then guided out and into a new state of being. The ritual is shared by “equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders” (2008: 328). A series of relationships between the participants, those guiding the ritual, and all others who have experienced the same process, create the *communitas*. In its creation *communitas* then reflects back to reinforce its constituent relationships. When this “dialectic” reaches its affective potential it creates a perpetual cycle. Turner writes: “Maximization of *communitas* provokes maximization of structure which in turn produces revolutionary striving for renewed *communitas*” (2008: 328).

Though ritual has often been a focus of anthropological investigation, only recently has evangelical ritual become a common object of study. Robbins (2004) argues the absence of studies on evangelical ritual life to be the “greatest lacuna in the work done [on Pentecostalism] thus far” (2004:126). Lindhardt (2011) suggests several reasons why this may be the case. Evangelicals themselves do not use the term ritual to describe how they practice their faith, instead they see ritual as the “prescribed, formal, and spiritually empty liturgy of mainline churches” (2011: 2).⁷ This idea of ritual contrasts with the “spontaneous, informal, and experiential forms of worship” in Pentecostalism (*ibid.*). Not only does Pentecostal ritual defy “classical” notions of ritual, the study of Pentecostal ritual is also elusive because the boundaries between where and when rituals begin and end are not always clear. Evangelical life itself is ritualized and there is no clear differentiation between “ritual and everyday spheres of activity” (2011:3).

Recently anthropologists have approached evangelical ritual from a phenomenological framework that places bodily experience as the central focus. What is essential for this approach, argues Csordas, whose work has been foundational in the study Pentecostal spiritual practice⁸, is to see the body as the “existential ground of culture” (1993: 135). Csordas proposes a focus on bodily experience because “embodied experience is the starting point of analyzing human participation in a cultural world” (*ibid.*). In terms of the importance of the body in Pentecostal ritual, Mossière argues that “ritual performance operates essentially through the body that transforms individual perception into a commonly shared symbolic system...[I]t displays therefore a way of embodying faith and religious belief” (2012: 55).

What makes a phenomenological approach useful, argue Knibbe and Versteeg, is that it takes individual experiences “as experiences of reality that arise out of the daily life and practical

concerns of people, without reducing them to socio-economic conditions or principles external to the situation itself” (2008: 49). We can see the importance of bodily experience in Pentecostal spirituality returning to Anderson’s definition of it as “an ecstatic *experience of the Spirit* and a tangible *practice of spiritual gifts*” (2013: 8 [emphasis Anderson’s]).

With the centrality of embodied experience in mind, these scholars focus on how the spontaneous and highly emotional experience comes into being, how it is articulated and how it impacts the individual who participates. Robbins argues that the “promotion of ritual to the center of social life” is the driving force that allows Pentecostalism to “travel so well and to build institutions so effectively even in socially harsh environments” (2011: 50). He suggests three interconnections that make Pentecostal ritual life so powerful. The first is that God “cares and intervenes in the mundane lives of his faithful” and this close and personal position comes forth in a spiritually pervasive world without a sacred/profane dichotomy (56). Secondly, anyone can “initiate” or “participate” in rituals because the “clergy has no monopoly on ritual” (*ibid.*). The Spirit can descend on anyone at any time, and through this encounter rituals can take place. Finally, the emotional energy produced during these rituals is highly desirable and therefore people want to keep doing them. In this final example, Robbins draws on Collins’ notion of an “interaction ritual chain” and argues that people are essentially “seekers of such emotional energy...and tend to invest in those situations and institutions that most regularly provide it” (57).

Robbins illustrates how these ritual spaces become so potent. First is the belief in a specific type of God, one that “cares” and, most importantly, “intervenes”. Second, the space is unmediated and open to anyone. These form the conditions most suitable for the production of emotional energy. He argues that this emotional energy comes about through the common goal

of the participants and the shared spontaneous yet synchronized movements and worship that take place (58).

By arguing for the “mutual focus” and shared movements of practitioners in creating emotional energy, Robbins seems to diminish the role of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal worship, which contradicts how the believers themselves imagine their experience. For a Pentecostal, the emotional energy does not invite the Holy Spirit; the energy is the Holy Spirit. This is not to devalue the role of synchronized and shared communal participation, but, *according to believers*, none of that happens or is meaningful without the guiding power of the Holy Spirit. For example, Chesnut argues that believers feel the real power in worship—that which allows them to transcend their bodily lives—is the Holy Spirit. He writes: “Filled with the power of the Holy Spirit...believers can experience the sensation of being transported from their social place (ekstasis) to an extraordinary space of supernatural rapture” (2013: 71).

Two scholars address how it is that believers “know” or “feel” God (Holy Spirit) to be present and active in their faith practices. Both Brahinsky (2012) and Luhrmann (2010) implicitly follow Csordas and take the body as the “methodological starting point” (1993: 136) of their investigations into Pentecostal worship. Both are interested in how believers experience contact with the divine and how this legitimates God’s existence. Brahinsky argues that the body is the site where legitimation of the “supernatural” takes place (2012: 228). This embodied experience of the divine comes into being as a process of cultivation, where “intensive study into bodies, texts, practices, and their interrelationships...effectively invite experience of what they [Pentecostals] call the ‘Holy Spirit’” (216-7). The intensive study of evangelical doctrine and cultivation of worship techniques creates a “sensorium” in which the believer understands the bodily experience of the divine. As the individual uses the sensorium to feel God’s presence, his

existence and their method of spiritual practice are affirmed (217). For example, Brahinsky speaks with informants who have had multiple sensory experiences of the Spirit, such as speaking in tongues or hearing those speaking in tongues, witnessing healing, or feeling the Spirit within them. Through these conversations he finds that “each sensory element adds a layer of potency—the more feelings, the more trustworthy the affirmation of spirit” (222). What is important here is that these experiences, though spontaneous, require “group effort and careful choreography” (224). For example, Brahinsky mentions that groups would come together and form a circle, speaking in tongues around a single individual in order to incite that person to speak in tongues as well.

Whereas Brahinsky speaks about evangelical cultivation of sensorial divine experience through communal effort and worship, Luhrmann focuses on how this same divine embodiment comes about inwardly through mental exercise. Luhrmann et al. (2010) define the embodied experience of the divine as “absorption” and question why it can be elusive to some, while others have a “proclivity” towards it. They find that it may be easier and more fluid for some but can be incited through repetitive training. “[There] is a capacity for absorption and that those who have a talent for it and who train to develop it are more likely to have powerful sensory experiences of the presence of God” (66). They focus on an American evangelical church that emphasizes prayer as the primary medium to have a “direct experience of God”. Believers learn they will hear God “speak back” while praying (69). They suggest that not everyone hears God or is absorbed in that direct experience of the divine. However, in order for this communication to happen in the first place, there needs to be a belief that God can talk back. With this notion believers reach to a God that can reach back and, when this happens in absorption through prayer, this practice becomes meaningful and sought after.

Luhrmann illustrates that a communal element is not necessary for divine encounters as Robbins and Brahinsky argue because this can happen through inward and personal prayer. In another research context, Rabelo, Mota and Almeida (2009) found communal participation can hinder communion with God. For example the public display of “letting oneself be used by the Spirit is not an easy disposition to be achieved; shame often prevents the full realization of this experience” (2009: 8). The Brazilian Pentecostal women in their study spoke about “the embarrassment of being used by the Holy Spirit” (*ibid.*). The authors suggest this shame dissolves in the attempt at “liberation from the world” which believers seek during worship (*ibid.*). Like Luhrmann, Rabelo et al. speak about the importance of prayer, but add an important bodily element as well. Through “the habitual, routine exercise of a set of postures and gestures” believers are brought into a totalizing experience with the Holy Spirit (7). Like Brahinsky, these authors suggest that a divine encounter comes about through a process of bodily cultivation. They write: “In order to have access to the Holy Spirit, to be filled with divine power during services, *crentes* [believers] must subject their bodies to constant prayer, temporarily empty their minds of daily concerns” (8).

Rabelo et al. tie these faith practices to the socio-economic context that situate the believer’s position. For example, “class, gender, and ethnicity are particularly significant, insofar as they delimit the specific socio-cultural and existential horizons within which individuals understand and experience their world” (4-5). Their informants are poor and marginal women, and their experience in church being filled by the Holy Spirit offers them a way to deal with and transcend their difficult life circumstances. Therefore, the (worldly) socio-economic factors and the (spiritual) Pentecostal worship need to be addressed together as two parts of the same process.

Conversion as a Process

Gooren brings the spiritual and material aspects of religious experience together as related aspects within the process of a religious change (2010). He gives us a “heuristic” model to understand the situations, social factors, interactions and experiences of the individual’s process of conversion. Looking at religious change as a process helps to show which factors are most important at each particular stage of the “conversion career” (2010: 3). For Gooren this group of factors play various roles at different times in one’s conversion career.

According to Gooren, the conversion career is a non-chronological process (50) where individuals can move through the stages in different ways. These stages are 1) *Preaffiliation* – “worldview and social context of potential converts” during first exposure to new faith and making a decision to join or not; 2) *Affiliation* – “being a formal member of a religious group [but]...membership does not form a central aspect of one’s life or identity”; 3) *Conversion* – the “personal change of religious worldview and identity”; 4) *Confession* – “high level of participation inside new religious group and a strong ‘missionary attitude’ towards non-members outside the group”; 5) *Disaffiliation* – which represents the stage of “former involvement in an organized religious group” (48-49).

Gooren also gives five main groups of factors that express themselves at different points along a conversion career. To conclude this section I present these five groups of factors with examples I have discussed in the chapter.

1) *Social factors* that deal with the role of “social networks” such as family and friends in influencing a religious change and the role the religious group plays in the “socialization and role

learning” of the new believer (51). For example, Smilde mentions one is unlikely to convert if he or she has strong Catholic family connections.

2) *Institutional factors* that describe the presence of different religious groups and “recruitment strategies” of these groups as well as the “appeal” of the different churches’ message and practice (*ibid.*); for example, religious pluralism and the “free market of faith” in Latin America and the use of mass media by evangelical groups to advertise their “product”.

3) *Cultural/Political factors* which refer to the “culture politics” of the religion and what its “views on local culture and society” entail (*ibid.*). For example, Brusco (1993) shows Pentecostalism dissolves the accepted cultural notion of *machismo*.

4) *Individual factors* which refer to different internal needs such as a “desire for meaning”, a desire to “change one’s life situation” and to find spiritual meaning amongst a religious group (52); for example, Stark and Smith’s (2010) critique on the overly material explanations instead of focusing as well on the spiritual, existential or moral aspects of religious change.

5) *Contingency factors* such as an “acutely felt crisis or turning point”, something happens that’s “inspired” and responds to and fixes the crisis, or a “chance meeting” with current believers of the new religion (*ibid.*); for example, the anomie created by mass migration and urbanization that caused breakdowns in traditional systems of meaning that Willems (1967) and Lalive D’Epinay (1969) describe, or poverty, substance abuse and domestic issues described by Chesnut (2013), Smilde (2007) and Brusco (1993).

Gooren is critical of the history of studies on conversion because they have maintained the social scientific bias “to reduce religion to social-economic or psychological factors” (2010:

42). He argues that little attention has been paid to “what people believe in..., why this is so important to people, and how they express their religious feelings in rituals, emotions, or phenomena like speaking in tongues” (*ibid.*). Still Gooren does not ignore the important role that these social or psychological forces play in a person’s religious choices, but instead looks to these as factors supporting or negating a person’s religious choices.

Chapter Three: Methodology

To understand the motivations and factors that lead people to become evangelical, I conducted a two month (January 17-March 24, 2013) exploratory ethnographic study in the canton of Pérez Zeledón, Costa Rica. The primary site of my research within this area was the rural community of Santa Cruz, though I also spoke with evangelicals and observed church services in the market centre of San Isidro. Staying in Santa Cruz allowed me direct access to a visible evangelical community in a rural context. The growth of an evangelical presence was the primary factor this community was chosen as the central site of my research. As I said in the Introduction, Sick noticed the dramatic growth of evangelicalism in the community between her time there in the early 1990s and her return in 2006 (Sick: personal communication). My wife, daughter and I rented a single-room detached apartment from a family who lived beside the Catholic Church in the centre of town. Living in this location not only gave me close access to the evangelical church, Puertas Eternas, but I could easily observe the activities and environment of the Catholic Church, as well as the general daily life of the community.

My research consisted of three primary data collection elements: 1) participant observation in and around Santa Cruz and San Isidro; 2) structured and semi-structured interviews; and 3) participant observation in the evangelical church. These elements occurred in three overlapping phases. The first phase involved becoming familiar with the community, which included visiting the evangelical church, meeting the pastor, and getting to know the congregation. The second phase involved building my sample and setting up interviews with members of the church in Santa Cruz and others who attend churches in San Isidro, which is about 10 kilometres away or a 30 minute bus ride. The third phase involved the interview process. I conducted structured interviews with 34 people, as well as follow up semi-structured

interviews with 18 of these individuals. Though my research followed this pattern, different opportunities and obstacles forced me to adjust and all three phases significantly overlapped such as when I met new people and went new places while conducting follow up interviews.

The Study Sample

I recruited participants throughout the research primarily through quota sampling. Since gender and age were likely to influence decisions to convert and experiences of conversion, I wanted to have four even groups of both men and women in two age categories from 18-35 and 36 and older. I recruited the core of my participants during the first phase of research from Puertas Eternas. This process began earlier than I had expected. My interaction with the evangelical community began on my second day in Santa Cruz. I arrived on a Saturday and went to Puertas Eternas the following day. Before the service I was greeted by David, one of the core members. I introduced myself and presented my intentions and position as researcher. David later gave the church announcements and introduced to the congregation who I was and why I was there. This put my research in motion faster than I had intended. It was not long after my introduction that I met Pastor José who accepted my plan to carry out research with his congregation.

At first, selection of participants occurred opportunistically before or after church. It simply depended on who I happened to cross paths with or ended up sitting close to. I must admit here that my 10-month-old daughter Rose helped greatly in this process. People came up to us, eager to interact with Rose, and I used this opportunity to talk about my research and to ask if they would like to participate in my study. This process of selection may have produced an informant bias where I ended up talking with those more outgoing. However, I used different

means such as snowball sampling to gather other informants to balance out that potential bias. For example, a friend in the community introduced me to potential participants or sometimes interviewees themselves would direct me to other evangelicals.

Smilde, who conducted research with evangelicals in Caracas, chose to only recruit men because conducting private interviews with women was “not an acceptable practice” (2007: 233) and even if it was, it would have been difficult to gather data on “sensitive personal issues like sexuality” (233). Though not after the same questions, I did not find this to be a problem. My wife (Yvonne) and daughter (Rose) were with me for every interview with a woman, which changed the dynamic, allowing me to discuss more topics than if I were alone with the informant.

To best observe the church environment during services, I sat in the back of the congregation. It was therefore easier to talk to the people who sat around me. I do not believe it impacted my sample, as before or after the services everyone congregated near the church entrance and it was then I more often secured informants. When I started conducting interviews and began filling different demographics for my sample, I became more judgemental in my recruitment in order to secure participants according to gender and age characteristics that I did not already have.

Two situations impacted my recruitment techniques. First, I found it difficult to recruit enough people simply before or after services as I would usually end up talking to just one person in order to set up an interview. As there were only three services per week and I did not attend each one, this did not give me ample time to meet enough people (see later reasons for not attending each service). Second, most of the participants I interviewed at first had been

evangelical for between 10 to 20 years, (something I had not anticipated before entering the field) and I was eager to talk to new converts. I asked David, a core member of the church, if he knew any recent converts at Puertas Eternas. Reflecting the mature nature of the congregation, he could only give me the names of one couple in a congregation with an average size of a hundred people (I address this point later in the thesis). The congregation was thin on young adults and most were the children of long-time members and had been evangelical their entire lives. As my study goal was to understand those who had made a religious change, these were not necessarily my target. Nevertheless, on two occasions I did interview the children of informants to gain perspective from young people who had been evangelical their whole lives and how they articulated their faith.

For these reasons, as well as a desire to gain some perspectives from evangelicals who attended other churches in Pérez Zeledón, a local resident helped secure more informants on my behalf. Though a Catholic, she had evangelical family members and knew others in the community. The first time I asked for her help, I was happy to have informants representative of any demographic or length of affiliation. The second time I asked her to find people who had recently converted. I also used snowball sampling with participants I already had, whom I asked for the names of other evangelicals who recently converted and who might be interested in participating in my study. Using these two outlets helped round out my sample and gave me access to participants I would not have known previously. I did not want to utilize this contact too much as I felt this would have created a bias towards only a group of evangelicals that she knew or from existing connections through my informants. These contacts, combined with ones I had made on my own at the church in Santa Cruz, gave me a solid sample from a particular church community complemented by perspectives from others at different churches.

In the following I present the complexion of my sample through basic indicators of age, gender, time affiliated as an evangelical, church affiliation and occupation.

Table 3.1 Composition of Study Sample by age, gender and church affiliation

Church Affiliation	Male (n = 16)		Female (n = 18)		Total (N=34)
	Age 18-35	Age 36+	Age 18-35	Age 36+	
Puertas Eternas	1	8	2	6	17
Other*	3	4	4	6	17
Total	4	12	6	12	34

[*The five other churches attended were in San Isidro]

Source: Author's interviews 2013

I interviewed 16 men and 18 women. Of the 16 men, six farm their own land, all growing coffee, while two of these individuals also raise livestock (pigs), and two also grow and process sugarcane. Three are Pastors; two work in business and one makes furniture. Of the four men I interviewed under 25, two are university students and the other two unemployed. Of the 18 women, only three work outside the home. One is a law student at a University in San Isidro, one owns her own business and the other works part-time in San Isidro.

Table 3.2 shows the breakdown of the length of time affiliated with evangelicalism, in terms of gender and where they attended.

Table 3.2 Time Affiliated as Evangelical by Gender and Church Affiliation.

Length of time evangelical	20+ years		10-19 years		5-9 years		1-4 years		less 1 year		Raised Evan.	
	P.E	Other	P.E	Other	P.E	Other	P.E	Other	P.E.	Other	P.E.	Other
Male (n =16)	6	2	2	1					1	2		2
Female	3	1	1	3	2	2		2	1	2	1	

(n=18)												
Total	9	3	3	4	2	2		2	2	4	1	2

Source: Author's interviews 2013

Due to the mature congregation at Puertas Eternas, the majority who I interviewed from that church had been evangelical for more than ten years. The majority of those who had been evangelical for less than five years either lived in Cocobri, a suburb of San Isidro and worshipped at Centro Victoria or lived in Santa Cruz but went to churches in San Isidro. Thus, the mature congregation at Puertas Eternas also meant the majority of my informants under 35 attended churches in San Isidro.

Interviews

Through interviews I gathered the data related to who converts and the motivations and factors behind the decision. In addition to preliminary interviews with 34 people, I conducted a second series of interviews with 18 of these individuals. Of these 34 interviews, three were conducted with pastors. Some of the questions remained the same, but others specifically addressed broader issues of evangelical growth and presence in Pérez Zeledón. All interviews, except one in English, were conducted in Spanish. My Spanish ability was more than conversational but not fluent, therefore my wife Yvonne whose ability was greater than mine helped especially to clarify my questions.

The first round of interviews followed a specific series of questions designed to gather data on age, gender, occupation and place of residence as well as questions about basic motivations for conversion, previous religious affiliation, familial religious connections, and how they were exposed to Pentecostalism. The second round of interviews were constructed individually based on information given in the first interview, and focused on questions to

describe personal feelings regarding the effects of becoming an evangelical and more in-depth accounts of the process leading up to their decision to convert. As I wanted to understand the mundane and material conditions of their lives during this time of religious change, I tried to steer people towards reflecting on their experiences in the concrete events that inspired their decisions. My goal in the interviews was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the conversion process, from first exposure and entrance into the faith, practices and community, and how they perceived becoming an evangelical affected their lives, the data have been analyzed to determine patterns that brought people to become evangelical, such as previous relationship to Catholicism, personal or familial ruptures and common means of exposure to the faith.

I wanted people to share their personal and sometimes difficult stories openly and honestly, therefore gaining rapport was paramount for the interviews. I hoped that familiarity would negate reservations and break down barriers between myself and the participants. When possible, I tried to meet people before the interviews to gain mutual familiarity. The majority of interviews were conducted at people's homes, which I felt most conducive to creating an interview atmosphere of comfort and openness. Interview meetings usually started with other topical conversation that helped to break the ice. My wife and daughter accompanied me on almost every interview. Yvonne helped with translation when something was unclear and Rose helped with rapport. Having them there, especially Rose, helped immeasurably in creating rapport as many of my informants had children of their own.

All formal interviews were recorded using a digital recorder. I took minimal notes during the interviews themselves. Confident in the quality and purpose of the recorder, I felt it appropriate to have the setting of the interview less formal, more a conversation without pauses of note taking. I believe this created a more comfortable atmosphere for the participants. After

each interview I took notes on my impressions of the interview, any nuances or anything particularly striking or unique, and how the information related to what others had already said. In the first interviews I did not deviate much from the interview guide except for clarifications when needed. The structure and wording of questions evolved over time as I learned the best way to get at specific data. Before each second round interview, I listened to the individual's first interview, taking notes and building questions for further explanation and clarification for the second.

When I had the opportunity to meet with people beforehand, especially informally in church or around the community, the interviews went smoothly and seemed open and comfortable. It was more difficult to create good rapport with the participants I met through my local contact and snowball sampling. I was meeting people for the first time at the scheduled interview and these interviews at first were more rigid and seemed more interrogative than conversational. Fortunately, I had a chance to interview some of these people a second time and the interviews were, for the most part, much more congenial.

The selection of the participants for the second round interviews depended on several factors: primarily on filling my demographic and affiliation quota but also on practical logistics of convenience, such as schedule and location or on perceived rapport attained in the first interview. As the second interview dealt with more personal and in-depth feelings towards evangelical faith, if I felt I had made a personal connection and created an open atmosphere I wanted to use this rapport to go deeper into their story.

Throughout my time in Pérez Zeledón I constantly met new people either on my own or through contacts. These were individuals who lived in and around Santa Cruz but who went to

other churches in San Isidro. I realized too late during my study that there were more evangelicals in Santa Cruz than were seen at Puertas Eternas. Though I did get a chance for a few interviews, I would have liked, had I had more time, to find more of these individuals to have a better sense of the total evangelical population in and around Santa Cruz. It would have been helpful to gain a better understanding of what prompted people to attend churches in San Isidro instead of Santa Cruz.

There are limitations and potential problems of relying on interviews as a primary source of data. Both Brenneman (2012) and Smilde (2007), who gathered data on religious conversion through interviews, offer different ways to respond to the challenges of this method. For Brenneman it was critical to establish good rapport which he felt able to do having lived for six years in the Guatemalan *barrios* where he was conducting fieldwork. This experience allowed him to speak Spanish like a local using “idiomatic expressions...[which] put to rest at least some of their reservations stemming from the unfamiliarity of the interview situation” (2012: 255). In other examples, Brenneman triangulated these responses with an individual who had been involved in that person’s life such as a “Pastor, Priest, or gang intervention coordinator” (256).

Smilde took a different approach and avoided pitfalls by how he constructed his interview design. He avoided asking participants to share their life stories or explain their reasons to convert. Instead he walked respondents through the time period leading up to their conversions to articulate events and situations through certain variables such as “religious participation, residence, education...[etc.]” (2007:230). Both scholars had selected informants specifically due to violent and troubled life histories: Brenneman working with ex-gang members in Guatemala and Honduras and Smilde working with individuals from troubled and violent pasts in Caracas.

Brenneman writes that “interview subjects always engage in some level of conscious shaping of their own accounts based on deeply held commitments to a larger narrative or repertoire of stories” (2012: 255). In my research I was at the mercy of this reality as well, though the context and objectives of my study were different from those of Smilde and Brenneman. Not only is rural Costa Rica different from the barrios of Caracas and Guatemala city, I was not looking for people with a specific type of personal background but a diverse group of individuals with the common currency of being evangelical Christians (however some of my informants had a troubled past that I hoped to gain insight into). Nevertheless, in my research I also encountered the problem that Brenneman discusses in terms of responses related to ulterior motives. This was especially likely when the individual wanted to evangelize during our interviews. It was often unclear to what degree responses were shaped by Christian metanarratives, such as the common motif of “once was lost” (Smilde 2007: 230), or giving God the agency in a situation instead of explaining the personal, material or social conditions and factors involved.

Participant Observation in and around Santa Cruz

Participant observation was carried out throughout the duration of my time in and around Santa Cruz and began during the first phase of research. My goals were to meet people and get a general sense of the community, then set up interviews and begin to gather general observational data. These observations informed and contextualized data from interviews and complemented observations in church. This phase of research involved a myriad of different situations such as informal conversations with individuals in the community, either before or after church services, on the bus to or from San Isidro or at the grocery store. As well, I visited other churches in the area and made general notes of the public space as I went about my daily tasks in Santa Cruz or

in San Isidro. This element provided me with an understanding of the community evangelicals live within on a daily basis.

As Catholicism remains the dominant faith in the region, I also visited the Catholic Church in Santa Cruz to contextualize my observations at the evangelical church. In addition, I went to services at three other evangelical churches in San Isidro to see how the church in Santa Cruz compared to these others. I looked at the style of worship and service, attendance, and demographics.

The objective of my observations during church services was to understand the nature of services, gather data on demographics (size and composition of congregation) and to recruit participants. These observations went on through all three phases of the research.

I went to at least one service per week, usually every Sunday, and most weeks I would go to at least one of the weekday services. Spending time in church, observing and participating in services helped to inspire questions for interviews, and contextualize given information. It was helpful to observe how people participated in services and how they were outside the church and in the interview process.

A challenge I faced throughout my study, but primarily during church services was my positioning as a researcher. I found it difficult to be an objective researcher while inside an intensely religious and participatory environment. I grew up in a religious Mennonite household which involved attending church and Sunday School regularly until I was 16. Therefore my personal identity is very much tied to this upbringing and I felt sensitive and sympathetic with the believers in church while attempting to maintain my position as a critical researcher.

I found myself in a balancing act of trying to uphold my integrity as a researcher, while at the same time not distancing myself and damaging rapport. I was asked often my religious identity and I always answered with “*I am Mennonite*”. When asked if I attended church I would respond that I did not and that I had not found one I liked. More complicated situations arose when there were expectations that I was a participating fellow believer. For example, the standard greeting for evangelicals is “*Dios lo bendiga*” (God bless you), where the response is supposed to be repeating the phrase or with “amen”. Naturally almost everyone who greeted me would say this phrase and each time I never knew exactly what to say. Usually I would say thank you, yet in some circumstances I felt it would be offensive to not properly respond to the greeting if the situation was more personal and with someone I knew well.

At one point after an interview I was asked if I was baptized. I said no and could feel the energy in the room change dramatically. I responded honestly and was then told why I should get baptized. Situations like these would cause me some anxiety as how best to react. I was encouraged reading another anthropologist struggle with the same issues. Shoaps, working with Pentecostals in the United States, felt challenged because “the anthropologist cannot sit passively in a corner and watch without becoming a focus of evangelizing efforts” (2002: 37). She goes on to say:

Indeed, during my fieldwork...the status of my own beliefs was constantly an undercurrent of my interactions with pastors and members of the congregation. I felt unable to fully participate in the community without changing my beliefs or risking offending the congregation by rejection or challenge of theirs. This problem was compounded by the fact that the members of the congregation, all of whom were friendly and well intentioned, approached me either as a fellow believer or, later, as a potential convert. (*ibid.*)

I felt this imposed identity of being either a fellow believer or potential convert often during interviews especially in the second round when people were more familiar with me. Being treated as a potential convert affected my data in that when I would ask questions hoping for personal answers some would respond with what being a Christian *can do for your life* not about what *it did for their lives*. My status as potential convert was best exemplified when someone responded to a question saying, “Even if you are going to university and studying big questions and have a daughter and wife you still need to have Jesus in your life”. On these occasions I tried to steer the questions back to their lives by asking, “Yes, but can you explain your situation”.

I was not there to understand the validity or soundness of people’s beliefs but to understand them as they were cultivated, embodied and expressed. I wanted to know how people’s beliefs and religious lives made sense to them on their terms. I tried to create an environment where their beliefs could be expressed with openness and confidence not suspicion.

Chapter Four: The Religious and Socio-Economic Context

In this chapter I sketch the geographical, social and religious context in which my research took place. I trace the history of the evangelical community in Santa Cruz. I present a basic description of the congregation at Puertas Eternas, and situate it alongside several other churches I visited in Pérez Zeledón.

Costa Rica is located in Central America and shares borders with Nicaragua to the north and Panama to the south. Costa Rica suffered from a brief military coup that ended in 1948 (Uppsala Conflict Data Program 2014). In the aftermath, the nation abolished its military and has been a bastion of relative stability in a region plagued by instability and conflict. For example, on the 2013 Human Development index Costa Rica scored 62 out of 196 countries, compared to Panama 59, while Costa Rica's northern neighbors scored significantly lower (El Salvador 107, Honduras 120, Nicaragua 129, Guatemala 133) (UN Human Development Index 2013). Costa Rica's economy has traditionally relied on agricultural exports of primarily coffee, sugar, banana and pineapple. Within the last couple of decades, a growing service and technology sector has become a major part of the economy as well. Due to its diverse natural beauty as well as political and social stability, tourism has become an important industry to the country and even more so recently with the growth of ecotourism (Costa Rica: 2014).

The canton of Pérez Zeledón, with a population of 134,534, is located in the southwest of the country. Its municipal centre of San Isidro Del General, with a population just over 45,000 (INEC (*Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos de Costa Rica*): 2011), is strategically located along the Pan-American highway between San Jose and the Panama border. Pérez Zeledón is primarily an agricultural region and recognized as a central coffee producer in the country (Sick

2008: 34). Settlement of the area is fairly recent; it was not until the construction of the Pan-American Highway in the 1940s that Pérez Zeledón experienced a pronounced population growth (2008: 35). The impetus for migration south from the central valley of Costa Rica was a growing scarcity of land (*ibid.*). During the first half of the 20th century land was available in Pérez Zeledón to anyone willing to work it and not until the 1960s was “free land” difficult to find.

The small town of Santa Cruz, located in the district of Páramo, in Pérez Zeledón is representative of its canton’s character. People came from the central valley around San Jose from the 1950s to the 1970s in search of virgin land to farm (Sick 2008: 39). Coffee continues to be the primary economic focus, though, because of the fragile nature of the coffee export market, the region has undergone rapid socio-economic changes in reaction to the fluctuating market and in attempts to diversify its economic productivity. As I said in the introduction, coffee prices crashed in the 1990s and led many to seek alternative sources of income; for some this meant immigrating to the United States and sending remittances back to family in Costa Rica(Sick 2008).

Santa Cruz is spread along a main road that links it and other communities to San Isidro. The road, only paved 20 years ago has made the commute into the city much easier. The town has a family medical clinic, a Catholic church which holds 80-100 people, a primary school, a small grocery store, a bar/restaurant and a large gymnasium/community centre.

The Religious Landscape of Costa Rica

According to a public opinion poll conducted by CID-Gallup in 2012, Costa Rica is made up of 63.4% Catholic, 22.9% Protestant, 3.6% other, and 10% of no religious affiliation (Holland 2012). According to statistics compiled by Holland in 2011 comparing religious affiliation across South and Central America, Costa Rica's religious landscape looks similar to Panama's and has roughly 10 to 20% fewer Protestants than its other Central American neighbours (Holland 2011). Costa Rica remains a predominantly Catholic country. Though Catholicism maintains a majority, religious affiliation has changed dramatically over the last thirty years. For example, in a 1983 poll conducted by the ICCR (*Investigaciones Ciencias de Costa Rica*) the country was 84.9% Catholic, 8.6% Protestant, 2% other and 4.5% none (*ibid.*).⁹ The primary thrust of Protestant growth has been through Pentecostalism, such that by 2001 over 60% of Protestant churches in Costa Rica were of the Pentecostal variety (Holland 2001). As of 2011, nine of the ten largest denominations in Costa Rica are Pentecostal (Holland 2011).

Unfortunately it is difficult to discern the breakdown of religious affiliation specifically in Pérez Zeledón.¹⁰ Yet there is an indication that Pentecostalism has a formidable presence as one of the three largest congregations outside greater San Jose, "Centro Victoria - Ministerios Casa del Banquete" (Holland and May: 2011), is located on the outskirts of San Isidro, Pérez Zeledón. The church began in the centre of San Isidro in 1979 and now has a congregation of 1500 members as well as a total of 25 churches in other Latin American countries and the United States (Centro Victoria: 2013). According to the *Directorio de Congregaciones Evangelicas en Costa Rica* (Directory of Evangelical Congregations in Costa Rica), as of 2001, there were 50 different evangelical denominations in the canton. This number is relatively standard in relation

to other cantons of similar size in population and in composition (combination of urban/rural but not connected to a major city such as San Jose or Cartago) (INEC: 2011).

None of the churches I visited in Pérez Zeledón call themselves Pentecostal, though their style of worship is indicative of Pentecostalism. Cartledge suggests the vast diversity of the movement makes it difficult to define. For example, there are distinctly Pentecostal denominations but also “a host of independent, indigenous, and autonomous churches around the world that display what might be considered Pentecostal characteristics but that do not necessarily affiliate with broader denominations or networks” (2012: 587). It is this second category of churches that best defines the character of the evangelical churches I visited in Pérez Zeledón.

Evangelical churches share the religious landscape of Pérez Zeledón with other Christian groups such as Jehovah’s Witnesses but primarily with the Catholic Church.¹¹ San Isidro is part of one of the eight Costa Rican dioceses; its geographical boundaries extend just north of San Isidro, and south to the Panama border, west to the Pacific coast and east to the western slope of the Talamanca mountain range. Within this area there are 26 parishes and as of 2002 there are 49 priests (*Directorio de Grupos Religiosos en Costa Rica* : 2008).

Evangelicalism in Santa Cruz

The religious landscape of Santa Cruz is shared between Puertas Eternas and the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church hosts Mass each Sunday as well as other services throughout the week; the priest lives in the community and everyday there seems to be activity around the church.

The evangelical presence in Santa Cruz centres around the Ruiz family. The growth of the movement in the community can be traced through the patriarch of the family, Gustavo Ruiz. Gustavo died at 86, the year before I arrived in Santa Cruz. What I learned of him came in fragments through my interviews with his children and other evangelicals in Santa Cruz.

Gustavo came to Santa Cruz over 40 years ago from a rural area around San Jose. As his daughter said he came because the land was virgin and productive. Life was hard for Gustavo. He farmed using oxen but these died; he felt cursed and struggled to feed his twelve children. He first consulted *brujos* (witches) to exorcise his curse but this did not work. He met an evangelical pastor, who read the Bible and shared the Word with him; this had a profound impact. Jorge, his son, said this “tore away his sins and they never returned”. According to his daughter Marta, he finally found a way to deal with his problems, and it brought him peace. Because of “the change he noticed through knowing the Word” (Marta) he began to share his experiences in the community.

Gustavo started working when he was eight and left school in grade two. He could not read or write and only learned to read through the Bible. According to one woman, if I gave Gustavo my notebook he could not read it; he could only read the Bible. “The Holy Spirit taught him to read the Bible” said Marta. If you quoted scripture, from Genesis to Revelation Gustavo could tell you exactly where it was, up to its chapter and verse. If someone said a verse wrong, including a preacher, he would correct them and help with the sermon. He had a gift of weaving biblical passages with daily experiences. My informants described him as “generous and humble”, “a man of truth and a man of God”.

Together with Pastor Carlos Riviera, around 28 years ago Gustavo founded the first evangelical church in Santa Cruz.¹² At that time Gustavo's children were not interested to join their father, as one of them told me, they did not want to change. However over time, seeing how "the Word" impacted their father and through what he shared, as well as their own personal motivations, they joined him. The pastor is Gustavo's nephew, and most of the core members are his children and their spouses. One of his relatives told me that 90% of the people in Puertas Eternas are "*por la semilla de el*" (by his seed).

Carlos Riviera, whom I did have the opportunity to interview, is currently the pastor of a small church just outside San Isidro. He studied to be a pastor at a mission of the Assemblies of God in San Jose and founded the fraternity of evangelical pastors in Pérez Zeledón. As I found out through several informants, he was instrumental in spreading the evangelical message in the rural areas surrounding Santa Cruz.

Puertas Eternas looks from the outside like an ordinary industrial building or warehouse. It consists of one main room with space for about 400 people, a Pastor's office and an annex of a kitchen and common area. In general the setting is typical of evangelical churches in Latin America (Smilde 2007: 33), with only large speakers adorning the walls painted industrial white. The seating arrangement consists of plastic foldable chairs arranged in four columns. Central and at the foreground of the stage is the pulpit. Behind the pulpit is the musical set up that includes an electric keyboard, drum-set, three vocal microphones and space for a guitar and bass player. For the most part the music team was fairly consistent, with only minor changes to personnel at some services but always with the same rotation of people.

There are three services per week. Wednesday and Friday night services begin at 6:00pm and go until 8:00 or 8:30. On Sundays, services begin at 10:00am and go until around 12:30. Wednesday night the first hour is worship music followed by a member of the congregation giving a testimony. Friday night services start the same with an hour of music followed by a brief Bible reading and sermon. The second hour consists of open prayer and concludes with music. The open prayer is led by the pastor, though others take turns praying with the microphone. Sunday services start with an hour or so of music followed by announcements or dedications, then an hour sermon delivered by the Pastor. The service closes with more worship music and prayer led by the Pastor. Roughly every two weeks on either Friday or Saturday the church has a special service that lasts around six hours, starting at 4:00pm and ending at 10:00 or later. Sometimes these services have special events such as youth dance routines and other times they are special prayer services punctuated by intervals of music. Half way through the service there is dinner, sometimes free and other times at a reasonable cost.

On any given Sunday there are around 100 people in attendance. The only time I saw the congregation markedly larger and close to its 400-seat capacity happened at the *Campaña* hosted by the church. This annual event occurred over a weekend with the purpose to bring in new members (this will be addressed in Chapter Five). For the Wednesday, Friday and special services held bi-weekly, the congregation is noticeably smaller with usually around 50 to 75 people. For the most part, the same core group of people attend the weekday and special bi-weekly services.

On a weekly basis the congregation has a slight female majority. The average age of the congregation is roughly 35 to 45. There are young families with small children, older families whose children sit with their friends and other youth, and a few elders.

Every service starts with music to ignite the faithful. Even as an outsider, it was hard not to get carried along with the music and energy flowing and pulsating through the room. The style of music is contemporary, driven by heavy rhythmic drumming and simple but powerful chord progressions with electric guitar and piano. The music is well choreographed, with seamless transitions between songs. Songs often go on for over ten minutes with choruses repeated numerous times. The music group is extremely committed; they practice every day there is not a service except for Monday. The music is always loud. Whether during a service or practice, you could hear music coming from the church six days a week. I lived about a ten minute walk from the church and I could hear it from home. The songs are popular Christian rock songs, some translated from English as my wife recognized them from her church experiences years ago in an evangelical congregation in Langley, British Columbia. The pastor informed me that most of the recordings they draw from are produced in Mexico.

People react differently to the music, but almost everyone worships in motion. Some stay in their seats and sway with raised hands. Others in the aisles dance and wave their arms. Some go to the space just in front of the stage and dance even more emphatically or kneel at the stage in prayer either with arms outstretched or with head bowed into hands. Some people pray in the same manner in their own chairs during the music, but this was more common during the prayer time of the service. People sing in all manners of expression. Some move in trance, at times weeping and gyrating, while most sway with raised arms. Often eyes are closed with facial expressions that speak of an inner dialogue of surrender towards the divine. Generally people carry out their same worship routine each week. Someone who weeps and shakes on Wednesday, would do the same on Sunday.

Before the music ends, and while everyone is still in motion, the pastor begins to pray. These prayers could be described as incantational, the purpose being to invoke the Holy Spirit; to invite and encourage its presence and action in the congregation. At the Sunday services and during normal worship time, a single prayer could go on for over five minutes. With very little pause and in continuous rhythmic phrase, the Pastor would ask the spirit “to come, to move the people, to ask God in his glory, power and presence to work for the church to inspire the people, the community, the town, the nation”. During the Friday night prayer services and at the bi-weekly services, these types of prayers go on longer. The microphone is passed around and people pray as long as they can until they start crying and can no longer speak.

In general, people pray in different ways. Some kneel at their seats, put their heads down and pray quietly to themselves. Others stand still praying with arms raised and some walk around the sanctuary praying out loud. Sometimes small groups form and a two or three people go to someone, lay their hands on his or her head, shoulders or heart and pray for that person. From what I observed, everyone prays his or her own prayers but saying the same types of things as the pastor. When the speakers fell silent, a multitude of personal conversations could be heard through the church.

There are other more intentional prayer times where the pastor prays for a person or group about a specific event or situation. On our last Sunday we were invited to the front and prayed for in this way. The pastor invites members of the congregation to the front of the stage to help with the prayer; people come up and lay hands on the individual. Other times people make a circle with arms around waists and shoulders. The group prays out loud together, each with their own personal dialogue.

Sermons and individual testimonies rely heavily on biblical material and encourage living according to its teachings. For example, one sermon discussed the importance of proper speech where the pastor encouraged people to speak as if from the mouth of Jesus. Another sermon followed similar ideas but about making one's home a house of God. In one sermon the pastor spoke about different ways one could save money, and give more to the church without losing other income. The pastor had felt a calling from God to build a bigger kitchen and common area.

Puertas Eternas within the Evangelical Milieu of Pérez Zeledón

Puertas Eternas is a member of the fraternity of evangelical churches in Pérez Zeledón and has three sister churches in different parts of the country. The fraternity functions as a support and communicative network for its member churches. They meet once a month to share ideas and plan events. It does not have any authoritative power and its member churches are free to conduct their services as they like. Puertas Eternas is an independent church with no parent church or denominational affiliation. Pastor José at Puertas Eternas received no formal education and became the pastor after his brother, the former pastor, died in a car crash. Pastor José told me he never wanted to be a pastor but felt a calling, that after sometime he could not ignore.

I went to a service at three other evangelical churches in San Isidro. I observed continuity between all four churches but with some differences. The main difference separating Puertas Eternas from these others was the use of multimedia such as video screens which Puertas Eternas does not use. Screens were primarily used to present song lyrics, Bible verses or religious images and videos.

The majority of evangelicals in Santa Cruz who did not attend Puertas Eternas go to *La Iglesia Cristiana Bautista* (Christian Baptist Church) located in San Isidro just off the Pan-

American Highway. This church is the most similar to Puertas Eternas. The demographics at the service I attended were similar, but with a slightly older average age, between 40 and 50. The capacity is 250 to 300 and on that Tuesday night the place was just over half full. The music has the same type of instrumentation and style of songs but with a softer rock quality (Simon and Garfunkel instead of Led Zeppelin). The style and content of the prayers and sermons matched those at Puertas Eternas.

Santuario de Adoracion (Sanctuary of Worship) located in San Isidro about a kilometre north of Cristiana Bautista along the Pan-American Highway was another church closely resembling Puertas Eternas. Pastor Julio, whom I interviewed, is the president of the fraternity of evangelical churches in Pérez Zeledón. For the Sunday morning service I attended, the church was full with between 250-300 people. There were more young adults than at Puertas Eternas but the average age of around 35-45 was the same. The music was somewhat different: more electronic keyboard driven and more monotone, with even more repetition of choruses.

The church I visited that was most different from Puertas Eternas was *Martillos de Guerra* (Hammers of War), located in the southern outskirts of San Isidro on the opposite end of the city from Cristiana Bautista and Santuario de Adoracion. The average age of the congregation, 18-25, was dramatically younger than Puertas Eternas and the music even more geared to the youth. The building is slightly bigger than Puertas Eternas with capacity for around 500 people. On that Sunday afternoon the place was three quarters full. A friend of mine, who invited me to the church, said that the services are even “crazier” on Monday night and Sunday morning. The style of music, worship and prayer were similar to the other churches and people expressed themselves in the same way but with heightened energy and emotion. The space in front of the stage was packed with people jumping, dancing and raising their hands to

the stage. The environment and service seemed more akin to a rock concert than a church service. Compared to these urban churches, Puertas Eternas, not surprisingly, seems a simpler version. It has a smaller congregation, and a smaller population to draw members from. However, I would argue the musical ability and sound quality are superior to these others, rivaled only by Martillos de Guerra.

Chapter Five: Understanding the Conditions for an Evangelical Conversion

In this chapter, I focus on the motivations that led my informants to seek an evangelical faith and the factors that influenced their decision. I present the different situations and contexts my informants experienced leading up to their religious change. In the presentation of this material, I show there are common scenarios that underlie a person's desire to become evangelical. In Chapter Two, I highlighted the debate between spiritual and material motivations of conversion. In this chapter, I follow the arguments of Gooren (2010) and Steigenga (2010) who do not advocate one or the other explanation but see religious conversion as a complex process. As mentioned in the literature review, Gooren presents a group of factors that influence a person's religious decisions on his/her path through the conversion career. In this chapter I use his five factors as a heuristic tool to exemplify the interrelated factors operating in my informant's lives before they converted. For Gooren these factors operate throughout the conversion career. For my purpose here, I highlight those relevant to the *preaffiliation* stage, and therefore some aspects are left out.

Social Factors: The Importance of Family Networks

For Gooren part of the social factors relate to the role played by "relatives, friends, and/or acquaintances on joining or leaving a religious group" (51). Here I focus primarily on the role of family in two aspects: for exposure to evangelical ideas and to impede or encourage a conversion. My 34 informants family religious background is broken down into four categories: a majority Catholic family (11), majority evangelical family (11), a fairly even mixture of the two (7) or family affiliation was unclear (5).

Before any religious change and conversion can happen, there first needs to be exposure to evangelical ideas. These ideas will either “plant a seed”¹³ or be ignored. Steigenga found that in Costa Rica exposure to evangelical ideas happens commonly through family networks (2001:38). It was the same for my informants. Seventeen had been exposed to evangelical ideas primarily through interactions with already evangelical family members, both immediate and extended. They spoke about the combination of these ideas with the change they witnessed in the converted individual that got their attention.

Not only is it through the family that one is exposed to evangelical ideas, but also family play an important role in influencing a conversion. Not including the five participants who had contact with evangelicalism from early age, 18 out of 29 who converted did so explicitly with the influence of evangelical family members. Similar to the process of exposure, to influence a conversion the common process is that someone converts, introduces evangelical ideas and eventually invites the individual to church, or in time those exposed to these ideas make their own decision to go. For example, Rosario’s sister converted before her, and at that time Rosario did not understand much about the evangelical faith. When she saw the change in her sister she became interested. She attended the Catholic Church regularly but never liked the recitation style of prayer. While listening to the evangelical radio station Faro del Caribe (I address this shortly) she was taught that Catholicism “practices idol worship” and this distanced her from Catholicism even more. Eventually she started going regularly to the evangelical church, invited her husband and now the whole family goes together. Others also spoke about influencing their spouses to join them. For one woman this was “the most difficult thing” she had ever done; it was a long process but eventually her husband joined her. Another informant, at the time of our interview, was going through the same challenge and hoped her spouse would join.

Returning to Gustavo's story, we see the impact that his conversion had on his family, even if it took ten years to fully materialize. His personal transformation and the change that his family members noted appear to be the central impetus that allowed an evangelical community to grow in Santa Cruz. Pastor Julio illustrates the influence that an evangelical family member can have on their kin: "If you convert one, the rest of the family comes; they can see the testimony evident in the transformation of one where Jesus has entered their heart" (Pastor Julio).

For over half of my informants, family networks played a visible and crucial role in their decision to become evangelical, through exposure to evangelical ideas and/or encouragement to take the evangelical path. However in some cases family networks negatively influenced my informants, specifically those who came from a strong Catholic family network. As I showed in Chapter Two, Smilde, studying with evangelicals in the *barrios* of Caracas, and Gross, studying with indigenous evangelicals in Oaxaca, Mexico, found the same situation.

David's family, who were actively involved in Catholic Church activities in his home town of Santa Maria, just outside San Jose, ostracized him for becoming evangelical. They called him a traitor, to not just his family but to his country as well. Another was totally ostracized from her Catholic family because of her conversion. One woman's father said that she would lose the respect of her grandfather if she converted, and almost went back to Catholicism because of this strong criticism. As I only interviewed practicing evangelicals, I do not have data from those who were unable to overcome this criticism and either left the faith or did not pursue it enough to convert. I imagine that for everyone able to overcome these family pressures there are others who are unable to, and who succumb to that pressure as Smilde and Gross both note.

My informants discussed the criticisms of their Catholic family towards their decision to become evangelical. For example, some evangelicals I spoke with said they had been called brainwashed “*le lavaron en el coco*” or “*panderetas*”, which literally means tambourines but is an expression meaning one who is flighty or just goes along with the flow. In other cases, families criticized a conversion because they felt the evangelical church just wanted money for “*diezmo*” as evangelicals are supposed to tithe 10% of their income.

For some informants these negative attitudes changed overtime, when those critical of a person’s conversion saw the change it had affected. In some cases, they even began to respect not only the decision to convert but also the faith adopted. For the woman who feared losing the respect of her grandfather, over time, once her family saw the person she had become, they respected her. For others, tension with Catholic family was minimal and there were simply avoided topics of discussion.

In other instances, informants came from nominally Catholic family networks and therefore experienced little if any discouragement towards their decision to become evangelical. If the family saw a conversion would help, or had helped, the individual then this change was encouraged and could become the impetus for another member to follow. This process was best exemplified in Marcelo’s story. Marcelo talked about liking to party with his friends and around his family he was angry and confrontational. When his family found out he wanted to become evangelical, they encouraged him, and now he has other family members converting as well.

For Marcelo and Omar, two of the men under 25 who I spoke with, the greatest pressures against their conversion came from their peer group, not family. Like Marcelo, Omar’s family, specifically his elders (grandmother, aunts and uncles) encouraged his decision to become an

evangelical. They see it as a way for him to leave his unhealthy partying lifestyle. Yet his friends and brother are more critical, and have not taken his desire to change his life through becoming evangelical seriously. Not only are they critical, calling him a “blasphemer” and “crazy”, they also present the temptations that he seeks to avoid. Marcelo spoke about the same form of peer pressure, but his friends seem more accepting of his desire and only jokingly call him “Pastor”. Yet he too deals with peer pressure: when he is with his friends they try to get him to drink beer with them.

For the two other young men I interviewed, they addressed the problem of peer pressure from non-evangelical friends by distancing their relationships to them. One, who has been evangelical his whole life, has some Catholic friends but these are not close. Because of their “liberal” ways he would rather spend time with his closer evangelical friends. For the other, who recently converted, he has simply started a “new life with new friends” and left his old non-evangelical friends behind.

Institutional Factors: Catholicism and the *Campaña* and *Cruzada*

In the previous section, I showed the impediment that a strong Catholic family network can be to an evangelical conversion. In this section I go deeper into my informant’s relationship to Catholicism, their proximity and criticisms toward it. I then explore how evangelicalism reaches out to the broader community. I present this material through Gooren’s institutional factors in terms of the “[d]issatisfaction with current religious group or with religious inactivity...Recruitment methods of these [different/new] religious groups (evangelization, TV/Radio messages)” (51).

None of my informants, not surprisingly, had a religious background outside Catholicism. In total, 26 of 34 had been Catholic before. Of the remaining individuals, four had been evangelical all their lives, with varying degrees of participation, and only three had no previous religious affiliation.¹⁴ Of those who were Catholic before, nine mentioned being active in the church, or attended Mass on at least a regular or semi-regular basis (once a week, every couple weeks or once a month). Seventeen explicitly mentioned they were not actively Catholic. They were either just born Catholic, hardly ever went to Mass, or spoke about being Catholic but had no active relationship with Catholicism.

Chesnut (2013) and Cleary (2004) both argue previous nominal Catholicism is common of evangelicals. Chesnut argues that nominal or “cultural” Catholicism arises due to a lack of Catholic presence during times of crisis “which so often leads afflicted individuals to the doors of a Pentecostal temple” (67). Cleary makes a different argument simply based on an individual’s degree of religious activity. He writes:

Empirical studies and the long history of religious conversion have shown that the convinced and the committed are rarely converted to a different faith or group. Rather, it is typically the nominal Catholic or indifferent Protestant who becomes the engaged Pentecostal. (2004: 50)

Though Catholics make up the overwhelming majority of the population in Latin America, the number of those active in the church is significantly lower. This has led scholars to suggest that on any given Sunday there are more people worshipping in evangelical churches than in Catholic ones (Cox 1995: 168, Martin 1988: 50), even if the ratio of “believers” is roughly 70/20/10 (Holland: 2011) Catholic/Protestant/None. This is certainly the case in Santa

Cruz with the number of worshippers at Puertas Eternas being significantly greater than at the Catholic Church on a weekly basis.

Whether strong, or more commonly weak, my informant's previous Catholic experiences act as a reference point from which they construct and understand their evangelical faith. Annis showed that his informants' evangelical identity was articulated to a certain degree by what made it not Catholic (1987: 80). My informants, at times, articulated their faith in the same way, specifically what I see as an opposition between tradition and innovation.¹⁵ My informants spoke often about Catholicism, using religion and tradition interchangeably and their own evangelical faith as a statement against this.

From my own observations, I saw the relationship between daily living and religious practice in each faith as opposite. My informants espouse a strict moral life outside the church firmly guided by unquestioned biblical authority. However, when it comes to worship they may do so as they choose and follow the impulses of their spiritual yearnings so long as it is supported in the Bible. This happens within an open and free space conducive to experiential somatic worship. On the other hand, practicing Catholics must follow a regime of rituals and observations to have grace with God, such as communion, and confession. These are practiced within a highly organized and proscribed liturgical space. Yet outside the church, according to my informants, and to a less dramatic degree what I saw myself, they are free to do as they wish so long as they confess afterwards.

My informants were critical of what could be considered this antinomian quality of their Catholic counterparts. One informant suggested that Catholics "are allowed to go to the bar then go to Mass" (Sophia). Another gave the same example, also highlighting the difference between

tradition and innovation: “For me, in the Catholic Church, you go to Mass then leave and do normal things [like] drink...it’s more a tradition to go to Mass...In [the evangelical faith] it’s different. You go to change your life” (Yaneli).

There are four other key examples of tradition versus innovation that my informants described. The first is prayer and the difference between *rezar* and *orar* or recitation and oral/personal prayer where you can “pray what your heart says” (Marcelo). The second is the content of sermons. According to one informant, priests are restricted to preach following Papal guidelines whereas evangelical pastors have the freedom to “preach what they want” (Manuel). Third is style of worship, from “routine” where you “sit and stand, sit and stand in total silence”, to freedom to worship in whichever way “your heart wants” (Marcelo). Finally, access to divine authority, from following ritual guided by priestly authority that mediates between the divine and the believer, to being able to construct one’s own faith through direct and encouraged study of the Bible and accessing spiritual energy with only the body as intermediary.

Evangelicals believe they have direct access to God, where, before as Catholics, access was controlled and mediated through intercessors, such as the priest, saints, and the Virgin Mary. For example, numerous times my informants said that their faith was “not a religion but a relationship directly with God” (Isabel). Pastor Julio summed up this point as he articulated his church’s cordial but tense relationship to the Catholic Church in his community.

Many people who want to convert to Christ come from Catholicism. They start to read the Word of God, study the Bible and worship the Lord. They realize quickly that there is more than what they have been taught as religion, some of them find they no longer fit into that religious environment. They want a real experience with God. (Pastor Julio)

People construct their evangelical faith against the traditional structure and style of services in Catholicism: against what they have been taught and have experienced within that tradition, as Pastor Julio suggests. This oppositional construction is legitimated and learned through engagement with the Bible and is further positively reinforced through the somatic quality of evangelical worship.

My informants strongly criticized Catholicism as a “deception” which many said they only came to realize as they started to study the Bible. Two common deceptions or “*engaños*” my informants discussed were idolatry and the “worldly” or man-made quality of Catholicism. My informants saw the usage of statues and sacred images in Catholicism as the worship and construction of images or idols condemned in the Bible (Exodus 20: 4-5). For example, Manuel mentioned that Catholics “adore images, *oh Maria!*...the Bible is the truth and the word is the Bible... In the evangelical church it is God and Jesus directly. You don’t need a Saint” (Manuel, [emphasis Manuel’s]). Another “deception” my informants put forward was the ability of Priests to pardon sins. One informant said that Catholics are taught “to confess to a Priest... It’s a lie to confess to that man; it’s only the Lord who can pardon sins, not a man” (Diego). Others followed in this vein and criticized the “worldly” practice and character of Catholicism. Jorge believes Catholic customs “are the rites of man, not of God...we are approaching Holy Week, [where it is] prohibited to eat red meat... but if it’s a sin today it’s a sin tomorrow” (Jorge). Another informant suggested that priests should be respected, but as “people not Priests”. At the Catholic Church “[t]hey teach you that they are Holy/Saints. For us they are equal sinners...[they] have the same issues that we do. The only difference is they have studied biblically” (Fabio).

Spreading the evangelical message. Gomez (1996), polling evangelical pastors, found that they believed “personal evangelism”, through friendships, family, going door-to-door, or preaching in the streets, was more effective than mass events (114). The fact most of my informants had been exposed through personal or relational means supports this conclusion. However mass events still occur and can play an important role in an individual’s conversion process as it did for two of my informants. Along with other mediums of communication, such as television and radio, these events advertise and promote evangelicalism to the broader community with the goal to attract new members.

Several of my informants spoke about the evangelical radio station “Faro del Caribe”. For some the station gave them a way to understand their faith in the early stages of their conversion, while for others it is a source of knowledge and inspiration as they continue to cultivate their faith. It is a national evangelical radio station whose goal is to “illuminate the pathway of life” and:

[E]xtend the kingdom of God to the nations, transmitting to the whole family a message based on biblical principles, ethics and morals...that bring to each listener a recognition of Jesus as the lord and only savior of life. (Faro del Caribe: 2013)

According to the station’s website, in 1948 it gave the first ever evangelical broadcast in Central America. As the mission statement suggests, the station does more than just play Christian music and share a Christian message but also offers counselling to help people “reach a full spiritual and emotional life and create awareness of salvation through the light of the word of God”(ibid.).

Only two people spoke about the influence of evangelical television programs. For one woman, it was the only access she had to evangelical ideas growing up in a strict Catholic household. For another informant, when he heard an evangelist preaching on T.V. that “you have

to change your life”, these words “hit [his] heart” and were a primary trigger that led him towards becoming evangelical.

During my fieldwork, I had the opportunity to observe two mass evangelizing events: A *Campaña* (campaign) at Puertas Eternas and a canton wide *Cruzada* (crusade) in San Isidro.

The “campaign” is a yearly weekend event put on by Puertas Eternas to bring in new members. The church spread flyers throughout the community, going door to door and advertising in local shops. The tag line of the event was: “Jesus wants to enter your life”. It started with a six hour service on Friday night meant for the usual congregation then special evening services on Saturday and Sunday, plus the normal Sunday morning service. The Saturday and Sunday night services were the primary events of the campaign. Puertas Eternas invited members of one of its sister churches in San Andres (just outside San Jose), where Pastor José’s brother is pastor, to come and help in the event. On Friday, members of the church in San Andres along with Juan Navarro, a prominent member of Puertas Eternas, drove through the community playing Christian music over loud speakers, inviting people to the campaign. In the evening, the same group set up outside the fruit and vegetable market in the centre of town and began intervals of testimony, sermon and music. The group played Christian music in a traditional *ranchera* style (Latin American folk or country music). The music was a stark contrast to the usual rock style of evangelical worship music, no doubt with the intention to reach a different type of audience. Juan preached about repentance and the joys and fulfillment of a Christian life. Another man gave a testimony about how empty his life had been and how transformed he was through Christ.

For the most part the whole scene was ignored by those who passed through the area during the event. In the 45 minutes to an hour the group performed, several people came and went from the vegetable and fruit shop and only one person lingered long enough to have a conversation. I observed the whole event, first from the vegetable shop then from a common meeting and sitting area in front of the store across the street. There were, as usual, a group of people sitting and talking, none of whom I had ever seen at the evangelical church. Only one man, as far as I could tell, paid attention to the evangelizers. I later saw this man at the campaign service the following night. I had seen him in town numerous times but never at the church.¹⁶ I asked Alejandro, the main sound technician at Puertas Eternas, about the evangelizing effort and he said plainly that some people will be bothered by it and some will like it. I heard this type of realistic optimism often.

The Saturday campaign service drew a larger crowd to Puertas Eternas than I had seen before. There were new faces and the usual. There was one family I had seen in town but never at the church. One woman brought her husband who, she had told me, came from a strong Catholic background. Many of the new faces were from the church in San Andres, which made it difficult to discern who had come as a potential convert from in and around Santa Cruz and who had come from San Andres. The fact that at least some people from the surrounding community came to the event suggests a positive impact, but its lasting impact for the church remains unclear. As I noted above, a campaign like this played an important role in the very early stages of David's conversion. While it is unclear if the 2013 campaign triggered a similar process for someone else, the other evangelizing event I witnessed in San Isidro did have an important impact on one of my informants.

The crusade was a much larger event, hosted at the municipal soccer stadium near the centre of San Isidro and put on in a combined effort between evangelical churches throughout Pérez Zeledón. This event advertised as “for the health of the family”, and featured “Pastor Apostle” William Magaña as the keynote speaker. He is the pastor of “*Comunidad Apostolica Internacional: Pasion por las Almas*” (International Apostolic Community: Passion for the Souls) in San Jose which has a weekly attendance of 5000 people (Holland and May: 2011). This event was not peculiar to Pérez Zeledón, but part of a series of crusades hosted by William Magaña in other cities in Costa Rica and other countries in the region (Cruzadas por la Familia: 2013)

The stadium with a capacity of around 5000 was full. Both sets of bleachers were packed as well as half the field. Many people from Santa Cruz were in attendance. There were gates to get onto the field and a friend of mine explained that the field was for people who wanted to be “healed” or who wanted to convert. Encircling the crowd on the field was a line of people carrying clipboards with the intention to receive those who wanted to make a declaration of faith. They were positioned in such a way to make it difficult to leave the field without crossing their path. A few weeks after the event, Omar talked about his declaration of faith at the crusade, and how the event had been foundational in his effort to change his life.

For a long time I wanted to do it [go to the crusade]...I was crying, a pastor William Magaña came, I made a declaration of faith to accept Christ to change my life. Something in me didn't want to go I had fear, I had to stop doing things of the world, I had to go make the declaration of faith. (Omar)

In Omar's story his desire to change his life and step forward as an evangelical crystallized at the crusade. Events such as these are important demarcated spaces for conversions to happen.

Everyone who walked out onto the field for the same purpose as Omar was brought to that point, motivated by a complex series of life choices, experiences, relationships, hopes and fears. It would be naïve to assume we can explain exactly why people went out onto the field and left evangelical, yet careful attention to Omar's story and the stories of the evangelicals I interviewed suggest there are at least some common factors. So far I have presented two of these factors: the role of family to share evangelical ideas and encourage or impede a conversion and a disenchanted, non-existent or nominal relationship to Catholicism. Alone, these factors are only part of the story and only matter when a situation in life brings someone to question their current path, to seek more spiritual meaning and purpose or to "stop doing things of the world"¹⁷ and seek solutions to change it.

Individual and Contingency Factors: Seeking Solutions to Life's Challenges¹⁸

In this section I explore the primary motivations that led my informants to seek an evangelical faith. Of my 32 informants who had converted or returned to the faith, 25 did so in response to difficult life situations. Of this group 22 made a direct link between a difficult life situation and their conversion. The other three spoke about difficult life situations during our interview but did not give these as a direct reference that motivated their conversion. The remaining seven did not make any reference to a difficult situation. For the 25 who did speak about difficult situations, 13 were women and 12 were men. Of the seven who did not mention these types of situations there were four women and three men. As I mentioned in the literature review, there is a debate between "material" and spiritually motivated conversions. In this section I traverse this debate and highlight cases of both.

Steigenga notes the danger of “reifying the instrumental nature of conversion as a path to resolving life crises” (2010: 79). I agree with Steigenga that too much of a focus on the instrumental nature of conversion neglects the myriad of social factors that play into a religious change. However, because so many of my informants did seek an evangelical faith because of difficult life situations, I need to focus on this angle to understand my informants’ religious decisions. As Pastor Julio argues, it is difficult situations which cause one “to cry out to God” and this “spiritual yearning starts one on the path of God” (Pastor Julio). Along similar lines one of my informants suggested that when these situations do not arise and things are going well “you don’t remember God” (Sophia).

I present the material in this section through a combination of Gooren’s individual and contingency factors. The individual factors, that I focus on are: “A personal need to give concrete expression to feelings of meaning (or meaninglessness)...A personal need to seek meaning and/or spirituality in a religious group...A personal need to change one’s life situation” (52). It is this last aspect that links most directly with the contingency factors, such as: “An acutely felt crisis or turning point...A chance meeting with representatives of a religious group” (*ibid.*).

As I mentioned in the literature review, the anomie hypothesis has been popular for understanding evangelical growth in Latin America since the work of Lalive D’Epinay (1967) and Willems (1969). Most have drawn a link between those poor rural migrants to urban centres who have been displaced and disconnected from traditional sources of value and meaning creation with Pentecostal growth (Robbins 2004:123). Though, as I said earlier, my context was different. Though dealing with a mostly rural and middle class population, the idea that an evangelical faith often corresponds to difficult life situations remained central. The economic

and social stability of Pérez Zeledón depends to a great degree on the ever fragile and fluctuating market price of coffee. This position of constant uncertainty could have been an underlying factor that led so many of my participants into the difficult situations that motivated their conversions such as substance abuse (alcoholism) and family and marital problems.

Dealing with difficult life situations. Of the 25 individuals who were motivated by a crisis or difficult situation, 11 were because of substance abuse and 14 due to difficult family situations such as marital problems, dealing with a death, support for children, or having a child (seeking support and stability to raise the child). One woman spoke specifically of depression leading to her conversion, while others mentioned depression related to their marital or substance abuse problems.

It was more common for men to convert due to substance abuse (9 of 11), primarily alcohol related but several also spoke about drug use (marijuana). Only two of those who converted because of substance abuse were women, and both, along with three of these men were also motivated to deal with family problems. For women it was more common (10 of 14) to seek evangelicalism due to family problems, which in several cases related to their spouse's drinking problems. Three of the men had different motivations related to family: two because of the death of a family member and one because of getting married and having their first child. The fourth spoke about drinking problems as well but was primarily focused on rebuilding his marriage. Age did not appear to be a variable, as the majority of informants in the older age bracket had converted around the same age range as the younger group, and in both age groups similar motivations came up.

As other studies have found, (Smilde 2007; Martin 2002; Annis 1987) searching for solutions to substance abuse problems has been a key factor motivating religious change, and Pérez Zeledón is no different. Several members at Puertas Eternas spoke about their time at a cantina, which two members used to own. They spoke about their drinking problems as a struggle against “*las cosas del mundo*” (the things of the world) or “*andaba en la calle*” (going in the street), as they phrased it: a battle against the temptations of the flesh, of worldly things. This was a common theme amongst my informants, especially those who had struggled against these temptations.

Jorge, a son of Gustavo, provides an example. He had a well-known drinking problem. His siblings told me how he would start drinking on Friday and not come home until Monday. Jorge spoke about the Word of God as a “sword” that allowed him to battle his struggles with drinking and partying. When one of his friends, with whom he drank, stopped because he converted, Jorge saw this as a path to follow. In another case, Omar, who was undergoing a conversion process at the time of our conversation, explained that he needed God in his life to help him “fill an emptiness with peace” because he said, “When you have peace you don’t need to dance [or] drink alcohol” (Omar). Both Pastor José and Pastor Carlos talked about having problems with partying and drinking as reasons to change their lives through an evangelical faith.

Depression as a result of having to deal with marital problems was cited as another motivation for conversion. One woman spoke about the struggles in her marriage and the depression she was caught in. A sister-in-law prayed for her and her husband and brought a pastor to their house to do the same. As a result of this intervention her depression faded and her marriage improved; she consequently continued to pursue an evangelical faith. Several women

spoke about marital problems stemming from their husbands' drinking and they wanted to bring change to the household through evangelicalism. Some women sought change in their households for the sake of their children. One woman was pregnant at the time of our interview and she said her primary motivation was to bring her child to a "tranquil home without problems". One woman spoke about a depression that was not tied to a difficult situation. She said she had an "emptiness" in her heart, and was always sad. When people started to pray for her this emptiness was "healed" and she continued "going forward" in her evangelical faith.¹⁹

One young couple spoke about their depression as well as substance and marital problems as motivators for a change. Marcelo said that he wanted to "open a relationship with God" in order to change his life (Marcelo). He and Isabella had recently moved to Matanzas, a community close to Santa Cruz in Pérez Zeledón, and had used this as an opportunity for a change in their spiritual lives as well.

For Edwin and Maria, different situations caused rupture in their lives and led them to seek spiritual answers. For Edwin, it happened around the time he got married and the birth of his first child. He began to "experience a different kind of love" (Edwin) and had many questions. He did not expand on these questions in our conversation but said he consulted those "mature in Catholicism" about them. He was unsatisfied with their suggestions and found the answers he sought in evangelicalism. Maria had already been exposed to the evangelical message and had wanted to convert. The impetus to cross the threshold came at the funeral of her sister where an evangelical man spoke to her about the benefits of the gospel and she decided to change her faith.

In situations of dramatic change, such as the birth of a child or the death of a family member, my informants were confronted with central uncertainties of life: how to care for and guide a new life into the world, and how to deal with one's own mortality. Religion provides a framework to understand these difficult situations. For both Edwin and Maria, the answers provided by Catholicism were not satisfactory and they looked elsewhere. Both had previous encounters with the faith through "chance meeting[s]" with evangelicals (Gooren 2010: 52). From these encounters they sought out solutions and security in the same faith these individuals exemplified to deal with and understand the difficult questions they were forced to confront.

Living with religious meaning and purpose. Not every participant spoke about their motivation to become evangelical in connection with a specific crisis or event. Seven described explicitly being motivated by a desire to live a more spiritually meaningful life. Three others, whom I spoke about in the previous section, referenced a primarily spiritual motivation to become evangelical yet also spoke about difficult situations but did not tie these explicitly to their religious decision. For example, one informant became evangelical "for the Truth" which he did feel existed in the Catholic Church. However, he later explained that his evangelical brother, before he passed away, hoped his siblings would become "Christian". Yet for others there was no indication of an event or situation. As one informant said, he just wanted the security of walking "the path of God". It does not mean these individuals woke up one day and decided to become evangelical; I do not believe religious decisions happen inside a vacuum.²⁰ For most of these informants, a negative relationship to Catholicism played an important role. As one informant put it, people seek answers in evangelicalism because the Catholic Church "has lost its ability to regenerate the individual" (Jorge).

Manuel described being motivated to search for new spiritual meaning when he no longer “felt” anything during Catholic processions. He started to read the Bible and found evidence that the “worship of images”, which he felt Catholics were doing, was biblically prohibited. Unlike the rest of my informants, no one led Manuel to evangelicalism. As he started to read the Bible he began to think differently. When he found that those who thought like him were evangelicals, he joined them. Manuel spoke about not having any vices or problems but wanted an evangelical faith to have a relationship directly with God and Jesus, not mediated through Catholic intermediaries. Manuel lives in Santa Cruz but goes to church at Santuario de Adoracion in San Isidro. He studies computer engineering at a university in San Isidro, speaks English,²¹ and works part time in the tourist town of Uvita on the Pacific Coast. These factors, and the fact he found an evangelical faith on his own, exemplify his unique character amongst my informants. He framed his conversion as a desire to have a “real” relationship with God. I believe it could also be understood as a project to break from tradition. He was critical of the intermingling between Catholicism and the State in Costa Rica, and what he sees as the blind obedience to and maintenance of traditional norms by his extended Catholic family. For example, his grandparents, aunts and uncles fought with him about his decision to become evangelical. They tried to argue with him that it was bad but, as he said, they could not tell him for what reasons.

Like Manuel, Diego attributed his conversion not to having any vices or problems, but to a desire “to know the Word, to discover what the Bible taught” (Diego). Diego articulated his experience as starting to learn, through the Bible, that what he had been taught in the Catholic Church was wrong, and he felt the need to “go on the correct path that the Bible teaches” (*ibid.*). Diego is in a unique position at Puertas Eternas, as one of the few core members who is not part of the extended Ruiz family.

In his story it is difficult to discern the conditions that influenced his conversion; in two lengthy interviews nothing concrete was brought forward. What appears to be the most relevant event was his “chance meeting” with Pastor Carlos Riviera. As I mentioned earlier, Pastor Carlos was influential, alongside Gustavo Ruiz, in founding the evangelical community in Santa Cruz. Diego met Pastor Carlos as he was walking through the community evangelizing. He specifically noted that he was impressed by Carlos’s “way of being”. He was in his early 20’s when he met Carlos who shared the Bible with him and invited him to church. Diego, now 42, has been going ever since. The fact Diego brought up his meeting with Pastor Carlos as the only connecting situation to his conversion directs us to the role that those spreading the evangelical message have on influencing a religious change. How much did Diego’s own questioning of his traditional religious knowledge influence how receptive he was to Carlos’s message, and how much was Carlos able to induce this questioning through how he presented the evangelical message to Diego?

In the beginning of this chapter I spoke about the important role that one’s family plays in influencing an evangelical conversion. The best example of this comes from the Ruiz family. Gustavo converted, and overtime his children followed and have taken up his mantle sustaining the evangelical community in Santa Cruz. Though Gustavo was presented to me as a type of mythic figure, a man of charisma, with integrity and, most importantly, with a miraculous gift of encyclopedic biblical understanding, his children did not come around and join him in the faith for 10 years. Yet all it took for Diego, it seems, was one meeting with Carlos Riviera. These two examples highlight the importance of timing: the right variables aligning at the right time to lead someone to engage with the evangelical faith. For Diego, it seems the timing was perfect. He

was ready and in the right frame of mind to absorb Carlos's message or at least Carlos presented his message in such a way that got Diego's attention.

For another informant, the right conditions coincided with a chance meeting. Mateo spoke about his struggles with substance abuse and his desire to overcome them. A crusade passed in front of his house, where he saw people with whom he used to drink but had become evangelical. He noticed the dramatic change in them and wanted the same for himself. He did not have a strong Catholic faith, in part, because of the irregular and infrequent services at the Catholic Church close to his house. As his old friends exemplified, evangelicalism offered a way to change his life and he decided to take it.

The timing worked different for Gustavo's children, who were not ready to follow their father right away, and it took many years for the evangelical "seed" to take root and grow. His children all had stories of their own struggles, experiences and interactions with other evangelicals, such as Jorge's evangelical former drinking companion, that eventually led them to follow their father.

In this chapter I have described the motivations and factors that lead people towards an evangelical faith. On the one hand there are common themes, such as a previous nominal Catholic faith and the importance of family to present evangelical ideas and encourage or impede a conversion. I believe these two factors are important as secondary conditions, as those which make the soil more fertile for an evangelical seed to take root and grow. My informants described the way "the Word" works on a potential convert as "planting a seed" and I follow this metaphor here. Though these conditions make the ground more fertile, the impetus for the seed to take root and grow is a situation of crisis, change, or existential and spiritual dislocation. Though more elusive to the outsider, those who articulated a spiritual motivation still went

through a process that led them to a space detached from Catholic meaning on the one hand, and a desire for an alternative system of meaning on the other. From this space of dislocation, the next chapter looks at how evangelicalism engages people to step out of this phase and become evangelical.

Chapter Six: Engagement and the Making and Practice of an Evangelical Faith

If one wishes to be religiously active, to participate and engage in worship in Santa Cruz, there are only two options: the Catholic or evangelical church. If one is unsatisfied with these then a bus trip into San Isidro provides more variety but little fundamental difference as the choice, for the most part, is either Catholic or evangelical.²² At this point my informants have been exposed to Pentecostalism, experienced something that has caused them to seek religious help, and for various reasons no longer see, or have never seen, Catholicism capable of responding to their religious needs. In this chapter, I look at how evangelicalism works to engage people and pull them towards the faith and how the characteristics of evangelical faith and practice attempts to provide for these religious needs. My informants come from a religious milieu pervaded by Catholicism. As a result, much of how they describe becoming evangelical and practicing the faith is framed against their previous Catholic experiences. I highlight this perspective at times in the chapter to show what they feel evangelicalism offers that Catholicism does not.

Engaging with the Message and Messengers

My informants spoke about first becoming engaged with evangelicalism because it offered something that they had not heard or seen before. According to one of Gustavo's daughters, the pastor's message that Gustavo first heard was different and it caught his attention. "The result was that he encountered a way out for all his problems. He started to rise up²³, to see things different, [to have an] interior peace" (Marta). Another of his children suggested that the biblical basis of the pastor's message may have been the verse I heard most often quoted: John

10:10. “The *thief*²⁴ cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”.

My informants would describe the effect the evangelical message had on Gustavo as the “power of the Word”, as if God were speaking directly to him. For example, David spoke about a sermon where the pastor “was preaching something he hadn’t heard before, that the Lord spoke [to him] in his word. [The Pastor said] he that does this or that will go to Hell if he doesn’t repent to the Lord of Glory” (David). He was outside the church waiting to pick up his wife and children. Being married into the Ruiz family, he no doubt had heard the evangelical message before, but something about that situation “hit” him. After that night, he began engaging more and more with the faith. We were sitting around the family’s kitchen table when he told me this story. After finishing he broke down crying and said, “Why [Jesus] did you change my life, change my home, my family, everything” (*ibid.*). He converted over 20 years ago, but his emotional response is emblematic of what becoming evangelical means in many people’s lives.

For Maria, she first engaged with Pentecostalism because of how an evangelical woman calmed her “fear of death”. The woman did not have fear, Maria said, because “she was with Jesus”; this was something that Maria had not heard before. She was 15 when she spoke to the woman in San Jose. She “liked the gospel but people said it was bad so she lived with fear” (Maria). It was 12 years later that she finally converted. A man at her evangelical sister’s funeral talked to her about the gospel. “He gave account of many beautiful things”. He invited her to accept the Gospel and she did so because of what he said (*ibid.*).

It was not just the message that engaged Maria’s attention and drew her to pursue the faith; she was also impressed by the character of these evangelicals. “They demonstrated much

love in a different way than I had been living before” (Maria). It was because of this love “[they] had towards me that I wanted to live like these people lived” (*ibid.*). Maria’s story illustrates the important role that those carrying the evangelical message play in engaging people with the faith. For Maria and other informants, the evangelicals they met represented examples of a way to live a life they wanted to follow.

In Isabella’s case it was not necessarily the message or messengers that engaged her attention but the faith in practice. For her it was the style of worship and how people reacted to the worship that got her attention. Similar to the cases of Maria and David, evangelicalism illustrated something entirely new.

When I went [to the church]...it was very strange, I hadn’t seen it before. I felt the people were feeling a living God, God is alive, he was there...a God that is with them, filling them,...Those people are feeling something, I asked what do they feel, the woman crying, falling. What is this they are feeling? I wanted to feel this. I wanted to cry, jump, shout, and be happy. I had many problems and here there is a God and I wanted to feel it. (Isabella)

In this example we see engagement through witnessing the faith embodied and in action. She was impressed and saw it as a way to deal with the challenges in her own life. Isabella was exposed to not just a “living God” but to a God that is active and “filling” his worshippers. It is the same type of attributes that David described with regards to the “power of the Word” when he felt the “Lord speak to him”. Not only did evangelical faith get their attention because of something new and different, but in these interactions with the faith they felt God was present and active.

Experiencing the Divine through Embodied Faith

As discussed in the literature review, the notion of God as active in the lives of believers is central to Pentecostalism (Robbins 2011: 56). When my informants experience this reality in their own lives it further motivates their evangelical pursuit. For two informants, God's presence was felt dramatically when they first attended the evangelical church.

For example, Anna had some exposure to evangelical ideas and was impressed by a pastor who came to pray for her husband's ill sister; however, her own affirmative experience that triggered her conversion came when she first attended the church. "She [a woman at the church] put her hands above me and I felt a shiver from my head to my feet. I was scared. I had never felt that in my life... I felt an incredible inner peace...because of this I kept attending the church with everything against us" (Anna). As I highlighted in the previous chapter, Anna had already felt pressure from her strongly Catholic family discouraging her from pursuing evangelicalism and was having second thoughts. This experience gave her the courage to continue despite her family's condemnation.

Another woman was dealing with marital problems and a dysfunctional household, and was encouraged by her uncles to try the evangelical church to help her situation. As soon as she walked into the church her decision was confirmed. She felt something "indescribable" go through her whole body. She said she felt the Holy Spirit and knew she was on the "right path" (Camila).

For another woman, a similar experience occurred when she first interacted with the Bible. Rosario was still Catholic at the time and felt a desire to read the Bible; when she touched it she felt a "shiver" go through her body. She was scared and did not understand what

happened. Her evangelical sister explained to her that “now the Holy Spirit is inside you...because you are starting to understand the Word of God” (Rosario).

One woman spoke about the feelings she got after she started attending the church, and framed these against her previous Catholic experiences.

Before my spiritual life was go, sit, rise then good-bye, always the same for 33 years it was the same. When you enter the [evangelical] church its different, the songs are different...there is something inside you, something that comes to you, that you can't explain but you feel well, you are happy, everything is beautiful. (Sophia)

These stories show how evangelicalism engages people through somatic experiences. These can be “indescribable” sensations or feelings of “inner peace” and can happen, instantly and spontaneously, or they are cultivated overtime through continued worship. These experiences work to fuel further practice and investigation into the evangelical faith. As one person said, “When [you] feel something that fills you and gives you peace you want to search for it” (Marta). Earlier I spoke about two individuals who witnessed (Isabella observing evangelical worship) or heard (David hearing the “Lord speak” to him) God active and present in a church service. God’s accessible presence is most acutely confirmed when it is embodied, as my informants understand, in the form of the Holy Spirit. This experience gives the individual “a spiritual motivation each day to know more and more” (Juan). These experiences then pull people onto a spiritual path where God is active and “pervasive” (Robbins 2011:56). Believers are encouraged to engage with this relationship to God through a study of “His Word” in the Bible and by embodying the relationship during worship.

Empowering the Faithful through Access to the Bible

As I highlighted in Chapter Two, central to Pentecostalism is a strong relationship with the Bible. It is here where the “Word of God” emanates and where evangelicals turn to in order to both guide and define their spiritual and daily lives. The church promotes the importance of the Bible and gives classes for new members in how to read it and what to focus on.

For example, at Santuario de Adoracion, before the service, there was a small study group. This was a Bible study group for new members, who a friend said were learning “how” to be evangelical. For one man the *“pura palabra”* the (“pure Word”) was the most important element of his faith that changed his life. When he first congregated at Puertas Eternas, there were classes to learn and study the Bible, which helped him “to learn better” how to understand the Word. Two recent members at Puertas Eternas talked about the importance of this kind of Bible class they were taking. They were guided through the Bible by two core members of the church and directed towards certain passages, with the members there to answer any questions.

In most cases people had never read the Bible until they were exposed to evangelical ideas or became evangelical. Everyone who spoke about the Bible in regards to their previous Catholic faith said they had never been encouraged to read it.²⁵ Some intimated, such as Manuel, that it was specifically starting to read the Bible that fostered an initial connection to evangelicalism. For others it performed more as the framework and manual for their new faith.

New believers are encouraged to interact with the Bible because it gives them direct access to the power and authority of the Word. Through this process, believers come to cultivate a different understanding of the Trinity (Father [God], Son [Jesus]), Holy Spirit) and build a new relationship to it. For example, as a Catholic, Diego was taught that the Holy Spirit was a “dove

locked inside a closed trunk”. “Before this you never had the experience; [you] never knew what the Holy Spirit was” (Diego). But this changed when he began to study the Bible and understand the Word.

To know the Word, it teaches you something else: that we are temples for the Holy Spirit. It’s not going to be in a locked trunk, it’s going to be in our hearts, in the moment you receive Christ the Holy Spirit is going to be in you and me. (*ibid.*)

Like Diego, Maria’s perspective changed when she began to read the Bible. Maria talked about her new relationship to God, who before was “distant”, but through reading the Bible she “realized that God is a friend, father, brother and companion” (Maria).

Through encouragement to read the Bible, evangelicals are empowered to construct a faith directly with God. They no longer rely on what they see as a “man-made” religious authority to decree what they should or should not believe. This guidance instead comes from fellow believers and pastors who “show the way”, guiding the new believer into a personal dialogue with God. For my informants the central points of dialogue are through the Word and the Holy Spirit. For people like Camila, Anna and Rosario, somatic experiences of the Holy Spirit confirm the validity of the dialogue with God. For others such as Sophia, Diego and Manuel, the sensation may be more ordinary (feeling of peace, happiness, redemption, etc.) but no less affirming. The believer is led back to the church to constantly re-ignite the dialogue with God and led towards the Bible to continue to learn his Word.

The knowledge that gives meaning to evangelical experience is created through a study of the Bible and entrance into its teachings. This knowledge is never complete but simply begins a process of learning without end. What crystalizes at this point is the framework with which to

understand the experiential quality that evangelicalism produces and is given full expression during worship.

In Church Where Believers are Made

Evangelical worship was often compared by my informants to previous experiences in the Catholic Church. For example, as one woman put it, “when I attended the Catholic Church it was very cold, you just go and listen to the Priest and sleep. Here [Centro Victoria in Cocobri²⁶] you come, dance, speak to God and worship God, everything is beautiful” (Sara). The evangelical church environment is legitimated in biblical authority. As one informant argues, “in the Bible it says chant to God with shouts, jumps and praises... you do this, you jump and clap as it says in the Bible” (Marcelo).²⁷

It is important to note, as others have (Mossière 2007: 119; Shoaps 2002: 39) that though evangelical services have a “spontaneous” disposition, the program is well orchestrated. The music team practices three nights a week along with playing at three weekly services. Songs can be ten minutes or longer and when on point the transitions between them are seamless and the flow of energy is uninterrupted. During services, the pastor often participates in worship on stage and conducts the music team alongside the piano player to cue a transition or continue with a rhythm.

The songs are styled and played to maximize an emotional response, the choruses are repeated extensively and the lyrics are simple and engaging. For example, one of the most popular songs heard every week was “*Creo en ti*” by Julio Melgar. The verse is as follows: “Today I want to lift my hands to you, marvelous Jesus, miraculous Lord, fill this place with your presence and send down your power to those who are here, I believe in you Jesus and in all

you will do in me”. The chorus follows and is repeated numerous times: “Receive all the glory, receive all the honour, precious son of God” (translation mine). Even I, the uninitiated, could not help but be moved by the music and feel the emotional energy pouring through the room. I tried to imagine what that emotional upwelling would feel like if thought of, with absolute conviction, as the presence of God.

Worship music and prayer are complementary ways God’s presence is invoked during services. During prayer, the pastor invites God to “enter into the hearts of each and every person” and to “move them in all his glory and power”. The believer imagines a “personal God” who they speak freely and directly with in prayer. Some informants spoke negatively about the Catholic style of recitation and believed it impeded their personal prayer desires. For example, one man said that “in the Catholic Church it is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. There is a way to follow, to pray the same...even if you have something to pray for, you have to recite” (Marcelo). In the evangelical church you can “sing what your heart wants” and read what your heart wants” (*ibid.*). The church body constructs its services in terms of worship songs and prayers to facilitate this freedom to follow one’s own heart in dialogue with God.

The experience of this dialogue with God is not an end point but an entrance into a new way of living, one that requires constant nurturing. The experience is effective; people come and feel peace and gain strength to confront life’s problems. As one woman said, “When we take medicine and we feel better, we are going to want to take more to stay better” (Marta).

At one of the first services I attended, a member described the church environment as “*todo libre*” (totally free). His comments were confirmed as constantly I saw people coming and going from the church, moving around within the congregation during services, standing or

sitting, participating or visiting. On one occasion, Pastor José led a special prayer for a small group up at the stage. There were several people around the group praying with energetic purpose. It seemed to me a powerful moment of devotion and divine request. At the back of the church, a group of people visited casually as if nothing was happening. At that moment I was shocked, but over time I came to expect this type of environment.

Beyond the openness of worship, the evangelical church creates a place of unprecedented affection. One woman had never felt this type of community in the Catholic Church, only “greetings from a distance”. In the evangelical church she felt affection like she had never before because “people embraced you” (Sophia). In the Catholic Church, Anna said, if “you came and went or didn’t go no one realized it but in the evangelical church...if you don’t go for a while people get concerned and they come to see you or call to make sure everything is okay” (Anna). On this point, I was fortunate to have an outlier among my sample participants who tempered the rosy image everyone else constructed.

Alberto had attended Puertas Eternas for three months and no one had greeted or welcomed him. Diego and Catarina, who lived just down the street from him and who sat in church usually not far away, had no idea who he was. During my time in Santa Cruz, Alberto left Puertas Eternas and began attending Cristiana Bautista in San Isidro where he received an entirely different reception. The friend who invited Alberto to Cristiana Bautista had a similar experience at Puertas Eternas. I was thankful to hear this account as it shed light on the fact that this “atmosphere of love” can be exclusive, and seems to emanate from the congregation and not, as they imagine, descending from God.

Freedom to worship as one desires is not the only open aspect of the evangelical church. Other informants spoke of the freedom pastors have to preach what they want, to engage with the intricacies of the lives in their congregation. According to Manuel “a pastor can say whatever things that have changed lives...depending on the place...they can speak of what is happening in the world. In the Catholic Church it is whatever the Pope says” (Manuel).²⁸

In this open and free space believers come to worship as well as follow the pastor through his leadership of service, prayer and sermon. As Manuel suggests, they can innovatively present their Christian message. In such a competitive market, a church’s viability depends on the skill of the pastor to engage the faithful, to provide hope and structure, weaving biblical narrative into the common daily struggles of their immediate community. He must offer a space that empowers people to explore their relationship to God, to feel good, to find meaning and hope in a sometimes harsh and often unpredictable world. Though Puertas Eternas does not have any neighbourly evangelical competition, the ease with which people can go to San Isidro provides a choice. In order to keep and attract members, the church body must create an engaging space that facilitates both personal and community fulfillment. A church as a centre for fellowship and worship must have financial means to survive, which only happens if on a Sunday morning enough people come and tithe.

Evangelicalism engaged my informant’s attention because it presented something different that they had not experienced before. In this faith and practice, believers are encouraged to construct a dialogue with a God who is immediate and active in daily life. God’s position and the relationship one can have to him are legitimated through the Bible, as God speaks directly through the “living Word” (Marta), and through worship where God’s presence, as the Holy

Spirit, is embodied. It is stepping into and cultivating this dialogue that allows my informants to change their lives, and how evangelical faith responds to their needs.

The Evangelical Mindset

When my informants begin to cultivate their personal dialogue with God they adopt a certain understanding of reality, one where the “dichotomy of sacred/profane” (Robbins 2011: 56) dissolves and is reoriented into a dichotomy of good versus evil, spirit versus flesh, or righteousness versus sin and temptation. The believer imagines herself in a constant battle between these. God sends down his spirit to influence and lead one onto the “right path” and Satan summons up his power into the body, the flesh, to lead one to temptation and bodily desire. For Smilde (2007), the adoption of this mindset, what he calls “imaginative rationality” (52), gives people a way to understand their struggles with temptation and allows “God [to take] ‘control’ of the person and keep dangerous influences at bay” (62). I believe this concept explains how individuals dealing with substance abuse or family and marital issues use their evangelical faith to both confront and overcome these challenges. Omar’s²⁹ story provides unique insight into how employing the evangelical mindset can help a person change his or her life.

I heard from numerous people in Santa Cruz that there was a drug problem amongst the youth in the area. Late at night a group of young people would congregate beside the town store. I felt these individuals may be that group. I first saw Omar in that group. I did not really take notice until I saw him at the crusade in San Isidro. The next time I saw him he was passing out flyers in Santa Cruz for the campaign at Puertas Eternas. Eventually we set up an interview and he told me his story.

I have always been a *malcriado* (misbehaved) in the gospel since I was very small. I never took it seriously. I was always going in the world, it was never important...Now in this time and going forward I want God to enter my life. This world doesn't give you anything, only maybe suffering...Now I am looking for him [God] for help going forward to change my thoughts. It's complicated, because it is still new. Being new you still want to drink, smoke, be with women to have sex. I think that the love of God is unique. It's the only way to deal with life. Only he can fill an emptiness...If I start thinking, I haven't done anything. I am 23 years old. There hasn't been any change in my life, I have continued being a failure...Its beautiful when you have his [God's] love. You have peace, you don't need to dance, drink alcohol. (Omar)

There are two specific aspects of Omar's story that exemplify the evangelical mindset. First, Omar believes in an active God who will not only offer help to change his thoughts but provide him peace in this process. Second, this peace is embodied as he believes it will fill the space once occupied by dancing and drinking. This suggests that overcoming problems is not just done through the adoption of a mindset. An evangelical faith can substitute somatically for what "dancing and drinking" provided before. Yet it is not entirely a somatic experience, as the feeling of peace comes through a realization of the emptiness of his previous actions and hopes for a more meaningful future. For Omar, being 23 and "going in the world" led to his life as a failure and now when "God enters his life" he hopes it fills his emptiness with love and peace.

The most common biblical reference my informants used to articulate the folly of the "things of the world" and the hope of a spiritual solution was John 10:10, which I quoted earlier. At the beginning of this chapter I spoke about the importance of this passage in Gustavo's transformation. His son used it as a way to express how his father understood his problems and found motivation to overcome them. Juan used the same verse to articulate his change. He was young and had "vices of the world" but becoming evangelical "brought new hope" and he "woke up to a life of abundance in Jesus Christ" (Juan). As Smilde argues, part the concept of

“imaginative rationality” (2007: 52) refers to people drawing meaning from a “source domain” (the Bible) and using it in the “target domain” of daily life to articulate difficult situations (56). Applying this verse of the Bible helps people understand their past failures and provides a way to navigate through daily life with hopes of a more “abundant” future.

After the crusade where Omar had made a declaration of faith, he went drinking again with his brother and friends. He articulated this desire to drink as the “work of the devil”. For Omar, this temptation affirmed the forces of evil at work, but also emphasized the importance of having God “enter his life” to combat the devil’s influence. As he said: “When you are on the side of flesh (*carne*) you can’t do it alone”. In other words, evangelicals require the assurance of divine help to confront temptation and follow a path away from it. Jorge, who also converted to tackle a drinking problem, believes this help comes through interacting with the divine during prayer because “you have communion with God and God guides you and gives security” (Jorge).

In Chapter Five, I discussed how some of my informants sought an evangelical faith to deal with marital problems. Like dealing with substance abuse, God works in the same way and is brought into an accessible and close relationship to give “fortitude” and assurance to help solve these problems. For example, Marcelo and Isabella were rebuilding their marriage through evangelical faith. As Isabella said, “coming to the church we have decided to talk about our problems...and put it in God’s hands...there are things that are really difficult but God has solutions to the problems” (Isabella). Marcelo described God’s helpful presence in the following: “before the problems were like an impenetrable mountain...the Holy Spirit that is in us gives us the fortitude to think of many options to confront problems” (Marcelo).

Those who did not convert in direct reaction to difficult life situations also spoke about the assurance a personal relationship to God provides. For example, in Manuel's case "life was always good" (Manuel), yet the importance of now imagining a close and personal God still gives him assurance that when he does have problems he can overcome them. "I can handle problems [where] before it maybe was the end. Now it's different, you know God has a solution for you, you have a lord next to you, near you, in your heart" (*ibid.*).

Like Manuel, Diego did not have any specific problems with "things of the world" but still spoke of the assurance that comes from a relationship with God. For Diego the assurance is not just about the ability to solve problems but that it gives life meaning and purpose.

In my case I didn't have problems with alcoholism or things of the world, but you start to have a confidence in God. In many cases for people there is insecurity, they don't know what they want in life...they don't have goals³⁰...But in God there is a confidence, a new mentality. Now you have hope for life...when you know God, get the word of God, God begins to change your mind...[and] you have a totally different life. (Diego)

The confidence in God that Diego speaks about, from his perspective, is not simply a belief that there is a God out there, but that there is a God inside him that he can "know, and who "begins to change [his] mind". Manuel is even more direct about the embodied nature of God, as God is now "in [his] heart". For Marcelo and Isabella this embodied nature is operationalized and God's presence is used as a means to confront problems and build solutions to repair their marriage. For my informants an evangelical faith is more than just a mindset where they "believe" God is active and present in their lives. This mindset exists but is only legitimated because people "feel" that God is as such and therefore they can, as Diego says, "know" Him. For individuals like Omar, who seek evangelical faith because of substance abuse, the embodied quality of God is central. According to Omar, this feeling of "peace" that comes from God

replaces what drinking and doing drugs did before. Instead of a brief period of euphoria, happiness, or carefreeness usually preceded and followed by guilt and shame, one comes to worship with hopeful anticipation to be filled with “God’s love” and leaves rejuvenated with a healthy desire to “do it again”. Even for the embodied experiences in church, like alcohol and drugs, the buzz wears off, and one must return to worship, to experience and reinforce God’s presence again and again.

As discussed in Chapter Two, not everyone returns. In fact, Gomez’s research shows that by 1996 more people had left evangelicalism (12.1% of total population of Costa Rica) than remained evangelical (10.6% total population of Costa Rica) (1996: 10). There is more to an evangelical faith than the dialogue one builds and cultivates with God. Though my informants spend a substantial amount of time insulated inside the walls of the church, they spend more time outside it, negotiating their faith in a dialogue with daily life. The more people nurture their faith through study of the Bible and worship the easier the negotiation with daily life becomes. The line is sharper between right and wrong, good and evil, and the ability to react appropriately and live with “proper” conduct is more automatic. With a strong faith an individual is less likely to question or be unsure of how best to act. Yet this way of being is difficult to maintain. Gomez found (1996: 56), and Gooren agrees (2010: 129), that the inability to live up to the high moral, almost ascetic, guidelines that an evangelical faith engenders is the most common reason people leave the church. Because evangelicalism asks so much of its believers, it is perhaps just as interesting to ask why people stay in the church. I address this question in my conclusion and attempt to show that it is no coincidence so many evangelicals came to the faith because of difficult life situations.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions

In preparation for this research, I anticipated arriving at Puertas Eternas to observe and document religious change as it happened. I imagined meeting neophytes, potential converts, and those just processing early exposure to evangelical ideas. This did not happen, at least not at Puertas Eternas. The core of this church is the second generation of believers. The first was Gustavo Ruiz and his contemporaries and the mantle is carried primarily by his younger relations (children, nieces, nephews, and their spouses). The majority of the core members have been evangelicals for 10 to 20 years. Though not what I expected to find, this situation presented questions I had not intended on asking in the first place.

One Sunday Juan led worship; he read from the Bible and then prayed in the common invocative style as the music team began playing softly behind him. Within moments he was weeping, and could no longer speak. He stayed at the pulpit while the music shifted to a more energetic style. Next to the Pastor, Juan is the most integral member of the church, he is the only one who leads worship or preaches besides the Pastor, other than nights of sharing testimony. I had seen others in this state often but never on display as it was that morning. How was he able to do it? How, after all these years, week after week, could my informants conjure such powerful emotion on a regular basis?

Evangelical Faith as Perpetual Liminality

Turner's understanding of liminality in ritual contexts provides a useful framework to address how my informants are able to sustain their active evangelical practice. Turner believes that liminality, which in "tribal society" represent "transitional qualities," has, in more complex societies, become an "institutionalized state" (1995: 107). This has happened because of the

increasing “specialization” and “progressive complexity in the social division of labor” (*ibid.*). What exemplifies this “institutionalization of liminality” best, according to Turner, are the “monastic and mendicant states in the great religions” (*ibid.*). Though evangelicals are not monks proper, there is a certain ascetic quality, most notably the cultivation of a detachment from the “things of the world”. Szakolczai (2000) draws inspiration from this same understanding of “institutionalized” liminality and argues we can understand modernity as a type of “permanent liminality” (219). The best example of this state, Szakolczai argues, is the creation of the mentality of the United States “by those who made the ‘great passage’ through the ocean, thus severing themselves from their past and traditions” (224). As a result, the structures of meaning that pulled people out of liminality before were no longer accepted; without a “bottle”, as Szakolczai says, to contain a “source of renewal, a restoration of meaning”, this state remains in constant flux (226). Boland (2013), picks up Szakolczai’s argument and suggests that permanent liminality remains because our modern *communitas* is based on principles where “freedom and choice are mandatory; not only is everything open to question but it is vital to be sceptical, critical and even cynical” (234). As this creates the *communitas* between all those who share this mentality, there is no master or grand narrative that pulls people out of this state. Therefore, meaning is constantly defined as “ambiguous and indeterminate” (Turner 2008: 327) and a liminal state becomes fixed.

For my purpose I take a different approach, and argue that evangelicalism produces a perpetual liminality. It is not permanent, because people are not stuck only in the liminal phase but adopt a faith and practice where they move freely and constantly between liminality and pre-liminality, though they do not step past liminality. For example, Szakolczai believes one “frozen” in the liminal state is like an actor stuck in a role permanently performing a play (221).

In this situation “the difference between ‘life’ and ‘stage’ disappear” (222). As evangelicals adopt a faith where reality is entirely infused with spiritual energy, both inside and outside the church, the line between faith and daily life does seem to “disappear”. Yet I believe this is not fixed because the ever present danger of falling out of the “role” into sin and temptation—and acknowledgement that they cannot entirely overcome this danger—keeps evangelicals praying and worshipping (performing) in dialogue with God.

Conversion to evangelicalism, like any change in religious identity or affiliation represents a complete rite of passage. A person moves from being a non-evangelical, through a threshold (whether demarcated in water baptism, verbal declaration, or divine intervention “slain in the Spirit³¹”) and becomes an evangelical believer. At this point the believer fuses the evangelical mindset into their worldview. This mindset requires constant reinforcement, and this happens through a spiritual and symbolic rite of passage that is never complete. The stage of “stepping-out-of-and-into” never occurs for two reasons. The individual remains always symbolically a child and physically a sinner. Only in the liminal stage of worship are believers able to transcend these states but only briefly. If they were to be achieved and totally transcended then the worship and ritual would become useless. The believer would have no reason to ask forgiveness or seek redemption, nor would nurturing and support be required to deal with life.

As I said in the introduction, most evangelicals preferred to call themselves “children of God” instead of “evangelical” or practicing “evangelicalism”. For example, Pastor José felt uncomfortable “using those types of fundamentals” and instead preferred to say “we are believers and children of God”. As a child, the believer requires nurturing received most directly during the liminal time of worship. At this time the believer can rise up and feel God’s embrace

through the Holy Spirit. Yet they do not leave the church an “adult” who no longer requires this nurturing but instead return to feel supported and nourished again and again. There is spiritual growth in knowledge, experience and practice, but this status of God as watchful and nurturing adult and believer as child always remains.

According to evangelicals with whom I spoke, we are a body susceptible to the “will of the flesh,” and only Jesus while living could truly resist bodily impulses. As guilty sinners, believers come to church to ask forgiveness. Yet the believer walks out of church and feels the threat of ever lurking temptation. God’s ability to give peace is affirmed through the feelings of redemption and security during services. Because this feeling of redemption only exists in relation to why it is sought, the constant potential of sin is also confirmed. Being children and sinners requires a need for nurture and forgiveness.

What gives this evangelical way of being its particular potency is that there are no worldly “ritual elders” who “monopolize” ritual (Robbins 2012: 56); the authority, guidance and interaction with spiritual energy comes directly from God. As Turner writes, “*communitas* emerges where social structure is not” (1995: 126); therefore, evangelicals produce this *communitas* amongst their fellow believers who all engage in their own direct communion with the divine, with no hierarchical segregation. Though the pastor maintains a more prominent position in the church, he is not above his congregation, nor invested with particular studied skills that make him closer to God; he thus does not have authority to dictate what a believer should or should not do. He may be seen as possessing a heightened ability to understand and convey God’s message, but there is no formal structure that gives him a higher status.

God, in this direct communion with believers, is never fully realized; only in fleeting moments, and always through a “glass darkly³²” do believers get just enough sense of divine reality to seek more. In this seeking the believer does not want to fall back into the body’s temptation and therefore stays in a constant forward motion to a horizon that, while living, is never reached. As Smilde argues, evangelical faith is about a “continual search for communion with God through prayer, worship and scrupulous observance of evangelical norms” (2007: 30). Often times my informants spoke about their faith in this same way, as either a process of learning to “know God” or walking “*el camino de Dios*”. On this path believers are neither *here*, in the fleshy profane world, nor *there*, fully in spirit in the “kingdom of heaven”. Turner references this path as a direct example of the “institutionalized state” of liminality. He writes, “The Christian is a stranger to the world, a pilgrim, a traveler, with no place to rest his head” (1995: 107).

Staying on the Evangelical Path

The evangelical path is not an easy one to follow. As I highlighted earlier, the main reason people leave the church is their inability to maintain the totalizing commitment, both inside and outside the church, expected of believers. The type of faith I saw practiced and lived in Pérez Zeledón is not one that is adopted lightly, but one that involves a profound and life changing commitment, that when fused into a person’s very core and cultivated regularly does have dramatic effects. A central aspect of how the faith is adopted and practiced with passion rests on the ability of believers to imagine their position in this dialogue with God. The more a person needs the support and guidance as a child of God, and needs to be redeemed as a sinner, the more potent and sustained the dialogue with God will be.

Anyone can reach this level, as it rests only on the ability of the individual to adopt this position, but I do believe it comes more naturally to those who have actually gone through dramatic and difficult situations and sought God because of them. The more negative a person's experiences are in the "world" the easier it is to cultivate an aversion to it once the temptations that led to these experiences are conquered. For example, a heroin addict will take Methadone³³ to challenge their addiction, whereas someone with a headache will take Tylenol to alleviate the pain. It is not to say that evangelicals are like recovering heroin addicts, but it is an intensive and demanding faith not undertaken mildly and is more easily adopted by those with the greatest spiritual needs.

It is not just that people *become* evangelicals because of difficult life situations but that those more likely to stay evangelical have come to the faith for this reason. This could help explain why the majority (78%) of my sample participants sought evangelicalism in direct connection to difficult life situations. Stark and Smith argue against the centrality of material concerns leading to conversion. They base this argument on the fact that people from all different social and economic strata of society become evangelical, not just the poor and marginalized. Yet their argument appears to be based on an assumption that only the poor and uneducated experience "material deprivations", and that the educated and wealthy do not. I believe this is not the case and that "material deprivations", physical problems arising out of daily life situations, can take a variety of forms. The wealthy obviously do not deal with the deprivations of poverty but the fear of it. In terms of dealing with illness, those with money most likely have better access to health care and, one could argue, are more likely to seek a private doctor, not a pastor to deal with health concerns. Yet there are other material deprivations that cut across social and economic lines, such as substance abuse and family and marital problems.

One need only look at pop culture news to see the almost daily parade of wealthy celebrities to divorce lawyers and detox centres for evidence. Stark and Smith argue that a lack of ethnographic depth has led to the over usage of the deprivation hypothesis. However my ethnographic observations have shown that those not of the “lowest classes” of society *do* seek religious solutions because of difficult life situations. Those of my informants who dealt with crises were not poor, sick and old. Some owned considerable amounts of land and lived in houses not unenviable by Canadian standards. Yet it was these people who talked about their drinking or marital problems as motivating them to become evangelical.

The question becomes, what caused these types of negative life situations amongst my participants if they were not poor and marginal? Our interviews were not doctor-patient and I did not pry people to uncover the roots of their now overcome negative behaviours; however, I believe a link can be made to their economic practices. Bob Dylan sang “when you’ve got nothing you’ve got nothing to lose.” My coffee farming informants had a lot to lose. The sustainability of their livelihoods is anything but guaranteed, and with large tracts of land to maintain, bills to pay, and families to support, there is constant pressure and uncertainty. When the crops are strong and the prices high, then these pressures and uncertainties are minimized. When the prices fall, as they did in the early 1990s these pressures are heightened and further exacerbated by the need to generate income and the potential of having to migrate for work. How does one cope? Perhaps what were once a few beers to dull the anxiety turned into a bottle of *guaron*³⁴ and a short fuse with one’s wife and family. The pressures and uncertainty remain and one’s ability to manage them gets out of control, until the crisis leads, usually the wife first, to intervention. An evangelical faith does not dissolve pressure and uncertainty but it does provide

options to deal with it. This could be the link that brought the current core of Puertas Eternas to convert around this time, in the early 1990s, and why they remain committed believers.

Evangelicals remain a minority group in Santa Cruz. The uncertainty of daily life, heightened in the early 1990s only brought so many inhabitants to become evangelical. As my research only focused on evangelical conversion, I have no data to highlight other ways people may have dealt with difficult situations. My informants in Santa Cruz said that evangelical growth and impact in the community had been minimal, primarily because of Catholicism's deep roots. As I said earlier, Smilde argues that Catholic family networks often impede an evangelical conversion by providing those elements of meaning and support that others seek in evangelicalism. This could very well be the case in Santa Cruz. Further research into how Catholic faith responds to difficult life situations would offer a helpful counterpoint to what evangelicalism does for those who adopt it. Not only would it provide a comparison to see what aspects of the Catholic faith become "instrumental" to alleviate situations of crisis but, more generally, it would also shed light on how people use traditional structures of meaning innovatively to deal with challenges.

My informants *did* choose to innovate and try something new. I interviewed those currently practicing evangelicalism and explored how their faith is practiced and the reasons it is sought after. Because of this primary focus with those currently practicing, I present an almost entirely positive image of evangelical faith. I did not speak to anyone who felt the evangelical "burn out" (Bowen 1996: 225), and left the church. Perspectives from these individuals would have given me valuable data on how evangelicalism is unable to answer an individual's spiritual needs and the factors which influence disengagement from the evangelical path. As I have

shown, people do become and stay evangelical; through this faith they can transform their lives. This is the complex process I have focused on directly and tried to understand.

Seeking Faith for Faith's Sake

An evangelical faith provides people with a system of meaning that transcends daily life. An individual not only realizes a higher purpose and significance to life, but believes in an eternal paradise after life's struggles are through. In the evangelical faith of my informants, this system of meaning is more than just a belief, but is embodied. God becomes a personal companion ever present and willing to help deal with the uncertainties of life. He is there to speak to in prayer, embodied in worship and learned from in the Bible.

I spoke to enough committed believers who embody this faith and did not convert because of difficult life situations. These individuals wanted access to divine power and authority through the Bible, and a personal and embodied relationship with God. They sought to be religiously active to live with spiritual guidance and divine companionship, not unlike their evangelical brethren who chose these because of difficult life situations. They wanted spiritual guidance to navigate and define daily life, not just to be guided away from the bar. They wanted divine companionship for the sake of having a personal relationship with their creator, not to fill the void of a crumbling marriage. Therefore these benefits of being religiously active transcend the motivations one has to seek them. Yet there needs to be something that makes these spiritual benefits worth adopting. I believe this is so much harder to uncover for those who do not link their conversions to specific life situations. Perhaps it is this reason that so much focus has been with those who do become evangelical because of difficult life situations instead of with those who seem to only want to be evangelical simply for the sake of it. Though it may be more

elusive, that does not mean there are not factors in a person's daily life that cannot help us understand this dynamic.

As I have stated already, a nominal Catholic faith was common for my informants. As in the case of Manuel and Anna, (both of whom did not speak about difficult life situations) disenchantment with Catholicism led both to the evangelical church. Yet if the majority of Latin Americans are nominally Catholic, then most are happy to stay this way instead of becoming actively evangelical; there must be more to the story. Another avenue to explore is the role of those who share the evangelical message. For Stark and Smith these individuals are crucial. They argue:

[V]ery few people are walking around seeking a religious solution to their needs, of whatever variety. Typically, religious interests and concerns must be generated by others, and that seems to happen very rarely unless bonds of trust and affection already exist or form between those seeking converts and those they convert. (2010:10)

The experiences of my informants who dealt with difficult situations suggest that some people do in fact go and seek religious solutions to their needs. Obviously there needs to be exposure to religious options in the first place, but I do not believe those who share the message “generate” the religious interest but direct an individual to a particular religious option. When it comes to those who seek a faith for only spiritual reasons, I believe those who share the message play a much larger role in producing a religious interest in the individual. I believe “bonds of trust and affection” are especially important to sustain an evangelizing effort to engage a person's attention, but there is also more to motivating a conversion. For example, Gustavo's wife never converted. There still needs to be something that makes the message pierce to the

core of an individual and plant the desire for a conversion. With more stories of spiritual motivations, a clearer picture of what provides the impetus to convert, grounded in this spiritual desire, could have emerged. This would help clarify what made Diego so receptive to Carlos Riviera's message, while his neighbour may have closed the door in Carlos's face.

Between Heaven and Earth

It is difficult to look past Gustavo Ruiz when considering the dynamics of evangelical growth in Santa Cruz. As my informants said, he almost single-handedly built the evangelical community. What was it that got people's attention? Was it his own testimony and ability to share his faith with miraculous biblical knowledge and charismatic delivery? Or was his message only effective because people were desperate and ready for greater meaning and purpose as their lives became more and more uncertain? Though it is difficult to truly get to the core of religious decisions, through close study, we can at least understand the mechanisms through which they are made. In my research I have made an attempt by shedding light on a particular religious context through the motivation to adopt an evangelical faith and practice. In this complex process a religious decision is never made independent of a person's daily life experiences, nor is faith and religious practice passively adopted in reaction to life's inherent uncertainty. What is most important for the alcoholic who becomes evangelical and recovers: his past that brought him to the church or his faith that changed his future? It is both. His faith would not have its meaning and foundation without this history, and he may still be drinking³⁵ had he not found the evangelical path. A focus on only motivations to become evangelical casts the lens too narrowly on the individual's life before their conversion and neglects what the faith actually does for the individual who adopts it. Yet too much focus inside the church neglects the complexity of the individual's daily experiences that lead to conversion, sustain a faith practice or, to disaffiliate.

Only with further research can we better understand the dynamics that motivate an individual to become religiously active and the relationship between this motivation and the faith adopted and practiced. There is inherent variety and complexity in each individual story. Though each arrived with their own unique experiences, they all made the same decision to become evangelical. By embodying an evangelical faith, my informants live and practice on a border: somewhere between the everyday physical world and the spiritual realm which they know exists beyond it. They practice their faith in the fullness of life with passionate emotion yet directed to an active reality beyond the physical with absolute conviction.

Endnotes

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- ¹ Other dramatic Pentecostal growth has been found in East Asia from Korea to Indonesia (Anderson 2013:2)
- ² Though Spanish explorers arrived in the late 15th century, it was not until the 1520s and onward that an organized and sustained Christian mission was undertaken (Burkholder & Johnson 2004: 97-98).
- ³ I would prefer to use Evangelism as a more direct translation of what my informants call their practice but this word has a different connotation in English, such as the act of evangelizing or sharing Christian values, beliefs with the purpose of converting someone. As well I have thus far not seen anyone use this term, in English to describe this type of Christianity.
- ⁴ All biblical citations come from the King James Version.
- ⁵ Berryman defines Liberation theology in three main points “1. An interpretation of Christian faith out of the suffering, struggle, and hope of the poor. 2. A critique of society and the ideologies sustaining it. 3. A critique of the activity of the church and of Christians from the angle of the poor” (1987: 6).
- ⁶ The document containing Gomez’ work is the abridged Spanish version “*El Crecimiento y la Deserción en la iglesia evangélica Costarricense*” of his 1996 doctoral dissertation at Columbia International University. Gomez’ work only came up once (Gooren 2010: 124) in all the literature I searched in. All translations are mine.
- ⁷ This was the case as well with my informants, who spoke about their own practices as *alabanza* (praise) and *adoracion* (worship), they spoke of Catholic practices as *ritos del hombre* (rites of man).
- ⁸ Csordas has worked primarily with those in the Catholic Charismatic renewal, a type of modern Catholicism that uses Pentecostal style of worship, within a Catholic framework.
- ⁹ As these statistics come from different sources, with different methodologies as suggested by their compiler Clifton Holland, they need to be taken with some precaution. Religious identity is complex, and how accurately national statistical data captures religiosity as it is lived and practiced is debatable. However when not relied upon to heavily it gives an indication of the general religious affiliation of Costa Rica.
- ¹⁰ The most localized data available is provincial and Pérez Zeledón is within the province of San Jose therefore anything specific to the area will be skewed by data from the vastly more populated area around San Jose.
- ¹¹ The Catholic charismatic renewal, a Catholic response to Pentecostalism in terms of style of worship has a presence in the area with a congregation in San Isidro but I saw no presence in Santa Cruz, and I did not meet anyone with a connection to it.
- ¹² It seems the presence of this church community was small enough to be undetectable as Sick, conducting her research in the late 1980s found no visible presence of an evangelical community in Santa Cruz (Sick personal communication).
- ¹³ My informants often used this metaphor of planting a seed to describe the process of their own conversion in terms of the way evangelical ideas worked in their lives and led to their conversion.
- ¹⁴ For only one informant it was unclear what his or her previous religious affiliation was.
- ¹⁵ Smilde calls the evangelical conversions of his informants a “cultural innovation” (2007: 158).
- ¹⁶ I left Santa Cruz the next Monday and never got a chance to talk further with him.
- ¹⁷ A common motif used by my informants when speaking about sin and the life styles they have overcome and try to avoid, more will be discussed on this notion in the following chapters.
- ¹⁸ I do not specifically address Gooren’s “cultural and political factors” (2010:50) here. A cultural factor of conversion, such as a reaction by women against *machismo* that Brusco (1993) talks about may have been a motivation. However no one spoke about their spouse in a way to suggest this was the case. Furthermore I believe marital and family issues predicating a conversion fit within the individual and contingency factors I address in this section. In terms of political factors, there was little mention beyond Manuel’s criticism of the intimate relationship between the Catholic Church and the state.
- ¹⁹ Her husband also did not mention any difficult situations related to his conversion.
- ²⁰ It is entirely possible that some people chose not to share their “real” motivations. Perhaps it was something deeply personal, and they did not feel comfortable discussing it with me. For some people we met for the first time

at our interview, and I must accept the fact that some information may have been withheld. However, that does not mean that information provided does not give some indication of what their motivations were.

²¹ Manuel and David were the only informants who spoke English.

²² There is a Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses, and a Church of Latter Day Saints in San Isidro and most likely other non-Catholic or non-Evangelical options but the evangelical or Catholic are by a wide margin the most popular.

²³ The effect of the power of the Word was often described using the verb *levantarse* "to rise or get up"

²⁴ Thief or "*Ladron*" was often replaced by *Satanas* or *El enemigo* another word for the Devil in this particular context.

²⁵ Gomez makes a similar point and suggests that part of the reason the Bible is so important for evangelicals is that in Catholicism they were "not qualified to interpret the scriptures" (106)

²⁶ I visited this church but did not attend any services there. This is the church where all the women from Cocobri attend. The church is part of the network of "Ministerios de Casa Del Banquete" the largest local evangelical organization in Pérez Zeledón without ties to a multinational church organization.

²⁷ Though Marcelo doesn't mention which verse he could be referring to Psalms 47:1 "Clap your hands, all you nations; shout to God with cries of joy"

²⁸ Manuel's experiences have led him to this conclusion whether accurate or not. From my own observations, he may have a point. I was in Santa Cruz when the new Pope was named. I went to Mass the following Sunday and there was only brief mention of him, only rejoicing that a new Pope was named, and no mention of where he was from or the implications of his pontification. I asked several Catholics in the community what they thought about the new Pope and no one had much to say. Only one man referenced the Pope's Argentinian roots and suggested he better understands Latin America's challenges, having grown up there.

²⁹ Omar was the only person I interviewed who was currently undergoing a conversion. As I have said earlier, the congregation at Puertas Eternas was mature with most having been evangelical for years, and the youth primarily second generation believers.

³⁰ It was in Diego's extended answer that I was proselytized to most explicitly. He went on to say that "even if you are in the university and doing a big study you still need God in your life" as well he mentioned that I won't "enjoy my family and daughter" without God's love to give direction in my life.

³¹ A common phrase used in Pentecostalism to describe confirmation of the Holy Spirit's entrance into the believer exemplified through embodying the gifts of the Spirit such as speaking in tongues and the gift of prophecy.

³² Passage from 1st Corinthians 13:12 in which Paul is speaking about prophecy and other gifts and that these are only parts, and glimpses of the whole or "perfect" yet to come.

³³ A common drug administered to help recovering heroin addicts deal with withdrawal

³⁴ A type of hard alcohol, that is potent and cheap.

³⁵ During worship one man at the church said to me "if it weren't for this (referring to the scene around us), I would still be at the bar drinking".

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