

**Religion in the Trenches<sup>1</sup>:**  
**Liberation Theology and Evangelical Protestantism as Tools of Social Control in the**  
**Guatemalan Civil War (1960-1996)**  
by  
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Appearing gaunt and with hollow, distant eyes, Father Luis Eduardo Pellecer stepped to the bevy of microphones at a podium surrounded by army officers. In a vapid, monotone voice, the Jesuit priest regaled the Guatemalan television audience with a remarkable story that reached deep into the soul of the nation. Originally believed to have been murdered, the Jesuit Priest instead reemerged from 113 days of captivity on 30 September 1981. Explaining his mysterious and violent disappearance at the hands of unidentified men as a “self-imposed kidnapping”, the now repentant Pellecer provided a vivid account of the struggle for control of the hearts and minds of the Guatemalan people interwoven into the civil war. As if reading from a prepared script, the seemingly brainwashed priest described how Catholic organizations had utilized religious mobilization in conspiring with armed guerilla groups to build a political base with which to spread their revolutionary ideals. Key to the development of that following was the progressive Catholic ideology of Liberation Theology, which up until his abduction, Father Pellecer had embraced and actively disseminated from the pulpit. Following his “self-imposed kidnapping”, the priest felt the need to expose this scheme and stop this disgraceful use of the Word of God.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This essay was read during the Student Scholarship Day 2008.

Father Pellecer's frightening ordeal is indicative of the role religion played in Guatemala throughout its history and, more specifically, its 36-year civil war. Religion was a dangerous yet prominent aspect of life in this small Central American country that, during those brutal decades, seemed forsaken by God. This conspiracy, conceived in an army prison and reiterated from the mouth of a tortured and troubled priest, exemplified how the military government saw progressive Catholic activism, specifically Liberation Theology, as a threat in the same vein as armed resistance movements. The military regimes' and death squads' attempts to suppress both subversive activity and armed rebellion resulted in the death or disappearance of an estimated 200,000 Guatemalans.<sup>2</sup> From the late 1960s to the early 1980s, during the most violent years of the conflict, local and international changes in religious doctrine and practices exacerbated this brutality. These factors gave the concepts of religiosity and faith a unique significance in Guatemala. Throughout the Guatemalan civil war, the government's fear of the socially and politically progressive Catholic ideology of Liberation Theology, coupled with their own long-held vision of modernizing the indigenous populations by transforming their social structure, led to a brutal program of forced conversion to Fundamentalist Protestant ideologies that focused on the individuality of salvation and believer's submission to authority.

The relationship between the Catholic Church and the institutional state has always been precarious in Guatemala. During the colonial period, the interests of these two prominent institutions frequently overlapped and conflicted. Once the small Central American province broke from the Spanish empire in 1824 amidst the wave of independence movements sweeping across Latin America, the role of the Church within

the state became a key issue in the direction of the new country. While members of the Conservative Party wanted to maintain the legacy of Spanish imperialism, Liberal Party members wanted to modernize the country.<sup>3</sup> Limiting the power of the Church was one potential method of accomplishing this goal, since Liberals saw the Church as an impediment to modernization and a visage of the old colonial system.<sup>4</sup> From the onset of the short-lived United Provinces of Central America in the 1820s, successive Liberal governments in Guatemala were effective in curbing the Church's power and influence in the country. The government put limitations on the Church's ability to own land, exact a compulsory tithe, regulate marriage, and maintain its religious hegemony.<sup>5</sup> Guatemala became the first country in Latin America to allow religious freedom, potentially allowing for the establishment of Protestant churches, which Liberals believed were more in line with the changing world. This religious freedom lasted only one year, however, as a peasant army funded and controlled by the conservative oligarchy ended the Liberal government's modernization policies.<sup>6</sup> As a precursor of what was to occur in the future, the use of violence ensured the country remained the colonial-style fiefdom desired by the landed elite.

Religion became a key component in this ideological battle between Conservatives and Liberals over the fate of Guatemala. Conservative Party rule over the next thirty years saw a return of the Catholic Church to its former prominence as an institution. While practically everyone in the country was nominally Catholic, religious practices varied greatly along regional and social lines, ranging from strict adherence to Catholicism to syncretism of Mayan and Catholic beliefs.<sup>7</sup> The inhabitants of the western highlands were largely of indigenous descent – approximately 70 percent of the entire

country was either Maya or of Mayan ancestry. This segment of the population remained largely autonomous of the central government, basing their social organization almost entirely upon the *cofradía* – a self-governing social, political, and economic network made up of individual ethnicities aligned loosely around the local Catholic Church.<sup>8</sup> These independent Indian social structures allowed the people to remain free of government influence and practice their own “Mayanized folk Catholicism.”<sup>9</sup> The *cofradía*’s autonomy from both the Catholic hierarchy and the central government provided indigenous groups with a means of collective resistance against Liberal modernization schemes.<sup>10</sup> A violent uprising led by the Liberals in 1871 brought about a change in political leadership, and with it a renewed attack on the role of the Catholic Church in Guatemalan society. Two years later, “Supreme Commander of the Guatemalan Republic” Justo Rufino Barrios (r. 1873-1885) again declared religious freedom in Guatemala.<sup>11</sup> The Liberals were once again looking to modernize the country, hoping to break the power of both the Catholic Church and the *cofradías* in the process. In keeping with their practice of looking to the West for inspiration, as well as for successful models of economic development and progress, the Liberals sought to transplant Western religion, i.e. Protestantism, into Guatemala.

The presence of such a high concentration of Indians in Guatemala is important for understanding the decision by the Liberal regime to allow, and actively promote, Protestantism in the country. The government believed that allowing the free exercise of religion would encourage European immigration to Guatemala.<sup>12</sup> In an age when social-Darwinism prevailed, notions of racial superiority fostered the government’s belief that significant structural change and westernization could only come from the top down.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, any attempt to modernize Guatemala had to begin with a program of public education carried out by Protestant missionaries.<sup>14</sup> Implementation of the plan would further restrict the traditional role of the Catholic Church, while potentially providing a means with which to indoctrinate indigenous populations with a pro-Western and submissive ideology in the future.<sup>15</sup> Eventually, the government envisioned that the complete overhaul of Guatemalan society would occur, forcing the indigenous populations to change in the process. In 1882, President Barrios personally went to the Presbyterian Board of Foreign Ministers in New York City to request missionaries be sent from the United States, and in the following year the first Protestant Church was established in Guatemala; its mission was converting the wealthy of the capital city.<sup>16</sup> While the program was largely unsuccessful, it opened the way for other Protestant sects to gain a foothold in Guatemala and perform their missionary work.<sup>17</sup> Because the *cofradías* coalesced loosely around local Catholic parishes, breaking the religious monopoly of the institutional Church was the logical method to combat their power. In its attempt to promote the modernization of the small Central American country, the Liberal regime openly challenged the supremacy of the Catholic Church by allowing Protestant missionaries to enter the autonomous indigenous communities in the countryside.

The modern Guatemalan state slowly began to take shape. The autonomy of the Indian communities began giving way to landowning *Ladinos* – indigenous Central Americans who embraced European over Native culture. This change in control over local politics allowed the newly professionalized army to consolidate its power at the national level, fomenting the rise of authoritarian military rule.<sup>18</sup> Despite the promise of

Westernization and their foray into the country's wealthy communities, Protestants had little influence in this transition after their arrival in 1883. Subsequently, they devoted their efforts primarily to missionary work among the indigenous populations, concentrating on literacy programs and rural development projects over the next several decades. As the world fell into a global economic depression in the 1930s, concerns about backward Indians slowing down the Nation's progress were replaced by fears about a literate indigenous population rising up against the landowning elite in a popular, "communist" revolt.<sup>19</sup> Suddenly, the autonomous, ignorant Indian became appealing to a government wanting to secure its hold on power. The regime of General Jorge Ubico (r. 1931-1944) therefore began to limit the number of Protestant missionaries allowed into the country, despite its association with the Liberal Party.<sup>20</sup> Ubico's actions regarding both Indians and Protestant missionaries were indicative of how the Guatemalan ruling class viewed religion as nothing more than a tool to advance their political agenda. Since Guatemalan independence in 1824, the elites had used religion as a means to achieve social control. Whichever religious ideology the authorities could manipulate to ensure their hold on power while maintaining Indigenous complacency was the version they would officially espouse. While religion may have embodied the Word of God, it became the will of the Guatemalan government.

This all began to change in 1944 with the post-scripted "ten years of spring."<sup>21</sup> A military coup, labeled the "October Revolution," and subsequent open elections ushered Juan José Arevalo (r. 1944-1951) into power as President of Guatemala. Invoking the nation's unique religious situation, Arevalo referred to his plan for Guatemala as "spiritual socialism."<sup>22</sup> He believed that neither Marxism nor capitalism on their own

were viable economic systems for Guatemala; his policy was an innovative precursor to Chilean President Salvador Allende's experiment in finding a "third way". Instead, Arevalo's strategies of economic nationalism, development projects, popular organization, and reforms in land, labor, and education policies began moving Guatemala towards becoming a more equitable country.<sup>23</sup> Arevalo's administration promised to provide all of Guatemala's people with a "square deal," which meant avoiding the abuses and corruptions of the past, including the use of religion as a tool of social manipulation.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, the Arevalo government reinstituted past policies by utilizing Evangelical missionaries to implement a nation-wide basic education project aimed at the poor.<sup>25</sup> However, instead of attempting to indoctrinate indigenous communities into a pro-Western ideology, the Arevalo administration drew upon Protestant missionaries because of their belief that literal reading of the Bible is necessary for salvation.<sup>26</sup> The Guatemalan government again favored Protestantism, but this time as a tool to improve literacy and society in general by a government working for the benefit of the entire population.

While President Arevalo had some support from Protestant groups, by 1951 the newly elected President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán (r. 1951-1954) incurred the wrath of Guatemala's religious communities. Despite his baptism as a Protestant, Arbenz's reputation as a communist sympathizer led all but the most radically leftist religious away from the newly elected President.<sup>27</sup> The conservative Guatemalan Catholic Church was perhaps the most vocal religious opponent of the President, working fervently to mobilize opposition within the country.<sup>28</sup> Weakened from over 100 years of Liberal onslaughts, fear that a communist government would completely stamp them out led the Church to

oppose vehemently what they believed were socialist tendencies in the democratic government.<sup>29</sup> Yet with only 132 priests throughout the entire country in 1950, their opposition was ineffective at best.<sup>30</sup> Such tactics were not needed, however, as there were other, more powerful entities that felt threatened by Guatemala's emerging democracy.

External forces, namely the United Fruit Company (UFCO) and the United States government, were more than adequate to end Guatemala's democratic experiment. These outside groups, by providing funding, training, and air support for a conservative counter-revolutionary movement led by Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, forced Arbenz to resign on 27 June 1954.<sup>31</sup> With help from the United States government, both Guatemala and UFCO's lucrative banana plantations were safe from the threat of international communism sinisterly posing under the guise of a democratically elected administration. In the name of thwarting communism, efforts to bring about true, progressive modernization were jettisoned in one swift and decisive act; this time by the very country looked upon as a model. The military once again ruled Guatemala, and it would work to maintain that control at any cost.

Shortly after the coup, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas (r. 1954-1957) took power as the country's president with the goal of undoing the progressive reforms of the previous administration. Because the new president had received strong support in the months leading up to the coup from the conservative Catholic Church, the constitution drafted after the change in government contained a very pro-clerical slant, giving the institution back privileges it had not had since before independence.<sup>32</sup> In this time of upheaval, the Protestant groups that had worked closely with the Arevalo government



were labeled as communist sympathizers.<sup>33</sup> Indigenous converts in the western highlands subsequently became the victims of sporadic anti-communist attacks.<sup>34</sup> Despite the conservative fervor of the new U.S.-backed regime, Castillo Armas's political inclinations were that of a traditional, unreconstructed Liberal.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, while the government ignored the random violence perpetrated against Protestants, because of the desire to see Guatemala modernize, Castillo Armas did not allow the new constitution to reinstate Catholicism as the official state religion.<sup>36</sup> Although some Protestants had worked with the previous "communist" regime, not all were expelled from Guatemala in the wave of anti-communist zeal due to the long-standing idea that different, more conformist Protestant ideologies afforded the country the best chance for modernization. The military regime could still exploit ideologies that focused on individual salvation, personal responsibility, and submission to authority instead of those that promoted literacy and social change. The Guatemalan government needed a more complacent version of Christianity, either Protestant or Catholic, to be disseminated among the indigenous population if their modernization schemes were ever to succeed.

The Catholic hierarchy hoped to use its relationship with the new right-wing government to rebuild the power and prominence of the Church. Despite still having to deal with its upstart competitor for the souls of the Guatemalan masses, one important privilege the Catholic Church regained was the return of foreign religious to the country.<sup>37</sup> The hierarchy initially believed this would benefit the institution, since the new religious would help replenish the understaffed ranks of the Church. The hierarchy also believed that their support of the coup would ensure that the government would no longer work against the institution's attempts to keep Catholicism relevant in Guatemala.

The Church expected that their denunciation of the Arbenz administration would end the government's love affair with Protestantism. Unbeknownst to the Guatemalan Catholic hierarchy, however, events would shortly transpire that would change the look, and the message, of Catholicism throughout Latin America and the world. To the chagrin of the conservative Guatemalan hierarchy, the Church would become relevant in a completely new way.

Changes associated with the convening of Second Vatican Ecumenical Council in Rome from 1962 to 1965 ultimately led to the creation and development of Liberation Theology. Later known as Vatican II, Pope John XXIII summoned this meeting of the Catholic leadership from all over the world to deal with modernizing the archaic institution. Out of this congregation, the Church changed from a generally conservative, pro-establishment institution to one that supported democracy, human rights, and social change.<sup>38</sup> While this meeting initiated a fundamental shift within the Church around the world, the most important aspect of Vatican II for the Church in Latin America was that it led some in the hierarchy to look more critically at their Church and the societies in which they lived.<sup>39</sup> This critical look crystallized in 1968 at the Latin American Bishop's Conference in Medellin, Colombia. What emerged from Medellin was a different Church; one that in theory no longer expected the poor to stoically face their lot in life and obediently await entrance to heaven as the reward for their suffering.<sup>40</sup> Drawing on Latin America's economic and international situation, socially and politically progressive members of the Church hierarchy gave anti-imperialism, class struggle, and social revolution a previously unknown Christian character.<sup>41</sup> They argued that Christians should be active and engaged in working towards a positive transformation of society and

the world.<sup>42</sup> In Medellin, an ideology emerged in which its adherents viewed sin no longer solely as an individual issue but as an institutional problem.<sup>43</sup> In addition to these changes in outlook, there was also a shift in ideas concerning the secular role of the Church. Some within the Church were so involved with advancing the cause of the poor and disenfranchised that a group of Bishops at Medellin declared:

We express our desire to be very close always to those who work in the self-denying apostolate with the poor in order that they will always feel our encouragement and know that we will not listen to parties interested in distorting their work.<sup>44</sup>

In Latin America, Liberation Theology eventually evolved out of this fundamental transformation in Catholic doctrine. Author Philip Berryman defined this ideology as:

- An interpretation of Christian faith out of the suffering, struggle, and hope of the poor;
- A critique of society and the ideologies sustaining it;
- A critique of the activity of the Church and of Christians from the angle of the poor.<sup>45</sup>

The Catholic Church finally took notice of the dismal poverty, lavish wealth, and political repression that were rampant throughout Latin America. At both Vatican II and the Latin American Bishop's Conference, the hierarchy reevaluated the official stance on the temporal role of the Church and a brave few within the clergy decided to stand up and take action. Among the ranks of those who could no longer sit idly by, witnessing the diabolic destruction of their societies, Liberation Theology was born.

In 1971 Gustavo Gutiérrez wrote a seminal book in which he describes the transformation taking place in the Catholic Church throughout Latin America. The term Liberation Theology originated from Gutiérrez's book entitled *A Theology of Liberation*. Liberation Theology sought to address means with which to escape from the poverty that enslaved the vast majority of Latin Americans. Gutiérrez argues that there is a need to

end the cycle of dependence that plagues Latin American countries in relation to the West.<sup>46</sup> In advocating such a change, Gutiérrez utilized ideas associated with dependency theory, which states that the leading powers of the world (particularly the United States) have used their economic strength to ensure Latin America's development is dependent solely on the interests of those same powers.<sup>47</sup> Instead of developing a diverse economy similar to those nations in the industrialized world, these dependent countries export primary goods, such as aluminum, bananas, cotton, etc., controlled by the wealthy elite, making a subjugated working class necessary to ensure the system's smooth operation.<sup>48</sup> With the world split along the ideological lines of the Cold War, Gutiérrez's message to end this system was highly controversial. The military leaders of many Latin American countries, such as Guatemala, considered arguments like Gutiérrez's, which did not overtly advocate the free-market capitalist ideologies of the Western world, akin to communism and a potential danger to their hold on social control.

While Gutiérrez never actually advocates an overt Marxist-Leninist overthrow of the capitalist system in his book, he phrases the call for liberation within a framework of homegrown, hemispheric socialist change.<sup>49</sup> What sets Gutiérrez's ideology apart from other calls for revolution is the inherent Christian component of his message. He seeks to bring Marxism into the Christian fold within the specific Latin American context.<sup>50</sup> Because an anti-socialist doctrine had imbued Christianity for so long, it was the duty of Liberationists such as Gutiérrez to free people from the ideological fallacies associated with socialism.<sup>51</sup> Given the abject poverty and opulent wealth of Latin America and the changes that had occurred within the Church's doctrine, there was no other option but for Christians to side with the revolutionaries, in spirit at least if not in action.<sup>52</sup> Gutiérrez

goes so far as to encourage and validate justifiable violence perpetrated at the hands of those fighting for liberation against the weapons and armies of oppression and dependence.<sup>53</sup> Liberation Theology openly challenged the role of the Catholic Church as the spiritual sanctuary of Latin America's wealthy elite. Contrary to the seemingly tacit support of Liberation Theology from Vatican II and the Medellin Conference, the ideology created divisions within the Catholic Church unseen since the Reformation.<sup>54</sup> There was an open battle within the Church between those adopting the "preferential option for the poor" and those who still adhered to "the values of tradition, the institutional and sacral aspects of the Church, and hierarchical authority."<sup>55</sup> In a time of cultural change at the grassroots level, albeit with global ramifications, not even the Catholic Church could avoid the ominous upheaval looming on the horizon.

Despite the reluctance of some within the highest levels of the Church hierarchy to change, radical priests and lay workers were not the only adherents to Liberation Theology. Many members of the Catholic Church throughout Latin America subscribed to the ideology and promoted it in writings, in sermons, and in their parishes. They used the ideology to give new perspective to a variety of subjects, including Christianity's role in the political realm, the morality of resistance to repression, and the need for social justice.<sup>56</sup> Fundamental to Liberation Theology is a passage from the bishops at Vatican II that states:

In the Old Testament God reveals himself to us as the liberator of the oppressed and the defender of the poor, demanding from man faith in him and justice towards man's neighbour. It is only in the observance of the duties of justice that God is truly recognized as the liberator of the oppressed.... Christ lived his life in the world as a total giving of himself to God for the salvation and liberation of men.<sup>57</sup>

Because issues of justice and oppression were so pertinent to their particular diocese, many bishops throughout Latin America slowly began converting to the tenets of Liberation Theology. Gone were the days when the Church promoted social action while simultaneously denouncing any participation in the realm of politics.<sup>58</sup> In the span of just over a decade, the Church in Latin America went from working hand-in-hand with the established oligarchy in fighting popular uprisings it perceived to be communist to having prominent priests disseminate ideas that violent revolution may in fact be justified by the teachings of Jesus Christ. During this transitional period within the Church, religious involved with the Catholic Action program from all over the world came to Guatemala. Brought in by Archbishop Mariano Rossell y Arellano shortly after the U.S. backed coup in 1954, their task consisted of strengthening the Church and re-energizing the faithful.

Once these priests and workers began to proselytize in the northwestern highlands of Guatemala, they saw the living conditions the indigenous population faced in Departments such as Huehuetenango, Quiché, Chimaltenango, and Alta Verapaz. This new perspective made the ecclesiastical emphasis of their mission seem inconsequential when compared with efforts to improve the social and economic conditions of their parishioners.<sup>59</sup> Traditionally a conservative organization, members of Catholic Action that came to Guatemala began taking progressive stances because of the circumstances they witnessed in the country.<sup>60</sup> Foreign Catholic priests and workers in Guatemala became more concerned with economic development and education projects, working in popular movements at the community level in predominately-indigenous areas.<sup>61</sup> This is how Christian base communities developed. These grass-roots organizations allowed people to organize and become involved in participatory democracy, albeit only at the

local level.<sup>62</sup> The participants, called catechists, selected leaders from their own ranks who then became responsible for disseminating the message of Liberation Theology.<sup>63</sup> While these communities began after the arrival of foreign Catholic workers following the 1954 coup, they proved to be the most important, and most subversive, work of Catholic activists among the people of Guatemala during the civil war.<sup>64</sup> In the department of Quiché, for example, by the late 1970s there were several thousand catechists with close ties to traditional indigenous communities.<sup>65</sup> These communities harkened back to the *cofradía* and openly challenged the existing political and social order, incurring the wrath of those in control of the country's economic and political machinery.

With the help of both these indigenous and foreign adherents to Liberation Theology, the peasantry began to take on a more active role in resisting oppression. On a theoretical level, the doctrine of bettering the lives of the poor through economic and political development was more important to Liberation Theology than the principle of heavenly salvation through faith in Christ.<sup>66</sup> Therefore, the local residents and catechists, not the priests, made all major decisions concerning the base communities.<sup>67</sup> With assistance from the religious, indigenous villages started cooperatives through which they bypassed merchants looking to exploit what little resources they possessed.<sup>68</sup> Unfortunately, these cooperatives could only help those indigenous people with sufficient financial means. Consequently, many on both sides of the political spectrum questioned their validity. While some Indians perceived the cooperatives as doing nothing for the landless peasantry, the overzealous government viewed them as communist subterfuges.<sup>69</sup> Despite these setbacks, Catholic workers emphasized collectively working

together for the advancement of all; how exploitative practices were sinful in the eyes of the Lord; and how Jesus Christ had fought against imperialistic practices in his time.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the peasant communities of Guatemala began utilizing the strategies that would later evolve into a theology of liberation before the ideology had even been given its name.

Among the influx of Catholic Action religious entering the country, perhaps the most prolific was the Maryknoll Order based in New York. Although the religious order had never identified with any specific political ideology, this began to change when the Maryknoll priests and nuns began their work in Guatemala. By identifying sin as a social phenomenon, Liberation Theology tended to blur the line between religion and politics.<sup>71</sup> The conditions that the religious workers saw led some of them to look for ways outside the spiritual realm to exact change, even advocating the necessary use of violence.<sup>72</sup> A specific group of religious workers exceeding their traditional role as God's representatives and becoming intimately involved in the revolutionary cause spawned what became known in Guatemala as the "Melville case."<sup>73</sup> This incident, while being the first of many involving religious revolutionaries in the country, exemplified what the Guatemalan military regime feared most about progressive Catholic activists: the use of religion to justify taking up arms in the name of social justice.

Two priests, Tom and Art Melville, along with a nun named Marian Peter, had been working in Guatemala since the 1950s; they and other Maryknollers were some of the first foreign religious to arrive in the country via Catholic Action. While the Melville brothers were proselytizing in the indigenous western highlands, Sister Marian was teaching in an upper-class high school in Guatemala City.<sup>74</sup> As their work progressed,



the brothers began to realize the limitations of development projects in remedying the problems of the peasantry. Moreover, Christian base communities, while helping to spread the ideas of the new Liberation Theology, were doing little to end government oppression and violence. Sister Marian Peter, also feeling a sense of frustration, began to take high school students to work with the rural poor in these base communities.<sup>75</sup> She too became disillusioned with the lack of progress. These religious searched for a way to bring about reform, leading them into a relationship with other groups of people working towards revolution, elevating the use of religion as a weapon of war in Guatemala to a new level.

Seeing first hand the conditions faced by the rural poor of Guatemala, these religious workers realized that revolution was the only way to break the cycle of poverty and provide a ray of hope for the country's oppressed. Utilizing the connections of some of Sister Marian's students, the three contacted the guerilla leader Luis Turcios Lima in 1967 and decided to join the revolution.<sup>76</sup> The rebels, from the *Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes*, or Rebel Armed Forces (FAR), utilized their new connections with these three religious to recruit from the indigenous communities, which had traditionally sought autonomy and were reluctant to join Ladino-led resistance movements like the FAR.<sup>77</sup> The FAR and subsequent rebel groups realized that Church organizations, whether they were base communities or similar progressive groups, had much better relationships and communication with indigenous communities.<sup>78</sup> At this time, however, the rebels had nearly been annihilated by a particularly violent counter-insurgency campaign; this was their last ditch effort at maintaining their presence in the country.<sup>79</sup> Though the rebels were trying to develop both a Christian and an indigenous presence in their revolution, it

was to no avail. Both Church and government officials discovered the plan, expelling the Melvilles (along with Sister Marian) from Guatemala.<sup>80</sup> This incident exemplified for the army the latent danger posed by progressive members of the Church to the ruling oligarchy's monopoly on power and control. Grassroots work done by Catholic activists could potentially threaten the oligarchy's iron grip on the indigenous peasant majority, even more so than isolated bands of rebels constantly on the run from the U.S. funded and trained military. This concern of the military would lead to the start of a second, ideological front in the civil war; one to maintain social control more effectively.

While many foreign workers connected with the Catholic Church were involved with the poor in developing ways to better their lives, Protestant churches were actively expanding in Guatemala. Earlier, unsuccessful forays into the realm of politics left these churches advocating a more otherworldly message instead of proselytizing about social ills and the need for popular action to enact societal change. As violence associated with the civil war increased in the mid-1960s, some people turned to Protestant churches looking for answers. Millenarianist neo-Pentecostal sects preaching individual salvation for the righteous and obedience to authority in seemingly apocalyptic times broke off from the traditional churches.<sup>81</sup> Eventually these neo-Pentecostal churches began to split as well, creating homegrown Guatemalan congregations, usually meeting in people's homes and often consisting of only a few members.<sup>82</sup> While these churches were anti-Catholic in nature, they espoused patriotism and the doctrinal message of resignation – the traditionally conservative belief in accepting one's fate in life and submitting to the will of authority.<sup>83</sup> The military government hoped to utilize this message in order to counter the social activism embraced by the Liberationists in the indigenous

communities. While Guatemalan Protestant sects were branching off into apocalyptic realms completely devoid of political involvement, the Guatemalan government was endeavoring to exploit the Pentecostal message as another tool of social control.

This situation came to fruition, oddly enough, with an act of nature. Early in the morning of 4 February 1976, an earthquake that registered 7.5 on the Richter scale struck the north-central part of the country. Over 22,000 people died, three times that number was seriously injured, and another one million people – nearly one sixth of the country – were homeless after the catastrophe.<sup>84</sup> The tragedy affected the poor in Guatemala City and the Department of Chimaltenango the worst since their adobe homes were poorly constructed and hence more susceptible to damage from the cataclysmic tremor.<sup>85</sup> This devastating event made it necessary for the government to ask outside countries, particularly the United States, for help. In addition to aid from the U.S. government, a large amount of resources came by way of North American Protestant churches, which saw the earthquake as an opportunity to further proselytizing efforts in a country seemingly forsaken by God.<sup>86</sup> While these churches spent their resources in rebuilding the homes of the poor (while many of whom actually needed help planting their crops before it was too late in the season), their recruitment efforts focused largely on the wealthy elite of Guatemala City, including future President José Efraín Ríos Montt.<sup>87</sup> Despite the fact that these churches concentrated their recruitment efforts almost exclusively on the Guatemalan elite, the wealthy were not the only ones that joined the congregations. Overall church membership jumped almost fifteen percent in the months immediately following the earthquake.<sup>88</sup> This number is deceiving, however, as the monetary generosity bestowed upon those who adhered to the benefactor's protestant

religious beliefs played a major part in increasing the number of converts to the flock.<sup>89</sup>

For the government, this rise in conversions to Protestantism was another positive development in their ongoing effort to modernize Guatemala. In addition to the arrival of foreign missionaries and relief efforts, the earthquake and ensuing chaos served as a catalyst for already rapacious land seizures by people searching for oil deposits or fertile cattle lands.<sup>90</sup> These assaults on both their traditional ways of life and their lands now forced indigenous people who once sought autonomy to look for ways in which to mobilize resistance.

As the threat of losing their land compounded the ever-present violence, the peasantry began to look for ways to mobilize. Rebel groups consisting of survivors of the first counterinsurgency campaigns in the 1960s began reemerging in indigenous regions and establishing relations with the residents.<sup>91</sup> Following the example of the Catholic activists and Liberationists, the rebel groups worked to create better, more productive relationships with the indigenous populations. They began to work together with indigenous populations on issues in need of immediate attention, such as the killing of right-wing landowners and military officers who were excessively abusive.<sup>92</sup> Along with rebel groups, activist Catholic priests were still working in Guatemala. The indigenous communities that had been involved in base communities, and that had seen the brunt of the military's violence in suppressing the first wave of rebel activities, began to organize under the leadership of these Catholic priests.<sup>93</sup> On 29 May 1978, a group of Kekchi Indians descended on the northern town of Panzos to ask authorities for help in protecting them from inevitable land seizures.<sup>94</sup> Following the standard policy of violently suppressing any confrontation, the military unleashed its destructive forces on the

unarmed group of Indians, killing well over one hundred.<sup>95</sup> This massacre signaled the start of the most brutal years of the Guatemalan civil war, when just over a month later General Fernando Romeo Lucas García (r. 1978-1981) succeeded General Kjell Eugenio Laugerud García (r. 1974-1978) as president in another fraudulent election. The Lucas presidency would be the most corrupt and violent reign of terror that Guatemala had witnessed up to that point in the nearly two-decade-long civil war.

This became the most brutal period of the war as the guerillas became more politically and militarily active than at any other point in the conflict. One of the main reasons for this was that the guerilla organizations, which had largely been comprised of middle-class Ladinos during the 1960s, now had the support of a large number of the Indians in the regions where they operated.<sup>96</sup> A group known as *Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres*, or the Guerilla Army of the Poor (EGP), began briefly occupying regions of the highlands, and by mid 1979, another group called *Organización Pueblo en Armas*, or the People-in-Arms Organization (ORPA) began utilizing the same tactics.<sup>97</sup> Indigenous people were collaborating with, and even joining, these resistance groups in ever-increasing numbers.<sup>98</sup> For the first time in the Guatemalan civil war, revolutionary groups began taking the offensive.<sup>99</sup> Because Catholic activists had first organized the indigenous into base communities and served as the conduit for Liberation Theology's "preferential option for the poor," Catholics bore the brunt of the political violence during the Lucas regime.<sup>100</sup> Because of the work that Catholic activists had done during the 1960s, the regions where base communities were located emerged as the areas in which the rebels had the most success.<sup>101</sup> In retaliation, by the end of 1979 the army had essentially put the Indigenous communities in the northwest highlands under siege.<sup>102</sup> In

January 1980, a large group of Indians came to the capital to plead their case to the public. What followed would catapult the civil war onto the international stage and usher in the beginning of an even greater level of violence in the battle for the hearts and minds of the Guatemalan peasantry.

On 31 January 1980, twenty-three peasants, along with five labor and university leaders, took over the Spanish embassy in Guatemala City. Many who were involved in the occupation were themselves Catholic activists.<sup>103</sup> Although the Spanish ambassador Máximo Cajal was willing to meet with the occupiers, feeling that their actions were justified considering what was transpiring in their communities, several hundred police and military personnel arrived at the embassy and placed it under siege.<sup>104</sup> In spite of the Ambassador's protests, the Guatemalan authorities attacked the embassy, causing an explosion and subsequent fire.<sup>105</sup> The pleas of onlookers went unheeded as the Guatemalan authorities, refusing to allow firefighters on the scene, watched as twenty-seven of the twenty-eight occupiers and twelve of their hostages burned to death in the blaze.<sup>106</sup> Despite international outrage and a severance of diplomatic relations by Spain, the "Spanish Embassy massacre" only increased the government's repression of the indigenous communities, initiating the most brutal phase of the war and the beginning of the push towards coerced Protestant conversion.

Anyone associated with Catholicism in the indigenous regions of Guatemala was already under intense government subjugation. Since guerillas were difficult to find or identify, and could potentially defend themselves, the army went after anyone they believed was associated with the resistance, particularly those participating in Catholic activism.<sup>107</sup> Consequently, those who were not politically active converted to

Protestantism in large numbers to avoid the brunt of the government's force.<sup>108</sup> This political and religious expediency was not, however, the only appeal of Protestantism to Guatemalans mired in a brutal, decades-long civil war. As Virginia Garrard-Burnett explains:

The attraction of such churches was plain: not only did their message of a violent chaotic, unjust, and sinful world reflect believers' reality, but it also rendered a larger meaning and cosmic plan from nearly incomprehensible terror. For believers, the promise of redemption in the hereafter was not simply deferred gratification, or "pie in the sky," but a time for vindication, justice, empowerment, and reunion for the poor and oppressed, the inheritors of the earth entitled by Jesus Himself on the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>109</sup>

It was not just the idea of redemption in the afterlife, the financial help from missionaries, or the protection from the army that made Protestantism appealing to some indigenous Guatemalans. The churches had a welcoming atmosphere of popular religiosity, with services that often included time for singing, dancing, and physical gestures towards the heavens.<sup>110</sup> Compared to the stodginess of traditional Catholic mass, this visceral appeal contributed substantially to Protestant growth.<sup>111</sup> There were many non-political conditions contributing to the unprecedented growth of Protestant churches in Guatemala. Nonetheless, these changes in the country's spirituality would have immense political ramifications, especially for its most impoverished and marginalized inhabitants.

The government was cognizant of this rise in Protestantism and believed that they could utilize it to create a new political base. If Protestants literally adhered to the biblical passage to "submit to the authority in power," it could counteract the Catholic activism occurring in the indigenous highlands.<sup>112</sup> Despite the military's desire for an obedient Protestant populous, not all Protestants aligned themselves with the oppressive apparatus of the state. While a very small number of Protestants did join the rebels, for

the most part they tacitly, and oftentimes actively, supported the military dictatorship.<sup>113</sup> Their support, however, was often a survival strategy rather than a specific act of defiance against the rebels. For example, during the early 1980s in the Ixil town of Cotzal, located in the Quiché Department where the guerillas had a high level of support, the Protestant congregation of the Full Gospel Church of God openly reported on guerilla activities and collaborated with the army.<sup>114</sup> They did this under duress in an effort to prevent their families, and their church, from falling victim to the army's scorched-earth policies.<sup>115</sup> Promotion of Protestantism was the tentative policy of the military government at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s. The ascension of a Fundamentalist Protestant to the presidency, however, created a full-scale religious battle in the countryside, where forced coercion became a way of life throughout the indigenous regions of Guatemala.

With every escalation in violence by the military, there was a concomitant increase in guerilla activity in the highlands. In January 1982, all four of Guatemala's guerilla groups announced they were joining forces and becoming the *Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca*, or Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG).<sup>116</sup> These guerillas consolidated their power and were becoming a significant threat. The military and oligarchy only had to look at what had transpired in neighboring Nicaragua, where a popular revolution just a few years earlier had toppled the Somoza family from power. The Guatemalan military regime believed that they needed to take drastic action in order to end this potential threat, and conventional violence was only strengthening the opposition's support. Young military officers, believing that the Lucas regime's gross corruption was undermining the war against the guerillas, orchestrated a



coup to usher in a new era of counter-revolutionary warfare.<sup>117</sup> The extensive violence and brutality of the war waged by the Lucas regime, while effective in killing peasants and Catholic activists, had failed in eradicating the guerillas. The next step was one that had been in development for one-hundred years, an attempt at a total transformation that would completely alter Guatemalan society and forever end any political opposition by imposing God's Will of conformity and obedience onto the people of the small Central American nation.

Guatemala needed a fundamentalist Protestant to lead the country through this monumental societal change. Herein lies the reason why the young officers who orchestrated the *golpe* (coup) in 1982 chose the evangelical Efraín Ríos Montt to be president (r. 1982-1983), literally plucking him from teaching Sunday school at the Word Church in Guatemala City to be the next military dictator of the country.<sup>118</sup> Seeing this conflict through a strictly religious perspective, the "born-again" Christian understood the guerilla movement to be a result of moral failings within the country.<sup>119</sup> In order to end what Ríos Montt saw as the guerillas assault on Guatemalan values, he would create "*La Nueva Guatemala*," or the New Guatemala.<sup>120</sup> This would fundamentally change society by basing it solely on the principles of morality, obedience to authority, and national unity.<sup>121</sup> Ever since the introduction of Protestantism a century earlier, the Guatemalan government had sought to create a compliant, "modern" population. Through unprecedented violence in the name of eradicating a rebellion, this modernization was about to be realized by a zealously fundamentalist President in the midst of a brutal civil war. The indigenous people of Guatemala would arrive in the modern Western world,

not through development projects and proselytizing but through unimaginable death, destruction, and forced conversion.

Modernity and social peace would be achieved by way of a scorched-earth policy the new President referred to as “*fusiles y frijoles*,” or “bullets and beans.”<sup>122</sup> The “bullets” facet of the program, destroying the guerilla’s relationship with the indigenous communities, was summed up best by one army officer’s statement: “if you are with us, we’ll feed you, if you’re against us, we’ll kill you.”<sup>123</sup> The “beans” portion of this brutal pacification strategy consisted of creating the *La Fundación de Ayuda al Pueblo Indígena*, or the Foundation for Aid to the Indian People (FUNDAPI).<sup>124</sup> Ríos Montt enlisted members of the Word Church (of which he was a member) to create an organization for administering the contributions from North American evangelicals in order to provide food, shelter, clothing, and medicine to the refugees created by the counter-insurgency campaign.<sup>125</sup> In the process of razing over 440 villages to the ground, the military created FUNDAPI clients by displacing more than one million people.<sup>126</sup> Another aspect of the “bullets and beans” plan was the vast expansion of the *patrullas de autodefensa civil*, or civil defense patrols (PACs), that originated under the Lucas regime.<sup>127</sup> The army commanders of the PACs conscripted male Indians to fight against the rebels, giving them only wooden weapons if any at all.<sup>128</sup> Instead of leaving the vast indigenous peasantry potentially to fight against the military, the PACs forced them to combat the rebels who were theoretically on their side in the liberation struggle. These civilian militias were rag-tag armies of men forced to go to war in the advancement of their own oppression. With a policy of burning people’s homes and then using potential starvation to force them to fight against their own interests, it is understandable why the

government sought a way to enforce a sense of conformity and justification on these subjugated people.

Indoctrination was vital to inculcate this sense of conformity. The “bullets and beans” policy targeted Catholic activists involved in Christian base communities to the extent that in May 1982, the nation’s bishops described what was happening in Guatemala’s indigenous highlands as a “genocide.”<sup>129</sup> They were only the first to claim this, however, as both Amnesty International and the United Nations later did so as well.<sup>130</sup> The military regime seemingly deemed everyone associated with Catholicism to be a communist and hunted them down like criminals. This coincided with a particularly large growth in membership among Protestant churches during the early 1980s, especially in those Churches that were encouraged by the government to evangelize in the highland war zones.<sup>131</sup> This growth was most apparent in “model villages”, where the FUNDABI could use religious affiliation as a condition for aid. These work camps, created and controlled by the army and built atop the ruins of destroyed communities by the relocated survivors of the “bullets and beans” campaign, were the penultimate step in the violent crusade to ensure social control.<sup>132</sup> Those indigenous who survived would be the first inhabitants of a brave new Guatemala.

Under constant surveillance and the guise of benevolence, these villages constituted a sinister attempt to modernize the *campesinos*, or peasants, through indoctrination and integration into the New Guatemala.<sup>133</sup> The government tried to destroy traditional ethnic unity and isolate individuals by purposefully placing people from different villages and language groups together.<sup>134</sup> While everyone was stripped of their ethnic identity and forced to learn and speak only Spanish, the only outside

institutions that were allowed into these villages were Protestant Churches and the FUNDAPI.<sup>135</sup> The number of Protestant converts swelled in these model villages because the military perceived those that did not convert as ostensibly opposing the government's program. This was a critical aspect of the Guatemalan military's psychological war against the indigenous population. With hundreds of thousands of people displaced and impoverished, the military left them with nowhere to turn but these horrific resettlement centers. The government sought to ensure that the "rebellious" Indians transformed into people grateful for the generosity shown them and who thank God for the life given to them. This was more than a military assault on guerilla activity or a violent insurgency; it was an all-out genocidal campaign pitting Evangelical Protestantism against Liberation Theology, with the indigenous population caught in the middle. The Guatemalan government, under fundamentalist President Efraín Ríos Montt, used violence and fear to convert indigenous society into something that better suited the military regime's desire for conformity and submission.

The crowning day for that transformation was to be the centennial celebration of Protestantism in Guatemala. In October 1982 the Argentine evangelist Luis Palau, renowned as "the Latin Billy Graham," spoke to an estimated half million people in Guatemala City on the subject of Ríos Montt's miracle.<sup>136</sup> On the surface, it seemed as though the "bullets and beans" campaign had done to both Guatemalan Catholicism and society in a few short months what the government, through traditional Protestant missionaries, had been working at for over a century. Yet the Protestant experiment had cracks in its foundation. Because the numerous sects and factions of the Protestant community were not united squarely behind the President, there was little opposition

when, as often happened with Guatemalan Presidents, Ríos Montt was ousted in a *golpe* on 8 August 1983.<sup>137</sup> Once the brutality of his campaign ended the crisis in the countryside, disabled Catholic activism, and put the rebels back on the defensive, Ríos Montt's inability to make headway in the country's economic matters caused him to lose the support of the landed oligarchy.<sup>138</sup> His cultural revolution was not as important to those in power as the price of coffee on the futures market. Nonetheless, Ríos Montt had been successful in destroying the indigenous revolution. Through the death of almost one-quarter million people, and the destruction of the survivor's traditional way of life, General Ríos Montt had "miraculously" brought modernization to the indigenous people of Guatemala.

The Ríos Montt administration tried to force the indigenous to remake their entire society and abandon their beliefs or face the government's wrath. That policy worked so well that the conversion rate to Protestantism among the indigenous continued to rise until it leveled out in 1985 at around ten percent a year.<sup>139</sup> Throughout the Guatemalan civil war, when right-wing Protestants came into conflict with left-wing Catholic activists, both religious and political differences overlapped and developed into what in some instances resembled a holy war.<sup>140</sup> Notwithstanding the threat of unspeakable violence and death, the indigenous community internalized the fundamentalist message of conformity and obedience, replacing Liberation Theology's message of liberty and justice for all.

This had been the decades-old plan of the military government. In order to placate their concerns about Liberation Theology and peasant social activism, the oligarchy-military cabal, seeing the already occurring rise in Protestantism, actively

planned and initiated a strategy to convert the peasant population to a more palatable religious ideology. The long-held position of Protestantism as a tool of modernization in Guatemala, coupled with the violence occurring at the hands of the military, allowed for a strategy of Protestant conversion on a mass scale. The authorities both forcefully pushed modernization on the Indigenous populations and refuted Catholic-based ideas of social change and revolution. This occurred extensively and with the most brutality in the “model villages” that the military regime created to restructure Guatemalan indigenous society. The dictatorship was attempting to create an entirely new society, free of dissent and subversion, modeled after the conservative, Protestant countries of the West. They carried out this goal through violence, internment, enslavement, and attempted indoctrination and brainwashing of over 60 percent of the country’s population.

The capture and brainwashing of Father Pellecer is reminiscent of the situation faced by the indigenous people of Guatemala. Seeing Liberation Theology as a threat, the military government tried to alter the mindset of the people to better suit its plans for the country. David Stoll, in his contribution to Robert Carmack’s compilation “Harvest of Violence,” quotes an evangelical missionary discussing the confrontation between Fundamentalist Protestantism and Liberation Theology as stating that Central America was: “one of the strategic battlefields in the spiritual warfare over the allegiances and eternal destiny of the world’s inhabitants.”<sup>141</sup> Indeed, to these people they were soldiers in a war; a war for the hearts and minds of the indigenous population that eventually reaped incredible havoc on an entire generation of Guatemalans in an attempt by the military to maintain social control. Liberation Theology threatened the elite’s control over Guatemalan society, while Fundamentalist Protestantism gave hope to its

preservation. While Guatemala may have seemed forsaken by God, in the eyes of those in power, God was working to help create, to quote the Fundamentalist Protestant former Guatemalan President Efraín Ríos Montt, “the new Israel of Central America.”<sup>142</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The story of Father Pellecer is recounted briefly in two of Phillip Berryman's books. Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion: Christians in Central American Revolutions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984), 214-15; Phillip Berryman, *Stubborn Hope: Religion, Politics, and Revolution in Central America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994), 114. Both citations by Berryman come from an article by Father Thomas Rausch. Thomas P. Rausch, S.J., "Reappearance of Terror: The 'Confession' of Father Luis Eduardo Pellecer," *Sojourners Magazine*, Volume 11, June 1982, pp. 8-10.

<sup>2</sup> Accounts from United Nations-mandated *La Comisión para Esclarecimiento Histórico*, or Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), concluded that the death toll was even higher. More than 200 000 people were killed during the war, with 83% of the victims Indigenous and 17% Ladino. The Commission also found that the state (through the army or right wing death squads) was responsible for 93% of the violence during this time. Virginia Garrard-Burnett, "God Was Already Here When Columbus Arrived: Inculturation Theology and the Mayan Movement in Guatemala, pp. 125-153," in *Resurgent Voices in Latin America: Indigenous Peoples, Political Mobilization, and Religious Change*, ed. Edward L. Cleary and Timothy J. Steigenga, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 127; Jeffrey Klaiber, S.J. *The Church, Dictatorships, and Democracy in Latin America*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 216; Victoria Sanford, *Buried Secrets: Truth and Human Rights in Guatemala*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 148, 155.

<sup>3</sup> Virginia Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy J. Steigenga, "Chapter 9: Guatemala, pp. 150-174," in *Religious Freedom and Evangelization in Latin America: The Challenge of Religious Pluralism*, ed. Paul E. Sigmund, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 152.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>7</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 7; Steigenga, 153.

<sup>8</sup> Steigenga, 151.

<sup>9</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *God Was Here*, 127.

<sup>10</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 11; Steigenga, 153.

<sup>12</sup> This is evidenced by a treaty made between the governments of Guatemala and Germany, which states that "The right to freedom of religion in Guatemala would remove one of the principal obstacles that has heretofore impeded foreign immigration to our country, for many do not wish to settle where they are not allowed to exercise their religion." Quoted in Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 14; Steigenga, 153.

<sup>17</sup> Steigenga, 153-4.

<sup>18</sup> Steigenga, 154.

<sup>19</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 74.



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- <sup>20</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 71-2; Steigenga, 154.
- <sup>21</sup> Ten years of spring is the term referring to the ten years of the Arevalo and Arbenz governments from 1944 to 1954 that saw a brief interlude of human rights, democracy, and equal opportunity for the poor (both Ladino and Indigenous) in a country renowned for graft, oppression, and dictatorship. As far as I have been able to surmise, the term was first coined by Jim Handy. Jim Handy, *Gift of the Devil: A History of Guatemala*, (Boston: South End Press, 1984).
- <sup>22</sup> The fact that the coup happened in October may have been detrimental to the chances of Guatemala maintaining their attempt at democracy and social change. Since this revolution had the same name as the Soviet revolution, there was already a subliminal connection to communism, and being so close to the United States, this may have been a factor that aided in its demise. Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 79; Susanne Jonas, *The Battle for Guatemala: Rebels, Death Squads, and U.S. Power*, (San Francisco: Westview Press, 1991), 23; Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 114; Steigenga, 154.
- <sup>23</sup> Jonas, 24; LaFeber, 114-115, Steigenga, 155.
- <sup>24</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 79.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., 80-1.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., 89.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid., 86-7.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Phillip Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 173.
- <sup>31</sup> Nick Cullather, *Secret History: The C.I.A.'s Classified Account of Operations in Guatemala 1952-1954*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 101.
- <sup>32</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 100-2.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., 102.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., 101.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>37</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 173.
- <sup>38</sup> Sigmund, Paul E., *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy or Revolution*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 19.
- <sup>39</sup> Philip Berryman, *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts About the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), 16-7.
- <sup>40</sup> Tommie Sue Montgomery, "Liberation and Revolution: Christianity as a Subversive Act in Central America, pp. 76-99," in *Trouble in our Backyard: Central America and the United States in the Eighties*, ed. Martin Diskin, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 77.
- <sup>41</sup> David Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?: The Politics of Evangelical Growth*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 141.
- <sup>42</sup> Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 23.
- <sup>43</sup> Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 23; Montgomery, 76-7.
- <sup>44</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Trans., Sister Caridad Inda and John Eagleson, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 115.

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- <sup>45</sup> Phillip Berryman, quoted. in “Humanism and Social Issues. Anthology of Essays,” ed. Marian Hillar and H.R. Leuchtag, American Humanist Association, Houston, 1993, pp. 35-52. <http://www.socinian.org/liberty.html>
- <sup>46</sup> Gutiérrez, 85-8.
- <sup>47</sup> LaFeber, 17.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>49</sup> Gutiérrez, 89.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., 104.
- <sup>51</sup> Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 27-8.
- <sup>52</sup> Gutiérrez, 105-6.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., 108-9.
- <sup>54</sup> Montgomery, 88.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>56</sup> Juan Luis Segundo, S.J., *The Liberation of Theology*, Trans. John Drury, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976), pp. 69-71; David Tombs, *Latin American Liberation Theology*, (Boston: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2002), 137-144.
- <sup>57</sup> Tombs, 143.
- <sup>58</sup> Berryman, *Liberation Theology*, 15.
- <sup>59</sup> Shelton H. Davis and Julie Hodson, *Witness to Political Violence in Guatemala: The Suppression of a Rural Development Movement*, (Boston: Oxfam America, 1982), 14.
- <sup>60</sup> Montgomery, 87.
- <sup>61</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 174.
- <sup>62</sup> Montgomery, 82-3.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid., 83.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid., 82, 87.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid., 87.
- <sup>66</sup> Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, 137.
- <sup>67</sup> Montgomery, 83.
- <sup>68</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 175.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>70</sup> Blase Bonpane, *Guerillas of Peace: Liberation Theology and the Central American Revolution*, (Boston: South End Press, 1985), 11.
- <sup>71</sup> Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, 137.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>73</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 175; Bonpane, 68.
- <sup>74</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 175-6.
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid., 175.
- <sup>76</sup> Ibid., 176.
- <sup>77</sup> Bonpane, 51.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid., 56.
- <sup>79</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 176.
- <sup>80</sup> After renouncing their vows, Tom Melville and Marian were married. Ibid.
- <sup>81</sup> These neo-Pentecostal churches bore resemblance to a new style of right-wing fundamentalist church developing in California in the 1960s, bearing no resemblance to

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the older style Protestantism long established in the country. Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 180; Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 115, 119.

<sup>82</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 115, 119.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 116-8, 132.

<sup>84</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 180; Garrard-Burnett, 120; LaFaber, 257.

<sup>85</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 180; Davis and Hodson, 15.

<sup>86</sup> Penny Lernoux, "The Evangelical Movement Harms Central Americans, pp. 186-192," in *Central America: Opposing Viewpoints*, ed. Carol Wekesser, (San Diego: Greenhaven Press, 1990), 189,191; Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 121.

<sup>87</sup> This is a general trend of the more right-wing Protestant churches, but specifically in this instance referring to the Word Church's (*El Verbo*) Gospel Outreach. It was after the earthquake that this particular church came to Guatemala and later was able to bring the General and former Presidential candidate into their fold. David Stoll, "Chapter 4—Evangelicals, Guerillas, and the Army: The Ixil Triangle Under Ríos Montt, pp. 90-116," in *Harvest of Violence: The Maya Indians and the Guatemalan Crisis*, ed. Robert Carmack, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 94.

<sup>88</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 121.

<sup>89</sup> Critics referred to this as "*lamina por anima*" (a soul for tin roofing), referring to people's conversion in order to receive goods from the churches. Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> LaFeber, 258.

<sup>91</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 183; LaFeber, 259.

<sup>92</sup> LaFeber, 259.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 189-190; LaFeber, 258.

<sup>95</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 189-190; LaFeber, 258.

<sup>96</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 194-5.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Davis and Hodson, 29.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 128-9.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 129-30.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 129-30.

<sup>103</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 196; Garrard-Burnett, 130.

<sup>104</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 196; Garrard-Burnett, 130.

<sup>105</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 196; Garrard-Burnett, 130.

<sup>106</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 196; Garrard-Burnett, 130.

<sup>107</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 209.

<sup>108</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 131.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 132.

<sup>110</sup> Lernoux, 191.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 190-1.

<sup>112</sup> The bible verse is a translation of a section of Romans 13:1, quoted. in Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 132.

<sup>113</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 135.

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- <sup>114</sup> David Stoll, *Between Two Armies in the Ixil Towns of Guatemala*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 102.
- <sup>115</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>116</sup> Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 215-6.
- <sup>117</sup> Ibid., 217.
- <sup>118</sup> This story may be fictitious; it later became known that the former Catholic and Christian Democratic candidate, who was cheated out of the Presidency in 1974, was wearing full battle fatigues at the time of the *golpe*, attire seemingly inappropriate to wear while teaching bible study. Berryman, *The Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 217; Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 139.
- <sup>119</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 141.
- <sup>120</sup> Ibid., 140-1.
- <sup>121</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>122</sup> Berryman, *Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 219; Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 147; Jonas, 148-9; LaFeber, 321.
- <sup>123</sup> Unspecified army officer, quoted. in Berryman, *Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 219; Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 147.
- <sup>124</sup> Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, 191.
- <sup>125</sup> Ibid., 192.
- <sup>126</sup> Jonas, 149.
- <sup>127</sup> Berryman, *Religious Roots of Rebellion*, 218; Garrard-Burnett, 147; Jonas, 150.
- <sup>128</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>129</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 148.
- <sup>130</sup> For an account of the scale of the violence, as reported by the UN created *La Comisión para el Esclarecimiento*, or The Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH), refer to endnote 2, p. 33 of this text. Sanford, 148, 155.
- <sup>131</sup> Lernoux, 188; Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 150.
- <sup>132</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 150; Sanford, 137.
- <sup>133</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 153; Sanford, 139.
- <sup>134</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 153; Sanford 137.
- <sup>135</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 153; Sanford 137.
- <sup>136</sup> Garrard-Burnett, *Protestantism*, 158.
- <sup>137</sup> Ibid., 158-9.
- <sup>138</sup> Ibid., 159.
- <sup>139</sup> Ibid., 162.
- <sup>140</sup> Stoll, *Is Latin America Turning Protestant?*, 138.
- <sup>141</sup> Stoll, "Chapter 4—Evangelicals, Guerillas, and the Army," 91.
- <sup>142</sup> Ibid., 90.

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