

SHARED EXPERIENCE

*An Ethnographic Study of Evangelicalism and Charismatic
Leadership in Santiago, Chile*

Maria Nathalie Oberti Tyldum



Master's thesis, the department of Social Anthropology

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Print: Reprosentralen, University of Oslo

ABSTRACT

Systematically aiming toward a high number of converts, Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism has for a long time been considered to be the world's largest growing religious movement next to Islam. In 2002 it was registered a total of 1.699.725 Evangelicals in Chile alone, which makes it the second largest religious group after Catholicism. Drawing on a five month long ethnographic fieldwork in Santiago, Chile this thesis explores the relationship between religion and social life at the Evangelical church Centro Cristiano Internacional (Centro Cristiano). This thesis seeks to illustrate some of the dynamic social structures that exist within the Evangelical community, and further how the Evangelical ideology shapes the lives of those involved. Drawing on Émile Durkheim, the thesis moreover aims to show how the individual and the collective meets during church meetings in a shared experience of embodied enjoyment, spirituality and community. Furthermore, people at Centro Cristiano have a tendency to describe their community as rather egalitarian. Interestingly, this stands in opposition to my own findings. I show throughout the thesis how there are tendencies of a hierarchical structure that put people into a system of charismatic inequality, and further how this structure is arranged according to a person's spiritual symbolic capital. As my argument goes, church leaders hold a strong central position within the Centro Cristiano, and they influence how the lay members interpret their own positions within the community.

Keywords: Religion, Christianity, Evangelicalism, Pentecostalism, Charismatic Leadership, Rituals, Symbols, Community, Chile, Latin America.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped me throughout the work of this project. I want to express my sincere gratitude toward all of those who have encouraged me, listened to me, and supported me – before, during, and after my fieldwork. I am also grateful for the financial funding and assistance provided by The Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo.

My sincerest gratitude goes to my supervisor Signe Howell, which has guided and directed me through the work with this project and thesis. I could not have asked for a better supervisor, and she has given good and constructive feedback from beginning to end. Thank you for your insight and knowledge.

I thank all my fellow students and *pauserommet* for being an endless source of energy and enjoyment. Especially, thank you to Jeanett and Cecilie for always being “*by my side*”! Thanks to Camilla for our talks concerning movies, documentaries, anthropology and life. Karoline, thank you for reading through endless number of drafts and your valuable comments. They have been much appreciated! Thank you Hilde, Cathrine, Thale and Solrun for your patience and understanding (I promise to talk about other things than anthropology soon!). *Mamma*, thank you for being an inspiration and motivator throughout my education!

I want to express special thanks to my wonderful partner Lasse, who always supports me. You never said no to read a draft, or listen when I read them out loud. Your own studies have inspired me greatly and enabling us to discuss academically and privately about religion. Thank you for all your support, understanding and love. *How good it is!*

Most of all, I want to offer my thanks to “Amarisa” and “Maria”, who I am forever grateful for. I would not have managed to conduct the field research without your help. Thank you for letting me into your life and being patient with all my questions. *Gracias por todo!*

Thank you all,
Nathalie

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The first time I met some of my informants, I was not prepared. It was late one evening, and I was walking around the center of Santiago, Chile with my partner who was visiting from Norway. It was getting closer to midnight. However, it was still summer so the temperature was warm and the city full of people. You could see people drinking in the bars, older men playing chess by the sidewalks, and teenagers gathering in the city parks. As we were walking up the street we could hear loud music coming from the 'Plaza del Armas', the main city square commonly found in cities throughout Latin America. The loud music was drowning the sounds from the clubs and bars in the area. As we got close to the square, we could see a large band equipped with drums, guitars, microphones, and a full choir.

Surrounding the band were people like myself who wanted to get a glimpse of the situation, but also participants who stood in a semicircle while actively praying. The nearby forty participants were expressing joy and excitement for the situation, while holding their hands up towards the sky, crying, smiling, closing their eyes, and praying out loud. Some people were holding each other, while one of them prayed intensely. In the middle of the crowded scene, stood a young man who directed it all. His eyes were closed, while praying towards the audience. It took no more than a few minutes before two girls came up to inform us about the group's motivation for being at plaza that evening. They came from an Evangelical church called Centro Cristiano Internacional and they wanted to invite us to their church meetings, clearly working to recruit new possible converts.

The next week I visited the church for the first time. After a short metro ride for about fifteen minutes south from the center of Santiago, you find the Centro Cristiano in the middle of San Joaquín. It is an area influenced by many offices and residents, and it holds a large university. Amidst it all, rests an old warehouse, which now holds the Evangelical congregation. The church gathers around fifteen hundred members on a weekly basis, and a group of approximately four hundred people participate on near all church meetings during a week. I witnessed somewhat the same scene as the one at Plaza del Armas that evening. However, this time in a grander scale with close to one thousand participants. People were dancing, singing, playing music, and celebrating Jesus.

Introduction

Drawing on ethnographic field research, including the anecdote above, this thesis examines social life at the Evangelical church Centro Cristiano Internacional (Centro Cristiano) located in Santiago, Chile. Moreover the thesis aims to examine the dynamic social life within an Evangelical church community, especially the relationship between members and leaders at the church. In this introduction I first introduce ‘Evangelicalism’, and next I present the Evangelical movement and introduce the ethnographic field site, before considering different anthropological perspectives on religion. Thereafter, I discuss different methodological and ethical implications. Finally, I give an outline of the thesis to further explain how it is structured.

What is Evangelicalism?

‘Evangelicalism’ originates from the Greek term “good news”, more commonly known as “gospel” (Coleman and Hackett 2015, 9). It is a term used about different Christian sub-groups within Protestantism, which formed after the sixteenth-century separation from the Roman Catholic Church under the Reformation (Woodhead 2002, 170). It has been used in literature in a very broad sense to cover many movements, such as Baptism, Lutheranism, Methodism, Presbyterianism, Anglicanism, Pentecostalism and charismatic Christians (Coleman and Hackett 2015, 9). Moreover it can be said to cover a general trend in the different protestant sub-groups, since we can find the “Evangelical style” in different Christian groups (Woodhead 2002, 170). The Evangelical style is known for its evangelization, meaning that people preach the gospel and try to convert people to Christianity or Evangelicalism.

Furthermore, Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism are two groups who commonly are put together in comparison. I suggest this is mainly because their similarities are too apparent to ignore. Firstly, they generally separate themselves from a Catholic tradition. Scholars have even defined Catholics and Evangelicals in a Latin American¹ context as simply the opposite of the each other (See Willems 1967, VI, Stoll 1990, 4, Coleman and Hackett 2015, 11). Unfortunately this does not lead to any discussions of the complex and dynamic categorization of Christians in Hispanic Americas. Joel Robbins (2015, 249) encourages studies of Christian self-identification, in order to explore how people use these categories in

¹ In this theses ‘Latin America’ refers countries where the Spanish and Portuguese in the main official language.

varied situations. In Chile for example, people may identify as both Pentecostal and Evangelical, while others may identify solely as Evangelical.

Secondly, both are commonly known for being somewhat *charismatic* and for its practice of ‘spiritual gifts’. Spiritual gifts are qualities or supernatural powers given to the individual believer by God. In the Bible they are particularly mentioned in 1. Corinthians 12-14 and Ephesians 4, and can be different things, such as the ability to heal, speaking in tongues (described further in chapter three), and prophesize. Simon Coleman and Rosalin I. J. Hackett notes, “it is common at academic conferences to hear the argument that the defining characteristics of a Pentecostalism must ultimately be the ability to speak in tongues” (2015, 6). They argue further that this is problematic because of the variation in tongues. Further, it would be near impossible to identify a fluent speaker, a true speaker, and the characteristics of what it actually contains of. In addition, I suggest, not only Pentecostals practice speaking in tongues, but also other Evangelical groups, like the one at Centro Cristiano. Being charismatic is still shared characteristic, but how people practice these gifts vary in each church community. In addition, to complicate things further, one can be charismatic Christian without identifying as Evangelical. For example, Thomas J. Csordas (1997) studied Charismatic Christians in the United States who, who also identify themselves as Catholics. The term has often been used by scholars about those “who practice spiritual gifts but retain their membership in older, established denominations” (Coleman and Hackett 2015, 9), and we can therefore say that *charismatic* is a type of practice rather than a defining factor of religious groups.

Further, ‘evangélico’ (Evangelical) is often used in a Latin American context as almost equal to ‘Protestant’ (Chesnut 2016, 1, Gross 2016, 106). My informants had disagreements among themselves about the characteristics of Protestantism and Evangelicalism, and some of them claimed it to be the same thing while others rejected this completely. They did however share, a common idea about them being Evangelicals, and not for example Catholics or Pentecostals. At the same time, they understood Pentecostalism to be a kind of Evangelicalism. In this way, Evangelicalism meant different things in different settings. They used ‘evangélicos’ (Evangelicals) firstly to described themselves and other similar Christian groups, often charismatic, and secondly as an umbrella term for all non-Catholics. Martin Lindhardt (2014) has done field research among Pentecostals in an Evangelical Pentecostal Church (EPC) located in Valparaíso, Chile, a city located two hours away from Centro Cristiano. He notes

how most Chilean Pentecostals think of themselves as belong to a wider community of Evangelicals, and further how some identified solely as Evangelical without emphasizing a particular affiliation (Lindhardt 2014, 12), similar to the congregants at Centro Cristiano.

Even though Evangelicalism can be difficult to define, I have found in my readings that there are many similarities across the world between Evangelical and Pentecostal churches.

Commonly they include three elementary parallels; the Bible is seen as a source of objective truths, human beings need to be saved from a life in sin by having an individual relationship with Jesus, and there is a common agreement that Jesus' message needs to be spread across the world. God is seen as the father² and creator of heaven and earth, and Jesus is believed to be the son of God sent to earth to free human beings from their own sin. There are also strikingly many similarities in the practice of Evangelicalism. I have especially been intrigued by the work of the British anthropologist Simon Coleman, who has studied global charismatic Protestantism and conducted field research in Uppsala in Sweden. His descriptions from the Swedish church 'Word of Life' that is a part of the European 'Word of Faith' movement, offers an interesting comparative perspective to my own data (see Coleman 2000, 2006). Independent of Coleman's work, Emilio Willems (1967, 111-112) studied the growth of Protestantism in Chile and Brazil, and he notes that parallel to North American Evangelists, Swedish Evangelists had begun converting Chileans already in the year 1937. It is impossible to measure the Swedish Evangelicals impact on Chilean Christianity. However, it shows how Evangelical Christianity has traveled across continents through missionaries and in time created a movement with striking similarities.

Centro Cristiano could fall under the term neo-Pentecostalism, as neo-Pentecostal churches also tends have a ministerial focus, they subscribe to a rather apocryphal narrative of the church's responsibility to save human beings from evil forces driven by the Devil, and generally see the world as under attack of these forces (O'Neill 2010, 10). However, I use Evangelicalism when referring to the Centro Cristiano and the overall movement, since this was the emic term used by my informants. I am aware of the confusing terminology; however, my ethnographic comparisons are base upon ethnographic descriptions above defining terms. In this way, I analyze and theorize based upon multiple factors rather than

² I refer to God and the Devil in masculine forms, since this was the emic terms used by my informants.

terminology. When I refer to different scholars I will use the specific term he or she use when referring to their work or ethnography.

The Evangelical Movement

Systematically aiming toward a high number of converts, Evangelicalism has for a long time been considered to be the world's largest growing religious movement next to Islam (Martin 2004, 53). It has had a massive growth trough the traditionally predominant catholic region Latin America. It has even been reports of it growing faster in the region than Protestantism did in Europe in the sixteenth century (Stoll 1990, xiv). It originates from the United States and has mainly spread through the global world through missionaries (Stoll 1990), and the movements has shown how people both export and import religion, religious beliefs and practices through people and media. It is known for moving across cultures and countries through missionaries, but also through active use of modern media, such as TV, Radio and social media.

The sociologists Scott Thumma and pastor Warren Bird has showed in their survey on *Changes in American Megachurches* (2008) that due to variations in the definition of a church member, it is difficult to estimate the actual numbers of Evangelicals in the world. Church membership is rarely based of formal registered membership, but rather attendance in church meetings. At Centro Cristiano they kept no formal register over membership number. Rather, a person regularly attending church meetings was commonly referred to as a member. The examination in this thesis has been less interested in the reasoning behind the movement's success, and rather concerns of how the movement impact the people involved.

Chile

Chile is a geographically thin and long country at the south-west side of Latin America, with an estimated population of over 18 million people (INE: Population Chile 2015). Many Chileans describe their country as an island, because of its geographical features. To the west you find the Pacific Ocean and to the east you find the Andes mountain line that isolates the country from the rest of Latin America. However, Chileans do generally see themselves as a part of Latin America culturally and socially.

The region has a long history of political turbulence, as Chile was until 1990 under the dictatorship led by General Augusto Pinochet that lasted for seventeen years. Pinochet came

to power under the violent coup d'état on 11th of September 1973. Emilio Willems (1967) reports how the Pentecostal movement commonly supported and celebrated the military coup and right-wing dictatorship. On the 13th of December 1974 the national newspaper *El Mercurio* even published a declaration of support to the new regime, which was signed by thirty-two Evangelical leaders. It described how the military coup was “a response from God to all the believers who considered Marxism to be the most powerful expression of evil” (Lindhardt 2014, 47). During the time of Pinochet Pentecostalism grew in Chile. It grew mainly among lower income socioeconomic sectors of the society, and Lindhardt (2014, 49) suggest a possible explanation of the growth is the weakening of civil society and in increased social insecurity. After encouragements from the church leaders, Evangelical adherents were getting involved in politics in order to support religious freedom (Willems 1967, 226-228). Pinochet was, like most of Chileans, Catholic. In time however, he experienced a losing support from the Catholic church, and embraced the support of the Evangelical and Pentecostal movement (Lindhardt 2014, 47). The Pentecostal pastor Javier Vasques was even invited to be Pinochet's minister of religion (Brouwer, Gifford, and Rose 1996, 204). At Centro Cristiano the leaders also encourages its adherents to vote for right wing conservative parties, in order to maintain the conservative laws, specially concerning abortion. I never heard anyone expressing liberal ideas about abortion; however, people expressed both support and opposition for the old dictatorship.

Contact between people across countries through Evangelicals and missionaries have a long history also in Chile. However, the Evangelical movement started with native leaders and sects that recruited members from lower classes of the country, in contrast with the Catholic church that was associated with the upper class (Willems 1967, 111, 42). Centro Cristiano is also run by native Chileans, and is connected to a network of churches in different cities in Chile, Guatemala and Honduras. It is located in the middle-income area San Joaquín in the Chile capital Santiago, a city that holds an estimate of five million people (UNSD: City Population). In the last registration done by the national institute for statistics, Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (INE), who perform surveys on Chilean population, Evangelicals was the biggest religious group after Catholics (INE: Religion 2002). From the year 1992 to 2002 the number of people in Chile over the age of fourteen who identified as Catholic had decreased with 7 percent, while those identifying as Evangelical had increased with 2,7 percent (INE: Religion 2002). In 2002, it was registered a total of 1.699.725 (15,10 percent)

Evangelicals in the Chilean population (INE: Religion 2002), and at Centro Cristiano there is approximately fifteen hundred members.

The rise of Centro Cristiano

Through conversations with church members and an interview with church leader Pastora Claudia Bunster, I was able to get an overview of the history of Centro Cristiano. Pastora Claudia and Pastor Billy Bunster founded it in 2007. They are both of Chilean origin and met when they were only teenagers, as both their families attended the same Evangelical church. The leader of that church happened to be the father of Pastor Billy. The couple had been friends for many years, as they attended church camps and meetings together since they were young. When Pastor Billy was twenty-four and Pastora Claudia nineteen years old, they got married. Pastor Billy has a son from a former relationship³, and now they have multiple children together. Felipe, their oldest son together, is a leading figure in at Centro Cristiano and often substitutes for his father when he is out on travel.

After getting married, Pastora Claudia and Pastor Billy kept attending meetings in their old church for some time, before they visited another church after a recommendation from a mutual friend. They liked the new Pentecostal church, because it was different from the Evangelical church they used to go to, as it was more liberal. This resulted in a church membership that lasted for more than twelve years. Then, Pastora Claudia got seriously sick, which resulted in her being hospitalized over a longer period of time. She described this period as quite difficult, and because of the situation she and Pastor Billy decided to go back to their old church.

Some time went by before Pastora Claudia recovered completely. At this point Pastor Billy started taking some classes in theology at a private institution in Santiago. He was not planning to become a pastor, but rather Pastora Claudia explained during an interview, it was mainly to educate himself to become a resource in his father's church. They were active in the old church for about four years, and held meetings, ran seminars and taught members the Bible. As time went by, Pastor Billy and Pastora Claudia started discussing new ways they could contribute to the church and reach new members. One day, Pastora Claudia was reading

³ In general people expressed a desire to be married before having children and engaging in sexual activity. However, I never heard anybody speaking badly about Pastor Billy for having a son outside of marriage or with another woman than Pastora Claudia. Rather, some people applauded him for it, since he was a considered a good father to all his children.

the Bible, when she unexpectedly came across a verse she had not read in a while. The verse says that one should not grow seeds amongst thorns (Jeremiah 4:3, Contemporary English Version). She read this as a sign from God, telling them not to start developing projects within their church, but rather to establish something completely new. They decided to wait and look for more signs, before making any decisions. Pastora Claudia never specified what these signs were, but in the following weeks they got more signs from God, which made them sure that establishing a new church on their own would be the right thing to do.

They started off renting an old theatre that could hold up to three hundred people. In the beginning Pastor Billy's father was very skeptical about the new church. Nevertheless, he tried to help and invited his own congregation to the first church meeting at the old theatre. At the second meeting, only four people showed up. Despite the low number, those four people are to this day members of Centro Cristiano, all of them active and one of them is a leader in a dancing group. Pastora Claudia and Pastor Agustí held the church meetings at the old theatre for about one year, before they decided to expand. The members had increased in numbers, from four up to about twenty in addition to the church band. After looking for a while they found an old car-mechanic shop that they renovated themselves.

The Church

Not long after the old car-mechanic shop became too small to hold the growing congregation. The new success required them to expand further. This resulted in them buying their first place, which is where the church is located today. It is in the middle of San Joaquín, a commune in Santiago with a lot of industrial and residential areas. People, leaders and members alike, were proud of the church and were enthusiastic about the ownership. They relocated to the current building three years ago. The location is interestingly very similar to that of Coleman's (2006) description of Word of Life in Uppsala. He describes a church that "has been set up in an industrial estate on the [...] border of the urban area. At first sight, it is almost impossible to distinguish the groups premises from the huge warehouses and offices of the rest of the industrial estate" (2006, 166). Centro Cristiano is also located on the border of an urban area and finds itself surrounded by offices, a university and a factory. These areas are quite practical, because the sound of the church meetings (the music and singing) does not bother the immediate neighbors due to their contrasting schedules.

Located in an old warehouse, the church building itself does not resemble a traditional Chilean church. With its rectangular shape, it has a flat roof and white concrete walls. Outside the church there are large posters facing the metro lines, which has the church's logo and the meeting schedule on them, and in large letters the church slogan is written; "Creemos en nuevos comienzos" (we believe in new beginnings). In front of the building there is a small garden, where the children usually play in the summer. A fence surrounds the property and the only entrance is in the front of the church. There is a gate by the entrance, which is closed during the evening and night prayer that makes sure that unwelcomed people stay out. More importantly, it makes sure that the children do not leave the area. During church meetings there is normally one or two members keeping watch by the gate.

Inside there is one large rectangular room that fits the congregation (see figure 1), and at first sight I thought it looked like a concert hall. It is about four meters between floor and roof. The whole room is covered with chairs that are placed in rows, facing one of the long sided walls where there is a stage. On the stage there are a lot of technological equipment, like microphones, wires and monitors and televisions screens. The stage is about one and a half meter high and is large enough to cover the band and the choir and still have free space.



Figure 1: *Illustration of the church layout* (The white rectangular shapes illustrated rows of chair)

Key Informants

The church members are people of all ages, both genders, and from different social and economical class. Some members lives quite close to the church, while other travels for hours each week to attend the meetings. The meetings are held multiple times a week, regularly on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and two times each Sunday.

Amarisa was only seventeen years old at the time of my field research, but despite her young age she soon became one of my most trusted informants. Her mother had sent her and her older sister to English classes outside school, resulting in her being fluent in English. My Spanish was still limited, and her English skills were central to her role as a key informant. She converted together with her family from Catholicism when she was seven years old and has a large social network within Centro Cristiano. She dances in one of the church dancing groups together with her mom and two sisters. Her brother is active within the media group that makes sure to film church meetings and is responsible for the light, sound and other technicalities at the meetings and events. Amarisa's mother and father had separated some years back, but her mother's new boyfriend was also engaged in the church. Her father on the other hand was active in another church, but also identified as Evangelical.

I also spent a lot of time with Maria, who was a close friend of Amarisa. At the time she was twenty-two years old, and like Amarisa she spoke fluent English. She used to be Catholic, but also converted together with her family eight years back. She finished primary school three years ago and was working on improving her grades so she could study psychology at the university in Santiago. She was currently working as a personal assistant for two older men outside Santiago, helping them with everyday things. At the church she was active in the choir, but also had smaller jobs, like giving people on the church stage water and wishing people welcome at the church entrance. Her family was also engaged with the church and she would often bring with her cousin for church meetings.

The Anthropology of Christianity

Scholars like Fenella Cannell (2005), Joel Robbins (2003) and Simon Coleman and Rosalin I. J. Hackett (2015) have criticized anthropological studies for ignoring Christianity for a long time. Christianity was merely mentioned in anthropological texts, rather than explored and studied. However, over the years the sub discipline Anthropology of Christianity has emerged, and Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism have grown to become of interest for

anthropologists. Together with the movements' rapid global growth, Coleman and Hackett argues how “the cultural noise from P/e [Pentecostalism and evangelicalism] has become too loud for anthropologists to ignore” (2015, 2). Coleman and Hackett recently dedicated a whole edited book on the matter, which was named *The Anthropology of Global Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism* (2015). With contributors such as Thomas J. Csordas, Kevin Lewis O'Neill and Joel Robbins, the book has been of great inspiration in the work of this thesis.

What is Religion?

In order to understand the religious life for the Centro Cristiano congregants, it is essential to understand religion. So, what is *religion*? I try to answer this question by using the definitions of religion by Émile Durkheim (1995 [1912]) and Clifford Geertz (2008 [1966]), as I find their work to be complementary towards each other. Moreover, I find Durkheim's views on the church and religious groups to be useful in order to examine Centro Cristiano, and base much of my understanding on his work. Therefore, I first introduce Durkheim's definition-, before looking into Geertz's definition of religion.

In his work *The Elementary forms of Religious Life* (1995) first published in 1912, Durkheim offers many great perspectives on religious life illustrated through his examination on Australian aborigines. His definition focuses on beliefs and practice and how it is put into a system together with beliefs in relation to sacred things:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them [original cursive].

(Durkheim 1995, 44)

Durkheim understands religion to be a separation of the sacred and profane (Durkheim 1995, 34-38). He argues that, “Sacred things are things protected and isolated by prohibitions; profane things are those things to which the prohibitions are applied and that must keep at a distance from what is sacred” (Durkheim 1995, 38). He defines the sacred and the profane in opposition and relation to each other, as they are interconnected in their nature – what makes the sacred ‘sacred’ is primarily that it stands in opposition to the profane. According to Durkheim, religious beliefs are in this way understood to represent ideas about these

oppositions. Furthermore, he sees rituals as rules about how to act when engaging with sacred things, and how all rituals are sacred to some degree (Durkheim 1995, 34, 38). In chapter three I elaborate upon the ritual act of fasting. This can for example be seen as a sacred ritual act and a strategy to separate the congregation and the church from the profane. I discuss the sacred and profane further in the same chapter.

Moreover, Durkheim argues how the function of religion not is to development of a mental world of ideas or meanings of life, but rather, “Its true function is to make us act and to help us live” (Durkheim 1995, 419). He sees religion as foremost based upon practice, and from that practice, other religious aspect develops, such as cosmological ideas and symbols. Geertz treats the question in hand differently, arguing how religion is a system that revolves itself around symbols. His definition goes as follows:

(1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) moods and motivations seems uniquely realistic (Geertz 2008, 59)

Geertz understands spiritual beliefs, ideas about “transcendent truths”, to have great importance in religion, as it is the very thing that separates religion from other things in which we hold great value and meaning. In his simple example about golf Geertz illustrates this clearly. He states that “A man can indeed be said to be ‘religious’ about golf, but not merely if he pursues it with passion and plays it on Sundays: he must also see it as symbolic of some transcendent truths” (Geertz 2008, 63). In this way, religion must involve ideas about something meaningful, often dedicated to a higher divine, heavenly, or transcendent, presented in something symbolic. As we will see in chapter four of this thesis, symbolic meaning and spiritual ideas about the world and human beings are central to the Centro Cristiano congregation’s practice of Christianity. Ritual behavior and ritual acts are indeed an essential part of church meetings, essentially because it is believed to be good for the church and the individual believers. Nevertheless, the symbolic meanings behind them are just as important. For example, as I will show in chapter three, church participants are not merely fasting for the fasting itself – rather, it is a symbolic act to “make room” for God and his words, and further to celebrate God and generate goodness into the world.

Although Geertz focuses on symbolic meaning, he also sees ritual practice to be an important part of religion. In his definition he emphasizes how religious systems establishes moods and motivations in men. He further argues how religious rituals, which involve symbolic fusion of ethos⁴ and worldviews, have a role in this establishment. He states how public religious rituals has “a broad range of moods and motivations on the one hand and of metaphysical conceptions on the other”, which together “shape the spiritual consciousness of a people” (Geertz 2008, 70).

In this way Geertz and Durkheim understand rituals in a similar way, as both of them find rituals to be the fundament in which people practice their religiousness. However, to Geertz, symbols are primarily the base of religion as a system, and for Durkheim it is practice. With this in mind, I understand religion to be a collective system that captures faith (conceptions of a general order of existence), practice (through the cult, which I explain below) and symbols, in an interconnected relation to each other. In a dynamic and continuous relationship, faith, practice, and symbols influence each other and create a religious system, which in turn influence the people involved in that system.

The Cult

Above all, Durkheim sees religion as a collective matter, which is imbedded in “collective representation”. In short, collective representation are shared, constructed and cognitive concepts of how a group collectively view itself, and they translate states of the collectively (Durkheim 1995, 15, 436). He further argues how “The men [people] who adhere to a collective representation verify it though their own experience” (1995, 439). It is also a point, as I will show in chapter three, to have these verifying experiences together as a group. This is rooted in what Durkheim names as “the cult”. The cult is described as “a system of rites, feasts, and various ceremonies *all having the characteristic that they recur periodically* [original cursive]” (Durkheim 1995, 60). Further, he argues how it is through the cult church adherents strengthen the bond between themselves and the sacred beings they count upon. Centro Cristiano can be said to follow a cult, as church meetings and activities are held on a regular basis, which most include rites, feasts and ceremonies. Similar to Durkheim’s theory, I will show throughout the thesis how the cult creates a strong sense of community at Centro Cristiano, which the leaders actively seek through different strategies.

⁴ Definition of ethos: “the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood” (Geertz 2008, 58)

Durkheim further argues how in religion, it is ultimately the cult that creates “feelings of joy, inner peace, serenity, and enthusiasm that, for the faithful, stands as an experimental proof of their beliefs” (Durkheim, 420). I will in the following chapters show how the church members and leader come together in in shared experience, especially an experience of positive feelings. I recognize how these feelings can be accumulated outside of the cult in other non-religious groups. However, drawing on Durkheim, this thesis will examine these practices as a religious phenomenon and as a part of the cult.

Religion and Social Structure

According to Geertz (2008) there are two important aspects that one needs to examine when doing anthropology of religion. The first is to study the actual religion in itself, and secondly to study “the relation of these system to social-structural and psychological processes” (Geertz 2008, 74). My main focus with religion will be been on the latter, namely religions influence on human relationships, worldviews and practice. However, as Geertz (2008, 74) points out, the religion itself is just as important in order to fully understand how it influences other aspects of human life. Studies of religion are not necessarily interesting because of what they describe about social orders, but rather how religion shapes it (Geertz 2008, 72). With this in mind, I examine how religion influence social structures at Centro Cristiano, and further how these structures relate to the aspects of religion discussed above, namely spiritual beliefs and practice.

Guiding Themes and Aim of the Thesis

My informants generally described the their church structure to be nonhierarchical and egalitarian, with a focus on church leaders being equal to the lay members. According to David Stoll (1990, 29, 36) there is a decentralization of authority within the Evangelical churches in comparison to the Catholic ones, basically because anybody can become a leader or important person within Evangelical communities. Joel Robbins argues how ”In terms of leadership, decentralization means that Pentecostal movements can be seen as acephalous (without leaders) or polysepalous (with many leaders) but not as possessing strong central leaders” (2010, 162). I agree that there is a decentralization of power when comparing the movement to for example the Catholic Church, in terms of size and formal structure. However, I argue how there is still a strong centralization of leaders. I will throughout the thesis show how church leaders at Centro Cristiano have strong spiritual and social positions.

Further, I will examine how the leaders influence religious practice, meaning of symbols and worldviews.

Willems (1967, 113) argues that most conflicts within the Pentecostal communities have been caused by an inherent structural inconsistency. Namely that between a “democratic” church that rose as a reaction to the Catholic tradition, and the other “authoritarian” with a successful leader who has received an unusual share of blessings⁵ and that has a unique relationship to God. This thesis is concerned about this inconsistency, and examines the democratic and authoritarian relationship further. I do this by exploring the relationship between leaders and members, individualism and collectivism, and in turn how these relationships influence spiritual beliefs, practice and worldviews.

The main objective is to understand the dynamic social life within the church community and the part played by spiritual beings and practices. This leads to further questions that need answering; how is authority expressed in a system described as rather egalitarian? How does individual experience relate to the collective? How do symbols and biblical truths shape collective representations and general worldviews of the people at Centro Cristiano? These are all questions I examine and elaborate further mainly in each separate chapter. However, they overlap and will therefore be visible throughout the thesis. Moreover, each chapter build on the others, all aiming to portray the complex relations of the people connected to Centro Cristiano. My main argument is that church leaders hold a strong central position within the Centro Cristiano and they influence how the lay members interpret their own position within the community. Further, the established leadership influences other aspects of religious life, such as meaning of symbols, biblical contextualization, and collective representations. In line with Durkheim’s argument, it is through the cult the church establishes and strengthens social bonds between the congregants.

Methodology

I knew I wanted to conduct the fieldwork in Chile, ever since it was clear that I was going to do an extended field research. My family on my father’s side originates from the country, and I always wanted to experience it first hand. Also, since I only had five month to conduct the

⁵ In short, a ‘blessing’ is a favor or gifts from God to the person/persons that gives happiness or protection. It is often seen as a specific favor, mercy, or benefit. It can also be used about making something ‘sacred’. For example, in chapter three, I describe how leaders ‘bless’ the bread and wine that are used in communion.

research I found it to be a strategic place to be. I have been in Chile before; know its history and, more importantly, I already had a social network in Santiago. This allowed me to visit different parts of Santiago, both in low- and high-income communities. I lived with my family for about three months and for the rest of the stay I lived alone in the city center of Santiago.

My initial plans were to study adoption between Chile and Norway. However, these plans quickly became difficult to follow through, since it was an unusual low number of children being adopted that spring. I was granted access to the orphanages. However, I decided to change the topic of the fieldwork. The situation taught me that formal access is not always enough, but access to actual situations is essential in order to conduct a successful field research. This led me to search for another place or community to perform my fieldwork, and it was in that same week I came across the people from Centro Cristiano at Plaza del Armas. About a week later, I visited Centro Cristiano for the first time. I ended up talking to Esteban, a middle aged man who was responsible for the church band. Two younger girls were witnessing our conversation and were nodding confirmingly as I explained that I wanted to “hang out” with the congregation for the next four months. Esteban smiled politely, before walking away to check something, although I did not catch exactly what it was. While I was waiting quite awkwardly for him to come back, the two girls started talking to me. We got into a conversation about my research and the church, and they invited me to go with them to the store before attending the church meeting that evening. Esteban was clearly busy with something else, as I could see him running around on the stage getting the music equipment ready. I said yes to the invitation from the girls, Amarisa and Maria, who turned out to be the most important informants during my research.

Participant Observation and Writing Fieldnotes

The data are collected almost exclusively from participant observation and informal interviews. I completed one formal interview with one of the church leaders, Pastora Claudia. Participant observation is nothing new to the anthropological method, but it does require some further explanation. Because of its nature, participant observation varies in great degree according to the ethnographer performing it and the location where it is performed. It was my first time ever doing an extended fieldwork, and it involved some stumbling and failure. As time went by I gained more knowledge of what it required and it became easier to adapt and adjust to the development of the field. Mostly I interacted with my informants in the church at meetings or other events. Maria and Amarisa on the other hand, I also met outside church. We

would meet in the city center for lunch or I would come over to their house. These meetings became important for collecting material, as I could ask questions that I felt were more appropriate to ask outside of church.

I also made sure to spend time in Santiago outside of the church, together with informants, family and friends. I also conducted informal interviews with non-Evangelicals to gain knowledge about the Chilean society and their perceptions of Evangelicals. My informants often spoke of Catholicism and since Chile is a predominant Catholic country, I often mention different Catholic practices in this thesis. During the fieldwork, and from an earlier visit to Chile, I attended multiple sermons in different Catholic churches. This allowed me to observe differences between the church meetings at Centro Cristiano and Catholic churches, and to discuss the differences with my informants.

I would also use other methods of collecting material, such as video recording and social media. In addition, I communicated with Maria and Amarisa on WhatsApp, an application for communication through text, videos, photos and audio. I would ask them questions about my notes, possibly something they said or that I observed. Often they would send me audio files where they explained different things to me. I would then write these messages into my word-documents so I could easily find them later. Despite my usage of video recordings, when returning home from the fieldwork, fieldnotes become my main source of data.

I wrote a lot of fieldnotes, and Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw argues how during fieldwork “‘Doing’ and ‘writing’ should not be seen as separate and distinct activities, but as dialectically related and interdependent activities” (1995, 15). In this way, fieldnotes are just as essential part of fieldwork as participating and observing itself. Judith Okely (2012, 78) indicate how writing fieldnotes involves a “double work shift” where the field researcher must both participate and write notes. Following this, I could spend days writing, especially after more important events at the church. Further, Raymond Madden (2010, 123) argues how the first notes are written in a “participatory context”, and the second are developed from the first in a “non-participatory” and private context. When I wrote in the non-participatory context, I had more time to write detailed notes about what I had observed.

Okely also argues how fieldnotes can “act as a mnemonic trigger of a total experience” (Okely 2012, 123). Mostly the notes from the field itself were written in a rush with a lot of

doodles, but I still kept all the books. They serve as a door to remembering a specific mood or feeling I had while writing the notes in the field. I therefore organized my fieldnotes according to dates so I can easily find the participatory notes in my notebook and the non-participatory notes in my word-documents. This makes it easy to track the evolution of the notes, as suggested by Raymond Madden (2010, 127).

The Role of the Ethnographer

Observations are just as much about the interactions between my informants and myself as anything else. Okely points out, it is “from that continuous encounter, the ethnographies emerge” (2012, 125). I got to attend most church meetings and celebrations. Being female, I was not able to attend those activities that were for men only. I kept mostly with the women, but more generally I was able to talk to anybody before and after church meetings.

O'Neill (2010) forces his readers, and especially the anthropologist of Christianity, to answer the question “Are you a Christian?” He argues how Christianity troubles the anthropological project, because “Christians are neither familiar nor strange to the Western anthropologist” and notes further that “The very nature of Christianity can make difficult (maybe even sloppy) the ethnographic project because of its frustrating familiarity” (2010, XXVII). The question “Are you a Christian?” is relevant because it pushes the fieldworker to reflect upon our own beliefs and academic tradition. In addition, it was a question many of my informants asked me during my time in Chile, which made me reflect upon it multiple times during the fieldwork. I am raised and personally identify as Roman Catholic, which influenced how I interacted with my informants. O'Neill reports how he was constantly exposed for efforts of conversion, but my informants rarely indicating such a wish. Further, Lindhardt (2014, 14) notes how it would be close to impossible for him to conduct his fieldwork among Pentecostals at the EPC in Valparaíso, if he identified Catholic – arguing how the Catholic Church is seen as the archenemy of Chilean Pentecostals. It was rather his lifelong membership to the Lutheran church in Denmark that offered advantages during the field research. However, I did not find this to be the case at Centro Cristiano, and more generally perceived the congregants as open towards others. Centro Cristiano congregants also showed skepticism towards Catholics and often expressed frustrations about Catholicism. Nevertheless, I was welcomed into the community and would often discuss my own religious beliefs with my informants. Some were more skeptic than other, but moreover we had a very open dialog about our differences and similarities.

Coleman and Hackett (2015, 4) point out that the secular fieldworker must ask him or herself how far they should go in participating and observing the Evangelical and Pentecostal communities. I found this to be just as important for a Christian fieldworker. I identify as Roman Catholic and I was very clear on this point with my informants. This transparency became really important for me to maintain, in order to separate my intentions of being in church from my informants. I made it clear that I was not there to learn about God or to educate my self on behalf of personal beliefs. At the same time, I did participate in some religious activities, such as the collective fasts and communion. Growing up in Norway, a predominant Lutheran Protestant country, I have often participated in sermons in Lutheran and Pentecostal churches. Therefore, it felt natural (in lack of a better word) to participate in some activities, like singing, dancing, fasting and communion. However, I did not actively engage in prayer.

Limitations and notes on Language

I collected most of my material from what sociologist Ervin (Goffman 1971 [1956], 32-34) calls “front” performances, meaning that I interacted and observed most of my informants in a public arena. I would have loved to engage with the church leaders outside of church, however this was not possible because of the role and position I was given. Of course some were more enthusiastic than others, but overall the older people in the church were not very interested in my project and me. However, I did meet some of the younger members outside of the church setting.

Despite half my family originating from Chile, I have yet to learn the language. Before leaving for Chile, I had a large Spanish vocabulary, but little knowledge of grammatical structure. As an effort of advancing this, I was enrolled in Spanish classes fulltime for the first six weeks in Chile, and thereafter I took some private classes. This was absolutely crucial in my work, as Chileans in general do not speak much English. Often people would understand me while speaking English, but they would get embarrassed when trying to speak it themselves. Combined with my former experience with Spanish, the classes were sufficient to have basic conversations about everyday life and sometimes more advanced things (depending on the topic) in Spanish. More importantly, I could understand what the people leading the activities were saying during church meetings.

Some topics were easier for me to understand than others, and my fieldnotes are clearly influenced by what I understood and not. Sometimes, when I could not follow what was being said, I instead jotted notes about how people were acting or other things I could observe without language. As Sarah Pink (2015, 127) points out, bodily experiences is an essential part of ethnography. It is through the body we learn and know new things, and I used it actively in the situations where my language skills were limited. I rather focused on physical feelings, smells, sounds and what I could see. I also used my limitation of language to be an opportunity to ask my informants to translate things to me. It was a great way for me to see what people choose to emphasize when retelling it to me, or how they understood biblical stories differently and similarly from each other. Unless otherwise is specified I will quote my informants in the language they were speaking in.

I use the Contemporary English Version of the Bible. When I do not refer to a specific verse in the Bible, it is because the related topic is mentioned a significant amount of times in the scriptures, normally more than ten times.

Ethical implications

Ethical considerations are important to maintain towards those who are being studied and written about. I made sure to get consent from each informant who I actively engaged with. However, in order to ensure the privacy of the younger members, I have chosen pseudonyms for all church members. Church leaders, such as pastors, apostles and other public figures within the faith network, is referred to with their real names. Since I have not anonymized the church's name, I find the words of Okely inspiring. She argues that the anthropologist will find him- or herself in situations where he or she is witnessing controversy, but the ethics "rest mainly with what the anthropologist chooses to publish, rather than pre-selection of questions and topic" (Okely 2012, 25). I have taken her words into account throughout the work of this project.

I practiced what Sharon Hutchinson (1996, 44) calls "open-note taking", where I would write my first draft of fieldnotes in front of my informants, and at times I asked if they wanted to add or remove something. Writing notes can work as a tool where the mindset of the ethnographer is secured and that it works as a reminder of the ethnographer's role and motivations (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 1995). Personally I felt that by not participating in active prayer and performing open-note taking, I reminded both myself and others of my role

and motives of being in the church. I found this important for ethical reasons, as my role as an anthropologist became transparent. However, at other times I did not take notes at all as a strategy to be as neutral as possible. It could also be out of respect, such as during intense collective praying sessions, I found it inappropriate to take notes or record what was going on.

In addition I have obtained permission from the Norwegian Social Sciences Data Services (NSD) to collect data. Throughout the work of the thesis I have followed and respected their guidelines and regulations concerning the handling of the research material.

Structure of the Thesis

I have divided the thesis into four chapters including this introduction. Chapter two elaborates upon the relationship between church leaders and the congregation, while focusing on the authority of the leaders. The church system is based on the idea that all Evangelicals are equal in the eyes of God, and it is described as a rather egalitarian place. At the same time my studies have shown that there is a charismatic inequality present. It is this inequality I explore further in the next chapter, while aiming to describe some of the complex relationship between members and leaders. I do so by using “spiritual symbolical capital”, drawing on Coleman (2006, 167).

Chapter three looks into ritual events and forms of worship. The chapter aims to show how the Centro Cristiano congregants balances individual and collective experiences through rituals, but also how rituals can function as a medium between the material and the spiritual world. In short, the meeting point between the individual and the group is what Jon Bialecki (2015) names “affect”. I look at some of the motivation the members have to participate in the church rituals, which in short can be said to internalize the word of Jesus and God, and to generate ‘good forces’. These forces stand in opposition to ‘evil forces’, which is further described in chapter four. As mentioned, religious symbols and rituals are linked to each other. However, I have chosen to present them in two different chapters mainly to systematically examine them in order. Chapter four examines symbols in relation to biblical understandings and worldviews, and further use “elaborating symbols” introduced by Sherry Ortner (2008 [1973]) to explore symbols’ conceptualizing power. Moreover, the chapter argues that the congregation has a dualistic worldview and engages in a ‘spiritual warfare’. Finally, I give some concluding remarks.

CHAPTER 2: DIFFERENT FORMS OF LEADERSHIP

Introduction

Centro Cristiano congregants described the church structure as egalitarian and emphasis a personal autonomy. In this chapter I aim to describe some of ways in which authority is expressed at Centro Cristiano. As mentioned in the introduction, I argue how church leader have a central position within Evangelical communities. Leaders have an authority within the church and the faith network that influence the participant's everyday life and worldviews. Therefore the relationship between leaders and members is central in order to further understand the congregation and their spiritual beliefs. I do this by first introducing the theoretical contributions about leadership and authority. I elaborate on two models of priesthood called "Icons of Subversions" and "Icons of Orthodoxy" introduced by Edmund Leach (1972) and developed by Coleman (2006). These models give a framework that describes different functions of spiritual leadership. Further, I discuss the term "spiritual symbolical capital", drawing on Coleman (2006). The empirical examples illustrate how the leaders influence how the lay members interpret their own position within the church community. I also examine gender related aspects of leadership by what Bernice Martin (2004) calls the "Pentecostal Gender Paradox", before giving some concluding remarks.

Leadership

Stoll (1990, 29) claims that there has been a decentralization of power within the leadership of Evangelical churches in comparison to the Catholic Church. Further, he argues how anybody can become a leader or a person of influence at an Evangelical Protestant church, without requirements of formal education (Stoll 1990, 36). This does not mean that some kinds of requirements are not expected, but there tends to be an emphasis on personal abilities and God-given qualities, rather than formal experience or education. As mentioned in the introduction, Pastor Billy had some years of theological education from a private school from when he was in his twenties. However, the members never spoke of this. Instead they spoke about "kindness", "empathy", "loyalty", and "love" when describing him as a good leader – and many did not know about his schooling. The authority as an Evangelical pastor or leader

lies therefore mainly on what Weber (2000, 93) describes as “charismatic”, which in short is personal qualities, especially those who are believed to magical or God-given ones.

Two Models of Priesthood

Coleman (2006, 172) uses Edmund Leach’s terms when distinguishing between two models of priesthood: “Icons of Subversion” and “Icons of Orthodoxy”. Where Leach (1972, 5) speaks of sacrifice, Coleman (2006) transfer the two models over to any kind of priesthood. The first, icons of orthodoxy, is a model where the priest or pastor functions as a *mediator* between the congregation and God. This means that for a person to get in contact with God, for example through rituals such as baptism and sacrifice, he or she is depended on a spiritual leader. The second model, icons of subversion, is on the other hand not reliant on such a mediator. This model skips this spiritual “middleman” and grace is “given directly to the inspired individual” (Coleman 2006, 172). In this way, icons of subversion functions as a nonhierarchical system where both members and leaders are in an equal relation to God and the Holy Spirit.

The models provide a useful way of talking about ideas of spiritual leadership and its function. The two models are not necessarily contradictory or conflicting, since it is possible to see traces of both models in one place, such as at Centro Cristiano. At first, I placed Centro Cristiano in the icons of subversion model, mostly because of the members and people often emphasized the special bond between God and each individual. One of the repeating topics in preaches and talks, is that nobody holds a special connection with God or has unique privileges – not even Pastor Billy and Pastora Claudia. The members often had appointments with the leaders, where they would seek guidance for spiritual and personal growth. At the same time, people did not see this as a way of getting closer to God. Rather, they described it as a place to reflect and progress on a personal and spiritual level. The leaders do not have any exclusive relationship with God. This is clearly demonstrated in baptisms, where any Evangelical is qualified to baptize a new convert. The baptism takes place immediately after an individual feels ready to receive and accept Jesus into his or her life. Then, the person must be completely submerges in water with the assistant of an already Evangelically baptized person. This person does not need to be a leader, pastor, or apostle – only a lay member. This stands as an example of a rather egalitarian system, that emphasizes the individual relationship to the sacred and God.

Let us not confuse icons of subversion with lack of leadership. Indeed, at Centro Cristiano it is believed that grace can go directly through the inspired person, and it does not collide with their ideas of leaders as spiritual guides. Pastor Billy and Pastora Claudia often mentioned in their sermons that nobody has special agreements with God, and that everyone's got the same value in the eyes of God and Jesus. The members also emphasized how the church system is nonhierarchical, and I witnessed leaders and members alike, telling stories about God and their contact with him. For example, members would often cry during prayer, and this was seen as a reaction to God's or Jesus' presence in the individual. I will examine this further in the next chapter.

Apostles

During the fieldwork I became very interested in the relationship between leaders and members, and in time I also found traces of icons of orthodoxy. This is evident in the status of 'apóstoles' (apostles). At Centro Cristiano and the faith network it is a part of, an apostle functions as the highest spiritual leader and has exclusive rights to interpret the Bible and teach the biblical doctrine. He is often a pastor to begin with (though, this is not a requirement), and must be given the title by another apostle. It is believed that the title is given from God, and therefore the apostle giving away the title must have received signs directly from God. In contrast to pastors, an apostle must be a man. Women can indeed become influential and important figures, but they cannot hold the title of apostle. With exclusive right to the scriptures, apostles hold a unique position within the faith network. Their position is special, as it comes with special assignments and responsibilities, but more importantly, it comes with high position as God himself has chosen the individual for this specific position.

To conclude then, the leadership at Centro Cristiano is fitting to both icons of subversion and orthodoxy. In general everyday life, for the lay congregation the leadership functions as icons of subversion, as they do not depend on anybody for having a connection to God. At the same time, as we have seen, they are limited at times, to interpret the Bible and to gain the highest of spiritual position of an apostle. The church structure then, also follows icons of orthodoxy when it comes to apostles, since this position does require a mediator between God and the inspired individual.

Spiritual Symbolic Capital

Evangelical churches do not have a central control organ, like Catholics have with the Vatican. However, they are often connected to other churches in formal and informal networks. Centro Cristiano is part of a larger faith network, often referred to as a “ministerio” (ministry/faith network). This network is not formally organized, but consist of personal relationships between leaders in different churches, where different leaders mentor each other. Pastor Billy has a Guatemalan mentor, Pastor Sergio, which oversees more or less five hundred churches around Latin America. This means that the church leaders are connected to other churches, where they seek spiritual advice and discuss biblical matters. Pastor Billy also has many churches located across Chile that he guide and mentors for.

Being part of a faith network also means inviting external pastors and apostles to preach at the church. Pastor Billy would often travel to other countries to hold talks and preaches, but he also invited pastors to Centro Cristiano. Coleman (2006, 167) describes this strategy as a way that “geographically and evangelically marginal groups [...] can gain *spiritual symbolic capital* [my own emphasize] within the faith network by attracting international delegates to its meeting and foreign buyers for its goods”. Unfortunately, Coleman do not elaborate upon his usage of the term “spiritual symbolical capital” (ss-capital), but I find it to be far too interesting not to discuss it further. I read the term as if inspired by Pierre Bourdieu’s (2013, 299) and his term “social capital”. Social capital is made up by long lasting established social relationships, or what Bourdieu describes as “to membership in a group” (1986, 248-249). The volume of social capital, Bourdieu argues, “depends on the size of the network of connections he [an agent] can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected” (1986, 249). Similar to social capital, a strong and large social network is a fundamental part of gaining ss-capital. In the same way the volume of ss-capital is based on a person’s capacity to build social connections. However, it separates from social capital in that *reaching out* to people is essential and absolutely necessary. I will discuss this further below. In short, reaching out to many people is highly valued, and Pastor Billy uses many platforms to do so, such as social networks, but also technological media.

Further, Bourdieu compares social capital to Max Weber’s term “charisma”, simply by transferring charisma onto the sociology of power (2013, 299). As mentioned, I suggest that

the leaders at Centro Cristiano gain their authority through their charismatic qualities. These qualities can be set into a system of ss-capital, where ss-capital is understood to contain people's *accumulated* recourses that are available for a person throughout his or her participation within the faith network. Examples of such resources can be social bonds, trust in others, participation in church activities, time invested, formal positions, and more importantly how many people one is able to reach out to. It is important to point out that all are accumulated and maintained over time, where a person can both gain and lose ss-capital. Similar to Bourdieu's (1986, 249) understanding of social capital, ss-capital can be also collectively owned, for example by a church or faith network.

Based on his fieldwork at EPC in Valparaíso, Lindhardt (2014, 20) argues how every born-again Pentecostal in the sense is a charismatic, since any believer can be a channel of the Holy Spirit. Further he argues how EPC hardly can be categorized as a charismatic movement in a strict Weberian sense, since the charismatic authority is spread among a number of congregants. Instead, Lindhardt (2014, 21) draws on the work of Csordas (1997, 141) and argues how we can speak of a "charismatic action", which is basically a *rhetorical* process that creates charisma. Moreover, Lindhardt argues how this can help to explain the existence of leadership in charismatic movements, since the source of authority then is located outside of the leaders. Further, he allows "for the possibility that individuals have different rhetorical skills" (2014, 21). I agree with Lindhardt in that rhetorical skills create charisma, and also suggest that leaders utilize these skills in order to gain ss-capital. I further argue how high volumes of ss-capital in addition to valued charismatic qualities, makes it easier for a person to become a pastor, leader or mentor. In addition, there are positions within the community that are perceived as considerably *more* charismatic than others – such as the charismatic qualities of apostles. We conclude then, with the words of Coleman, that "(...) the lack of a fully established priesthood with exclusive access to the divine does not remove the ordinary believer from being inserted into an apparatus of charismatic inequality" (2006, 172-173) – despite some charismatic qualities being spread across the lay members. It is this apparatus of charismatic inequality that influences the relationship between leaders and members, and it is this relationship that I intend to examine further in this chapter in order to further understand the construction of social relationship and how church leaders influence the congregation.

Reaching out to People

In order to evangelize, one is directly deepened on an audience. To gain such an audience and to 'reach out to people' is a highly valued quality within Centro Cristiano, and I suggest that when a person does this successfully it increases the person's ss-capital. The church leaders therefore use different strategies in order to reach as many as possible, and need to have certain rhetorical skills in order to do so. The young church congregants evangelize in different ways, such as playing music or praying in the streets, going to houses to give handouts, and visiting hospitals. This is often done in larger groups, but sometimes in a group of three or four people. Pastor Billy also has an audience outside Centro Cristiano in other churches, and by using different strategies he gain ss-capital, such as technological media and by holding talks in different churches across Latin America. Pastora Claudia do not utilize modern media in the same way and does not travel as much as Pastor Billy, and in this way he functions as the highest ranked leader at Centro Cristiano. In the following I describe some of his strategies and also how he portrays himself in the church meetings.

Marketing and Social Media

Faith Evangelism in general are known for using modern technology to communicate with old and new members, such as radio, television, books and magazines (Coleman 2006, 174). Stoll (1990, 122) even reports that of an Evangelical TV-pastor who organized his meetings in consideration of the TV-screen. During a visit to Guatemala City, he placed the cameras in front of himself, with the crowd in the back – giving the TV-viewers an impression of a full crowd. Different media are also a central part of Centro Cristiano's marketing strategies and it is a way for the congregation and Pastor Billy to reach out to people across the world. They live-stream the church meetings through their website, but also records it for future use. Short sections of church meetings are often published on the church's different social media like YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. It has a strong media profile, were they promote and post different activities. There are multiple members of Centro Cristiano who are professional photographers, so they take pictures and shoot videos during meetings. The media profile is portrayed as very professional, and is based on simple fonts and design. Within the last year, it has also become common to live-stream church events at the church' Facebook profile.

Coleman and Hackett (2015) argues that as a consequence of modern media technology, communities can become “super-communities” where “Para-church agencies and organizations can advertise and raise funds on a global scale; and individuals can communicate to their pastors, their headquarters, and fellow believers around the world” (2015, 17). In many ways Centro Cristiano is a super-community, as it is part of a large international faith network and live-stream church meetings to other churches around the Americas. For example, during the festive fast ‘Ayuno Congregacional’ (described further in chapter three), there were other churches located in other Latin- and North American countries that celebrated the fast while live streaming the event from Centro Cristiano. Before the fast Pastor Billy encouraged all the members to invite people who were not already a member of the church, and promoted the event on all the church’s social media platforms. The encouragements and the promotion resulted in thirty new people showing up at each fast, tripling the average number of new visitors.



Figure 2: Girl recording a church meeting

In addition to the church’s official media profile, many of the church leaders have their own personal profile online. Pastor Billy is active on both Instagram and Facebook. He has more than nine thousand followers on Instagram and more than eighteen thousand followers on Facebook. He also has his own radio- and TV-program. The shows are broadcasted through

specific Christian channels, and are therefore not common to have access to. I never spoke to anybody who followed his shows, but the people I talked to already attend church meetings and followed his sermons in person. Pastor Billy reaches a lot of people through his social media platforms as well as his TV- and radio-show, which both increases and maintains his ss-capital. He also visits other churches in Latin America and in the United States. Coleman (2006, 167) observed the same trend during his fieldwork at the Word of Life church and observed how the church had a steady expansion while maintaining a constant contact with similar groups in the United States and inviting preachers over to Uppsala to speak. As mentioned above, Coleman also describes this as a common way of gaining ss-capital.

Getting Introduced

On average, seven to ten new people visited Centro Cristiano during standard meetings. As a part of his sermons, Pastor Billy always asked the congregation who visited the church for the first time. Some people eagerly raised their hands and waved them around in order to signalize that this was their first visit, while other (like myself) sat still as if trying to avoid the attention. Most people know the church members, so it is easy to detect new visitors – and if spotted, old members will raise their hand on the behalf of the new visitors. Pastor Billy asked different questions to the potential new members, such as how they had found the church, who introduced them to it, and whom they came with that day. Now and then he went down from the stage to properly greet the new visitors. When Pastor Billy does this, the whole congregation's attention is on the new person. The first time I visited the church, Pastor Billy was away in Mexico, so it was his and Pastora Claudia's son Felipe that performed the welcoming ceremony. I was together with my partner, and I was sitting with him, Maria and Amarisa during the meeting, and still I felt nervous about it. The church was quite full, so more or less seven hundred people were looking our way as Felipe asked our name, who we were, and he told us that he remembered us from the night I first met them at Placa de Armas.

By instructions from Pastor Billy or his substitutes, the whole church would welcome each new member by collectively saying “bienvenidas” (welcome). In some cases, when the new visitors just had arrived to Chile from other countries (often Colombia and Haiti, but also Venezuela, Peru, Guatemala, Argentina, Honduras, and Nicaragua) Pastor Billy would encourage those who originated from the same country to get up and properly greet the new visitors. This often resulted in people with the same local language (variations of Spanish and Creole) getting in touch. These first meetings often resulted in long lasting social relationship

between the new and old members, and these people would often sit together in future church meeting.

In an Evangelical setting, people often convert as members of their social group and not as individuals (Stoll 1990, 75). Many of the members at Centro Cristiano were converts from the Roman Catholic Church, and most of them, such as Maria and Amarisa, had converted together with their families. Others got introduced to the church through friends and co-workers, but nearly always with people they knew from before that were already a member in the church. I only observed two persons who visited the church who had found it independent of their social network, and they had found the church through social media.

Meeting the pastor

With the exception of his first greetings, it is quite difficult to get time with Pastor Billy. He has a very busy schedule and is generally inaccessible. The first time I greeted him was after a church meeting, when Amarisa dragged me along to introduce us. Amarisa was really excited about it, and said, “It’s hard to get to the pastor, because everyone wants to talk with him. I’m so excited for me too, because I don’t know him!” After the sermons, we rushed over to the end of the stage. “You don’t know him?”, I asked Amarisa. “No, like, of course I know him, I know everything about his life, but he knows nothing about mine”, she replied. When we got to the stage there was already a couple of women waiting for him. We waited our turn, before Amarisa got a hold of him. The three of us had a short conversation where I got to introduce myself and asked for an interview with him. He seemed very positive to the idea, and we agreed to set up an appointment. Pastor Billy disappeared into his office, leaving Amarisa and me by the stage. She expressed that was really excited about what just happened, because she rarely had an excuse such as this one to talk with him.

I never got to interview Pastor Billy, because he was too busy to fit me in his schedule. I reminded his assistant, who was also his daughter, of it and the last time I asked the pastor directly I was told he was leaving for Mexico again, so there was no time before my departure from Chile. It was difficult for all the members to get a meeting with him. They had to get in touch with his assistant and she would schedule an appointment. He met with members once a month, and because of the demand some had to wait for a long time. I suggest that this results in his time being highly valued by the church members, which in turn contributes to his volume of ss-capital. It was highly valued to get private time with him and Pastora Claudia

alike. Instead of interviewing Pastor Billy, Amarisa and I managed to get an interview with Pastora Claudia.

One time during a sermon, Pastor Billy was walking around the church while welcoming the new members. When he passed where I was sitting he stopped. I could not help feeling nervous about it, and was insecure whether I should look up at him or not. I was alone in church that day, as most of my key informants had other plans this particular Wednesday. He kept talking to the congregation into the microphone. Then he touched my shoulder and stopped talking. I looked up at him while smiling. He asked me how I was doing, and I answered that I was doing good and I asked him the question in return. The whole congregation looked at us, as Pastor Billy took a long pause while looking at me and holding my shoulder. He said he was doing fine, and then he paused again, rubbing my ear with his fingers. He took a couple of steps away from me before he continued with his talk and walked away. Regardless of my personal relationship or view of the pastor, I could not help to feel proud about him stopping at *my* seat. He could have stopped anywhere else, but by stopping and talking to me, he somehow made me feel special and appreciated. Especially after our short introduction I had been insecure about what I felt about me being in the church, but I saw this as a form of acceptance of my participation in church meeting.

This illustrates how the pastor's unavailability effects how people, including myself, view him. He actually gains his ss-capital by being inaccessible. He also separated from the other leaders by not being a part of the whole church meetings. The rest of his family, including Pastora Claudia, is often spotted sitting together with the congregation. Sometimes she was sitting in the front close to the stage, and other times all the way in the back.

Apostles and ss-capital

As mentioned above, ss-capital consists of many things, including formal positions. These positions may not *give* power in itself, but rather confirm the authority already possessed by a leader. For example, Pastora Claudia and Pastor Billy own the church, and would probably have the same amount of economical and organizational authority independent of their pastoral statuses. The statuses clarify their role and authority in church, however it is their ss-capital that gives them influence on others. The ss-capital then, becomes the main source of authority, which is implemented among other things through formal positions. At the same time, formal positions can also *give* authority as a part of the elements that gives ss-capital.

The highest ranked spiritual position being apostle clearly illustrates this. The term ‘apostles’ is often associated with the twelve disciples that Jesus pointed out to be his apostles.

However, in the faith network that Centro Cristiano is connected with, apostles are viewed as leading persons who are selected by God to guide and gather Evangelical groups, and to teach Jesus’ and God’s word. Since the title is believed to be given directly from God, the title itself bear a sense of sacredness, making the person holding it special in the eyes of God. It is only people that already hold the title ‘apostle’ that can give the title to someone else. I suggest that it is the ss-capital of apostles that gives them this authority, but also what sustains it. As a result, by simply becoming an apostle, one is credited with specific sacred qualities (you are “chosen” by God), and therefore endorsed with capital. We can also see clear signs of icons of orthodoxy, as the ‘old’ apostles function as mediators between God and his new apostles.

During my interview with Pastora Claudia, she told the story of how Pastor Billy became an apostle. It was some years after Centro Cristiano was connected to a faith network, and their spiritual mentor, Pastor Sergio, was visiting from Guatemala. It was during a weekend where it was arranged seminars⁶ and other church activities. Pastor Sergio is an older man, who has been a pastor since his youth. He is also an apostle, and has functioned as a spiritual guide or counselor for Pastora Claudia and Pastor Billy for many years. The church members also knew him quite well, as he often came to the church to preach. I never got to meet him, as he did not visit during my fieldwork, but I often heard people speak of him.

During the visiting weekend, Pastor Sergio slept at a hotel close to Centro Cristiano. Pastor Sergio had been praying in his room, when God spoke to him, letting him know that he wanted Pastor Sergio to make one of God’s servants to an apostle. Sergio quickly understood that the servant God had been talking about must have been Pastor Billy. This was the first sign out of many, which indicated that Pastor Billy was going to become an apostle. Pastora Claudia on the other hand, stressed that they needed to look for multiple signs, so that they could be absolutely sure about God’s messages. To my great frustration, she never specified what these signs were, but more generally signs are given through readings in the Bible, prophecy and/or directly from God through conversation and prayer. In the end, it was Pastor

⁶ Seminars are different from other church meeting in that they are dedicated to bible studies. There is less time for songs and worship, and more focus on lectures about the Bible, tips on how to read the Bible, and questions from the audience. Unlike standard church meeting, during seminars the stage lights are turned off and ceiling lamps turned on, making it easier for everybody to read in their bibles and take notes.

Sergio that made the decision and assigned⁷ Pastor Billy as an apostle. In this case, the signs were primarily given through Pastor Sergio, making him a kind of mediator between God and Pastor Billy, and as I suggested above, this implies characteristics of icons of orthodoxy. To be acknowledged from another apostle and God himself, gave Pastor Billy increased ss-capital. It gives him a formal position, which in itself functions as a source of authority and influence. Yet, the formal position in itself is not enough to give Pastor Billy a high volume of ss-capital, but functions as a highly valued addition to what he already has. However, his position also makes him more reliable in the eyes of other Evangelicals, since an already appointed apostle has recognized him as chosen by God, which in turn makes it easier to reach out to more people and gain ss-capital.

Risking ss-capital

Apostles are the highest ranked leaders in the spiritual system of the faith network that Centro Cristiano is a part of. I never heard of anyone losing their position or title, but there were stories of apostles losing their credibility and therefore ss-capital. Pastora Claudia told me about a celebrated apostle that was highly respected in the faith network, which assigned a woman to become an apostle. Why he decided to do so was unclear. Since it is believed that God elects his apostles, and that God only elects men, the celebrated apostle broke with fundamental ideas about God, masculinity, femininity and leadership. As a result he and the woman alike, lost all credibility in the faith network. People stopped listening to him, and he was no longer invited to preach in other churches. Pastora Claudia said that nobody can take their titles away from them, but without support from a faith network and other apostles the positions is worth nothing in itself. This shows how apostles and leaders can easily lose their ss-capital, if they go against fundamental ideas of what Evangelicalism is or how it is supposed to be practiced.

The example illustrates that apostles are limited in their authority, as the social structures make sure that they act within a set of regulations. This makes it clear that formal positions do not equal ss-capital, because one can lose ss-capital (and credibility) even though you have a highly valued position as an apostle. Further, since the Evangelical faith network lacks a formal control organ, I suggest that ss-capital can function as an informal control organ where leaders are “forced” to act in a certain way in order to maintain their influential power and

⁷ People used the verb 'Ungir' when describing the act of giving away the title 'apostle'. This verb is used in the Bible, whenever God is naming a new king, priest or prophet.

position. When the celebrated apostle went against common ideas about female leadership, he quickly lost his social position and status-capital. Also, because he could not have gotten these signs from God (since God only elects men), his personal relationship to God lost its credibility.

Gender and Evangelicalism

The example of the celebrated apostle and the female leader also raises interesting questions about gender. Drawing on the work by Linda Woodhead's (2004), the London based sociologist Bernice Martin introduces what she calls "The Pentecostal Gender Paradox" (2004). This paradox takes into consideration that religious movements which seem to be of a patriarchal character, often "masks a very different substantive reality in which women exercise a considerable degree of influence over domestic and family matters, find important arenas of religious expression, and even achieve a surprising measure of individual autonomy" (2004, 53). She argues further, how our ideas of religious movements as patriarchal may disguise an underlying shift in power relation, where women have gained increased authority in congregations with the growth of Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. Martin points out important aspects of social life in Evangelical movements, which can be transferred to Centro Cristiano.

Moreover, I do agree with patriarchal tendencies can mask an overall trend. Furthermore, as Lindhardt (2014, 180) points out, the Latin American Pentecostal movement has been successful in redefining gender relations. It has challenged traditional ideas about masculinity and male behavior. For example, similar to the men at Centro Cristiano, Lindhardt reports how men at EPC in Valparaíso weeps during church meetings. This is generally perceived by Chileans as a female behavior; however in Evangelical and Pentecostal communities, this can be seen as a testimony of a person's contact with the Holy Spirit. Lindhardt (2014, 179-181) makes an important argument, when stating that the position of women has been improved by a general trend of "domestication and feminization" of converted husbands. Nevertheless, he also points out how the patriarchal subordination of women is justified through biblical terms, and how the wife is generally supposed to be obedient to her husband.

Centro Cristiano is seemingly patriarchal at first sight, as men hold most leadership positions, and the highest ranked leader is Pastor Billy and not Pastora Claudia. The pastora is directly

linked to the title of her husband, as women cannot become a pastora without being married to a pastor. I never saw or heard of women traveling to visit other churches to preach, nor did any women visit Centro Cristiano. On the contrary, I quite frequently witnessed men participating in this pastor exchange between churches. For example, Pastor Billy traveled to Mexico, Guatemala and the United States during my time in Chile. In addition, as we have seen, women cannot become or hold the status of apostle. Martin (2004, 54) also reports that women often get excluded from priesthoods and are restricted in their leadership participation, as well as strict regulations regarding how they dress. Lindhardt (2014) writes about regulation concerning appearances for both men and women at the EPC in Valparaíso. For example, women must wear decent clothes that does not display or enhance the contours of the body, makeup is banned, and they should have long hair (Lindhardt 2014, 71). This was not the case at Centro Cristiano, except from the outfits men and women wear when dancing in the dance groups. Rather, members took great pride in being flexible regarding dress codes, and Maria and Amarisa distanced themselves from traditional Chilean Pentecostals mainly because of the strict regulations regarding clothes and cosmetics.

When taking a closer look, I came to realize that women had other strategies of practicing their authority and gaining influential positions within the faith network. Despite the limited opportunities for leadership, women have a greater access to spiritual gifts than men (Martin 2004, 54). Women are able to dominate this domain, in a movement that is built around spiritual gifts. By practicing such gifts, women grant themselves more ss-capital and become central figures in the faith network. Coleman notes that Pentecostals have “argued that the ability to speak in tongues could be seen as an outward sign of inner sanctification” (2006, 163-164). At Centro Cristiano speaking in tongues, together with crying, are also considered a sign of inner blessing, where the individual believer is directly in contact with God. Women were also seen as good worshipers, and there were most females in the dancing group and the choirs, which are groups that specializes in worshipping.

Pastora Claudia stands as an example of the gender paradox. She may not be allowed specific formal positions or to interpret the Bible (a job meant for apostles), but she owns the church, runs it together with her husband and she led many church meetings alone. She often spoke in tongues during church meetings and would guide church members in spiritual questions. The lay members perceive her as a highly ranked leader with a lot of ss-capital, making her a trusted person to seek advice and spiritual counseling from. Pastora Claudia illustrates

women's possibilities to influence aspects of religious life and achieve individual autonomy, but she also stand as an example of how women are limited in their possibilities within the faith network. The Bible stands as the fundament of Christian understanding and practice, and apostle's exclusive rights to interpreting it, shapes the authority of women within the movement. I argue, how the true gender paradox lies in the male interpretation of the Bible, which states that women cannot interpret it themselves, and therefore cannot argue that women indeed can interpret the Bible. This makes their influence and authority limited not only on paper, but also in practice. This was clearly illustrated in the case of the celebrated pastor who attempted to assign a woman the title of apostle. So, what can we make of this conflicting observations of women's authority? I argue how women indeed have strengthened their position in Evangelical communities, but their authority is still limited in terms of influence on the social structure and interpretations of biblical truths, which are both key aspects of social religious life. However, they can gain and accumulate ss-capital and become respected leaders within the faith network.

Ideas about Femininity and Masculinity

Sylvia Yanagisako and Carol Delaney (1995, 20) describe how people "naturalize power", which is also the name of their edited book. By naturalizing power, they mean that social groups naturalize identities and social bonds to autonomy from a "a nonhuman basis" that can "be whether in nature, biology, or god" (1995, 20), which in turn implements certain power relations. The edited book shows how hierarchies of power are embedded in ethnicity, sexuality, nation and religion. They argue further how origin stories, such as the Genesis in the Bible, shape peoples view on gender, and naturalize ideas about gender and power. It appears to be "God-given" or "natural" forces that creates differences in societies, but in reality "cultural domains, like social institutions, are human-made and only appear to be natural" (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995, 20). I suggest that not only the Genesis, but also the whole Bible shapes the Centro Cristiano congregants' ideas bout gender. These stories were often referred to in sermons and talks, and Pastor Billy often discussed different ideas of femininity and masculinity. People often spoke about women and men being naturally different from one another, and that God made it so. The idea of men and women being fundamentally different also shapes the ideas of only men being apostles. This is considered a man's job, and that is acceptable due to the "natural" differences between men and women.

Throughout the Bible you find stories where men and women are associated with specific things, such as headscarves, blowing horns or tambourines (further describes in chapter three). For example, only women are allowed to play the tambourine as a part of celebration in the church meetings, as only women play them in the Bible. Some members bring their own from home and the women in the dancing groups often danced with them as a part of the choreography. Often the tambourines are decorated with different fabrics that match the dresses of the women dancing.

Headscarf

Some time into the fieldwork, I bought myself an English bible from an American Evangelical church in the center of Santiago. I brought it with me to church meetings, so I could more easily follow the sermons and seminars, since the Bible was continuously referred to. On days when there were no activities in church, I would often stay at home reading it. This resulted in multiple questions from my part, as I was wondering about different understandings of the words and the biblical interpretations explained to me by my informants. For example, according to their understanding of the Bible women must use headscarves while praying or prophesizing. In the Bible (1Corinthians 11:2-14), the “Rules for Worship” are described, and the mentioning of women needing to cover their hair. Women at Centro Cristiano normally had their scarfs wrapped around their shoulders or lying in their bags, and took them on during active prayer in the church meeting. The headscarves covered most of the head, leaving the face exposed. The headscarves are made of all kinds of material and design. The fabrics are indifferent colors, some with pattern or other decor, such as roses, leopard-print, or different colors stripes. Many women used them as elements of their outfits, matching them to their outfit of the day. Additionally, the female dancers wore them while dancing and used them as a part of the choreography (see figure 3).

After reading the Bible, I reflected upon the usage of headscarves. As I read it, the Bible clearly states how a woman should indeed cover her head while praying and prophesizing, however there is no mentioning of a headscarf (see 1Corinthians 11:2-14). Instead the Bible mentions long hair to be a beautiful way for women to cover their head. I talked with Amarisa and Maria about it, interested to hear their views and reflections. Amarisa expressed that she was confused about this part of the Bible, because she read it the same way as I did. She reassured me there was probably a reason why they had to wear the headscarf, and that it was

the Centro Cristiano congregant's way of understanding the Bible. We quickly went on to talk about other things, and I did not put much thought into the conversation until some time later.



Figure 3: Women praying and dancing with headscarves.

A couple of weeks went by before I found myself in a new talk with Amarisa, Maria and some other church members. We had gotten into the discussion about homosexuality, due to the TV-series *Game of Thrones*, which is well known for its violent and sexual scenes, which among other things contains homosexual acts. Maria strongly argued that even if one is committing a sin, like homosexuality, it does not mean that you should judge or exclude them from the church. Amarisa nodded her head in agreement, also stating that many people do still judge and exclude, which makes it hard for homosexual persons to attend church meeting or actively engage in Christian congregations. She expressed that to judge, bully and exclude anybody is wrong and “unchristian”. She was hoping that people would come around, understanding that the Bible does not tell people to judge. Further, she argued that it was the same with homosexuality as with headscarves. With homosexuality, she explained, people think the Bible says that one should exclude them from the church, but that this only is a misinterpretation of the biblical words. It was the same with the headscarf, she suggested. After our earlier conversation, she had realized that there was no need for a headscarf, and

that the Bible do not explicit tell you to wear one. The following is from my fieldnotes from the conversation:

Amarisa: "do you remember what we talked about with the veil⁸ [headscarf] and prayer?"

Me: "yes, about the hair and everything?"

Amarisa: "Yes, because it [the Bible] says that you only need to have hair. So, that why, lately I have stopped using my veil. Because it doesn't say so in the Bible. But I don't go running around telling everybody that what she is doing is wrong. I know that in time they will understand"

Me: "I understand"

Amarisa: "it doesn't say in the Bible that you should not wear a veil, so it doesn't really matter"

Based on our earlier conversation, Amarisa had made a choice not to wear her headscarf anymore. In the following weeks I watched her multiple times praying without it, even getting up close to the stage to pray for the so called 'alter call', which I will describe further in chapter three. For the most part I was really concerned about her choice, since I was the one who brought it up in the first place. I was expecting some sort of reaction from the congregation and for Amarisa to get sanctioned. To my surprise, nobody really seemed to be bothered about it. I never heard of anyone questioning it, but again, it was not uncommon to pray without it now and then. People might not have noticed it at all, and I had probably not noticed it myself unless she explicitly told me. Also, people might have confronted her about it without my knowledge.

Some church meetings went by without Amarisa using her headscarf, before it was time for me to conduct the interview with Pastora Claudia. Amarisa had been looking forward to this interview for a long time and really wanted to assist me in case I needed a translator. The day of the interview she left school early so she could take a shower and get properly dressed first. Her mother had made it clear that she needed to look fresh and clean, because when meeting with Pastora Claudia it was important to represent the family in a good matter. Amarisa spent so long getting ready, that she showed up thirty minutes late. While I was waiting outside the pastora's office, I felt stressed about her not making it in time. I really appreciated the value of Amarisa's support to my work, and I was relieved that Pastora Claudia was even more

⁸ Amarisa and other members referred to the headscarf as a 'veil' when they spoke in English and 'velo' in Spanish.

delayed than Amarisa, as she was busy in a meeting with another church member. When it was our turn to go in to Pastora Claudia's office, Amarisa made sure to put an extra coat of lip-gloss and combed her hair one more time.

The interview turned out to be an interesting conversation between myself, Pastora Claudia and Amarisa. We talked freely about different things and Pastora Claudia told me different stories about herself and the church. During the interview we got into the conversation about leadership and I asked about the limited possibilities for women to become apostle, since nobody that I had talked to seemed to know why. Pastora Claudia said that this was simply the way it was supposed to be, because God made men and women to be different, and that there was no point to reflect on it. She further said that they based it on the Bible, without referring to a specific verse. To illustrate her point, Pastora Claudia brought up the headscarf as an example. She said that she would never speak to the congregation on this topic, because she is not entitled to do so, since this was a part of apostles' responsibility. She clarified further that she would never question Pastor Billy and his teachings, as it was not in her place to do. So, if he said that she were to use a headscarf, she would do so without asking any questions. She emphasized that it is important to trust the apostles, because God has chosen them himself, and they are given the important job of interpreting the biblical doctrine. Amarisa nodded approvingly to Pastora Claudia's words. Not long after, during the first church meeting after the interview, Amarisa wore her headscarf again in a session of prayer.

What does this illustrate?

The empirical material I have presented here, stands as an example of how a member of a religious congregation can experience her own possibility of interpreting sacred scriptures and how she acts accordingly. Firstly, it illustrates the strong influential power of leaders, and shows how high amounts of ss-capital create little room for individual interpretations of the Bible. I strongly believe that the leaders gain more ss-capital by talking about themselves as a part of the congregation. Pastora Claudia used herself as a role model by doing what is expected from the lay members. She often spoke warmly of Pastor Billy and used herself as an example of how people need to learn different things. In her stories, it was often herself that needed to learn, and often from her husband (for more, see chapter four). She can, based on some simple words, change the way people act and perceive their position in the world. Pastor Billy also spoke of himself simply as a member, emphasizing the nonhierarchical system in the faith network. By stressing that the system is egalitarian and that nobody has

special rights to the divine, the leaders mask their authority and become perfect examples of good members, and the lay members can easier associate with what the leaders are saying. If Pastora Claudia wears the headscarves without questioning why, I suggest that it is more difficult for Amarisa not to do the same. Moreover, we can see how hierarchy and authority at Centro Cristiano is an observable fact, rather than a part of the Evangelical ideology.

Secondly, the empirical material illustrates how women have limited opportunities to interpret the Bible themselves. The actions of Amarisa illustrate how she first tried to do so, however she quickly changed her views about this. It also shows how the knowledge of an apostle is considered *final*, not uncommon in Evangelical churches. In her article on Christianity and Gender from the South Pacific nation Vanuatu, Annalin Eriksen (2012) examines some of the similar matters as I have done in this chapter. She shows how female prophetess' position functions similar to that of apostles in the case of Centro Cristiano, as they mediate messages from the Holy Spirit to the congregation. However, in the case of Vanuatu it is the male pastors that encounter the Holy Spirit directly through forms of fire or by hearing the voice of God. In these encounters the pastors are often chosen for a task or a mission, whereas the prophetess merely sees images for the *pastor to interpret* (Eriksen 2012, 115). It is the male pastor that interprets the visions, and the women simply become mediums for sending messages from the Holy Spirit to the congregation. It is the pastor's words, and apostles' in the case of Centro Cristiano, that knows the true meaning behind words and spiritual messages from God.

Coleman (2006, 168) has argued how, "not only is the bible seen as a source of objective truth, but the words of an inspired speaker can also be regarded as truth incarnate". I will discuss this further in chapter four, but the words of a leader also meant a great deal to the members at Centro Cristiano. For example, whatever topic the pastors would speak of was often the same my informants found important to tell or teach me the following day or week, or happened to be the topic of conversation between people later on. There is a confusing balance between how to read the bible, since the lay member is constantly encouraged to read it. However, they are not allowed to interpret the words they read.

Finally, it also illustrates Yanagisako's and Delaney's (1995, 20) point that I mentioned earlier, namely how what appears to be natural or God-given differences between men and women may simply be socially constructed. Amarisa interpreted the bible herself, and then

were indirectly instructed not do by so by one of her most trusted leaders and role models. I suggest how it is through situations like these that social structure is constructed and creates an idea of what we consider as “natural”, or in this case “God-given”.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have aimed to show how different forms of leadership influence the church community and how they gain authority through different strategies. The Centro Cristiano congregants describe the church as nonhierarchical, emphasizing that leaders and members have the same possibilities to get in contact with God. At the same time, I have shown how there are traces of icons of orthodoxy in the case of apostles, where one is dependent on an apostle to mediate between God and a new potential apostle. Moreover, there are clear differences between members and leaders. The leaders have high volumes of ss-capital, making them more powerful and influential than the members. Nobody has exclusive rights to the divine, but there is still a system of charismatic inequality measured according to people's ss-capital and rhetorical skills. The system does not only arrange people's possibilities to speak *with* God, but also people's possibility to speak *about* God.

The empirical examples all illustrate ways of gaining ss-capital even though I might not have pointed it out directly. Examples of such are Pastor Billy's welcoming ceremony, his behavior in church meetings, or how Pastora Claudia talks about him when he is not there. Moreover, men are believed to have a special right to become apostle and therefore interpret the Bible. This creates a power relation, where we find the true gender paradox mentioned above, which lies in the male interpretation of the Bible of how women cannot interpret it themselves and therefore they cannot argue that women indeed can interpret the Bible. Indeed, women can gain ss-capital and become influential figures within the faith networks. Nevertheless, the Evangelical church structure makes their authority limited. The next chapter aims to examine the individual experience of being a part of the church community further, by looking into individual's religious experience in relation to the cult.

CHAPTER 3: COMING TOGETHER THROUGH RITUALS

Introduction

Church meetings are structured through the use of different ritual events. Generally there is a focus on the individual experience when performing rituals, which is expressed through bodily action. Bodily experiences are a central part of the religious life of the congregation, as they fast, eat, dance, sit, run, cry, and resist sleep. However, what might be of greater importance, there is a focus on having those individual experiences *together* as a group. I argue how there is a continuous effort to balance the relationship between individualism and collectivism, and I explore this further in this chapter. This is best expressed in two specific and contrasting rituals, namely ‘Santa Cena’ (Communion) and ‘Ayuno Congregacional’ (Congregational Fast), but also in more common actions such as dancing and prayer. I use the term “affect” introduced by Jon Bialecki (2015) to explain the interdependent relationship between individuals and the group. I will mainly examine four forms for worship, namely dancing, praying, eating, and fasting, in relation to the balance between individualism and collectivism. I begin by outlining the church meetings’ structure, in order to give an idea of how the meetings are organized. Thereafter I give some remarks on rituals and worship, as I will use Durkheim’s and Roy A. Rappaport’s theoretical perspective to examine the ethnographic data presented. Furthermore, use these perspectives to understand *affect*, and collective and individual experiences for the Centro Cristiano congregants.

Church Meetings

The most common ritual event at Centro Cristiano is ‘la reunión’, the standard church meetings. These meetings are normally held four times a week, on Saturdays, Wednesdays and two times on Sundays. The meetings structure varies, but they all include a music/dancing session, prayer, and one or multiple sermons. The music sessions mainly consist of worship through dancing and singing, and are normally the starting point of church meetings. Prayer is spread throughout the church meetings, both during music sessions and during the sermons. Prayer is done both collectively and individually, and may last from minutes up to one hour. Sermons usually come at the end of meetings, unless it is a special event, and involves Pastor

Billy preaching for everything from one to three hours. The transitions between each session are not always easy to spot, as they smoothly merge into each other.

During the first few weeks spent in the church, I was primarily concerned with the structure of the meetings, as I tried to find some sort of pattern. I quickly realized that the structure varies a lot from meeting to meeting. Standard meetings have more or less the same structure, starting off with music, dance and worship, and finishing with a sermon. Special events, such as ‘Santa Cena’ (Holy Dinner, commonly known as communion), ‘Oración de la noche’ (Night Prayer) and ‘Ayuno Congregacional’ (Congressional Fast), are more unpredictable and hold a loose structure, where the time and order of each session varies. In standard meetings each session normally last between one or two hours, for about five hours all together. At special events, each session could last one to three hours, depending on the day. For example, during a night prayer that lasted for nine hours (from 11pm to 8am), the congregation danced for two hours, prayed for one hour, went back to dancing for a hour, followed by a sermon, then prayer, and so on. There were no breaks during church meetings, but members could walk out, without problems.

The Meaning of Rituals

The church meetings consist of long lasting performances by the church leaders and the congregation, as they sing, dance, and cry. The material presented in this chapter could also be analyzed in relation to performance theory developed by scholars such as Ervin Goffman (1971) and Victor Turner (1986). As Roy A. Rappaport (2008 [1999], 414) argues, there is a special relationship between rituals and performativeness, however you can also find performatives outside of rituals. Performance in itself is therefore not enough to create a religious ritual setting. Rather, Rappaport argues that it is the *formality* of ritual that “makes very clear and explicit what it is that is being done” (2008, 414). In this way it is not just what is being done and what is being said that gives the ritual meaning; rather, it is the ritual’s context that clarifies the meaning and social background. It is these formalities and contexts I find interesting and wish to examine further. For example, in the case of Centro Cristiano it is common that dancers perform in front of the congregation. This performance in itself may not be spiritually meaningful or expressive, but rather the performance’s contextualization and symbolic meaning as a worshipping form.

I perceive rituals as Durkheim's (1995, 38) understands them; as something social and collective. He describes them as "ways of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain, or re-create certain mental states of those groups" (Durkheim 1995, 9). In this way, rituals are practices that are directly connected to mental states of a group, and consequently they are social. Similar to Durkheim (1995, 38), Rappaport (2008, 426) argues that rituals are not only symbolic representation of social connections, but that they are the very basis for social acts. The rituals in themselves create social actions, a sense of community and individual experiences. There is an emphasis on individual experience, and leader and members often spoke to me about the importance of a close personal relationship with Jesus and God. However, as I will show, the rituals at Centro Cristiano are social and collective since they tend to focus on having those personal experiences together with other Evangelicals through the cult.

Further, Durkheim define rituals as "(...) rules of conduct that prescribe how a man must conduct himself with sacred things" (Durkheim 1995, 38). I use Durkheim's definition here, because the rituals at Centro Cristiano are indeed ways for the congregation to handle sacred things, such as worship, prayer, glossolalia, and the bread and wine under a communion. I will discuss the sacred further in chapter four, and look into some of the critiques made about the distinctions between the sacred and profane. Ritual events are an arena for the congregation to come together, where they are set apart from everyday things and where they celebrate God. However, through worship the congregation not only dance and pray *for* God, but also *with* God. It is believed that the individuals encounter God when they "feel his presence" or "get touched" by him during worship sessions, which is expressed through bodily expressions such as crying and speaking in tongues.

Building a Strong Church

Rituals are not only concerned with encountering God, they are also aimed at building a strong⁹ church, solid enough to fight evil forces and generating goodness. Thomas J. Csordas has done field research among charismatic Catholics, and even argues how "Charismatic communities exist so that their members can share a collective spiritual life and a collective mission of evangelization for the sake of renewing the church" (2015, 136). It is commonly believed, also described by my informants, that Jesus will return to earth, for a final reunion

⁹ When people said "strong" in this context, they often meant spiritually and that they church has a high number of members.

between himself, God, and his followers. In order to “be ready” for this reunion, it is important to build a strong church, both spiritually (by having members who live a life according to Jesus’ words) and physically (in numbers of members and size of the church). In turn, by building a strong church one is also generating goodness.

I discuss the worldviews of the Centro Cristiano congregants in the next chapter, and intend to show how the congregation sees the world as a dualistic place. I will argue, that they find themselves in a ‘spiritual warfare’ against evil forces in society. In short spiritual warfare captures a common dualistic worldview of Evangelicals, namely the idea of good and evil forces in the world are fighting over the control of human beings. Following Durkheim, I suggest that the dualistic worldview Centro Cristiano is evoked and maintained through ritual events. Not only do the ritual events remind the congregation of the spiritual warfare they engage in, they are also seen as a weapon of war. Kevin L. O’Neill (2010) demonstrates through his work with Pentecostals in Guatemala, how prayer can be a weapon to use in the combats against evil forces in the self, others, object and nations. He notes how his informants “pray for reduced levels of crime; they fast for less political corruption; and they sermonize on the service of self to the nation” (2010, 202). Similarly, at Centro Cristiano, prayer and worship is generally seen as a way to generate goodness and fight evil. This can be observed in many situations. For example, a pregnant member of the church was experiencing serious illness related to a pregnancy, and the church congregants wanted to help her. Pastor Billy then held the ultrasound pictures of the fetus in front of the congregation while asking them all to pray for the mother and child. To pray was not necessarily considered sufficient to save their lives, but is perceived as an act that can help in addition to modern medicine. In this sense, prayer is not only symbolic, but can also be actual action against evil forces (in this case the disease making the mother sick).

Dancing, Praying and Speaking in Tongues

At Centro Cristiano, as in many Evangelical communities, music and singing is a central part of worship. The Bible mentions that people should gather in a church to celebrate God and Jesus, and through the cult the congregation follows the Bible’s encouragements. An important part of this is celebration and worship through music and dance. During church meetings there is a band and a choir on the stage, and in front of it there is a large red carpet marking the area for the three dance groups to perform. They dance facing the congregation in outfits custom-made for the occasion. The church has been using the same seamstress for

many years to make all the outfits. The dresses for the women are full of detailed work, with long skirts that flows when the women are dancing. The younger women and girls often talked about the dresses with admiration and wanted to collect as many different colored dresses as possible. The average member considers the dresses to be quite expensive (approximately 50.000CLP=74USD), so it is not uncommon to sell and buy used dresses among each other. The male dancers use the same colored t-shirts with the church's logo on them, and black pants as an outfit. Most members are participants in one of the dance groups, but they rotate who dances and not. The different groups organize the rotation of dancers according to the color of their outfits. So for example, if the owners of red t-shirts are dancing, all the men with the red colored t-shirts can dance in the meeting if they want to.



Figure 4: *Woman dancing and worshipping with a tambourine.*

There are three dance groups, 'Corros', 'Danza de Profética' and 'Mahanaim'. Each group dance in every church meeting, and all have different dances that they perform. The groups are lined up after each other in front of the stage. 'Corros' means 'dancing in lines', and consist only of men and boys. The members of Corros always wear dark pants and same-colored t-shirts. The group's choreography moves fast and the motions are firm and hard, and include loud, deep sounds of screaming. This stands in contrast to the two other groups. Their choreographies are smoother in their movements and normally do not involve screaming. The

second group, 'Danza de Profética' (Dance of the Prophecy), is gender neutral, but women tend to dominate in it. The men in this group wear custom made suits, which often match the dresses of the women and girls. The female dancers wear custom made dresses in different colors and fabrics. The last group, 'Mahanaim', consists of only female dancers. 'Mahanaim' is a Hebrew word, which was explained to me as meaning "a place where earth and heaven meets". This group wears the same style of dresses as the women in Danza de Profética. Women across the groups commonly dance with tambourines (see figure 4). As I mentioned in chapter two, the instrument is described in the Bible multiple times, however it is only mentioning of women playing it. Therefore, it is argued, only women can play the tambourines at Centro Cristiano. The Bible is in this way incorporated into the dance, both as a form of worship and through the use of tambourines, and more over as a congregating practice.

The dancers guide the congregation through the music session, and many members join in the choreography or simply dance freely. The whole congregations dances, and many place themselves in the back of the church or move around on the church in order to move freely. The music sessions consist of hours with intensive dance and singing, performed both by the choir, band and dancers, but also the lay members. They follow the instructions by the main leader who orchestrates the session. In church meetings, Pastor Billy always sing one or two songs, but commonly it is another leader who leads the congregation through the music sessions, such as Pastora Claudia, Felipe or other singers. However, Pastor Billy normally sings on special events, such as at the Congressional Fasts. Generally people spoke warmly about Pastor Billy's voice when singing, and described his voice as "strong", "beautiful" and "powerful".

In O'Neill's (2010) ethnography from Guatemala, he shows how an Pentecostal congregation is guided through "emotional peaks and valleys" by the church leaders, and that "Upbeat songs electrify the congregation; sad melodies slow the pace of service, bringing many to tears" (2010, XVIII). This could just as easily have been a description of a church meeting at Centro Cristiano. The pace of the music, songs and dancing varies a lot according to the leaders' instructions, as he or she tells both the congregation and the band what to do next. All of the songs are about God, Jesus or another bible-related topic, and some of the lyrics instruct the congregation to do different things, such as jumping, running and screaming. These songs often lead to fast pace dance and loud singing from everybody involved. The

leader directs the congregation in and out of prayer and dance, often resulting in many people changing between laughing and crying, sometimes at the same time. The transition from dance to prayer, or from prayer to dance, may happen fast and firm, while other times slow and over a timespan of several minutes. Normally the music session would end in a slow song lasting for ten to twenty minutes. These songs were often mellow and calm with a lot of instrumentations. On top of the slow rhythms the lead singer would start to pray, encouraging the congregation to do the same.

Prayer

Prayer is an essential part of all church meetings at Centro Cristiano. Some people pray out loud, while others pray calmly and muted. Moreover, it is common to express prayer through bodily positions. Members are often seen with their hands lifted upwards, with closed eyes, sometimes lying on the floor, and kneeling. Many people also kneeled while holding on to their chair and putting their head on the seat, covering their face with their hands. Some selected church members make sure to put a piece of cloth on the back of the person praying that is laying on the floor, to make sure that the person does not have to concern themselves with underwear showing outside of their clothes. In this setting the prayer is normally personal and private, and the idea is that the praying person should keep him or her entire focus on the prayer and on God, instead of having to worry about other things.

At Centro Cristiano they pray ‘Oración’ that can be translated to ‘oral prayer’, which means that they do not follow a pre-written text, poem or scripture, but rather say what ever comes to their mind while praying. In Catholic churches they pray ‘Rezo’, which can be translated to ‘written prayer’, which means prewritten prayers such as “Hail Mary” or “Our Father”. For many of my informants it was important that they did not pray rezo, but rather used their own words when talking or prayer to God, and that the words comes directly from the believers themselves. Individual prayers are highly appreciated and encouraged in church meetings. If a person is extremely eager while praying or a person speaks in tongues, the leader’s microphone is likely to hold in front of that person. In this way individual experience is collectivized, as it is shared with the congregation. The prayers are fundamentally personal, but when shared the prayer gives a collective experience. This is not an uncommon practice, and children are also encouraged to pray, and would now and then be asked to perform a prayer in front of the congregation. For instance, one time during a night prayer, a six-year-

old girl named Dayenú¹⁰ was invited to the stage. The entire congregation, including band and choir, was engaging in a collective prayer. Close to the whole congregation was praying intensively, and many had their eyes closed, some were looking down toward the floor and others up against the roof. After discrete direction from the leader, Dayenú walked exited up on stage wearing her pink-colored headscarf over her head. The invite was clearly not planned, but rather a spontaneous act from the leader. Dayenú was handed the microphone. She looked towards the crowd as she calmly repeated for about two minutes,

Thank you Jesus for my family, thank you Jesus for the church, thank you Jesus for everything, thank you Jesus for my family, thank you Jesus for my life, thank you Jesus for my church, thank you Jesus for everything. In the name of Jesus, thank you for everything... (Translated from Spanish)

The congregation responded with great enthusiasm, and many were crying, screaming and applauding her performance. Dayenú smiled and handed the microphone back to the leader. The congregation kept applauding and shouting words and phrases like “en el nombre de Jesús” (in the name of Jesus), “aleluya” (hallelujah) and “amén” (amen). In the middle of the excitement the band started to play and the choir started to sing, leading the congregation back into a dancing session that lasted for several hours.

Oral prayer is highly valued, however it is also common with repeating prayer, meaning that the lead-singer or preacher lead the prayer by instructing the congregation in what to say. Sometimes this is long sections, and other times short phrases or words. Pastor Billy and other leaders often asked the congregation to say specific things when they were engaging in collective prayer. For instance I wrote the following in my fieldnotes from a prayer-session during a standard meeting:

Pastor Billy: “Dios, escúchame” (God, listen to me)

Congregation: ”Dios, escúchame” (God, listen to me)

Pastor Billy: “Dios, perdóname” (God, forgive me)

Congregation: “Dios, perdóname” (God, forgive me)

¹⁰ Dayenú is a pseudonym. However, many people had biblical names, and Dayenú was especially appreciated by the members since it means “God is more than enough for us”.

This kind of prayer was often accompanied with oral prayer from the congregation. Pastor Billy also used repeating prayers during his sermons. For example, if he preached about the strong forces of the Devil, he would pray together with the congregation for the people present not to be contaminated with these forces.

Glossolalia

At Centro Cristiano congregants occasionally spoke what is regarded as a holy language, often referred to as ‘tongues’, ‘speaking in tongues’ or ‘glossolalia’. The practice is described in the Bible (1Corinthians 12-14) and is understood as a language a person speaks when encountering the Holy Spirit. Coleman (2000, 127) argues how language functions as a mediating vehicle between the believer and the transcendent world of the Spirit, and that the individual is “colonized” by it. At Centro Cristiano it is understood in somewhat the same terms, as it is perceived as a spiritual gift given to the believers directly from God. This allows the person to speak with God personally, and those two are the only ones that understand the spoken words.

People would often speak in tongues during church meetings and events, however it took many weeks before I understood what glossolalia was and noticed how they spoke it. Pastor Billy often spoke in Hebrew, which he learned online. Consequently, I was convinced people speaking in tongues simply were saying a verse from the Bible in Hebrew. I had never heard people speak in tongues before. My associations to it were influenced by what I had seen on TV and stories I had been told, which painted it as a quite dramatic practice. To my surprise, people speaking in tongues were normally praying in the same way as normal, but happened to speak another language than Spanish. Pastor Billy would switch between tongues and Spanish during active prayer. He normally spoke in Spanish, and now and then one sentence or two would be spoken in tongues. Other times, it would last for many minutes. When a person from the congregation spoke in tongues nobody understood what was being said, however it was not uncommon for the leaders to hold their microphone in front of that person for the congregation to hear. Similar to regular prayer, speaking in tongues also becomes a collective and shared experience by letting the congregation hear what the individual person is saying. This becomes especially powerful when the person is speaking in tongues, since that is seen as a proof of God being present in the church and the individual. Some members told me that some selected Evangelicals could understand glossolalia even when spoken by someone else, but I never witnessed such an interpretation or translation myself.

Leaders and members alike speak glossolalia during church meetings. Dancers have smaller breaks between the choreographies, while they dance and pray freely. During these breaks it is common for the dancers to pray out loud and speak in tongues. Generally it is practiced together with prayer and often followed with tears. When the Evangelist weeps it is described as a reaction to an encounter with God, which in turn was described as a response of feeling something “wonderful” and “beautiful”. I mentioned in chapter two that the ability to speak in tongues or to cry can be seen as a sign of inner sanctification (Coleman 2006, 163-164). Since both actions are reactions from encountering God, it is not uncommon to do both things at once. In her contribution on religious weeping as a ritual in the medieval west, Piroska Nagy (2004) argues, how crying is a process between body and soul, as the persons emotions are being expressed through actual tears. The same can be said about glossolalia, as it is a practice and performance that expresses a spiritual experience through the body.

Speaking in tongues may be a common practice in Evangelical and Pentecostal communities, but *how* it is practiced varies (see Coleman 2000, 135, Brusco 1995, 63, Martin 1990, 173-174, Csordas 1997, 170). At Centro Cristiano tongues is practice in social ritual settings, but is seen as a private individual *conversation* between God and the believer. At times the person speaking gets full attention from the congregation while speaking, but it is not a conversation to be translated or interpreted. In the case of Word of Life in Sweden, speaking tongues can be used by pastors as a strategy for healing purposes, where the pastor commands evil spirits to leave the believers bodies while holding a hand on the forehead the person (Coleman 2000, 135). At Centro Cristiano on the other hand, congregants described similar forms for healing to be false and “a show” from the pastors performing it. It never witness any form of healing at Centro Cristiano, although this was commonly referred to as an ordinary spiritual gift. However, congregants often prayed for people to stay and become healthy.

When Dancing and Prayer meets

Normally it is a church leader who guides the congregation through church meetings, while instructing everybody to pray, sing, and dance in different ways. Drawing on his own fieldwork from the Vineyard church in the United States, anthropologist Jon Bialecki (2015) argues how “affect” can link language and embodiment together. By affect he means specific intensities and energies that are “found in a particular moment or object that has consequences on others that it is in contact with in that moment” (2015, 97). He argues how affect “travels”

through the speaker's use of both language and body, and transfers to other speakers and people. This can be seen as affective energy build up that seems to spill over, transferring from one person to another (Bialecki 2015, 107). Similar to the case of Centro Cristiano, it is often leaders who create affect, by using both language and body as suggested by Bialecki. He describes a situating from the Vineyard church, where a speaker gradually leads the crowd into prayer during a conference. He starts off in a slow manner, and as the music gradually builds up, so do his movement and the intensity of his talk. Following his direction, the crowd is affected and eventually engages in deep individual prayer. In the case of Centro Cristiano, people do not fall to the ground or experience bodily movement or twitching, as in the case of believers at the Vineyard church. However, they do experience the same "out of control" affect, such as crying and speaking in tongues. Prayer is often a collective act, led by a leader of some sort. The leader often intensifies his voice gradually, making the session more *affected*. The congregation follows his or her lead, making the praying more intense and energetic, resulting in many people crying, increasing their voice, and this is a common moment where it is common to speak in tongues.

Drawing on Bialecki's usage of affect, I want to use the term to explain how the church leaders create a collective experience. I suggest how affect not only is the meeting point between language and embodiment, but also between the *individual* and the *collective*. The individual experience an intensity and energy that could not have been created without the leader and the congregation. The bodily experiences are rooted in the affect, which in turn is dependent on the social travel of energy. The individual person's affect and emotion becomes important in establishing a sense of belonging and religious experience. Bialecki (2015, 97) points out that emotions are not to be confused with affect, but are rather a reaction to affect itself that the affected person experiences. I argue further how it is precisely their own emotional experience that makes them feel connected to the church, since they *share* these individual experiences together. This is also emphasized in other ritual acts, such as eating and fasting, as I will show later in this chapter. In this way, we can see similarities to what Durkheim writes, as the congregation lean on their own emotional experience of "joy, inner peace, serenity and enthusiasm that, for the faithful, stand as experimental proof of their believes" (1995, 420). Through their affectedness, they experience God on an individual and a collective level.

Bialecki also points out that affect is not exclusive for Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, but nevertheless the movement has been especially successful in using affect in order to switch from “identitarian to ex-centric, *open* [my emphasis] modes of being” (2015, 107). I agree with Bialecki in that church leaders utilize these “open modes of being” in order to reach the congregation. Pastor Billy for example never entered the stage to either sing or speak, before the church meeting had lasted for a couple of hours. At this point the congregation had been affected for quite some time, and the members were receptive to his messages. In this way, the congregation is more open towards information or prayer when in an affected atmosphere. This does not only count for Pastor Billy, but also for other members. For example, the little girl Dayenú who spoke in front of the congregation was also able to create a strong reaction to her prayer on stage and in that movement she intensified the affected atmosphere in the church. However, leaders are often more talented at creating such an atmosphere, since they have practiced it for a long time and they are generally more rhetorically skilled.

Santa Cena

Every first Sunday of the month, Centro Cristiano celebrates ‘Santa Cena’ (Holy Dinner/communion). The ritual originates from the biblical story about Jesus having his last meal, also referred to as “Passover Meal”, together with his disciples. During the dinner, Jesus says to his disciples that the bread they are eating is his body, and the wine they are drinking is his blood. Communion is meant to replicate this dinner, where Jesus’ followers internalize a part of Jesus through the meal. Communion is a common practice in Christian congregations, but the way in which it is celebrated varies a lot. In Catholic churches, communion is normally performed at every service and has somewhat the same structure every time, where the priest blesses the bread and wine, and the individual believer receives bread to eat and do so while engaging in private prayer. In Evangelical churches the practice varies in each separate church. For example in Coleman’s descriptions from the Word of Life church he writes that, “The conventional celebration of communion is a rare, almost casual affair, and accordingly the sacramental table is not on permanent show” (Coleman 2000, 156). The sacramental table is not on permanent display at Centro Cristiano either, but rather because it is a highly formal affair. The table is placed in front of the stage on the days of the celebration and is prepared early in the morning on the day of communion.



Figure 5: *The top of the sacramental table.*



Figure 6: *The side of the sacramental table.*

The first time I saw the sacramental table it reminded me of the painting by Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper* (see figure 5 and 6). Similar to the table in the painting, it is narrow and long, covered with a white tablecloth reaching the floor. In front of it there is embroidery with citation from the Bible written in Hebrew that reads, “I pray that the Lord will bless and protect you, and that he will show you mercy and kindness. May the Lord be good to you and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26). The table is decorated differently every time, but normal ornaments are flowers, fruits, bread, decorative plates and cups, and jugs filled with wine. In addition there are plates covered with bread and containers with small classes of non-alcoholic wine, used for the communion. The members who decorated the table were quite proud of their efforts, and would made sure to tell me that it was they who had decorated it and was curious to know what I thought about it.

Internalizing Jesus

During communion, the bread and wine symbolizes the body and blood of Jesus. This is believed to result in Jesus’ blessings and words being internalized inside the person performing the meal, making them “clean” from contamination and evil forces present in society. Coleman (2000, 127) shows in his ethnography how the Word of Life congregation in Sweden “hunger” for and “get filled” with the word of God. He further argues that eating is an especially powerful metaphor, since it implies internalizing the words directly. At Centro Cristiano, the symbolic idea of eating is also taken literally. Not only are they metaphorically talking about being filled with Jesus’ word, but also they are actually eating Jesus’ blessings and words. This was an important point to be made by Amarisa and Maria, since they assumed I would see it as a symbolic representation of Jesus. In the biblical story that communion originates from, Jesus explicitly tells his disciples that the bread and wine they are consuming *is* his body and blood. The meal is in this way considered to be an extension of Jesus. Therefore the consuming person receives his words, blessing and sacrifice, and incorporate Jesus and God into the body. Similar to glossolalia, the bread and wine becomes mediating vehicles between the material and the spiritual world.

Pastor Billy often stressed that performing communion is a personal act between the individual believer and God, and that the person consuming the bread and the wine is obligated to continue on a “pure” path. By performing communion, the individual believer enters a contract with God, ensuring God that the person will do its best to live according to Christian beliefs. In this way the person becomes “pure”. Similar to the Catholic tradition of

confession, communion is perceived as a cleansing ritual, where the sins of the individual get “removed” from the body. During a Catholic confession and Evangelical communion, the believer confesses his or her sins to God while expressing repentance, and the sins are in turn forgiven. After receiving the bread and wine then, it is particularly important to be pure and to keep away from ‘contamination’ (further described in the next chapter). Pastor Billy would use different examples of how the congregation could be contaminated and to keep themselves pure, such as keeping away from cigarettes, eating healthy and keeping away from “junk food”, and not cheating on school tests. It helps little, he claimed, to take communion and thereafter contaminate your body with unhealthy objects or sinful behavior.

Maria and Amarisa had never witnessed the ceremonial ritual where the bread and wines are blessed in order to become Jesus. This normally happens before the day of the communion. When I asked if it was possible to participate in the ritual, they told me that it was the church leader who handled the blessings, and it was not possible for the lay member to participate or observe it.

Eating Together

I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis that Durkheim (1995, 60) argues how it is through the cult that church adherents strengthens social bond. An essential part of the cult is feasts, and the Centro Cristiano congregation often arranged for the congregation to eat together. For example when Pastor Billy celebrated his 50th birthday, the whole church celebrated in church with beautifully decorated tables and a dinner for all. Another example is during night prayer, where the congregants were eating together in the middle of the night. There is a small tent outside the church that often is used for these kind occasions. However, the most common situation to eat together is during communion.

The celebration of communion normally lasts for about five hours, where the actual consumption of bread and wine happens in the last thirty minutes of the church meeting. First there is a long worship session, where the congregation dance and pray for about two to three hours. Thereafter, Pastor Billy comes on stage and holds a talk that lasts between two to three hours. The talk is normally concentrated around the communion, where Pastor Billy emphasizes the importance of building a strong church, coming together, and celebrating communion. After the sermons, the music starts playing while everybody stands up. After receiving both a piece of bread and a small cup of wine, you sit down. When the whole

congregation, children and adults alike, has received both things they follow the instruction of Pastor Billy. Normally he performs a collective prayer, often asking the congregation to repeat his words. The prayer is connected to the communion, asking God and Jesus to bless the congregation and guide them through life. Normally, Pastor Billy also thanks God for gathering the congregation for the celebration. Then, after everyone has received everything and the prayer has been said, the congregation eats the bread simultaneously. This is followed by a new prayer led by Pastor Billy before the whole congregation drinks the wine together.

I mentioned earlier that Centro Cristiano congregants balance individualism and collectivism. The ritual illustrates my point, since it both ensures a private relationship with God at the same time as it strengthens the social bonds between the members. It is in this way centered on the individual believer and the group as a whole. It shows how the individual relationship to Jesus and God is important at the same time as the collective, shared relationship is as highly valued. Consuming together is an essential part of the ritual. Supporting my argument, these examples make it evident that individual experience and encounters with God is important, but only if it is done collectively. Communion is therefore not only an individual affair between the believer and God, but also between God and the church. Affect is also created here, as eating together intensifies the experience. Both through prayer and through the actual meal, the leaders build up the energies in the room.

Alter Call

Common during all church meetings, and especially Santa Cena, is the ‘alter call’. It is a form of collective prayer where the leaders ask the congregation to gather around the stage, and instruct the congregating to pray, often resulting in an affected situation with very intense and energetic prayers. Sometimes specific groups of people were called up, such as only women, only men, those who were sick, and those who have sinned. This practice is also known to be a part of the Pentecostal movement, where there is a frequent use of the alter call toward the end of church meetings, meaning that the person leading the meeting is “encouraging people to come up to the front to receive salvation or healing” (Coleman and Hackett 2015, 8). At Centro Cristiano the alter call does normally not include healing, as it often does in Pentecostal churches.

The alter call was normally a quite intense prayer. Pastor Billy would pray into the microphone, switching his pitch from high to low. Sometimes he would be crying, and from

time to time he would speak in tongues. Many people would be lying on the floor, and since everybody could not fit in front of the stage, Pastor Billy instructed the rest of the congregation to lie down on the floor next to their chairs. Pastor Billy often cried while lying on the stage floor, praying into the microphone. The band and choir also lay on the floor praying during these sessions. During the communion or the congregational fast, Pastor Billy would pray, asking God to receive the prayer, worship and sacrifice (in form of money or fast) done by the congregation. These prayers would be centered on a general blessing or grace given to the church collectively, and illustrates how the church often perceives itself as one in the eyes of God. I would also suggest how this is a strategy for gaining social capital, as Pastor Billy generates affect and reach out to many people at once. He is also crying and speaking in tongues during these sections, clearly demonstrating his encounters with God.

Ayuno Congregacional

During my fieldwork Pastor Billy introduced a new ritual event to Centro Cristiano that he named ‘Ayuno Congregacional’, which translates to ‘congregational fast’. After the first fast, Pastor Billy decided to make it a regular event, so the church now arranges it every third Sunday of each month. It is a collective fast celebrated in the church from approximately 9am to 5pm, lasting for seventeen hours. There should be no consumption of food or drinks between midnight and 5pm at the day of the fasts. These meetings include the same elements as normal (music sessions, worshiping and sermons), however it is structured differently. The session’s differs from usual ones in order of events and length. Pastor Billy is the lead singer throughout the church meeting on the day of the fast. I attended two of these collective fasts during my time in Chile. The fast was said to have three main functions; it is considered to be a gift or sacrifice to God, an approach for strengthening the church, and a strategy to internalizing the words of God and Jesus.

The health of the physical body is an important aspect of Christian life. As mentioned, Pastor Billy often spoke about keeping the body “pure” and free from “contamination” in his sermons. Maria and Amarisa also said at multiple occasions that the body is sacred, and it is every Christian responsibility to take care of it. When they were talking about a healthy body they commonly referred to regular exercise, eating healthy, and not smoking cigarettes or marijuana. The fast might be important, but also the physical health of the body. Since the fast is a physical exhausting practice, the fast and physical health must be balanced. Therefore, Pastor Billy said that if anyone needed to eat or drink during the fast because of health

reasons or other relatable things, it was important that they did so. However, he encouraged those who could not fast, to eat and drink outside of the church area. Nevertheless, you could see smaller children eating biscuits and other snacks throughout the celebration, and the dancers in the dancing groups drank water after the most intense dancing sessions. This was also reasoned in terms of health; since the dancing is quite intense, it is important to keep the body hydrated.

A Celebrating Ritual

The collective fast is truly a celebration and illustrates what I discussed earlier in relation to Rappaport's (2008) argument about ritual's formality and context. In many ways it seems like a rigged show, planned to the smallest detail. In the fasts I attended, the musicians and singers dressed up, the men with suits and ties, and the women with dresses, makeup and high heels. At standard meetings there were five or six musicians, but during the fast there were twice as many. Furthermore, at standard meetings there would be only one drum set, but at the fast they included congas, a traditional drum common in Latin America. In the second fast I attended, there was also a woman playing a violin for the occasion. She was dressed in a long dress, a short shining jacket, high heels, and has a rubber band in her hair. Many of the female dancers had also braided their hair and/or decorated it with jewelries or flowers. More dancers performed than normally, so the three dancing groups now had more than twenty dancers each, filling up the space in front of the stage with about sixtly dancers all together.

In addition to the high number of people attending, dancing and playing music, there were small actions and objects that made the congregational fast into a formal, grand and impressive event in comparison with standard meetings. For example, Pastor Billy had a large blowing horn that he played on rare occasions, such as the fast. This horn is mentioned in the Bible, as a sign of victory or celebration, and is only played by men. It is long and thin, approximately one and a half meter long, and shaped in a spiral (see figure 7). In strong contrast to the sound of the tambourines played by women, the sound of the horn is strong and loud, stretching throughout the whole venue without problems. The atmosphere became very serious as he blew the horn multiple times while creating a victorious melody. Some people stood up in their seats, holding their hand up towards the roof, but nobody said anything. No shouting of "aleluya" (hallelujah) or "amén" (amen), just complete silence with the exception of the horn. Maria explained how the horn is a symbol of victory and peace, and Pastor Billy

emphasized that it is only mentioned in the Bible as a reference to celebration and joy. Therefore, he never used it on standard meetings.



Figure 7: Pastor Billy playing the blowing horn during the fast

A Gift To God

The Congregational Fast was first and foremost perceived as a gift to God¹¹. Giving up food and drinks is seen as a sacrifice, and if God “call you inn” for a fast, it is because he wants to give you something in return. One can understand this, as it is God himself who “arranges” the fast indirectly through the church leaders. For example, Pastor Billy told the story about Moses and how he fasted for forty days and nights before he received the Pact (the Ten Commandments¹²) from God. He further emphasized that God does not want people to fast solely for keeping them hungry, but rather because he wants to make pacts with people. Amarisa also told me, “When God call you inn for a ayuno [fast] it is because he want to give you something”. The point is to sacrifice the need for food and drinks, in order to receive something from God. Such things can be a pact, but also blessings, messages or a spiritual

¹¹ People used “sacrificio” (sacrifice), “ofrendar” (offering) and “regalo” (gift) when referring to the fast. I use the three words almost as synonyms, since this was how my informants used them.

¹² ‘The Ten Commandments’, also known as ‘The Decalogue’, is a short list of religious and moral principles for Christians. According to the Bible, the Ten Commandments were handed over to Moses directly from God at the Sinai Mountain. They are mentioned in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.

gift. What it is exactly God that wants to give or actually gives is unclear, even for the believers themselves.

In lines of anthropological gift theory developed by Marcel Mauss (2002 [1925]), the idea is that the congregation enters a reciprocal relationship with God, where God is obligated to return the favor of the fast (where the fast is a gift to God in itself). The congregation and God create an informal moral contract, as described by Mauss' work, where both parties are obligated to both give and receive gifts (Mauss 2002, 16-17) in form of blessings, worshiping, and fasting. The interesting point here, is that God is likely to do so, since it was he in the first place who invited the congregation to the fast. In this way, it is God himself that start the chain of exchange, and the congregation is obligated to return the favor by fasting properly. This ongoing relationship of exchange not only counts for fasting, but also money donation, which I will discuss further in chapter four. More generally, it is believed that God gives blessings to those individuals who deserve it and act according to the Bible. Together with money donation, worship and prayer, fasting is considered to be a good Christian act that deserves God's attention.

Internalizing the Word Through the Fast

The members at Centro Cristiano also describe the fast as a strategy to "make room for God" and "make room for Jesus" words. Through the fast, they are internalizing and embodying God and Jesus physically, since there is more physical room inside the body available. Coleman (2000, 129) points out that this discourse might be seen for an outsider as a symbolic or metaphorical relationship with the divine. However, for the Evangelical the words are actually internalized inside the body, helping the individual to gain a closer relationship to God and to live a life according to Christian values and ideas. Similar to the communion, the fast incorporates Jesus and God into the body – however in two quite contrasting ways. This shows how words can become internalized in different ways according to different ritual setting and purpose.

Building a Strong Church

Fasting can also be a strategy to generate good forces that fight evil forces in the spiritual warfare, since fasting together helps to build a strong church. One of O'Neill's informants describe the fast like this, "It's through prayer and fasting that we'll be victorious... because the bible tells us that [prayer and fasting] brought victory in all the great battles" (2010, 2).

Pastor Billy and Pastora Claudia often emphasized that the congregational fast is a way for the church to grow stronger and create solid social bonds between the church members. As I mentioned above, normally two meetings are arranged on Sundays. However, on the day of the congregational fast there is only one. Pastor Billy arranged it like that, so the whole congregation could fast together, instead of being split into two separate groups. This is an important aspect, as the point of the fast is *to come together as one church* and celebrate Jesus and God. This worked effectively, since at the fasts there were close to no available seats.

Lindhardt (2014, 205) notes how EPC congregants in Valparaíso sometimes engages in collective singing, which is believed to be a strategy in marginalizing the Devil whenever he is present. Similar to the EPC, there would often be groups of congregants at Centro Cristiano praying throughout the church meetings, but in other places than the main room, such as the tent outside of church. The prayer would be performed quite loudly, and was described as a strategy for “God to pay attention” to the church and to protect the church. When I arrived at church for meetings, these groups had often started praying already, and I could hear people screaming and shouting, often accompanied with crying. At times you could also hear this prayer during church meetings.

At the women’s meeting after the first congregational fast, Pastora Claudia explained what inspired Pastor Billy to arrange the fast in the first place. When Pastora Claudia was younger, she explained, she participated in all church activities full of enthusiasm without getting tired. Now that she is older, she shivered when the pastor suggested that they should fast. She had even demonstrated against the idea, arguing that it was just too draining. The fast had become difficult with age, she said, as she now gets tired and annoyed after hours with no nutrition. The older women at the meeting were laughing loud when Pastora Claudia told her story, confirming that they recognized her descriptions. Then, she explained, Pastor Billy got the idea of arranging a collective fast. Pastora Claudia looked toward the crowd with a smile and said, “Then it was different! We did it together... As a team! We danced and sang together! Together! As a team!” (Translated from Spanish to English). People were applauding and cheering in response to her words, all recognizing the success of the previous fast.

The short story illustrates how the collective experience and practice is valued for several reasons. Not only is it appreciated for the church to grow strong, but also to help each individual members partake in particular activities. The general idea of the congregational fast

is that fasting *together* is easier than fasting *alone*. Similar to my own argument, Omri Elisha (2015, 42) shows how North American Evangelicals appreciate and value individuality at the same time as they involve themselves in social networks where it is expected to be socially connected with other members. They seek ritualized practices and a fellowship where members are encouraged to “open their souls” and “becoming morally accountable to others” (Elisha 2015, 54). Further, Elisha describes a situation where a group of men come together in joined efforts to eat healthier food, since one of the men in the “fellowship group” suffers from diabetes. Comparable to the fast at Centro Cristiano, the logic behind is that it is easier to eat healthy together as a group. The Evangelical groups will in itself help the individual person, which in turn helps the community to build a strong church. Also, as mentioned, by asking people to leave the church area when eating, Pastor Billy ensured that larger meals were consumed outside of the church area. This allows the church to be a place where everybody indeed helps each other make it through the fast without temptations of food and drinks.

Separating the Congregation from Others

It is also believed that in order to create a strong church, the congregation must separate themselves from other groups of people. Pastor Billy told the congregation on several occasions how they should separate themselves from “the rest of Chile” or other non-Evangelicals. This was among other things rooted in a verse from the Bible that Pastor Billy had come across while preparing for his sermon during the fast. The first congregational fast happened to fall on 24th of April and he came across a verse in the Bible that reads as following;

On the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month, the people of Israel went without eating, and they dressed in sackcloth and threw dirt on their head to show their sorrow. They refused to let foreigners join them, as they met to confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors. (Nehemiah 9:1-2)

The day of the fast matched the day and not the month in the biblical verse. However, Pastor Billy saw his accidental meeting with the verse as a sign from God, stating that God himself arranged the fast. Pastor Billy made some jokes and asked all “foreigners” to leave the church, referring to the verse again. The congregations responded with laughter. Pastor Billy spoke further about the significance of the word ‘foreigner’ (extranjero), claiming that it used

to be a literal meaning behind it because foreigners used to be equal to “non-religious” at the time when the Bible was written. Therefore, Pastor Billy explained, in contemporary times one must understand and read *foreigner* as a person who is not a Christian- or Evangelical believer. He argued how the verse says, that you must get rid of those who have a bad influence on you, and that the congregation needed to “separate” itself from others on the day of the fast. When separating from other non-Evangelists, he said, it is easier to seek God and ask him for help.

Pastor Billy also stressed that the fasts were arranged partly to educate people in the spiritual hierarchy in the world. This hierarchy is not individually arranged, but rather collectively between groups of people. He spoke of how God valued the congregation more than the rest of Chileans and other non-Evangelical people, since they scarified the need for food and drinks for one day and because they were doing something together as a group to celebrate Jesus. Further, Pastor Billy said that the fast itself is perceived as a good Christian act, which actually raises Cento Evangélico on a worldwide hierarchy that sorts out different groups relationships to God. This shows how the congregation, are “one” in the eyes of God, and that through the fast the church increase its spiritual value. As mentioned above, those people who need to eat are encouraged to do so *outside* the church area. This strengthens my point, since the church both psychically and spiritually stands as a unit during the fast. It is the collective efforts of the church that is judged by God in the world hierarchy. By separating themselves from others, it is believed that they come closer together. They minimize the chances of sinful attending church meetings, which in turn maximize their chances of generating goodness and being a strong church.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have shown how the congregants want to establish a strong cult in order to further build a strong church, and further how affect gathers the individual and the collective in a meeting point of shared experience and energy. The leaders use language and their bodies as tools to affect the congregation, and create a collective spiritual experience. Rhetorically skilled leaders, such as Pastor Billy, easily create an energy build up during church meetings. *Affect* is maybe one of the most important tools the congregation uses to balance individualism and collectivism. Individual spiritual experiences of prayer, worship and glossolalia, are highly valued, but these experiences are intensified and strengthened when experiencing them in an affected environment together with the congregation. Further,

because each individual in their own right are important persons for the church to grow both spiritually and physically, the individuals in turn experience him- or herself as an important contribution to the church. When performing rituals collectively, the individual is connected to both God personally and to a larger collective group, which in turn helps to constitute the individual.

Affect creates an arena for incorporating biblical and sacred words (such as oral prayer and glossolalia) into the body through worship (such as dance, altar call, and physical movements). As we have seen through the ethnographic material presented in this chapter, an essential part of Evangelical ritual practice is to incorporate and internalize Jesus' - and God's words into the body. Communion and the fasts have in common that they are believed to internalize Jesus and God. Similar to glossolalia, and the bread and wine, the fast becomes a mediating vehicle between the material and spiritual world. In this way, the body also becomes the meeting point for the transcendent world and individual believer. In the next chapter I will examine the relationship between the two worlds further, by looking closer at the meaning of symbols.

CHAPTER 4: SYMBOLS AND SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Introduction

The main focus of this chapter is the Bible and its words, since it has huge symbolic and spiritual meaning for the people at Centro Cristiano. It is a constant topic of discussion, and I have already referred to it multiple times through this thesis. I wish to explore its symbolic power further, and do so by using Sherry Ortner's (2008 [1973]) theory on key symbols, and examine her distinction between "summarizing" and "elaborating" symbols. Next, I use Durkheim's (1995) terms "sacred" and "profane" to describe dualistic spiritual worldviews of Evangelicals. I am particularly interested in the elaborating power of symbols, and how symbols can conceptualize things, create collective representations, and help people communicate about abstracts things. I give some remarks on 'spiritual warfare', which is an analytical term that captures the dualistic worldviews of Pentecostals and Evangelicals. I argue how symbols become tools that enable the congregation to relate to narratives in the Bible and to conceptualize spiritual ideas about the world. I mainly do this by discussing the symbolic meaning behind the number '666', and how this number functions as an elaborating symbol. In the last section of the chapter, I also examine how church leaders present symbols in church meetings.

The Meaning of Symbols

I have already presented in the previous chapter what I consider to be an essential part of symbolic meaning, namely rituals. As Turner (1986) showed in his book *The Anthropology of Performance*, rituals are closely linked to symbols and symbolic meaning. He has also argued elsewhere that he sees symbols as triggers of social action and that "Their multivocality enables a wide range of groups and individuals to relate to the same signifier – vehicle [thing/symbol] in a variety of ways" (Turner 1975, 155). I further understand symbols in the same way as Geertz and agree that symbols can be an "object, act, event, quality, or relation which serves as a vehicle for a conception" (2008, 59). As we remember from the introduction in this thesis, Geertz include symbols as a part of his definition of religion, giving them the credit for establishing "powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men" (2008, 59). It is these "powerful" and "pervasive" qualities that I find

interesting, as symbols according to Geertz's understanding can initiate motivations and therefore action in people. He argues further that these system of symbols "formulate a conception of a general order of existence" (Geertz 2008, 59). This chapter examines symbols and what kind of "general order of existence" they are formulating, by looking at the cosmological worldview of the Centro Cristiano congregants. My main arguments is that the biblical interpretations Pastor Billy presents trough symbols create a dualistic worldview that is based on the opposition between good and evil. As a result, the participants engage in 'spiritual warfare', often recognized in Pentecostal and Evangelical faith communities (Coleman and Hackett 2015, 19).

Summarizing and Elaborating Symbols

In her article first published in 1973, *On Key Symbols* (2008), Ortner introduces a continuum of key symbols, which consist of two contrasting types of symbols, namely what she calls "summarizing" and "elaborating". In short, summarizing symbols *sum up*, express, or represent, in an emotionally powerful and relatively undifferentiated way, what a system means to a set of participants (Ortner 2008, 154). Ortner uses the United States' flag to exemplify this, as it represents ideas about "democracy, free enterprise, hard work, competition, progress, national superiority, freedom, etc." (2008, 154) The U.S. flag can, like most summarizing symbols, hold different and multiple symbolic meanings at once, but moreover hold meanings, values, and worldviews shared by a group of people. At Centro Cristiano a summarizing key symbol is the Bible. It has a central place in the church rituals and is a constant topic in conversation. The Bible is not only key to church meetings, and is commonly referred to, talked about and discussed; it also sums up the collective spiritual ideas and worldviews shared by the congregation. During communion, a bible is sometimes placed in the middle of the decorated table and becomes the center of the feast. They do not worship it by praying directly to it, but rather celebrate it. Often people would hold the Bible high above their heads while dancing, praying or worshipping, also by instructions from the leaders. For the Centro Cristiano congregants the Bible symbolizes collectively shared ideas about Christianity, family values, Evangelicalism, gender roles and leadership. As we remember from chapter two in the case of Amarisa and the headscarf, the Bible can be the source of objective truth. It is more than just a book and text; it is the very source of meaning. In this way, the Bible functions as a summarizing key symbol that represents Christian life, beliefs and practice.

The second type of key symbols, elaborating symbols, does not summarize meaning – rather it provides a way to *sort out* complex and seemingly undistinguishable ideas and emotions. These kinds of symbols help make feelings and ideas “comprehensible to oneself, communicable to others, and translatable into orderly action” (Ortner 2008, 154). Further, Ortner separates elaborating symbols into two modes, namely “root metaphors” and “key scenarios”.

The first, root metaphors, contains symbols that are believed to have *conceptualizing* elaborating power. As root metaphors, symbols become guiding representation that makes it possible to handle, discuss and present conceptions about the world and spiritual beliefs. These symbols guide us through the world and suggest ways for us to act in it – they simply “help us think about how it all hangs together” (Ortner 2008, 155). An example of such root metaphor in post-industrial societies, Ortner argues, can be the machine or the computer. In another example she uses to describe root metaphors is taken from Godfrey Lienhardt’s work with Dinka cosmology. For the Dinka, cattle conceptualize the structure of “their own society on analogy with the physical structure of the bull” (Ortner 2008, 154). Cattle then become root metaphors, a symbol in an elaborating mode, that help us think about the world and sort our experience and place it in cultural categories. An example of such key metaphors at Centro Cristiano that I will describe in detail below is the number ‘666’. This number is described in the Bible (Revelation 13:18) and is believed to symbolize the Devil and in turn evil forces in the world. Unlike with the Dinka cattle, the number 666 does not function as a metaphor for many different aspects of social life as in the case of Dinka, but is rather concentrated on evil forces in society in opposition to good forces. The number has conceptual elaborating powers and help order the world and conceptualize worldviews.

It is tempting to label the Bible as a root metaphor, mainly because it is often referred to when “making sense of the world”. However, the Bible itself may not serve as a root metaphor, but rather it is the stories that the Bible holds that become the true elaborating symbols in the context of Centro Cristiano. These stories fall under what Ortner names the second mode of elaborating symbols, namely key scenarios. These are scenarios that, “implies clear-cut modes of action appropriate to correct and successful living in the culture” (Ortner 2008, 155). Key scenarios can be myths or stories, rituals or events that represents the culture in different ways, and often they represent “visions of success”. An example of such scenario is what

Ortner names the “Horatio Alger myth”, which is a classic American Dream¹³ story about a poor boy who works hard and eventually becomes rich and powerful. The story symbolizes the North American idea of success (rich and powerful) and how to be successful (work hard). It describes what all key scenarios consist of, explicitly a “certain cultural effective courses of action, embody and rest upon certain assumptions about the nature of reality” (Ortner 2008, 156).

Biblical stories about different characters are in an Evangelical context understood to give directions and guidelines to how one should live one’s life, such as the story of Abraham who was ready to sacrifice his own son Isaac in order to obey God’s words and prove his love for him. When telling this story, Pastor Billy talked directly to some of the church members who are parents, asking them rhetorically if they could ever sacrifice their sons or daughters if God ever asked them to do so. When telling the story many of the church members were crying and saying worshiping words, such as “amén” (amen), “gloria a dios” (glory to God), “en el nombre de Jesús” (in the name of Jesus) and “aleluya” (hallelujah). The story illustrates to what extremes a Christian should go to show their trust in God. It was never encouraged to sacrifice a child or anyone else, however the moral is that you should do as God asks of you. The Bible is perceived as a medium through which God asks you to do different things, and what these things are up to the apostles to interpret. It can be smaller things, like wearing the headscarf, or larger life style choices such as limited consumption of alcohol, no sex pre-marriage, and regular participation at church meetings. The key scenarios that the Bible offers give “key cultural strategies” (Ortner 2008, 155) that helps the congregation navigate in life and the world.

As we have seen, *elaborating symbols* organize cultural phenomena, while *summarizing symbols* hold meanings (Ortner 2008, 157). I have shown that these terms may be used as aspects of any given symbol, due to the nature of symbols as they can represent multiple things at the same time or in different times (Ortner 2008, 158). The Bible for example is both a summarizing and elaborating symbol; dependent on the contexts it is utilized and referred to. This chapter further aims to examine the biblical stories elaborating power by handling it as a key symbol at Centro Cristiano. Next, by using Ortner’s theory, I wish to describe how church leaders utilize key symbols to describe biblical ideas and understandings to the

¹³ The American Dream is a North American concept that captures ideas about individualism and that anybody can through hard work can improve his or her life.

members. Elaborating symbols visualize, or materialize, the spiritual ideas about the sacred and the profane in such a way that it makes the spiritual concepts easier to understand and put into a context of the world today.

A Dualistic World

In her celebrated work *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas (1966) draws on Durkheim (1995) and argues how classification is a way for people to order and conceptualize the world. We categorize to make sense of what is around us, and as we have seen, elaborating symbols can function as a way to make these categorizations. At Centro Cristiano categories of the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ are frequently used in sermons and between people. Amarisa, Maria and other congregants often described the world using dichotomies, such as “Christian”, “unchristian”, “sinful”, “holy”, “evil”, and “sacred”. Pastor Billy often spoke of evil forces, and even claimed that human beings are naturally sinful. The Bible on the other hand is described as good and sacred, and if the words in it are followed, it can be a savior for anybody.

Sacred and Profane

The terms “sacred” and “profane” by Durkheim (1995) that I introduced in chapter one, are central in explaining the congregation’s religious beliefs, worldviews and symbols that represents them. As mentioned earlier, Durkheim defines the sacred as “things protected and isolated by prohibitions” (1995, 38) and the profane as “those things to which the prohibitions are applied and that must keep at a distance from what is sacred” (1995, 38). For Durkheim (1995) religious beliefs are understood to represent ideas about the sacred and the profane, which I suggest is also the case at Centro Cristiano. One could question whether the dichotomy presented by Durkheim counts in *all* religions, such as Durkheim suggests when he includes *the sacred* in his very definition of religion. The British anthropologist David J. Parkin (2015) points out in his review on the anthropology of rituals that Edmund Leach (1954) has critiqued Durkheim’s distinction between the sacred and profane, as he suggest that these terms rather should be seen as part of a continuum. Nevertheless, these terms do, in their contrasting form, describe the dualistic worldviews of Evangelicals.

Symbols provide a language for, or functions as a guide to, what things are to be considered either sacred or profane. Sacred symbols, such as the Bible, the cross, and the bread and wine in communion, are an important part of the Centro Cristiano congregation’s religious life. A combination of summarizing symbols, root metaphors and key scenarios provide a guiding set

of regulations for sacred and profane things. As mentioned, an example of an elaborating symbol is the number 666, which I will discuss further below. Object identified with this number and its symbolic meaning of being “the Devil’s number”, implies that the object is profane and to be kept away from the sacred. According to Durkheim’s understanding, the profane is not necessary equal to ‘evil’ or ‘dangerous’, but rather stands in opposition to the sacred as something informal and causal. I use profane in a broader sense, and also include things categorized as evil and dangerous that is given this specific meaning in relation to something sacred.

Some objects can be *both* sacred and profane according to situational context, such as money. Money can be a medium for gift exchange between the congregation and God, and is in this situation considered sacred. It is not uncommon for charismatic and Pentecostal churches to pray for and with money, and use it to request different things from God, like jobs or scholarships (see Lindhardt 2015, 153). It is believed that by *giving* money, you *receive* something in return. Olivia Harris observed in her fieldwork in the highland of Bolivia that some church members required receipts from the priest, as a “material evidence that the proper transaction has taken place” (2006, 55-56) when giving money or gifts. She further argues how the church members participate in the mass through the transaction of money and that people in this way have a reciprocal relation to God. Pastor Billy often emphasized that God does not need money, but that it functions as a symbol for their attention and gratitude to God. He talked of how endorphins would spread around the member’s body when giving away money; and that this was how God gave away true happiness. He also said at multiple occasions that money does not make you happy, but freedom from money does, and by giving it away you come closer to God. The members themselves said money-donation is a way of learning to be selfless and expressing their feelings to God, as a sacrifice of a “modern lamb”, referring to the Bible. In the Bible there are many stories of people sacrificing lambs, and congregants often referred to Jesus himself as “the last lamb”, symbolizing “the last sacrifice”. Lambs, like money now, was a common livestock during the time the stories of the Bible are believed to happen, and therefore this was a common sacrifice.

At the same time money can be “contaminated” by evil forces and represent something dangerous, to be handled with care. The ambiguity of money is an interesting one, since it can symbolize multiple things at once and is in this way multivocal. Martin Lindhardt (2015, 154) also examines spiritual warfare in a Tanzanian charismatic church and describes money as

multifaceted objects. He shows that it can function as a medium for exchange, as it is imbued with spiritual power that makes it a weapon in spiritual warfare. At Centro Cristiano money normally functions as a medium for exchange, but it is also believed to potentially hold spiritual power when used without caution. Then it becomes a profane thing contaminated with evil forces. Pastor Billy often said that it was *large amounts* of money that was problematic, since it made you dependent on a system contaminated with evil (see more below).

All of the standard church meetings and special events consist of a sermon, and in the first section of the sermons the congregation donate¹⁴ money to the church. There are two ways of donating; in cash and in credit. When donating in cash the individual person puts money into a basket in front of the stage. When donating on credit, you sign a form that says that you donate ten percent of your upcoming paycheck. Following, Pastor Billy holds a collective prayer for the congregation and for the money to be spent right. Each person donating in credit gets an individual prayer together with leaders in the church. In the Pentecostal and evangelical communities it is quite common to offer and donate money (See Coleman 2006, Harris 2006, Lindhardt 2015). It is a central part of the evangelical faith, and Coleman notes that “Blessings can [...] be related to specific acts of the believer, including giving away money” (2006, 176). The money goes to building the church, buying music instruments, and other things the church needs. In addition Centro Cristiano is connected to a drug rehab facility that they donated money to. Just how much money that was spent on what things I never got to know, as no account was provided for the congregation. When I asked people about it, nobody seemed to know or were interested in it. The church receives no public funding, so Pastora Claudia and Pastor Billy also receive their payment from the money donations. Their children all goes to private schools, which also is founded by the congregation’s money donations.

Last of Times as a Key Scenario

As Christians, Centro Cristiano congregants place the contemporary time chronologically after Jesus’s death and before his future appearance on earth. In the Bible it says that Jesus will “come again” (John 14:1-3). Therefore, it is believed that he will return to earth, where the Holy Spirit and Evangelicals will be united. The time before his arrival, the contemporary

¹⁴ They refer to the act of giving away money as “sacrifice”, “gift”, and “donation”.

times, Church members often described as “the Last of Times”, and Pastor Billy often referred to it as “Times of Contamination”. This time is particularly recognized by the rapid increase of sinful people, secularization, heathenism, and presence of evil forces in the world. It is believed that the Devil has contaminated many different everyday objects with evil forces, which the congregation needs to keep distance from. Examples of such objects can be money, people, alcohol, specific television programs, and specific genres of music.

Amarisa and Maria often told me about the Last of Times, and how the contemporary time is full of signs to confirm that we are getting closer to the end of the world. Amarisa said that she saw signs of this everywhere, especially when she was reading articles online or looking through her Facebook feed. She had come across an article one day, that told the story of an North American Christian group that wanted to legalize necrophilia, pedophilia and dendrophilia¹⁵. She had become really upset when reading it, and spoke of this as an ultimate proof of the Last of Times, since even Christian people live sinful lives, such as these people. In addition, Amarisa explained that the Last of Times is described in the Bible as a time full of sins. The world today, as she and others described it, is full of sins where people are untruthful, have abortions, are homosexual, consume high amounts of drugs and alcohol, have sex outside marriage, and listen to sexual and satanic music.

People often talked about abortion as being an ultimate sign of the Chilean society being contaminated, as a new pro-abortion law was debated in Chilean media. During the fieldwork, I also met many Catholics who were against this new law that could potentially legalize abortion. Nevertheless, the pro-abortion movement is a representation for the people at Centro Cristiano for Chile as a nation and its increasingly sinful population. Coleman also report this trend in the Word of Life church in Sweden, where abortion becomes the proof of the “nation’s spiritual, moral and culturally decline” (Coleman 2000, 223). The church leader also advocated right-wing political parties that stand for Christian values, such as “yes to life” in the case of abortion. Pastor Billy and other youth leaders at Cento Evangélico often advocated for the same thing, and encouraged the members to vote in future elections against politics that is pro-abortion.

¹⁵ Amarisa described ‘Necrophilia’ as having sexual or romantic relation with corpses and ‘Dendrophilia’ as having sexual or romantic relation with trees and plants.

Among the Centro Cristiano congregants it is believed that when the Last of Times comes to an end, at judgment day, there will be a unity between Evangelicals¹⁶ and Jesus. Amarisa and Maria often described this unity as a wedding, where the church functions as “the bride” that is waiting for Jesus. The bride needs to be properly prepared, and therefore it is believed that Evangelicals around the world must build their churches strong and large to be ready for the final unity with the divine. As with marriage, the unity is believed to unite Evangelicals and Jesus by making them one. Maria once demonstrated with her hands, as she put them away from each other before she clapped them jointly and tangled her fists together, and said, “So, they become like one. One person, one heart, one everything.”

Key scenarios may not only be formal and named events or stories, such as the American Dream, but also observable cultural sequences of action (Ortner 2008). The Last of Times and Times of Contamination are examples of such. The church members or leader has not necessarily named the narratives as a ‘symbolic stories’. Nevertheless, it still functions as key scenarios that describe a time of contamination, where one can only be pure if one live a life according to Jesus’ words.

The Devil, the Bible and Everyday Objects

The Devil is not a new subject for anthropological studies in Latin American contexts (see Taussig 2010 [1980], Harris 2006, 63, Gregory 2014, Sanabria 2016, 190-191) nor is it for anthropological studies on Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism in other parts of the world (see Meyer 1998, Lindhardt 2015, Elisha 2015). I suggest, that the Devil is commonly referred to in the literature, since he is a central figure to Evangelical understanding of the world.

Lindhardt argues how many Chilean Pentecostal see the Devil as “the architect of ‘worldly’ problems such as political corruption and a decadent mainstream culture, characterizes by sexual liberation, drug addiction, alcoholism, popular music with erotic lyrics, etc.” (2014, 196) Comparably, at Centro Cristiano the Devil is spoken of as a force rather than a person or character, and is believed to “be inside” different objects and even persons. In his sermons, Pastor Billy stressed that the Devil finds his way into people’s lives in the most curious ways. It is believed that the Devil is present “everywhere”, even inside different church communities. He is believed to be present where he can to the most damage towards God and Jesus, and therefore the church is the perfect place for him to be.

¹⁶ When people spoke about the Last of Times they also referred to Evangelicals as “a spiritual Israel” or “God’s chosen people”.

In chapter three I showed how bodily experiences are important for congregation. However, Pastor Billy also emphasized in his sermons that it is the *words* of the Bible that helps people understand God and Jesus. He often referred to the *Word of Life* verse in the Bible (John 1), which is the name of the church Coleman (2000) studies in his ethnography from Sweden. His study shows how important the actual words are for the believer, and how it is related directly to their formation of identity. As with the Word of Faith movement, the Bible is seen at Centro Cristiano as a source of truth where one can find prophecies for the future, but also guidelines for how to live a life free from evil forces. How the leadership understands the words in the Bible influence how the congregation perceives the world around them. The church leaders often analyzed the words in the Bible, in form of letters and numbers, during sermons and seminars. Due to space I cannot elaborate upon all these, but rather presents some selected cases, which also was given extra attention from Pastor Billy.

Numbers as Symbolic Representation

The Devil is described in the Bible together with the number 666 (Revelation 13:18) and is said to represents all evil forces in this world. The Bible reads, "You need wisdom to understand the number of the beast [the Devil]! But if you are smart enough, you can figure this out. Its number is six hundred sixty-six, and it stand for a person" (Revelation 13:18). This verse was commonly referred to in church meetings by Pastor Billy and was the focus of multiple seminars I attended. He argued how the number shows up in different locations in society, such as in VISA-cards, Islam, and energy drinks, and this helps the congregation to sort out contaminated things in the world. When talking explicitly about the Devil, Pastor Billy would often pray together with the congregation for them not to be contaminated and influenced by the numbers 666. Regardless, it was important to talk about it to make the congregation aware of how the Devil works. I argue how the number 666 becomes a root metaphor that help the congregation navigate in a contaminated world full of sinners and evil forces.

Durkheim argues that in order "to express our own ideas even to ourselves, we need to attach those ideas to material things that symbolize them" (1995, 229). For the Centro Cristiano congregants the sacred and the profane becomes materialized and conceptualized through numerical symbols and through objects identified by the Bible. By attaching ideas bout good and evil onto numbers, it becomes easier to talk about them. It no longer stands as abstract

concepts, but rather material things that we can see, touch and discuss. One can argue that numbers are not material as such, and in many ways, numbers are symbolic in their nature (they symbolize a specific number of things). However, I suggest that they function as “material” in that we can see them, calculate with them, discuss them, and handle them. They become something more than just concepts of amounts. The number 666 is in this case multivocal, as it symbolizes both a numerical amount of something and it symbolizes evil forces and the Devil. In this way, the number functions as an elaborating symbol that help the members at Centro Cristiano easier grasp ideas about the world.

Money, VISA-cards and Energy Drinks

As mentioned earlier, money was often spoken of in sermons and seminars as a source of evil. Money is not considered evil, but it can become so when there is too much of it. In large amounts, just as with alcohol, it is believed that money can contaminate a person’s life and even their soul. Pastor Billy often spoke badly about other pastors that belonged to other faith communities who own expensive cars, designer clothes and that buy luxury things. They were described as if “contaminated with money”, and he said that these kinds of riches had a bad influence on people. The problem with money is primarily that people find themselves in a system that is based upon it. Pastor Billy also said that “they” (people in general and more specifically leaders of big companies and governments) want people to be a part of a system where “they” are in control. They keep this control, Pastor Billy argued, by using advanced technology, such as monitoring people with fingerprints and eye scanning, and more importantly by keeping them dependent on “the system”. This system was never defined, but he more generally referred to the world economy that is surrounded around money. An essential part of this system is the banks and credit card companies that want people to have credit cards and to be dependent on them.

At one of his sermons, Pastor Billy asked how many in the congregation owned a VISA-card. Only a selected few raised their hands. Personally, I had three of them in my bag; however, I did not raise my hands because I felt embarrassed. It was pretty clear where the talk was heading, and in that moment I felt too embarrassed to expose my dependency on *the system*. Pastor Billy revealed that he also had VISA-cards, but that he used them with caution. On the big screen behind him, he had an illustration showing, and by using Roman, Greek and

Babylonian letters, Pastor Billy translated 'VISA' to the number 666¹⁷ (see figure 8). He put 'V' and 'I' together, which resembles the number six in Roman. Next, he showed the letter 'S' signifying six in Greek. Finally, 'A' look like the number six in Babylonian. He normally just used Roman, Hebrew, and Greek to translate letters into number, however; in this case he also used Babylonian without explaining why. When adding them all up, the letters in 'VISA' showed the Devil's number 666. When showing the slides on the screen, the congregation gasped and looked at each other as if surprised, while generating a form of affect. Eventually people started praying, raised their hands, while praying or saying "amén" (amen) and "aleluya" (hallelujah). One could hear whispers going through the church, as Pastor Billy took a short break from speaking while gazing out on the congregation. The calculation presented was seen as a proof of the Devil's presence in VISA-cards.

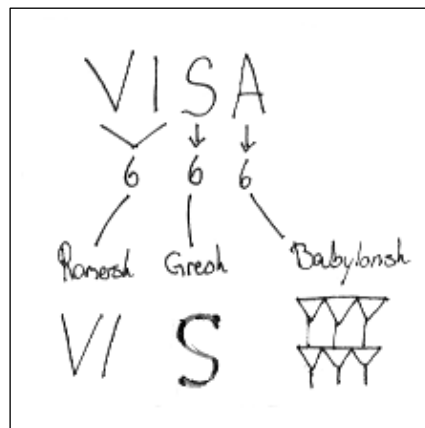


Figure 8: Illustration from my fieldnotes showing the translation from 'VISA' to '666' (From the left: Roman, Greek, and Babylonian).

In the same week as Pastor Billy held his sermons on VISA-cards he also dedicated a seminar to explain how the worldwide-distributed energy drink *Monster* is a product of the Devil. Building on the number 666, he went on to explain how the number six is written in Hebrew. The number is made up by a long line, which curls out on the top. When putting three of them together, forming the number 666, it is strikingly similar to the logo of Monster. The logo consists of three long stripes, which all curl on the top. During the seminar, Rodrigo, a male middle-aged church member, raised his hand. Pastor Billy asked him to speak up, and Rodrigo remarked that the slogan of Monster is "Dar rienda suelta a la bestia" (Unleash the

¹⁷ In one of the seminars I attended at the master course in anthropology at the University of Oslo, a fellow student told me she had heard the same interpretation of the meaning behind VISA-cards. It was a couple of years ago when she attended a sermon at a small church located in the south of Norway. A quick search online gives many similar theories and explanations about credit cards in general.

beast). People commonly use “La Bestia” (the Beast) in the church when they refer to the Devil, since this is a common word for the Devil in Spanish bibles. The congregation reacted with gasps and praising words, and Pastor Billy thanked Rodrigo for his contribution. He then concluded with this being a sign of the Devil contaminating powers in society and in everyday objects. In this way not only does 666 symbolize evil forces, but also Monster becomes a symbol on how Times of Contamination is connected to a larger system driven by the Devil.

Other Gods and Spirits

The Centro Cristiano congregants generally have an open conversation about spiritual or supernatural things other than God, such as witches, spirits, angels, or ghosts. Except from angels, which as believed to be messengers from God, spiritual beings are normally referred to as evil forces that one should keep away from and are often motivated by the Devil. There is a common agreement that one should respect supernatural things, however one should not worship them. Other religions and gods are viewed as possible distractions from the true God. Indeed, *God* is the only true god, but that does not mean that other supernatural beings are not real. It is believed that other religions, such as Islam and Hinduism, are based on supernatural things, which people have confused with God and thereafter created a religion based upon.

An example of such a spirit is Delilah. The Bible (Judges 16:1-13) tells a story about Samson, a man who is blessed by God and at various occasions his body is controlled by God himself. Delilah is a woman who uses her sexuality to trick Samson into doing things she wants instead of following God’s wishes. This result is Samson losing God’s support and consequently the Philistines¹⁸ pokes Samson’s eyes out and they put him in prison. Pastor Billy talked about this in his sermons, and Maria told me that Delilah is still present in society today as a spirit. She explained, “she [Delilah] still exists, but as a spirit. You need to be careful, because her spirit wants to confuse you. She wants to confuse people”. Delilah does not necessarily use her sexuality to confuse people as she did in the story, but used different tools of temptation. Moreover, her goal is to trick people away from God using different techniques. Samson stands as an example of how one should obey God and not be confused by other people or spirits. If you go against God, and listen to seducing women like Delilah, terrible things can happen, like what happened to Samson.

¹⁸ The Philistines is a group of people described in the Bible who commonly found themselves in conflict with the Israelites.

Another example of supernatural being is the Islamic god Allah. During a church seminar, Pastor Billy described in detail why Islam is a religion of the wrong God, and also implied that Allah could be the creation of the Devil, also recognized in African Pentecostalism noted by Lindhardt (2014, 196). He explained that the way “Allah” is written in Arabic is unquestionable similar to the Greek letters that symbolizes the number 666. Since parts of the original Bible were written in Greek, this was presented as a proof of Islam being a religion of evil. During the same seminar a visiting pastor from the south of Chile also lectured on biblical matters. One of the church members asked him to comment on Islam and asked if Christianity and Islam indeed have the same God or not. The visiting pastor himself did not believe it to be the same God, because he read the Koran so differently from the Bible. He also stated that if any of the members were to be interested in Islam and the Koran, they should be very certain about their Christian beliefs first, since other religions can confuse the Christian faith. He encouraged the members, especially the person who had asked the question, to read the Bible cover to cover before even considering reading the Koran.

People generally spoke negatively about other religious groups. Christians and Jews on the other hand, were also spoken of in sermons as examples of good religious people. Pastor Billy would talk about Catholics as an example of their loyalty to the Sunday morning sermons. He would also use Evangelical North Americans as an example of joy and enthusiasm towards the church, and that they were always happy while attending church meetings. Jews were also referred to as good God-fearing people, whom spent much time to learn their Scriptures. Pastor Billy used these characteristics to illustrate how the congregation could grow and learn from others. At the same time, Amarisa and Maria often criticized Catholics for their “weird” rituals and costumes, such as the “wrong” celebration of baptism. Amarisa expressed great frustration at multiple occasions of how Catholics perform this ritual by only pouring small amounts of water on babies in contrast to covering the whole body – and on babies instead of young adults and adults who personally *wants* to be baptized.

Spiritual Warfare

Pastor Billy and other church leaders use key scenarios to contextualize the Bible, and tell isolated stories to symbolize larger trends. As we have seen, the congregation is fighting evil forces in a time and world that is described as contaminated by the Devil and other forces. These forces are visible through many different things, such as pro-abortion, homosexuality,

massive consumption of drugs and alcohol, sex outside marriage, and other sins. I argue how this dualistic worldview creates an idea of a spiritual warfare going on in the world today where good and evil forces are fighting for the control over human beings. I do not mean to say that my informants think of themselves as in an actual war. Rather it captures their common ideas of how the world is constructed in dichotomies that describe good and evil, such as ‘right versus wrong’, ‘God versus the Devil’, ‘God fearing versus sinful’. I use spiritual warfare here, like anthropologist before me (see O’Neill 2010, Meyer 2010, Lindhardt 2015, Coleman and Hackett 2015), as an analytical term, to describe the dualistic worldviews that are generated and maintained in the church meetings.

Warfare may be misleading, as it is often thought of as involving violence and death. In the case of O’Neill’s (2010) ethnography in post-war Guatemala the term does in fact include actual violence, since the Pentecostals find themselves in a rather violent society. I use the term analytically to describe the worldviews of the people at Centro Cristiano. Lindhardt argues in his contribution on spiritual warfare in Tanzania, that the spiritual warfare provides language to speak about worldly concerns, “as the Devil and his agents are held responsible for different kind of hardship such as illness, death, failure in school, poverty, inequality, and so forth” (2015, 148). I agree with Lindhardt that it does provide a language to speak about concepts of good and evil. As mentioned earlier, Lindhardt (2014) also argues in his ethnography from EPC in Valparaíso how this rhetorical theological dualism, organizes and transmits experiences and understandings of the self, God, and the worlds. At Centro Cristiano, Pastor Billy makes sure to remind everyone that if they let their guard down for as much as a second, evil forces like Delilah and the Devil are ready to confuse and contaminate them. These forces need to be fought, and the only way to do so is to follow the words of Jesus and God. I also showed in chapter three, engaging in weekly church meetings and performing rituals is a weapon in combat against these forces. The power in the words in the Bible cannot be emphasized enough. The Bible is the source of objective truths, which describe the world, give advice on what is good and evil, and how to save the world from forces that try to contaminate the world.

Teaching and Preaching the Bible

Up until now this chapter has examined the impact of elaborating symbols. I have argued how these symbols conceptualize abstract things and create a dualistic worldview. The next section of this chapter focuses further on how these elaborating symbols are *presented* to the

congregation from the church leaders and actively used in seminars and sermons. I wish to describe how church leaders utilize key symbols to describe biblical ideas and understandings to the members. I argue how the way the leaders present and use symbols, creates an environment where the leader's interpretation becomes the only possible option. As we remember from chapter two, the words of a trusted leader means a lot to the members at Centro Cristiano, and according to Coleman (2006, 168) it can even be seen as a source of objective truth.

The congregation participated to a smaller degree during sermons, compared to the other sessions. This resembles Coleman's descriptions of the Word of Life in Sweden, where "During a sermon, the congregation is required to do little other than reply 'Hallelujah' when prompted by the speaker" (2006, 174). As with the Swedish congregation, the sermons were concentrated on the talk by the pastor. The congregation was highly focused and would show their support or agreement by shouting words such as "amén" (amen), "aleluya" (hallelujah) and "en el nombre de Jesús" (in the name of Jesus). This is also an arena to create affect, as the sermons often include sections of prayer.

Contextualizing old Narratives

Pastor Billy builds his sermons on biblical stories and biblical interpretations. Often he concentrates on one or two stories during a meeting, while contextualizing them in everyday life for the members. I have already mentioned the story of Abraham and Isaac, however there are multiple stories that are contextualized. For example, in the Old Testament there is a story about Ruth (Ruth 1-4), a young woman living in Moab. She married a son of the Israeli women Naomi, who had brought her sons with her from Israel when the country experienced shortage in food. However, some time after the marriage with Ruth, Naomi's son dies. Naomi then wants to travel back to Israel, while encouraging her daughters in law to stay in Moab. Unlike like the other daughter in law, Ruth persisted on going to Israel with Naomi. Naomi recognized her determination, and decided to let Ruth come with her after all. When arrived in Israel, Naomi introduced Ruth to Boaz, and arranged for them to be married. In the story, Pastor Billy said, Ruth represents 'people in the world' and Boaz represents 'Jesus'. As mentioned above, the future unity with Jesus is often referred to as a wedding. The story then, becomes a symbolizing one, of how humans and Jesus will be united. However, the important aspect of the story is Ruth's effort to join Naomi, who symbolizes 'the Holy Spirit', to Israel. She is quite persistent when Naomi first tell her to stay in Moab, but Ruth insists to follow her

to Israel and the true God. The old biblical story becomes relevant for contemporary time and for the congregation, as they are encouraged by Pastor Billy to follow Ruth's example and seek the Holy Spirit, and to ask for its guidance and to be persistent when facing obstacles or challenges when seeking God.

When presenting the stories in this way, they become easier to understand, and as Coleman (2000, 126) argues, this illustrates the direct application of scriptural narrative to the present time – not only making them comprehensible, but also relevant for the contemporary time. By acting as different biblical figures they show that Evangelicals achieve the same results of loyalty of divine power and truth over time as biblical characters. I argue further how these stories become key scenarios that bring the Bible “to life” by contextualizing it. In this way, biblical stories do not stand as old narratives, but rather become elaborate symbolic stories that help the congregation to make things comprehensive and communicable to others.

In his sermons, Pastor Billy has a dynamic body language and facial expressions, which he uses actively as a part of the talk. This includes different things, such as jumping, pretending to cry, crying, laughing, being serious, singing and smiling. At multiple occasions, he would pretend to be a snake by forming his hands in the shape of a cobra, while humming the melody of *The Streets of Cairo*¹⁹, which is commonly associated with snake charming. He moved his body in snake-like movements while lisping, to the congregation's amusement. His performance was meant to illustrate how the Devil, in this case shaped as a snake, lures around and into people's life without them knowing it. The imitation was funny. However, it often directed the talk in a more serious direction about the whereabouts of the Devil. The active use of body language and humor makes the talks more intriguing. The sermon becomes a show where Pastor Billy engaged everyone emotionally, as he brings the Bible to life with his demonstrations and enthusiasm. His emotional performance also adds to the experience.

An Emphasis on The Bible

Knowing and reading the Bible is portrayed by the leaders as an essential part of finding Jesus and God. The Bible is important due to its scriptures, but maybe more importantly because the leaders emphasize its importance. The congregation is encouraged by the leaders to read the scriptures as often as they can. Pastor Billy would often say that other people, such as

¹⁹ 'The Street of Cairo' is also called 'The Poor Little Country Made' and 'The Snake Charming Song'.

Jews and Catholics, know their scriptures better than Evangelicals and that all Evangelicals has something to learn from them. During seminars many people had their bibles in their laps, shifting between it and their notebooks, as they were jotting down what is being said and what was written in the slideshows and on the blackboard. There were also other pastors from the faith network visiting to give talks. Generally the talks was concentrated on biblical topics, such as which biblical translations to read, moral in the stories, and interpretations about words, numbers and letters that the Bible describes. Contextualized bibles were recommended to the congregation from the church leaders. This means that the Bible is not directly translated from Hebrew and Greek to Spanish, but rather put into a contemporary language that is easier to understand and read.

Most members bring with them a bible to church meetings, and they are full of markings, doodles, notes, scribbles, and most of them look quite old. Many people bragged about their old bibles, showing me how the pages had started to loosen from the binders as a proof of its good use. Amarisa once brought an old bible with her to a seminar, which her mother had given her when she was eight years old. It was pink covered with drawings of flowers, and inside it was covered with writings and scribbles. It has small tags along the side of it with the names of each book of the Bible, as she once had tried to memorize all of them. I suggest that the active use of the Bible in church meetings becomes a strategy for the congregation to elevate themselves as good Christians and convey to the pastor that they are good students that listen and learn, and also becomes a way of gaining personal ss-capital for the members. The Bible become important to them, because it is important to their highly respected and celebrated leaders.

Pastora Claudia often spoke of Pastor Billy, and made sure to describe him as a person of insight and knowledge, and often told stories that included Pastor Billy in one way or the other. One time during a women meeting²⁰ Pastora Claudia told a story of her being frustrated with God. She had been trying for weeks to get in touch with him, and felt like it getting close to impossible. During this time, Pastor Billy had been speaking quite openly about his conversations with God, and Pastora Claudia had said to herself that she needed to be patient. She read the Bible and prayed every day, but still she heard nothing from God. Consulting her

²⁰ 'Woman meetings' are church meetings explosively for women, where different topics that are considers to be 'female' are being discussed, such as motherhood. There are also meetings like this for men and for married couples.

husband about her frustration and attempts, she said she did not understand why God would not talk to her. Pastor Billy answer had been that he did not quite understand, because he himself spoke with God every day. Becoming even more frustrated with his answer, she asked how that was possible. Pastora Claudia looked towards the congregation as she picked up her bible from the table in front of her. While pretending to be Pastor Billy and rolling her eyes, she said “En este libro!” (in this book!). The congregation laughed, including myself, of her imitation of her husband. His point was that anybody could easily speak to God whenever they want, by simply picking up the Bible and read. The congregation applauded and cheered as Pastora Claudia smiled, raising the Bible towards the roof, while she spoke loudly towards the crowd, “Los palabras de dios está en este libro!” (The words of God are in this book!). Her message was that the Bible is there for anyone to read, anyone can listen to God’s words if they want – all they must do it to follow Pastor Billy’s example.

In chapter two I showed how the members are restricted in interpreting the Bible. However, the repeating message from the leaders was that anyone could find Jesus and God by reading the Bible, due to the truth in the words. The lay members are not certified to interpret the words, however they can read them, and in it they find the key scenarios that Pastor Billy constantly present and refers to. The key scenarios and their symbolic meaning is therefore already introduced to the members, and by reading the Bible the members get a continuously reminder the leaders message and interpretations.

Using the Symbols to Preach

Members are encouraged by church leaders to read the Bible and question the leaders if the leaders were to go against it or preach things that are not written in it. Due to regular bible studies, many members know the Bible in detail and have the knowledge to ask complicated questions about it. I only once witnessed a member directly questioning what Pastor Billy told the congregation. During one of his sermons he was talking about judgment day²¹ and arguing that the end of the world is close. On the slide behind him, he showed a calculation. Pastor Billy added up ‘666+666+666+6+6+6’, and showed the result ‘2016’, which was the year at that time. Pastor Billy used these numbers and his calculation as a proof of the troubling times we are in. It did not necessary represent judgment day, bur rather that the Last of Times is in the contemporary time.

²¹ ‘Judgment Day’ is a common term for the belief or idea that the world will end and God will judge between good and evil. This is also believed to be the day where Evangelicals and Jesus will unite.

Rodrigo, the same members that had commented on the energy drink earlier, raised his hand and was given the word. He pointed out that this was simple math, due to the year 2016 consisting of the number six in it. It is only logical, Rodrigo claimed, that one could create a calculation like the one Pastor Billy just had presented. Despite, he said, the number 666 is written in the Bible, however there is no mentioning of 2016. Pastor Billy response to the comment was simply that Rodrigo should not doubt God's words (the numbers are considered God's words). Further, he said that if the numbers were not enough, he only needed to look at the global climate. According to Pastor Billy there have been an increased number of tsunamis and earthquakes, which are in turn caused by the contaminated times that are in. Pastor Billy argued that this, together with the numbers, should be efficient proof of the contaminated times that we are in, and how Evangelicals around the world has a special responsibility to fight the contamination.

Pastor Billy calculation is not mentioned in the Bible. Nevertheless, when Pastor Billy bases his interpretation on what is written in the scriptures, it is difficult for a lay member to argue against it. Pastor Billy's response to Rodrigo shows how limited the members actually are to questioning the words of the leaders, but also how symbols (in this case 666) are used to conceptualize spiritual beliefs of the Last of Times. As we also see in the example, when questioning Pastor Billy, the member is also questioning the word of God himself. In this way, Pastor Billy words become equal to God's words itself. The calculation may not be in the Bible, but the calculation originates from it. By connecting it to the Bible, it will be close to impossible for a lay member to question it. This example also illustrates how Pastor Billy's used his ss-capital in his sermons to communicate to the church members. Clearly, Rodrigo has smaller amounts of ss-capital and his argument is quickly deconstructed with Pastor Billy's response. I suggest however, that this is not necessarily because of Pastor Billy's ability to convince Rodrigo, but rather because of his ss-capital and trusted knowledge.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have shown how symbols become tools that enable the congregation to relate to the narratives in the Bible and to conceptualize spiritual ideas about the world. The Bible functions as a *summarizing* symbol, and the stories, words and number in it become *elaborating* symbols utilized by the church leaders in sermons and seminars. They contextualize biblical stories, making them comprehensive and communicable to others by

connecting them to symbols, such as the story about Abraham, Delilah, Ruth, and the number 666. I have suggested how the elaborating symbols presented here create a dualistic worldview where the congregation see themselves as part of a spiritual warfare. The shared concepts of how the group view itself, are shaped by these symbols. The symbols function as translators, and are useful for the church leaders to preach about spiritual things. Not only do the stories function as key scenarios, but also the actual letters and numbers become root metaphors to help understand the world.

I agree with Geertz (2008, 59) that symbols can create long-lasting moods and motivations in people. As we have seen in chapter three, many of the rituals at Centro Cristiano are believed to generate good forces to fight evil forces in the world. The symbols used at Centro Cristiano create a dualistic worldview, which in itself initiate motivations and therefore action in people. I have shown how Last of Times and Times of Contamination functions as key scenarios that describe a time contaminated by evil forces, where one can only be pure if one live a life according to Jesus' words.

CONCLUSION: SHARED EXPERIENCE

Throughout this thesis I have tried to give a presentation of a charismatic Evangelical church community. I have done so through the framework of anthropology of religion, and shown how people at Centro Cristiano navigate in their religious lives. Drawing on Geertz and Durkheim, the main focus with religion has been on its relation to social structural processes, and on social relationships, worldviews and practices. I have examined different religious aspect of human life, and through the material I have shown how the church community is a dynamic social arena that influences spiritual beliefs and practices.

Overall, I believe this thesis points out some interesting aspects of religious life for the people engaging in the Evangelical and Pentecostal movement. Different aspects of *individualism*, *collectivism* and *leadership* are recurring themes. It has shown how people engage in enjoyable and meaningful activities that create a sense of belonging and a strong, sustainable community – which leads me back to what I wrote in the introduction, concerning the cult. The cult in religion, namely the system of regular rites, feasts, and various ceremonies, *initiates* feelings of joy, inner peace, serenity, and enthusiasm for the participants (Durkheim 1995, 60, 420). The church leaders provide the necessary tools for the church members to come together in rituals and social events. They continuously practice a form of community construction in their regular activities, where the goal itself is to come together through and for God. In this way, they are seeking an environment for the church participants to feel included and engaged in a meaningful and enjoyable shared experience. I must not underestimate the level of enjoyment the church meetings give the congregants. The church participants get to experience a higher meaning of life while engaging in a spiritual and embodied enjoyment, expressed through dance and worship, which results in enthusiasm and entertainment.

Moreover, Evangelicals have a tendency to emphasize individual choice when becoming a part of the Evangelical faith, and that through the baptism each individual Evangelist *chooses* the church and the Christian faith. Further, every single believer has the same possibilities to encounter God. This shows how the Evangelical church has to a larger extent than the traditional Catholic Church a focus on individualism. At the same time the Centro Cristiano

congregation focuses on community through the cult. Chapter three showed how there is a continuous effort from the congregation to balance the relationship between individualism and collectivism. Further, it is people's own personal emotional experience that makes them feel connected to the larger church community, since the congregation *shares* these experiences. However, through the baptism, each individual are incorporated into a community that makes their lives meaningful. Furthermore, their Evangelical "family" forms their Evangelical identity. By creating an "other" with Catholics and Muslims, they further strengthen this identity. The church leaders create a structure and discourse that includes the individual members on an everyday basis. Furthermore, as Durkheim (1995, 60) argues, it is through the cult that church members strengthens the social bonds between themselves. It is the leadership that keeps the cult going, as they provide a church, a schedule, a plan and a system for meetings, and not to mention the charismatic leaders.

Specifically, this study shows how authority is expressed in a system described as rather egalitarian, and further argues that there is a strong centralization of leaders within the Evangelical faith network. I have shown how a hierarchical system of authority indeed is observable. The leader's ss-capital creates a system of charismatic and formal inequality within the faith network, where church leaders with high volumes of ss-capital gain a strong and powerful position. Furthermore, I have shown how these formal positions are limited for women, since only men can become apostles and interpret the Bible. At the same time I show how women have strengthened their position in Evangelical communities, and how women also can gain high position and ss-capital. However, their authority is limited in terms of influence on the social structure and interpretations of biblical truths. The Evangelical ideology in itself may not include strong ideas about a central leadership, rather the opposite. Nevertheless, my analysis has shown how authority is an observable social fact.

Additionally, I have shown how through the use of affect and symbols, the leaders gain, maintain and mask their authority. They use biblical symbols as a tool to speak on behalf of God, and therefore create an environment where their understanding of the Bible is the only possible outcome. Leaders use symbols and create an environment where the leaders understanding and interpretation of the Bible becomes the only possible perspective, as we have seen in the case of Amarisa and the headscarf, and with Rodrigo and his critical questions regarding the Last of Times. Symbols become tools that the leaders use to connect biblical narratives to the contemporary world, and also use rituals events as a strategy to

implement spiritual ideas. As I have shown through the thesis, the world is portrayed as full of oppositions between good and evil, reflecting a dualistic worldview.

Although my findings may not be universal or countable for all Evangelical or Pentecostal churches, I have shown in this thesis through theoretical and ethnographic comparison how different church communities have remarkable similarities. I have referred and compared by my own material to that of Coleman's (2000, 2006) work in Uppsala in Sweden, a church located 8.200 miles (13 thousand kilometers) away from Centro Cristiano. Across the two communities we can see patterns of the same practices, beliefs and social structures. There are of course varieties within the networks. However, this study shows how Evangelical communities have created a global Evangelical style of Christianity, which is strong enough to travel across nations and continents.

I have also shown how God is perceived as an active participant in church meetings. He encounters the congregation daily through dance and prayer, and also come to them with messages outside of church. He speaks to the members and leaders in different ways, such as through the body (glossolalia, tears), the Bible, in prayer, and prophecies. He helps them, and through prayer the church participants actively help the world to become a better place. Moreover, the leaders generate a social structure that includes every individual member, and makes each member feel useful and important – while contributing to a meaningful mission of spreading God's word, generating goodness and fighting evil forces. They all, leaders and members alike, become valuable individuals in a community driven by a *collectively owned* and *shared experience*.

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