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Politics of Prayer

Christianity and the Decriminalization of Cocaine in Guatemala

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What are Pentecostal politics? The answer to this question, at least for the purposes of this chapter, does not linger on political biographies. Pentecostal politicians, even Pentecostal presidents, are well-worn objects of study. Not enough scholarship has explored the everyday experiences of believers who perform their politics through their Christian practices. This chapter's intent is thus to shift the analytical focus away from Pentecostal formations of political leadership to Pentecostal formations of citizenship. In doing so, it addresses a particular place (Guatemala), a particular people (Pentecostals), a particular cause (the decriminalization of drugs), and a particular practice (prayer). It is an anthropological approach that begins with a fairly mundane meeting between two political leaders but then fades into a less familiar vision of Pentecostal prayer as political action, ending with the very text that Pentecostals in Guatemala perform to battle the problem of drug trafficking. It is this text, as well as its incantation, that repositions the meaning of Pentecostal politics to include prayer itself. To perform this Pentecostal prayer, this chapter argues, is to participate politically.

A Meeting

On February 21, 2012, at the White House, in its famed Treaty Room, the US secretary of state Hillary Rodham Clinton shook hands with Guatemala's newest foreign minister, Harold Caballeros. The exchange was quick. "It's wonderful to have the new foreign minister of Guatemala here," Clinton announced. "We have a very close and important relationship with Guatemala. We have a comprehensive agenda that we will be

discussing, but I wanted to formally welcome him here in his new capacity and to publicly state how much I'm looking forward to working with you." Guatemala's foreign minister proved equally diplomatic. "Thank you very much," he said. "It is such an honor to be here representing my country. And as Madam Secretary has said, we have an intense bilateral relationship and an agenda we'll be talking about. Thank you." They then exited the Treaty Room, making polite small talk (US Department of State 2012).

Harold Caballeros's visit, however, was anything but polite. The immediate focus of this "intense bilateral relationship," as Caballeros described it, was the decriminalization of drug possession in Guatemala. It was an unpopular idea, to be sure. By the time of this meeting, this initiative had already been rejected by the governments of Honduras and El Salvador, and had been received with reservations by Costa Rica (Acercando Naciones 2012). The United States had also rejected it through its embassy in Guatemala. But Harold Caballeros, sent by the president of Guatemala, Otto Perez Molina, insisted that a conversation take place.

The conversation makes sense, for Guatemala, if only because the amount of cocaine passing through Guatemala on its way from the Andean region to the United States has been steadily rising over the last decade. Only 10 percent of this cocaine passed through Guatemala in 2004 (Jordan 2004). But with the continued militarization of Mexico by the US Drug Enforcement Agency and its Department of Homeland Security, Guatemala (with the lowest seizure rates in the region) has become an important point of passage for some 250 metric tons of powder cocaine (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2011, 122). Guatemala's piece of this pie jumped to 24 percent in 2006 and then 44 percent in 2008 (Archibold and Cave 2011). In 2011 nearly 90 percent of the cocaine consumed in the United States touched Guatemalan soil (Miroff and Booth 2011).

With cocaine has come chaos. Drug cartels, for one, pay drug traffickers for their logistical support—not with cash but with cocaine (Grainger 2009). This helps everyone sidestep international money laundering laws. Yet the only way to monetize this powder cocaine in a place like Guatemala is to turn it into crack cocaine and then sell it on the streets. Crack, for the unfamiliar, is the bologna of cocaine.

It is a far cheaper, far more addictive version of powder cocaine that hit North American cities in the mid-1980s (Bourgois 2003). Twenty-five years later, as an unintended consequence of a new war on drugs, crack cocaine ravages Guatemala with a desperate kind of addiction. A relatively small country, whose own genocidal civil war ended in 1996 (CEH 1999), Guatemala now experiences unprecedented levels of urban violence (O'Neill and Thomas 2011). Fewer civilians were killed in the war zone of Iraq in 2009 than were shot, stabbed, or beaten to death in Guatemala. Some seventeen murders occur daily in this small country, with the average criminal trial lasting more than four years and with less than 2 percent of homicides resulting in a conviction (Grann 2011, 42; Wilson 2009). "It's sad to say," one international observer remarked, "but Guatemala is a good place to commit murder because you will almost certainly get away with it" (Painter 2007).

For Guatemala, a conversation about decriminalization is important, if only to shift the country's approach to drugs from a retributive approach (e.g., incarceration) to a restorative approach (e.g., rehabilitation). Decriminalization would also initiate a much larger conversation about the decriminalization of drugs throughout the Americas. The idea would be that less unregulated cocaine could mean less unrestrained chaos.

Harold Caballeros proved to be an unexpected point person for this issue. Admittedly, from a certain perspective, he is a predictable politician. Caballeros was in line with any other politician that Hillary Clinton met that day. Trained as a lawyer at the notoriously rigorous Universidad Francisco Marroquín de Guatemala, Caballeros has a résumé that is impressive by any standard. In addition to a PhD, Caballeros holds a master's degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy of Tufts University and has completed postgraduate work at Harvard University's Weatherhead Center for International Affairs. Frequently quoted by the Guatemalan press, Caballeros has also been mentioned in articles published by the *Wall Street Journal* (Riley 2006) and the *Economist* ("Christianity Reborn" 2006). His own campaigns for the presidency in 2007 and 2011 not only developed his political persona but also advanced what many have described as a rather evenhanded (even boring) approach to an unevenly democratizing postwar country.

Yet Harold Caballeros is Pentecostal. A self-professed Christian, an ordained minister, and the founding pastor of a multinational neo-

Pentecostal megachurch in Guatemala, Caballeros has long advocated the practice of spiritual warfare (O'Neill 2010; see Caballeros 2001b). This means that he speaks eloquently and passionately—in sermons, public talks, books, and videos—about how and to what extent demons plague his postwar country. And he does so with great detail, describing with much poetic flair how he wages war against demonic armies and how he fights fallen angels in hand-to-hand combat, hunting down the devils that haunt both his city and his country. In one sermon in 2001, in front of thousands of Pentecostals, Caballeros announced,

I have been telling you for the last hour that we are at war! And that we are the conquerors! Moreover, we are conquerors in the name of Jesus, who loves us! [applause] Aaaaah, you must understand this, you must understand. . . . From the day that Jesus saved you, your enemy, the Devil, lost you. [The Devil] was once your father, had tied you up, was never going to free you, wanted you to be eternally lost. (Caballeros 2001a)

Lost and found, sinner and saved, God and the devil—these are Caballeros's political and theological points of reference.

Admittedly, Caballeros is not the first Pentecostal politician in Guatemala. There have been two others. In 1982 a coup d'état resulted in Efraín Ríos Montt, a Protestant military leader, becoming president of the republic (Garrard-Burnett 2010). On the night of the coup he addressed the nation via television, declaring, "I am trusting my Lord and King, that He shall guide me because only He gives and takes away authority" (Garrard-Burnett 1998, 138). Though he is largely recognized as the architect of Guatemala's genocide and has been indicted by international tribunals for crimes against humanity, the Christian dimensions of Ríos Montt's governance are well documented and rooted in a religious conversion that took place in one of Guatemala City's megachurches, Verbo (Stoll 1990, 187–90; Steigenga 1999). President for less than two years, Ríos Montt took a Christian approach to public office that included "codes of conduct" rooted in biblical principles for government workers (*no robo, no miento, no abuso*—I do not rob, I do not lie, I do not cheat), weekly radio addresses to the country that eventually became known among Guatemalans as Ríos Montt's "sermons," and close ties to the United States's growing Moral Majority, which included a guest ap-

pearance on the conservative US Christian television show *The 700 Club* (Garrard-Burnett 1998). Amidst a sustained, as well as manufactured, fear of communism, Ríos Montt became Guatemala's Christian soldier. Moral righteousness mixed with extreme violence to define Guatemala's first Protestant president until, in August 1983, he was overthrown in a military coup.

Almost a decade later, in 1991, Guatemala held a relatively fair and open presidential election. The neo-Pentecostal candidate Jorge Serrano ran against Ríos Montt, who, despite his history, remains active in Guatemalan politics to this day. A Pentecostal convert since 1977 and a member of the megachurch Elim, the politically moderate Serrano won with a campaign that emphasized the importance of the family, free market economics, social programs, lawfulness, and respect for God-given human rights (Hallum 2002). While Guatemalans, both Protestant and Roman Catholic, certainly did not vote in droves, the 1991 elections signaled the growing political involvement of neo-Pentecostals: urban, upwardly mobile, nondenominational Christians. Winning the election with 67 percent of the vote, Serrano became the first elected Protestant president in Latin America (Freston 2001, 275). Upwardly mobile voting blocs saw themselves as well as their future in Serrano, until he attempted to dissolve the Congress and suspend the constitution in 1993. In one of the stranger grabs for power in Guatemalan history, Serrano tried to take full control of the country until a combination of protesters, government officials, and international investors stopped his dictatorial efforts. While the full reason for his coup d'état remains unclear, many speculate that the coup was Serrano's own way of avoiding corruption charges, which he continues to skirt to this day by residing in Panama (Steigenga 1999, 162).

Harold Caballeros, as foreign minister, skirted nothing when it came to decriminalization. He insisted that the countries of North America and Central America begin a much-needed conversation about drugs and drug violence. Decriminalization could save lives.

Prayer

Sources closest to Caballeros stressed that he never wanted decriminalization in his political portfolio. His concern was that the

entire effort—that is, a former Pentecostal pastor fighting for decriminalization—sounded absurd. And in many ways, it did. But this sentiment obscured the fact that drugs and drug trafficking have always been a part of Caballeros's portfolio. As a pastor, he counseled congregants in the throes of addiction, sermonized on the perils of drug abuse, and initiated and led several prayer campaigns against drug trafficking in Guatemala. It is the latter that this chapter stresses—if only because prayer (from a Pentecostal perspective) can be just as political an activity as a trip to the White House.

To speak of the political power of prayer is not to suggest magic or to make a theological argument. Prayer instead is a kind of cultural work. It is a practice that “works.” Robert Orsi says it best when he argues,

Prayer is not an innocent social or psychological activity. It is always situated in specific and discrepant environments of power, and it derives its meanings, implications, and consequences in relation to these configurations. Indeed praying is one of the most implicating social historical practices because it is in and through prayer that the self comes into intimate and extended contact with the contradictions and constraints of the social world. (1996, 186)

Again, prayer (along with a litany of other Christian practices) “works” because it is a kind of cultural work that produces a sense of self, which believers learn to govern for the sake of Guatemala. Put another way, Pentecostals often work feverishly to combat the problems of postwar Guatemala City, such as drug trafficking, not simply as citizens motivated by their Christianity but also as citizens who consciously work *through* their Christianity. Prayer is Pentecostal politics.

This critical perspective helps explain why Pentecostal politics can result in practices and performances that are far afield from what the political scientist would recognize as citizenship participation. In the once overwhelmingly Roman Catholic but now Pentecostal-majority country, Pentecostal politics rarely look like Caballeros's trip to Washington as foreign minister. As is obvious with Caballeros's own political post, Pentecostals in Guatemala do cultivate candidates for elected office, and they also discuss how Christians should vote, but they do so only a fraction of the time. Pentecostals in Guatemala are more likely to

pray for Guatemala than pay their taxes; they tend to speak in tongues for the soul of the nation rather than vote in general elections; and active Christian citizens more often than not organize prayer campaigns to fight drugs and drug trafficking rather than organize their communities against the same threat (O'Neill 2010). This is all to say that Caballeros's meeting with Clinton is interesting and valuable, but from an ethnographic perspective it is (at best) an outlier. Pentecostals do a great deal, but they do things that ultimately frustrate Western, secular, and deeply liberal expectations of what it means to participate as a citizen of an emerging democracy—what it means, for example, to battle drugs and drug trafficking.

Campaigns

Take Caballeros's previous prayer campaigns against drug trafficking. These were large-scale efforts organized through his Guatemala City megachurch, El Shaddai. El Shaddai, for the unfamiliar, is a worldwide congregation with twelve thousand members in the capital city alone; the central church holds up to six thousand participants and is shaped like a soccer stadium. The structure is equipped with movie theater-quality seats and top-of-the-line audio and video equipment. More than eighty El Shaddai-incorporated satellite churches dot the Guatemalan countryside, from Chiquimula to Chimaltenango, as well as the Americas, from Bogotá to Boston. Connected via the Internet and radio stations, weekly services use contemporary Christian music to excite large crowds, guiding them through emotional peaks and valleys. Upbeat songs electrify the congregation while sad melodies slow the pace of the service, bringing many to tears. The main church structure also houses a small café, a twenty-four-hour ATM machine, and a bookstore with literally thousands of taped sermons for sale as well as Spanish translations of well-known titles authored by pastors from around the world. As almost a comical gesture to scale, a swimming pool serves as the church's baptismal well.

Historically upper-middle-class, the El Shaddai congregation embodies what critics have come to call the gospel of health and wealth (Coleman 2000; García-Ruiz 2004; Althoff 2005). It is a cultural context that allowed Caballeros to begin (both theologically and politically) with the

individual believer. Change the person and you will change the nation. This has long been Caballeros's logic, which has long defined Pentecostal politics. By beginning with the individual, Pentecostalism makes the individual—the self—the very terrain upon which political action takes place (O'Neill 2009).

Pentecostal politics, Caballeros has made clear on many occasions, begins with a decision. It begins with a call for *you* to choose God. During a sermon entitled "Escoge tú" (You choose), Caballeros announced,

I don't know why the world believes that we can't determine our future, that our future is determined by our past, our circumstances, our situations. The only person who can determine our future is *you*. Do you know who is *you*? Who is *you*? *Me*! In this phrase, *you* means every one of us. And the Bible says here, that amidst life and death, I chose *you*. And between heaven and earth, between blessings and failings, between life and death, I chose *you*.

Caballeros continued, "You choose. *You* are responsible for your future. *You* are responsible for living in blessings or failings. *You* are responsible for life and death. *You* are responsible for living in accordance with the word of God because the decision between life and death is in your hands" (Caballeros 1991). Pentecostal politics hails the individual, charging *you* with the power to change.

Caballeros consistently links *your* decision to choose God not just to the nation but also to each person's attitude:

Some people point to the situation of the nation, the situation of our currency [the *quetzal*], the situation of your employment, your place of work, your profession. They say that these circumstances mark your future. Your circumstances do not mark your future! Your faith marks your future! Your language marks your future! Your words mark your future!

By faith, language, and words, Caballeros largely means attitude, as he quickly clarified:

God wants to change your attitude because when you change your attitude, you change your entire life. . . . My attitude determines my future.

I will say it again. My attitude determines my future. Tell me. What can a person with a bad attitude say? Bad things. And what can he obtain? Bad things. And what kind of life can he live? A bad one. . . . Are you listening to me? Brothers and sisters, I am here to help you break the vicious cycle of a bad attitude. (Caballeros 1991)

For Guatemala to change, *you* must change.

Change

Changing Guatemala by changing yourself begins with specific prayers. One is entitled "Against Drug Trafficking." It comes from El Shaddai's principal spiritual warfare project, promoted since the early 1990s, which provides Guatemalan Pentecostals with a body of literature that instructs them on how to wage war in Guatemala. The project's pamphlets, manuals, and archives—yellowing pieces of paper that congregants carry in their back pockets or fold into their Bibles—go to great lengths to equip the believer with the necessary tools to win back Guatemala City from the Devil, to win back the capital as well as the nation from drugs and drug violence. Stowed inside this literature is a series of assumptions. One is the idea that Satan actively attempts to stunt a believer's efforts at prayer. The spiritual war is between Satan and the individual. This paraphernalia warns that Satan will try to make inroads to negatively affect one's own efforts at prayer; Satan will try a number of measures: "Attack our confidence in the Lord, making us feel incapable. . . . Attack our body, thoughts, and nerves. . . . Attack the time that we reserve to pray, making us feel too busy with seemingly other urgent tasks or will interrupt our prayer with things of little importance."

Caballeros had long been a champion of prayer:

The opposition can and must be conquered through prayer and fasting. . . . We have a very active role in obtaining our blessings. If we do not receive the answers to our prayers it is not because God doesn't want to give them to us, but because there is an invisible enemy that wants to place obstacles in front of our receiving, an enemy that it is possible to defeat. (Caballeros 2001b, 8)

But the fight does not come and go. The battle between good and evil, between God and the Devil, is not an infrequent activity.

The logic of these prayer campaigns insists that the successes and failures of each and every person will result in the success or failure of Guatemala as a nation. Participating in the battle for only a short time is nonsense. Every waking minute demands that the believer pray, fast, and speak in tongues. Hesitating for a moment means certain defeat: "Spiritual warfare really constitutes the normal way of life for the believers who have been redeemed by Christ from the slavery of the devil. . . . While we remain on the earth we will have an enemy that is in continual war against us" (Caballeros 2001b, 24). This battle is important for each individual because each individual struggle contributes to the future of Guatemala: "We were suddenly invaded by a sense of urgency. God was putting before us a revelation, giving us a great responsibility" (23). And, as the literature makes clear, El Shaddai congregants, as soldiers for Christ, face an unprecedented battle:

Now more than any other moment in the history of mankind, God is looking for men and women who are able to place themselves between God and this world, to intercede for Him, for a more just world, for a nation with government officials whose hearts are right with God, for a Church that is always on the offensive, for a strong and united leadership. (Oremos Online 2006)

These prayer projects make it quite clear that interceding in a spiritual war is not a collective activity; intercession is also neither public nor external. Intercession is individual, personal, and internal. The weekly prayer sheets are not used in groups or during church services, but are kept at bedsides and work areas, in one's pocket or knapsack. Fulfilling one's responsibility as a soldier for Christ takes place while praying alone and somewhere quiet. As one informant explained to me, with seemingly never-ending patience and with prayer sheets in hand, spiritual advancement takes effort, painstaking effort, which begins with praying an hour a day. The hour-long spiritual exercise has six phases of active prayer.

Phase 1 asks the Christian soldier to give thanks to God "for the privilege of entering into His presence." In this phase, the prayer guide asks

the lonely warrior to recite God's many biblical names, invoking the power that accompanies each name. Phase 2 involves praying for the manifestation of God's kingdom in the present world. The believer at this moment presents his or her petitions to God with only one caveat. The Oremos flier reads, "Remember that we should not pray about a problem without having a solution in mind. The solution to the problem? Yes, examine the Word to encounter what solution God has for this situation. The solution should then be placed in your mind and then confessed." In the third phase, "We pray for a resolution for the needs of our family, church, and nation. This is the intercession." Phase 3 begins the specific prayer-acts made on behalf of Guatemala, turning a devout believer into a citizen-soldier. The prayer manual programmatically provides a prayer, but Gustavo explained that the key here is to have one's own prayer melt into *glossolalia*, or speaking in tongues—to fade from specific words and toward direct communion with the Holy Spirit. Phase 4 asks the Christian soldier to put himself or herself at the service of God and neighbors, focusing on the importance of praying for the needs of others. Phase 5 returns to the explicit language of spiritual warfare: "Dress with the armor of God. Also, pray for God's protection (Solomon 5:12) in our lives, in our family, in our possessions, etc. (John 1:10)." Finally, the sixth phase asks the believer to pray for a specific theme (Oremos Online 2006). One relevant theme for Guatemala is drug trafficking.

Conclusion: A (Spiritual) War on Drugs

The following is part of a prayer that Caballeros once asked his congregants to recite against drug trafficking. While one could easily form a comparison between this prayer, published in 2004, and Caballeros's trip to Washington in February 2012, in some effort to plot out how Pentecostal politics have evolved in a few short years, it is important to note that the El Shaddai church still calls its congregants to wage a spiritual war against drugs and drug trafficking. Again, Harold Caballeros's trip to Washington is (at best) an outlier, while the Pentecostal politics that drive everyday life oftentimes begin and end with prayer. For the student of Pentecostal politics, then, it is best to consider the following prayer as not simply evidence or texture but as the actual medium

through which Pentecostals in Guatemala participate in their country's most pressing issues. To read this text out loud or to oneself, to follow the above-mentioned steps, to prepare oneself for spiritual battle, and then to read this prayer—this itself constitutes the stuff of Pentecostal politics:

Our powerful Savior will defend us. He has chosen us and we pray to Him day and night, asking for help. He will grant Guatemala justice against all odds; He will hear His children and will open his heart and his ears.

Certain paths have led us away from You. The godless do not recognize their limitations and their need for You. This has brought Guatemala to an uncertain reality that we all face as a nation. And You, who respect our will and our desires, no matter how selfish they are, watch with a heavy heart as today we live surrounded by drugs and death. This is not what You desire for Guatemala. Guatemalans and foreigners who lack the Word have created a space for corruption and greed.

Arrogance and disrespect, for both the law and human life, provide plenty of terrain for both organized crime and drug trafficking. The growing presence of drug traffickers also makes honorable citizens feel hopeless. It traps their hearts in a dangerous web of apathy. This is reprehensible because it makes society silently complicit in perpetuating a vicious cycle. It is also reprehensible that the spirits of greed and a thirst for power lead to violence and a destabilized country. In Guatemala men and women are controlled as if by puppeteers. In the name of Jesus, we think this shameful.

Lord, do not allow gangsters to dominate the north, south, east, west, and center of Guatemala. We declare that they will not take over the streets and the roads in isolated towns. They will not construct important stretches of highway; they will not build schools and clinics; they will not rob the hearts of the Guatemalans. They are not the benefactors of the needy. They are not the godfathers of our youth. *No!* Jehovah freed us from our trust in man and in godlessness. . . .

This land is God's land! God has not forgotten and will never blame the innocent. He is a sovereign judge and nothing escapes his presence. We reclaim Guatemala for God and for His glory. We pray that the Holy Spirit breathes a strong wind in Guatemala, and shakes the webs of drug trafficking and organized crime. . . .

Protect the authorities. Do not allow bribes or intimidation to blind people from acting in the Word and in the Law. Allow the authorities to combat drug trafficking and organized crime. We support the authorities, even though it is not in them that we place our trust, but in you, Lord. We ask that the authorities in Guatemala do their work for peace and happiness of Guatemalan citizens. . . . Amen.

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