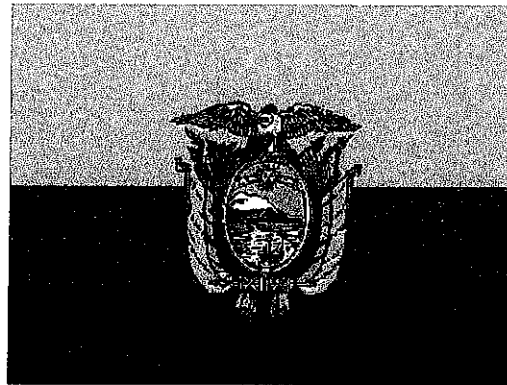


# The Evangelical Movement



## In Ecuador

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## The Evangelical Movement in Ecuador

The presence of religious thought is indelibly woven into the social fabric of Latin America. Acknowledgement of the spiritual is evident in the 'Dios es Amor' signs that adorn cabs weaving their way through the congested city streets, as it is in the impressive churches that dominate the plazas in every outlying town. In the innumerable conversations of each day, one often hears references to the supernatural. Unlike Western nations, religious convictions existing in countries such as Ecuador still have significant presence in the shaping of civil morality as well as personal ethics. Whether it is merely the lip service paid to tradition or the genuine ethos of culture, allusions to the Divine continue to hold power in the collective consciousness of the people. Assuming this truth, it would be useful to try and understand the most dynamic religious movement that Latin America has experienced in the last 500 years, namely evangelicalism. The evangelical movement has been and continues to be a significant element in shaping the face of culture in Ecuador.

### Evangelicalism Defined

The term *evangelical* can be an enigmatic one when seeking clarity because of the various connotations that tend to accompany it. When mentioned, many people equate an evangelical believer with a sweaty, polyester clad T.V evangelist or a bespectacled old lady with an enormous Bible and the WWJD bumper stickers to match. For simplicity sake we will attend to the definition of Evangelicalism as put forth by religious commentator David Stoll. His definition includes the essential tenets that consistently classify an individual as

being an evangelical. "Evangelical Protestantism is best defined as a tradition distinguished by three beliefs, including (1) the complete reliability and authority of the Bible, (2) the need to be saved through a personal relation with Jesus Christ, often experienced in terms of being 'born again', and (3) the importance of spreading this message of salvation to every nation and person, a duty often referred to as the Great Commission" (3).

In order to understand fully the evangelical movement in Ecuador, it is necessary to provide a brief history of its predecessor, Roman Catholicism. Catholic dominion in Latin America took hold in the sixteenth century when explorers like Balboa, Pizarro, Almagro and Valdivia invaded the continent in the name of Spanish interest. The year 1530 was a significant year for the inhabitants of modern day Ecuador and Peru. With a desire to secure the legendary riches of the Incan Empire, Francisco Pizarro and Diego de Almagro landed on the coast of Ecuador near the end of the year. The Spaniards proceeded to capture the emperor Atahualpa and subdue the Incan people.

As was the practice of all conquistadors, Pizarro and Almagro dutifully covered the military fist of the King with the pristine glove of the Papacy. Latin Historian George Pendle comments on the inseparable existence of both State and Church that emerged in South America:

Catholic missionaries-Dominicans, Franciscans, or friars of other orders – accompanied every expedition. When a city was founded, it was usually given a religious name; a priest was always present to bless it; and invariably a church was one of the first buildings to be erected. Wherever the conquistadors ventured they were the adelantados ('advanced agents') not only of the Crown, but also of the Catholic Church, whose secular head – both in Spain and Spanish America- was the King of Spain. (38)

The Church's dominion in Ecuador, as well as the rest of Spanish America, was further extended during the reign of King Phillip the Second. Missions expert John Maust purports that by ordering compliance of the Spanish Colonies to the articles of the 1563 Council of Trent, Phillip had effectively vanquished any outside ideology that might vie for the spiritual authority of the indigenous people. Most prominent in the articles was the forbiddance of non-Catholic immigration to Spanish America, as well as "the prohibition of Bible reading in the language of the people" (26). If Phillip's intent was to create a spiritual monopoly, he was wise to safeguard the colonies, both within and without, from contrary influences. The supremacy of the Church, established in the sixteenth century, remained virtually unchallenged for over three centuries. Today, however, the question emerges, how did the Catholic Church move from a position of cultural authority to that of a marginalized parent?

### **The Decline of Catholicism**

As with many cultural shifts, the decline of Catholic influence in Ecuador has been a gradual process of attrition, spear headed by a number of factors. After Ecuador received its independence from Spain in 1830, little changed in the de facto role the Catholic Church held within the hierarchy of social machinery. The Church still retained the right to tax and remained the only institution authorized to officiate in legally recognized weddings and funerals. A word from the Church Bishop could effectively decide who held what governmental position. As a result, a government sponsored Catholic curtain continued to envelop Ecuador against the introduction of Protestant teaching. The 1862 Concord between Ecuador and the Vatican documents this bias in stating:

The Bishops... will watch out for any teaching contrary to the Catholic religion and proper custom... no one will be able to teach in any public or private establishment, either theology, the catechism, or any religious doctrine, without having first obtained authorization of the Diocese Prelate, who will be able to revoke this authority when it seems appropriate to do so (Reichert 41).

It wasn't until 1895, when Colonel Eloy Alfaro came into power that seams in the clerical curtain began to show. Alfaro, a liberal political leader and wealthy businessman, had been banished twice for bold but unsuccessful attempts to overthrow the conservative dictatorship. Despite Alfaro's political failures, the character of his efforts served to endear him to the people of Ecuador and eventually secure his presidency. " 'The Old Warrior', as he was now affectionately known, was to wait in exile in Nicaragua until 1895 when the right combination of circumstances converged and he was invited to return and lead the liberal revolution to victory" (Reichert 46).

By examining the legislation wrought by the Alfaro regime around the turn of the century, one would be hard pressed not to conclude that it was his intention to destroy the exclusive monopoly of the Catholic Church within Ecuador. His sweeping reforms attacked the primacy of the Church on numerous fronts, the most prominent being constitutional. In the fifty-four years prior to Alfaro's presidency, the various groups that successively held power in Ecuador had instituted ten constitutional revisions. Despite the sundry additions and omissions made by distinct regimes, the government's religious policy remained unchanged.

Consider the 1861 revision, which was really no revision at all when addressing religious policy. "The Religion of the Republic of Ecuador is the Apostolic Roman Catholic to the exclusion of any other. The political powers are obliged to respect and protect her."

Article 12, Quito, April 10 1861 (Reichert 220). Slight changes in constitutional wording did not alter the established understanding, as each revision was practically a mirror image of its predecessor.

Breaking with tradition, the 1897 revision, made by the constitutional assembly under Alfaro, shattered any legal claim Catholicism had for an exclusive access to the people of Ecuador. With the addition of Article 13 to the language of the previous constitutions, competing views could now be heard. "The State respects the beliefs of the inhabitants of Ecuador, and will enforce the respect of their expression. Religious beliefs are not an obstacle to the free exercise of political and civil rights" (Reichert 220).

Alfaro's reign not only diminished the governmental support that the Catholic Church had grown accustomed to; it also thinned the padding on church coffers. Immediately after taking office, General Alfaro withheld the generous payment of State funds to the church, an annual sum of \$500,000 (Reichert 58). This bold move of "heretical defiance" not only caused a budgeting concern for the Church, but also created an avenue of grievance for the people. If the government saw fit to question the obligatory funding of Catholicism, then it only stood to reason that the common family, already living at a subsistence level, would do likewise.

In terms of charting the decline of Catholicism in Ecuador, few men did more to undermine the authority of the Church than did Eloy Alfaro. The presidency of Alfaro, however, was only one of several contributing factors in the deterioration of what seemed an impenetrable ecclesiastical edifice.

Of the numerous social factors that have weakened the influence of the Catholic Church in rural areas, none weighs heavier than the restructuring of the traditional hacienda system. In 1964, under the direction of Ecuador's military dictatorship, a program of agrarian

reform was enacted. John Maust asserts that by breaking up a centuries old oligarchy of hacienda families, land reform gave to the native populace, who had never been more than subsistence sharecroppers, an opportunity to become landowners themselves (82). According to Operation World's website, this "native populace" or indigenous segment of the population, accounts for at least 40% of the total twelve million. Of that 40%, the Quichuan people group, which we will often refer to in this paper, is the largest ("Republic of Ecuador").

This movement toward indigenous autonomy, coupled with the influx of capitalism and the subsequent occupational opportunities made available to the rural inhabitant, all served to diminish the role of the Church as social advocate of the peasant masses. The generalization that author David Stoll makes regarding all of Latin America on this issue is especially apropos to conditions in Ecuador:

What did debilitate the Catholic Church was the disintegration of Latin America's paternalist social order, a society of mutual obligations between upper and lower classes in which the Church served as spiritual guarantor. Such arrangements had protected much of the population against dislocation and impoverishment. As they crumbled under the impact of capitalist expansion, so did the Catholic Church's social foundations. (25)

The gradual dissemination of land and erosion of upper class paternalism freed the people to make their choice of religious affiliation based upon the convictions of their heart rather than the rumblings of their stomach.

If a change in the economic framework of Ecuador led to a decline of Catholic authority in respect to material needs, a deficiency in the provision of spiritual needs proved to have a similar effect for the individual catholic patron. The second half of the twentieth century saw a burgeoning Protestantism juxtaposed to a Catholicism that appeared unable to

engage individuals serious about their faith. Discontent among laity has been and continues to be centered around two principle issues: the inaccessibility of Scripture and clerical hegemony.

For centuries, the possession, not to mention the study of Scripture, was the exclusive right of Church clergy. The people's only contact with God's word, the mass, was conducted in either Latin or a theological Spanish that none but the well educated could understand. The danger of misinterpreting Scripture was the reason given for keeping the Bible and the common believer at a mutual distance. To say that Catholic devotees were slightly unfamiliar with what was originally intended to be the handbook of their faith would be an understatement.

The land reform law of 1964 not only created the autonomy for Ecuadorians to begin questioning the Church's role as an economic "big brother," but it also opened the door for the criticism of any who would restrict that which was already a biblical mandate. Joshua conveys this mandate in chapter 1 verse 8 of his self-titled book, "Do not let this book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it" (New International Version). Understandably this command to meditate daily on God's word proved to be a frustration for those adherents, from whom the Bible was kept out of reach.

It was not until the last twenty-five years that Church leaders in Rome began to acknowledge and attempt to address the damage that biblical elitism had caused among a laity that was evermore acclimating to an expectation of individual rights. Stoll adds that, "What had once been merely a fixture in Catholic pulpits, even a proscribed text available only to clergy and the persons they authorized, was now being exalted as a



guide to faith" (29). Many already skeptical of the Catholic Church's egalitarianism, however, saw this sudden change in policy as merely an attempt to imitate a long held and increasingly popular Protestant conviction, that God's Word in and of itself is sufficient for personal instruction. The book of Timothy provides the scriptural foundation for this position in noting that, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (New International Version, 2 Timothy 3:16,17).

This new stance on Scripture did not come without its own backlash to the Catholic Church. As a Catholic bishop comments, "We [Catholic Bishops in rural Ecuador] distributed quantities of *God Arrives to Man*, the ecumenical translation of the Bible societies. The evangelicals used it to argue that, according to the bishop, it was just as good to be evangelical as Catholic" (qtd. in Stoll 277). If it is true that imitation is the highest form of flattery, than it was to be expected that by moving toward a more Protestant-like view of Bible study and worship, the Catholic Church had in fact made Evangelicalism more appealing to the masses.

In addition to a history of biblical inaccessibility, the other main invective consistently launched against the Catholic Church has been the unwillingness of clergy to share leadership responsibilities with the non-ordained. Although willing to placate church members with a gesture of Bible handouts, the clergy was not ready to allow the laity a claim in the direction of the Church. It is understandable that a degree of resentment would exist among capable lay leaders who were denied leadership roles by a Rome appointed clergy of predominately European descent. Author David Stoll was able to gain insight into this rise in the frustration and flight of laity from an Ecuadorian

Bishop who was willing to be candid on the subject: "Individuals who didn't count for anything among ourselves", Bishop Jose Mario Ruiz Navas of Ecuador reported, turn into leaders or preachers and exhibit qualities which they never had the chance to demonstrate among ourselves" (qtd. in 36). When these lay leaders initially defected from Catholicism they did not go alone. Others that joined them lacked the same leadership charisma, but shared a similar conviction that they too were capable of guiding people into a deeper level of spiritual maturity.

Recognizing the threat of internal sedition against clerical authority, Catholic officials in Rome initiated a campaign to restore the validity of a centralized authority. Stoll points out that the pope personally made a number of pilgrimages to Latin America throughout the 1980's, to champion the prerogative of papal appointment from within its own ranks. Besides making the standard denunciations of Protestant "sects," John Paul II expended his energy stressing the position of the priest as an indispensable intermediary between God and His devoted (40). Stoll adds that, "(To) catholics who saw themselves in a personal, direct relationship with Jesus Christ, these were ominous steps backward" (40). Instead of bringing in the lost sheep, as the Pope had hoped, these efforts to reestablish the unquestioned authority of the clergy served only to further push independent Catholics toward congregations in which they were able to follow their own consciences and abilities.

Gaining a comprehensive look into the decline of Catholicism proves difficult, when taking into account the impact of complex factors such as antagonistic governments, changing economical systems and spiritual insufficiencies. This is evermore true when attempted within the breadth of a few paragraphs. Nevertheless, it is helpful to first examine the weakening of the preceding spiritual movement within a

culture, in order to gain a greater perspective on its correlating successor. Like most challenges to the established order, the upsurge of Evangelicalism in Ecuador has not come without opposition and setbacks. We will now consider those things that initially hindered and continue to be a point of resistance to this budding change.

### **Obstacles to Evangelical Growth**

Current statistics put forth by Operation World's web page estimate the evangelical constituency in Ecuador at just under 900,000 people out of a population of twelve million. With an annual growth rate of 6.9%, compared to the .09% of Catholicism, Evangelicalism is moving rapidly toward becoming a faith system of the majority (O.W. "The Republic of Ecuador"). Significant growth, however, did not characterize the Protestant presence throughout most of the twentieth century. Conversions were infrequent and indifference to the gospel\* message tempted to discourage those laboring on the mission field. Maust writes that, "Evangelical missions in general faced a tough time. In 1925, after almost thirty years of Protestant missions, Ecuador had only 158 evangelical believers, said evangelical historian Washington Padilla. By 1945, after nearly a half-century of Protestant missions, Ecuador had only 5,000 baptized Protestant believers and a worshipping community of 13,000" (37). If the bulk of evangelical growth has occurred only within the past few decades, what consistent deterrents hobbled the spread of the gospel for so many years?

It is essential to realize that for the average Ecuadorian a number of barriers have

\* The record of Jesus Christ's life and teaching

traditionally prohibited a fervent relationship with Jesus Christ from taking hold. The prevalence of alcoholism and the syncretism between pagan and Christian beliefs, were formidable challenges to the efforts of early evangelical workers. Like stonewalls around a flower garden, these protective shells seemed to hold in captivity the hearts of those who might respond to the message of the gospel. The importance of studying these obstacles extends beyond a mere appreciation for past struggles. Even as cracks in the walls of resistance have begun to form, the nature of these barriers remain. A bleeding of pagan thought into Christian doctrine and a cultural dependency on alcohol are as much a concern to Evangelicalism now, as ever.

For evangelicals, the existence of Christo-Paganism continues to be the most daunting obstacle to the diffusion of the Gospel message among Ecuadorians. The resistance runs far deeper than an affinity to a particular vice or superstition. Rather, an elaborate belief system has been developed, and embraced by entire communities, which operates incongruently to traditional, biblical doctrine. For clarity sake, the term *paganism*, when used in this paper, refers to the standard definition of the primitive, animistic thought that ascribes divinity to inanimate objects and or the forces of nature. In order to understand the unique faith hybrid that exists within Ecuador, one must first look back to the encounter between sixteenth century Spanish Catholicism and indigenous animism.

For the indigenous worshipper, the religion of the conquistadors contained similar ideas and images and little that could not be easily assimilated into already existing beliefs. Latin American Anthropologist Eugene Nida notes that within the indigenous faith system, every major object of nature was believed to possess a spirit owner or *dueno* who required periodic appeasement. These minions of earthly topography held sway over

such geographical features as valleys, mountains, and rivers (108). These lesser deities were relegated to the sphere of the mundane, while certain heavenly forces transcended to roles of creator and sustainer. As their Incan predecessors, the indigenous people who survived the period of conquest embraced the sun as creator and the moon as a type of earthly nurturer.

What then did indigenous belief encounter when it met the stream of clerical boats arriving from Spain? One would have expected the monotheistic beliefs of Scripture to be in stark contrast with the animism found on shore, and would have been, had the Bible's teachings been clearly presented.

The Catholicism of medieval Spain was a distant wandering from the Bible-centered constructs of the early Roman Church. According to Eugene Nida the initial impression Catholicism made upon the indigenous of Latin America seemed to welcome amalgamation. From the indigenous standpoint Roman Catholicism presented an essentially polytheistic system, containing many apparent parallels to their animism. Early priests spoke of *Dios* (God), who was said to be the "God of heaven" and thus easily likened to the native sun god. Moreover, this *Dios* was understood by native Ecuadorians to be quite removed from his creation. It would seem that he had turned most of the day-to-day "religious work" over to the saints, who could be readily equated with the *duenos* of animism. The bad spirits of paganism were likened to the demons of Christianity. The Virgin Mary became the moon, the symbol of benefits and fertility, and the offspring of God and the Virgin was Jesus Christ, the symbol of death and dying (108).

I have personally witnessed the outworking of this type of dualism during the Virgin of La Merced festival, held each year within the rural Ecuadorian town where I

now live. This two-week long showcase of Dionysian fervor includes numerous parades of impressive pomp, traditional dancing, religiously symbolic costuming and an almost perpetual inebriation. The festival climaxed on the second to the last night, on which a community inclusive mass was conducted in the Catholic Church. Afterwards, a parade of the town's men, many with faces painted black, circled the plaza directly in front of the church. Outfitted with decorative machetes and most carrying one or more dazed chickens, they began a lengthy display of slow, methodic dancing. The ceremony culminated in a series of ritual chicken sacrifices, which could only be explained as a throwback to animistic appeasement. The obvious elements of both Christianity and animism, were not presented at odds to each other as one might have expected, but seemed to be held in a rhythm like that of the dancers and their drum beats.

For whatever reason, early Catholic Church authorities choose not to correct the blatant misinterpretations of traditional Christian thought and thereby created an opportunity for a Christo-Pagan synthesis to be born. One can only speculate as to why this melding of contrarities was allowed to take place. Nida hints at a possible unwillingness of the clergy to challenge the cherished superstitions of a culture already existing on the brink of extinction. Like ousting a badger backed into a corner, it is possible that the priests recognized the danger of threatening the only means of cultural solidarity remaining for the indigenous people of Latin America (121).

Another explanation, that appears to be more plausible, as well as more consistent with the bulk of authorship and the thinking of that time, posits the likelihood that the clergy saw an opportunity within the animism of the indigenous people. Acknowledging an opportunity to harness the powerful convictions of animism, it is reasonable to hypothesize that catholic leaders recognized the possibility of creating a

mass of devote converts. It may have been reasoned that these converts would actively submit to the dictates of mother church without the need of perpetual coercion. After all, history assures us that superstition, when sincerely adhered to, can be a highly motivating incentive, regardless of its illogical nature.

If we assume that clerics were privy to this understanding and willing to allow a certain amount of animistic concessions in order to secure a spiritual stronghold, it is plausible that the temptation to turn a blind eye to doctrinal compromise was too great. Conjecture aside, the existence of a dualistic belief system here in Ecuador is a reality that has proved to be a major deterrent to the growth of Evangelicalism.

For initial evangelical workers, desiring to dialogue with indigenous people, the blending of Christian and pagan ideas was a source of frustration. Julia Woodward, an early evangelical missionary to the rugged mountain province of Chimborazo\*, experienced what this mixture of beliefs looked like during her fifty year stint in Ecuador.

Quichuas (indigenous Indians) would sometimes blame their illnesses on "bad air" which they had breathed somewhere. Certain places were to be avoided for that reason. Parents often attributed a child's illness to someone giving them the *mal ojo*, the evil eye. Fright could also cause illness, they believed. These same Quichuas, with their blend of Catholic piety and animistic rituals, seemed confused about the most basic Christian tenets. When Julia asked the Quichuas about Jesus, they sometimes asked to which idol or crucifix she was referring. Some considered heaven a reward for those going to mass, sponsoring the

\* See map on Appendix B

drunken fiestas or even being exploited by the whites. (Maust 28)

With a degree of confusion this severe, evangelical workers were left with very little common ground on which they could share the biblical message of Jesus Christ. As any educator will attest, it is more difficult to re-teach concepts that have previously been distorted, than it is to start from a clean slate.

While it was difficult to combat this syncretism of beliefs, an equally challenging obstacle to evangelicals has been the depth of complacency toward their message. Although Catholicism had failed to move the indigenous population away from the fear laced influences of animism, it had successfully inoculated Ecuadorians to the unique invitation of biblically based Christianity. Even today when presented with an opportunity to make a total surrender of one's life to the lordship of Jesus Christ, many Ecuadorians possess a "been there done that" attitude. Why adhere to a more challenging form of Christianity, one that asks you to put a commitment to Christ above all else, when the priestly ritual of infant baptism and a few communion ceremonies are sufficient to guarantee one's eternal standing? It's a choice that speaks to the nature of the human will. When given the option to either perform a number of ceremonial duties, with the intention of appeasing the divine while retaining undisturbed autonomy or choosing to allow the divine to be the center of one's existence, most count the costs and opt for the former.

To many nominal Catholics in Ecuador, the message of the Evangelical Church seems extreme, and, considering the fact that both groups share at least some of the same vocabulary, unnecessary (Nida 117). The numerous conversations I have had with Catholics here in Ecuador echo this idea. Many voice the opinion that Evangelicalism and Catholicism are virtually congruent. It is at this point that evangelicals are strained in



attempting to communicate the importance of possessing an earnest faith in the forgiveness of sins, as exclusively provided for, by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Discouragement is a real threat for the evangelical worker who is trying to convey spiritual urgency to individuals that appear, at times, to view religious conviction with the same "if it's close enough it counts" mentality found in the game of horseshoes.

Living here in Ecuador, I have often heard it said that the per capita alcohol consumption existing here is second only to that found in Russia. Though I don't have the statistics on hand to verify such a claim, it is obvious to the objective observer that alcoholism is an ever-present struggle here in Ecuador. Since being introduced almost five hundred years ago by Spanish settlers, alcohol's bondage over the people has remained steadfast. Anyone tempted to marginalize the tangible realities of this social dysfunction would do well to attend to David Stoll's apt description of ingrained inebriation and how it continues to manifest itself in many communities:

To understand what happened lets go to the area around the Gospel Missionary Union's station at Colta Lake. Before the spirit of Evangelism possessed the mud and thatch villages surrounding this cold, marshy body of water at 10,000 feet, it was common to find much of the population in a state of intoxication. On Sundays, the Pan-American Highway running beside the lake was lined with drunks, male and female, staggering back from the market and collapsing in the road. The consumption of cane liquor seemed to accompany every social occasion and many nonsocial ones, too... Then as the headaches took over, they quarreled murderously among themselves. (273)

The tragedy of such reckless dependency on alcohol hit particularly close to home when a professor from the school of my employment recently came upon the corpse of a man, who in a drunken stupor, had wandered out into traffic just a few miles from our campus. Sadly, a death such as this causes hardly a ripple in a community where alcohol induced accidents are a common occurrence.

Besides being destructive to human life and counter productive to the healthy functioning of the Ecuadorian community at every level, the prevalence of alcoholism has typically set evangelicals at odds with the people they desire to reach. The bottle in hand serves to numb the responsiveness of Ecuadorians to the evangelical message by breeding a habit of treasured addiction and a spirit of indifference.

The unwavering Protestant belief concerning the sinful nature of drunkenness, as found in Ephesians 5:18\*, created immediate friction between early evangelical workers and the Catholic populace. As noted in the last section, the syncretism between animism and Catholicism created a tradition of religious fiestas, which incorporated unbridled animistic excess with the celebration of saints. Even today, fiesta inebriation is not only allowed, it is actually encouraged. Eugene Nida explains the Catholic Church's stance towards the morality of inebriation and particularly its presence at religious fiestas: " But in the indigenous and Roman Catholic systems, the greatest sins have often been regarded as failure to carry out the required ritual [religious fiesta]...Drinking of alcoholic beverages is no sin at all; in fact, drunkenness figures as an important element in the ecstatic character of many religious fiestas. By getting drunk one does honor to the saint " (116).

Burned into my mind is the vivid image of the bowlfuls of chicha (strong corn

\*Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the [Holy] Spirit" (NIV).

liquor) being passed from person to person during the religious Christo-pagan fiesta held in our town square. What cuts through the heart to the conscience is knowing that the large gray cups of clear liquid were passed to even the smallest of children. In the United States we talk about responsible inebriation with a fanatical conviction that the freedom to senselessly harm oneself be the privilege of adults only. Here in Ecuador, however, is it possible to look with cold indifference when little ones are thrust into the pain of hangovers and initiated into chemical bondage?

Considering the volumes of research that unequivocally assert the power of alcohol addiction, an argument positing the tendency of frequent intoxication as being a precursor to a captivating compulsion is unnecessary. By cultivating a widespread dependency, the Catholic Church continues to inadvertently strengthen a barrier between evangelicals and nominal catholics. Living within a culture of religiously acceptable chemical dependency, initiated at childhood, it is little wonder that evangelicals have their work cut out for them when presenting a message of willful sobriety to the people of Ecuador.

Of the opposition pitted against the incursion of protestant missions, nothing posed a more immediate threat than did catholic antagonism. It was understood that for an evangelical to take the message of Jesus Christ into Ecuador, he or she would do so at a risk to personal well-being. During the first half of the twentieth century a consistent stream of persecution was volleyed against protestant missionaries by catholic churches. Although the use of pogroms by catholic leaders was never a public policy of the Vatican, it was viewed from the top down as a necessary means to quash a potential threat to both Church and country. As I have mentioned before, the Catholic Church had traditionally enjoyed the prerogative of serving as benefiting mediator between the

Euro-Spanish bourgeois and the indigenous proletariat. Both ends were working toward the middle as affluent hacienda owners provided financial support to the Catholic Church, understanding that the Church would, in turn, help pacify the droves of poorly paid workers by appealing to their weakness for superstition. The peasantry in return valued the Church as spiritual protector, regarding it as the holder of the community rabbit's foot. It is logical then that the evangelical imperative, which sought to stress the importance of a relationship with Jesus, as directed by the Word of God rather than the dictates of the Catholic Church, would experience clerical resistance.

It was not uncommon for early missionaries to become the target of clerical ultimatums, with the intention of motivating the people into violent action, as Maust shares in his account of Protestant persecution in the small mountain village of El Troje: "The priest in Columbe issued his El Troje parishioners an ultimatum: 'There will be no more administration of the sacraments as long as the evangelicals are permitted to stay'" (64). This was no trifling threat as it meant the cessation of all weddings, funerals and most importantly infant baptisms, which were believed to be the source of individual salvation [eternal life after death] (Maust 65).

The stoning of missionaries, destruction of property, and an inability to purchase supplies from local merchants were just a few of the pressure tactics spawned by various priestly directives throughout the country. At times the use of slander was employed to ridiculous degrees, with the intention of preying upon a community's proclivity for superstition. "The local priest had spread the warning that the evangelical baptisms would destroy the lake's fish and plant life. The evangelical heretics had polluted the water, he said. Since so many local Quichuas [indigenous peoples] depended on the lake reeds for

animal feed and for making mats, the reports upset them and they scorned the young converts" (Maust 54).

As cruel as the persecution directed against evangelical missionaries could at times be, the tactics of hate imposed on any native Ecuadorian who decided to convert proved to be absolutely fierce. The mere threat of excommunication, ostracism and or physical brutality was typically sufficient to halt many inroads that missionaries might make. As it stood, unless an initial group of native Ecuadorians were willing to endure the storm of ecclesiastically engineered persecution, Evangelicalism would forever be perceived as a fanaticism of foreigners.

Today the tension between Catholicism and Evangelicalism has been greatly mitigated, but antagonism continues to ebb and flow as new footholds are gained and lost by the other. According to Kenneth MacHarg, recent legislation has opened fresh wounds of contention, despite the rise in ecumenical cooperation. A controversial law introduced by the Roman Catholic Church, makes Catholic religious training mandatory in public schools. Embittered protestant groups view this new law as an attempt by the Catholic Church to buttress its waning political power within the country (73). By means of curriculum-based indoctrination, the next generation of church goers/voters, will be taught to value and capitulate to Ecuador's historical power broker, the Catholic Church.

Even with these occasional spikes in friction, the nature of conflict between these two spiritual institutions has moved away from bellicose entrenchment to an acceptance of ideological disagreement. Reichert concisely sums up the history of the conflict between Catholicism and Evangelicalism in Ecuador, "The battle with Rome was real but it is not where the war is today" (218).

The current opposition to the evangelical movement is a synthesis of factors including, the Christian-Pagan syncretism and alcohol addiction discussed earlier, as well as, the more recent developments of Secular Humanism. Secular Humanism is the predominant worldview of academia that denies the existence of a supernatural Creator and the need for moral absolutes. Humanist author Corliss Lamont asserts that, "There is no place in the Humanist worldview for either immorality or God in the valid meaning of those terms. Humanism contends that instead of the gods creating the cosmos, the cosmos, in the individualized form of human beings giving rein to their imagination, created the gods"(145). Humanist leader Arthur E. Briggs further delineates humanist doctrine as it pertains to the primacy of mankind by adding that, "A Humanist is one who believes in man as the center of the universe" (53).

With these foundational humanist dogmas in mind, it is understandable that those who actively promote the idea of a relative morality, as constructed and validated by the individual, would be antagonistic to any religious groups endorsing an absolute value system applicable to all. The evangelical believer reasons that since there exists a Divine Cause that perpetuated all living things, His commandments are to be heeded by all things living. The humanist on the other hand, sees humankind as a sufficient magistrate of self-governance, and views any incursion upon that utter autonomy as a usurping of human prerogative.

In Ecuador, this variance of opinion led to humanist attacks upon evangelical efforts. John Maust writes that, "'Change' is a dirty word for many anthropologists and sociologists. They often accuse Western missionaries of destroying or 'changing' indigenous cultures. Meanwhile, they ignore that missionaries, through reducing a tribal group's language to writing and translating Scripture, do more to preserve a culture than

any anthropologist might hope to accomplish" (107). Invalid accusations notwithstanding, foreign pressure from humanistic elements has at times proved effective, as evidenced by the recent expulsion of the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Entering the country in 1953, at the invitation of then President Galo Plaza Lasso, the Summer Institute of Linguistics set up camp deep in the heart of the Amazon jungle. During its thirty-five years of existence in Ecuador, this evangelical missions group successfully established community development and educational programs for the jungle indigenous people. For its years of service SIL received numerous commendations from the Ecuadorian government, including the Decoration for Educational Merit by the Ministry of Education. One would have thought that the future of such a socially beneficial ministry would have been easily assured. In the spring of 1982, however, President Jamie Roldos, signed a decree that canceled the contract the SIL had to operate within Ecuador. The SIL was given ten years to complete a total evacuation from the country. How did an organization like the SIL, which provided countless opportunities to the disadvantaged at little or no governmental cost, become the target of forced expulsion?

Employing up to fifty North Americans workers at their Limoncocha base in the Amazon jungle, the SIL had been a high profile mission organization for a number of years (Reichert 161). Reichert contends that the SIL's mission base at Limoncocha was a prime target to those who valued the idea of unobstructed primitivism at any cost. "They had planes and landing strips, hospitals, and doctors, a school for their children staffed by their people, telephone and electrical systems, computers and high-tech radios...It was natural that this 'gringo' city in the jungle could become the target of a government facing political and nationalistic pressure to preserve its jungle from all comers" (161).

Much of the opposition lobbied against the SIL was brought by those opponents who disagreed with the evangelical goal of bringing a message of transformation to the uninformed.

Humanistic pressure groups as well as “consciousness raising” individuals like naturalist filmmaker Erwin Patzelt, saw their opportunity to intensify opposition to evangelical efforts during the Jungle Indian Relocation Program of 1968. The possibility of rich oil deposits existing within Ecuador’s Amazon, created an interest among government developers to begin exploring the jungle regions, regions that were home to the isolated Huaorani tribe.

Having entered the area more than a decade before any other “civilized” presence, the SIL missionaries had already built an uncommon level of understanding with the indigenous people groups whom they served. As the only bridge between the primitive Huaorani and government officials, the missionaries found themselves in the position of indigenous advocate by way of default. Reichert shares that as the encroachment of exploration teams increased, the hostility of the Huaorani toward oil thirsty outsiders increased in turn. “ A desperate effort to avoid a military solution to the problem prompted the SIL personnel to do everything possible to convince the Huaorani to relocate in the region of Tihueno where they would be out of the path of the oil onslaught” (163).

Their effort to avoid bloodshed began a different sort of onslaught against the SIL. Criticism arose from a variety of sources but none more clamorous than that of humanistic anthropologists. Labeled as cultural oppressors and touted as imperialists, the missionaries were vilified as being responsible for the imprisonment of indigenous people within reserves. Accusations that persisted throughout the decade-long relocation



process were the cry of a vocal minority, at least initially. Humanist forces opposed to evangelical ideology skillfully employed several forms of slander against the SIL, including its presumed alliance with oil companies, its pillaging of native culture, and its harmful ecological tampering. Regardless of the absence of objective evidence in these indictments, the rhetoric of a largely anthropological voice effectively mobilized the intelligentsia in Ecuador to begin pressuring the government towards the eviction of the SIL. It didn't happen overnight, but with an undying persistence and aided by the process of attrition, the outcry eventually proved sufficient to move the hand of government. The SIL found itself no longer welcome in Ecuador.

Even among evangelical circles, a debate exists concerning the decision of the SIL to intervene. Some conclude that the mission had overstepped its boundaries by involving itself in matters reserved for the courts and parliament. In the long run, could more good have been accomplished by the mission had it chosen to tread lightly and deny its antagonists the material for its exile? In retrospect, however, it is difficult to gauge whether or not the actions of the SIL did in fact prevent a bloody native uprising. If an uprising had taken place, as conditions seem to indicate, and a military solution had been reached, the primitive Houaroni warriors would have undoubtedly been on the losing end.

Historically, a lopsided struggle between humanists, who tend to volley blows from a relatively distant position, and the missionaries on the receiving end, who have for decades lived with the indigenous people of Ecuador, has been the norm. For this reason I have included in Appendix A two excerpts from interviews with indigenous individuals, who speak to the romantic view of tribal life so often painted by journalists in newsrooms many countries away.

To this point, our focus of evangelical obstacles has been upon those unfavorable factors that exist outside the movement. The perception, however, that all deterrents to evangelical growth in Ecuador have been of external origin would be an inaccurate assumption. Like all movements peopled by imperfect humans, individuals or groups of individuals within the evangelical ranks have at times acted in ways inconsistent with the goals of their ideology. Typical criticism of evangelical efforts in Ecuador, tend to center around the irresponsible stewardship of supporting funds and the overshadowing of native-born converts by foreign missionaries.

Like the Hippocratic oath that all doctors pledge, an underlying platitude of evangelical missions is the desire to in no way harm those who are to be reached by mission efforts. World Vision, a social relief organization with evangelical leanings, compromised that credo in the 1970's. This high profile para-church ministry sought to raise social consciousness in the West to the struggles of the poor in Ecuador. This they did with impressive efficacy. By profusely pumping hundreds of thousands of dollars into impoverished regions, World Vision created an immediate stirring within communities, not all of which was beneficial.

World Vision's efforts in the long run, created a beggar's mentality, which only added to the economic woes of Ecuador. Helping people without creating a debilitating dependency is the tight rope that all mission organizations must walk, one that requires great planning as to how funds should be usefully distributed. A few evangelical development organizations, like World Vision, had not taken the necessary time to form an adequate helping strategy specific to the situation in Ecuador. Long-term handout programs of this type tended to create a welfare spirit among the poor, who found it easier to rely on foreign charity rather than strive for self-sufficiency.

Organizations like World Vision made “easy money” readily accessible to communities, often at a cost of greater disunity and strife as author David Stoll comments:

World Vision was a perfect example of a wealthy North American agency trying to buy the loyalty of the poor. Since accounting was not a highly developed skill in Andean villages, moreover, this kind of generosity was likely to leave many a quarrel in its wake. In Ecuador, just a few years after World Vision’s arrival in the late 1970s, it was accused of setting off or worsening conflicts in more than a dozen communities. Intimations of the same seemed to be cropping up in dozens more. The good part about World Vision, a man from a place called Yantzaputan told me, was that it gave poor people money. The bad part, he claimed, was that the fighting over the money was breaking up his community. (267)

It appears unlikely that it was World Vision’s intention to incite discord, and as an approach to helping it represents the exception rather than the rule, but the accusations of it having botched good intentions appear valid. Stoll grants that it is for this reason that today World Vision has been expelled from many regions in Ecuador, by the will of government officials and the support of both catholic and evangelical church leaders (Stoll 297). The well-financed organization seemed to do more damage than good, especially when seen as the most visible evangelical mission functioning in Ecuador. For a period of time, in the late 70’s and early 80’s, a general skepticism threatened to darken the image of valid evangelical helping efforts.

Although not as scandalous as the imprudent funding by para-church organizations such as World Vision, the perceived hegemony of established missions, has

also hindered the increase of Evangelicalism. Ironically, the same presence of plentiful foreign missionaries in Ecuador, that helped to initially plant the seed of Evangelicalism, appears to be that which in later years has slowed its growth. Interviews with Latin American missionaries led missionary journalist Kenneth MacHarg to offer the glut of missionaries in Ecuador as a possible factor in the slow development of the Evangelical Church. MacHarg included an excerpt from one such interview in his book:

‘There are too many missionaries in Ecuador,’ said Americo Saaverda, a Peruvian pastor working with an Ecuadorian-based Christian education program. ‘In Peru, when we had many missionaries, the church did not grow. But when they left, the church up and down the rivers took responsibility for its own program and outreach and the church began to increase.’ (qtd. in MacHarg 72)

The presence of a large body of missionaries has the potential to communicate to Ecuadorians that evangelical Christianity is a foreign religion meant only for gringos (MacHarg 73). According to Operation World’s website there are 924 missionaries in Ecuador as opposed to the 1,116 in 1993 (“The Republic of Ecuador”). With this statistic in mind, it appears that the threat of Evangelicalism being stigmatized, as the sole domain of imported curs, is one that continues to lessen with the increasing trend of foreign missionary pullout.

Besides the intimidation created by an abundance of foreign missionaries living in Ecuador, the paternalistic relationship between foreign missions and the indigenous, adolescent churches that they have established, has at times been perceived as a domination. For more than a century Evangelicalism was brought to and established within Ecuador by exclusively foreign parties. The relinquishing of the control of

national churches to indigenous converts, by these original missions, has been a gradual process. In the opinion of some, this transfer has been too gradual in fact. Scattered resentment can be found among those indigenous evangelicals who see the disinclination of mission organizations to fade out quickly as an offense to their competency for leadership. The dilemma for evangelical mission leaders, who established the churches among indigenous peoples, is to decide when it is appropriate to give relatively new Christians the responsibility of "shepherding the flock". Reichert notes that though most evangelical denominations have handled the transition of authority from foreign born mission leaders to native Ecuadorian pastors rather smoothly, there are those few that have experienced criticism and a modest amount of dissention (204).

Despite the formidable challenges of a muddying of Christian doctrine by Christian-pagan syncretism, the indifference of widespread alcoholism, the detractions of both Catholicism and Humanism, and the blunders of leaders within the movement, the Evangelical Church has nonetheless flourished within Ecuador. The question that emerges is, *why?* Why would an ideology that started as such a small seed and that unequivocally calls adherents to a radical, sometimes uncomfortable change in lifestyle, be so successful here? We now direct our attention toward this very question.

### **Factors of Evangelical Growth**

As with most large, multifaceted movements, isolating one main factor of growth is difficult. The evangelical movement in Ecuador is no different, in that it is also the creation of a combination of causes. A large contingency of missionaries, who

successfully created an initial church framework, favorable legislation, language sensitive outreach, a well organized approach to helping, and the release of church leadership to native-born Christians, are just a few of the most prominent catalysts of growth within Ecuadorian Evangelicalism.

Although missionaries had already been working in Ecuador for sixty years, an event on January 8, 1956 served to turn the eyes of the world toward evangelical Christian missions in a small country on the western coast of South America. On that fateful day, five missionaries were brutally massacred by an isolated indigenous tribe at the base of the Amazon. Throughout the previous century numerous missionaries had been martyred for their attempt to bring the message of Christ to un-reached people groups, but something about the death of Nate Saint, Pete Fleming, Jim Elliot, Ed McCully and Roger Youderian touched the evangelical community worldwide. Author Richard Reichert notes the effect a sacrifice such as this had upon missions work in Ecuador.

The singular most significant event of the first century of mission activity in Ecuador was the tragic death of five young missionaries at the hands of the Auca Indians. The event has triggered everything from sympathy to protest. It has inspired more interest in global advance, more prayer, and more giving than perhaps any other occurrence in church history... It has etched the country of Ecuador in the minds of evangelicals around the world... This one incident has done more for missionary recruitment in North America than any other single event or program. (143)

Many young people were ignited by the inspiring faith and commitment of the "jungle five", so much so, that they became determined to pick up the fallen torch and

bring the message of Jesus Christ to the un-reached. These new recruits were the hands and feet in the spiritual harvest field of Ecuador, establishing the churches, clinics and schools, which were to become venues for sharing the love of Christ. The blood of the five men primed a fountain of self-sacrificing zeal. Their desire to leave all behind in order to serve their creator and consequently strengthened Evangelicalism within Ecuador, became contagious.

What is it that made the death of these particular missionaries so inspiring? Could it have been the calculated risk that they took, their uncompromising passion to see other people saved from an existence lived in "spiritual darkness", the response of family and friends to their death, or was it a combination of all of these factors?

Their effort to reach the isolated Auca Indians was not the jungle trampling of some inept, fly by night mission, but rather the product of meticulous planning and research (Reichert 150). Over a period of time, the men had patiently developed relationships with a handful of tribal people. These five missionaries were familiar with the terrain, language and aboriginal understandings of the people (Reichert 146). Very little research would have been necessary, however, to make one aware that the Auca tribe had a history of hostility towards outsiders.

Richard Reichert shares in his book two documented accounts of approaching missionary groups that were nearly speared by Acuas in years prior to the massacre (146&154). Fully aware of the imminent danger and likelihood of bodily harm, these five men chose to stare down peril and enter the jungle, not because they were detached from sanity, but rather because of their willingness to risk life so that others may know the one they considered to be the savior of humanity. This fearless obedience to Christ's command to, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (New

International Version, Mark 16:15 & Matt. 28:18), impressed both Christians and non-Christians.

In a world where many people hold to their convictions so long as they are convenient, these five men inspired others by evidencing a boldness that transcended personal comfort. Throughout history we can observe the effect that committed self-sacrifice has had upon budding ideologies. Whether examining Washington's blooded and ragged troops on the banks of the Delaware, Gandhi's masses of emaciated non-combatants or a group of missionaries willing to face certain death, we tend to admire the passion of sincere conviction and, at times, desire to emulate it.

What fueled the outreach effort of the "jungle five" was an unremitting belief in the necessity of just such an attempt. Without journeying too far down the path of theology, we will examine the evangelical convictions that the jungle martyrs held as a source of their motivation.

Committed evangelicals, such as these five men, believe that the message of Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection is pertinent to all people, because all humans essentially find themselves in the same predicament. The wealthy stockbroker in New York struggles with the same apprehension of having lived a purposeless existence and wrestles with the same imprisonment to the fear of death that the jungle tribesman does. The former, however, will be more inclined than his jungle cousin, to attribute his discontent to an unrealized earning potential or a frustration with the languid pace that modern medicine is making toward a wishful immortality. Nonetheless, sincere evangelicals, who have experienced the freedom from regret's bonds and death's shrieks that a relationship with Jesus Christ affords, are convinced that all should have the same opportunity to respond to Christ's invitation to new life in Him.



Christianity, which traces its roots back to the Israelite people of antiquity, is, from its foundations, an exclusive faith system. Christ discarded the pantheistic system of his day by stating, "I am the way the Truth and the Life, no one comes to the Father except through me" (New International Version, John 14:6.). Evangelicals believe that in the marketplace of religions all ideologies were not created equal. They point to the doctrinal divergence between existing religions and the uniqueness of a (Christian) God who was actually willing to experiencing death for humankind, in order to ransom it from rebellious self-destruction, as evidence of its distinction. Evangelicals hold that since truth by definition is exclusive, than it is reasonable to assume that contradicting faith claims cannot be held in tandem. Either the assertions of Christianity, in the person of Christ, are God's message of redemption to humanity, or truth is actually found within the worship of nature that tribal animism (one can plug in any other competing faith system with equal effect) offers or God does not exist. To say that opposing options of belief can be equally valid is unreasonable. A choice inevitably emerges, and a dichotomy between what one concludes to be valid and fictional is inevitably assigned to the various faith claims.

Not surprisingly, evangelicals hold that the message of the New Testament is not only God's communication to humankind, but also our only hope and escape from an eternal separation from God. It is believed that this separation is wrought by our volitional misdeeds of conscience and that God, being both loving and just, allows us to have what we choose by our own free will. The choice to deny a relationship with God here on earth is that rejection of God's mercy that will carry into eternity, an eternity of hellacious regret for opportunities squandered. If this is in fact so, as evangelicals

understand it to be, then the most loving thing one can do is to share this message of forgiveness with others.

Now if you are the type that believes that life on earth is all we have -the brief dash between two dates on a gravestone- then this type of Biblical thinking will conflict with your reasoning. It is clear however, that missionaries such as Nate Saint viewed the work they were about to embark upon through an eternal perspective:

As we have a high old time this Christmas, may we who know Christ hear the cry of the damned as they hurdle headlong into a Christless night... May we be moved with compassion as our Lord was. May we shed tears of repentance for those we have failed to bring out of darkness. Beyond the smiling scenes of Bethlehem may we see the crushing agony of Golgotha [the site of Christ's crucifixion]. May God give us a new vision of His will concerning the lost and our responsibility. (Reichert 145)

After reviewing other writings by Saint, it does not appear that he intending his comments to be condescending or suggestive of any Acua Indian inferiority. Rather his statements are the evidence of a burning passion to reach this people group. A people, he believed, who knew just enough of God's will to leave them without the excuse of ignorance on judgment day (Romans 1:20\*), but were not yet familiar with the length that God was willing to go in providing for them a costly pardon, namely in the sacrificial life of Jesus Christ.

The world of the 1950's and 60's sympathized with the families of the slain missionaries, but it was the response of those surviving family members that amazed

\* "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities-his eternal power and divine nature-have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse" (NIV).

onlookers. Shortly after the massacre, two of the wives and one of the sisters of the fallen missionaries decided to move into the jungle and continue to share the love of Christ with the very same people who had killed their loved ones. Needless to say, the news of this extreme example of forgiveness and commitment spread like wildfire throughout Christendom, inspiring and encouraging others to likewise respond to the call of global missions. Of those who responded, a significant number were instrumental in the strengthening of Evangelicalism in Ecuador.

Reichert offers a concluding insight that attempts to put into perspective the impact that a few faithful “nobodies” can have on the course of human history:

The unselfish sacrifice of these five men, their wives and their families, resulted in a tidal wave response to the call to missionary service. The numbers of disciples who have come to know and follow Jesus Christ through the obedience of Christians to the Great Commission as a result of the impact of this singular event on twentieth century Christendom could never hope to be counted. (157)

About a decade or so after the missionary massacre, another stimulus was added to the growing evangelical movement, this time from a secular institution. In 1964, an agrarian reform law was enacted at the dictate of Ecuador’s then ruling military regime. According to John Maust, the intention of the reform was “to break up the big haciendas and give Indians the privilege of buying land for themselves. The law eliminated the system in which Quichuas [agriculturally based indigenous] worked for free on the haciendas in exchange for a tiny family plot for subsistence farming” (82).

Anthropologist William Reyburn asserts that, prior to 1964, rural Ecuadorians were at the mercy of rich hacienda owners, almost all of who were conservative Roman

Catholics. Dependent on their domineering employers, Quichuan farm laborers did not dare stray from the wishes or beliefs of those who could jail or starve their families at moments notice (Maust 83). This coercive influence established the economic, as well as the religious, lifestyles of rural Ecuador.

The land reform of 1964<sup>64</sup> meant more to the subservient individual than merely the freedom to buy a plot of mountain farmland. With the dawning of new land reconstruction, the oppressed laborer could now have a hand in determining his destiny. No longer was he forced to complacently accept the status quo, as imposed by the white collar from above. Issues of economy as well as faith could be directed by the inclinations of conscience. As Christian anthropologist Ruben Paredes notes, "The Quichuas were now able to hear the Gospel with fewer obstacles and choose to accept if they wanted to"(qtd. in Maust 83), and choose, many did, as evangelical growth trends tended to be the highest in these rural areas.

Favorable legislation adds another piece to the explanation behind the evangelical expansion in Ecuador. There still remain, however, a number of contributing elements to consider, all of which owe their success to astute mission methodology.

According to statistics put forth by Operation World's website, forty percent of Ecuador's population consists of indigenous people whose first language is not Spanish ("The Republic of Ecuador"). Of this native population, most speak some form of Quichua, the descended tongue of the ancient Incas. Understanding the importance of making the Gospel message applicable, evangelical missionaries embarked upon the laborious task of mastering native dialects soon after their arrival in the early twentieth century. This willingness to adapt was a departure from the practice of the Catholic Church to exclusively use European Spanish or Latin in church services.

This unconventional approach of communicating the message of Christ through the language of the people eventually produced great fruit, particularly when it led to the creation of a Quichuan New Testament (MacHarg 66). Author Richard Reichert comments on the impact that having the New Testament translated into Quichua had upon the furthering of evangelicalism, "It would be difficult to conjugate all the factors that converged to melt the hearts of the Chimborazo Quichuas in such a massive way. Certainly the completed translation stands high on the list. The first believers were baptized 5 years after their own translation appeared in print, and 55 years after [evangelical] missionaries had come to them" (133).

With a belief that God's Word possessed all the power necessary to bring change to the human heart, evangelicals set about exploring other means of disseminating the story of Christ in the native tongue. Radio was the answer that emerged. In the early 1960's radio ministry HCJB began establishing radio stations among the high mountain Quichuas (Maust 72). Besides being a novelty to rural residents, evangelical radio programs gained an ear among those who would not normally listen because of the inherent appreciation that occurs when one's own language is accommodated for. Maust provides an example of the attraction of native radio programs in an experience had by career missionary Henry Klassen.

Henry Klassen heard a blaring noise one day. He looked outside to see a man, obviously drunk, carrying a radio. As Klassen listened more closely, he recognized gospel preaching and music from the Quichua radio station. Out of curiosity, the missionary decided to approach the man.

"Excuse me, may I ask you a question?"

“What do you want to know?” said the man, eyeing the foreigner suspiciously.

“I assume you are not an evangelical, so I am just wondering why you’re listening to the gospel on the radio.

“Because it speaks my language, that’s why,” the man retorted proceeding on his way (73).

It is human nature, at least in some degree, to assign regard to an ideology according to the fervency by which it is propagated. By making efforts to understand and appreciate the native dialects of Ecuador, evangelical missionaries not only gave people a comprehensible access to the message of new life in Jesus, but also showed that their commitment to the share that message was not transient.

The overall effort to spread the gospel was aided by the way in which the evangelical movement was initially structured. Unlike the Catholic Church that strained to maintain a large, antiquated infrastructure of parishes, convents, schools and hospitals, the evangelical effort epitomized streamlined specialization (Stoll 35). Reichert explains in his book how the large group of evangelicals, who came to Ecuador with such a variety of resources and experience, were able to achieve a homogeneity of purpose that has survived to this day. “The full family of evangelical missions in Ecuador is a large and diverse body of believers. The vast majority has worked side-by-side in mutual respect. In decades past they agreed to share the task of evangelizing Ecuador by identifying specific areas of responsibility” (183).

The 88 mission organizations that are listed on Operation World’s website for the country of Ecuador, attest to the diversity of the existing evangelical effort (“the Republic of Ecuador”). Funding for these different agencies hails from various parts of the globe,

allowing the general evangelical movement to rise above the typical budgeting woes that plague many monolithic entities. Unlike government help agencies that are often crippled by recession or bureaucracy, evangelical agencies operate unfettered by avoiding the elaborate channels that a requisition for government aid must pass through. Author David Stoll notes that evangelical agencies are able to provide immediate aid within days of a dire situation, when government agencies can take years to respond (297).

It isn't only the timely nature of the assistance, but also the quality of help provided by evangelical organizations, that has made such groups a valued part of the Ecuadorian community. Most evangelical missionaries who work in skilled professions, such as medicine, engineering, computers and linguistics tend to be trained better than their Catholic or governmental counterparts. Because many evangelical agencies working in Ecuador trace their beginnings back to Western roots, they tend to place a greater emphasis upon the education of employees. This priority continues to hold true even today when many agencies are manned by a substantial percentage of indigenous people. By encouraging labor specialization, these evangelical organizations have allowed for a greater accommodation of individual needs, than the "one size fits all" approach offered by others.

The consistency, rapidity and quality of Evangelical assistance efforts in Ecuador help to legitimize their presence in the minds of the people, while also creating a window of opportunity through which the message of Christ can be shared. Therein lies the difference between evangelical agencies and an organization like the Peace Corp. While the latter seeks to provide aid for the physical needs of the disenfranchised, the former strives to alleviate those same physical needs, as well as those needs considered to be

spiritual. Those who study the Bible will attest that Scripture mandates both forms of assistance.

It is interesting to note that the main thrust of the evangelical movement did not take place until Ecuadorian (or “national”) Christians were brought into a place of active leadership. Instead of tightly grasping the reins of church authority, the Western missionaries who founded the evangelical work in Ecuador; saw it as a priority to train up national Christians to take leadership of the movement. This proved to be wise planning indeed as the biographical writing of missionary expert Henry Klassen attests.

“As he thought back over his twenty-three years of in Ecuador Klassen could not single out one reason for the growth. Many factors had contributed, but one of he biggest was the policy of giving Quichua believers their own churches and encouraging them to develop their own leaders and worship style” (Maust 109).

I mentioned in the previous “Obstacles” section that for a minority of evangelical mission organizations, a hesitation in transferring leadership to native-born converts has been a point of friction. The majority of Ecuadorian believers, however were, and still are encouraged to take ownership in the ministries that represent the larger Evangelical Church.

It would be unfortunate to underestimate the unique approach of egalitarian management, as introduced through Latin American Evangelicalism. In a Third World country such as Ecuador, the prerogative of leadership in all walks of public life is possessed by the privileged few. An oligarchic reign controls economy and government, while the religion of the majority takes its orders from a distant Vatican. Within evangelical Christianity, the haves as well as the have-nots, who posses a belief in the



verity of the gospel, are given the opportunity to have a hand in leading others to a similar conviction. The message of Jesus Christ, which is no respecter of wealth or privilege, instructs all who believe to be faithful priests (1 Peter 2:9\*). By imparting to national converts the reins of leadership, evangelical missionaries are not only being obedient to the command of Scripture, but also adding to the legitimacy of Evangelicalism. Reichert notes that in the opinion of career missionaries, the evangelical congregations in which foreign workers have decided to leave, have not only grown, but have also become more fervent in outreach and effective in mentoring the backslider. This exodus of foreign missionaries has provided a greater understanding amid both converted and unconverted Ecuadorians, an understanding that the gospel message is not solely a product of the foreigner (137).

As I mentioned in the beginning of this section, a difficulty exists when trying to isolate a single factor of growth behind the budding evangelical movement. Multifaceted entities, such as this one, tend to be the outworking of various elements. However, I have yet to mention that component, which is for the believer essential and for the agnostic a contrivance.

Whether the history of this movement has evidenced an intervention of the supernatural is an issue of continual dispute. One could offer the numerous testimonies of Ecuadorians that have claimed a spiritual transformation or the obstacles to Evangelicalism that have been overcome, as proof of the extra mundane. I, however, view the debate as being centered on a question of presuppositions.

\* [referring to all who have put their faith in Jesus Christ] "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (NIV).

In your opinion, can the astounding intricacies of our universe be explained as the result of eons of random chance or are you of the view that an intelligent mind lies behind the complex design? Is the possibility of an existing God, one who would chose to communicate and work through the lives of individuals, within your perception of possibility or not? These are important questions to consider because the preexisting convictions that we bring to the table so often determine what we will or will not swallow. Substantial evidence of a supernatural force at work in Ecuadorian Evangelicalism exists. The question of credulity however, will be decided for the individual reviewer wherever human will and critical thinking intersect. With this said, we will move from the discussion of cause and look to the result of Evangelicalism within Ecuador.

### **Result of Evangelicalism**

Secular criticism of the evangelical movement in Ecuador has been relatively minor. With more than a hundred years of in-country ministry, the unwise use of funds by World Vision and the political maneuvering of the Summer Institute of Linguistics continue to be the only substantial exceptions to the tranquil waters of Evangelicalism. This lack of criticism is largely due to the tangible, pro-social results that have come to pass because of the movement. On a number of fronts Evangelicalism has provided support and direction for those issues that concern both believer and unbeliever. In one-way or another, the evangelical movement has influenced social issues such as alcohol addiction, poverty and ethnic discrimination.

As we have established in the previous “Obstacles” section, alcoholism is a rampant and widespread affliction in Ecuador. Evangelical mission efforts have made progress in turning the tide of devastating inebriation, especially in those rural regions where Evangelicalism has been able to lay down a strong root. The excerpts from Appendix A testify to the dramatic role the gospel has had in breaking the grip of alcohol’s clutches.

Commendations for the work done by evangelicals in helping others out of dependency has not only come from within Christendom as Reichert shares, “The effects of the evangelical witness were beginning to be felt. One non-mission observer told an Alliance missionary, ‘If you have done nothing else, I give you credit for this. At least you have stopped the drunkenness’” (136).

Alcoholism isn’t the only social need that has drawn the helping focus of evangelical mission groups. Numerous agencies have also sought to create job opportunities for disadvantaged Ecuadorians. Vocational schools created by evangelical interests continue to provide job training for a multitude of people. This desire to provide advanced job skills has manifested itself in various fields including, medicine, construction and the manufacturing of textiles to name just a few. For example, an organization that I am personally familiar with, IPEE (Evangelical Covenant Church of Ecuador), has effectively created a machinist training program for people living in the Manta\* area.

It is important to note that as a rule significant social progress, in Ecuador, does not tend to preempt first a spiritual transformation. As I have shared earlier, a complacency among many indigenous Ecuadorians exists toward their own bleak plight.

\*See Map in Appendix B

A learned helplessness has been cultivated during the centuries of oppression that will not be broken until something changes from within. According to evangelicals, that change occurs when the indigenous begin to personally accept the idea that their worth as individuals is solidified in a God that has considered them precious enough to die for them. As John Maust shares in an interview with Phil Westra, a director of agricultural development with the Luke society, spiritual transformation serves as a plow by which the seeds of social progress are allowed to grow. (Westra speaking)“One of the hardest barriers to cross is the spiritual one. Getting someone to accept a latrine, health or agricultural project is easy compared to a spiritual change. But once this spiritual change is made, other change may be less threatening. The advance of the gospel has prepared the way for the kind of work (social and development projects) you see now” (108). As spiritual transformation begins to engineer social progress, indigenous converts find themselves moving away from debilitating vice and toward an industriousness that allows prosperity.

Initial social development, however, did not advance without its share of detraction. When economic self-determination became more than an isolated phenomenon among a handful of impoverished communities, criticism from those antagonistic to the movement intensified. Typical accusations usually fingered evangelicals with the transgression of creating “rice bowl” converts, reaching those who only became evangelicals to line their pockets with charity. Stoll claims that invectives of this sort often found their origin in those non-evangelical organizations that were sputtering in their attempts to match the results put forth but their gospel spreading colleagues (Stoll 298). Could the denunciations be merely the result of sour grapes eaten

by those frustrated with ineffectiveness? Maybe so, but in either case Reichert offers what appears to be an apt answer to the accusations of these individuals.

There is a simple answer to the accusation that [Ecuadorian] evangelicals were paid by the missionaries to become Protestants. The fact that many evangelicals appear to be better off economically after their conversion is used as evidence that they must be receiving something on the side. The answer is simpler: What they used to spend on prostitution, gambling and drinking, they now use to look after the basic needs of themselves and their families. (212)

For many years the indigenous people of Ecuador had resigned themselves to a life of desperate servility and oppression. With a concept of self worth afforded by the gospel message and the possibility of rising beyond one's own inherited destiny, many indigenous people began to expect the same rights deserved by all humans. Their movement toward a lifestyle of confidence and self-respect was eventually noticed by their oppressors. Missionary Henry Klassen had a conversation in the mid-1970's that illustrates this adjustment in perception. "An Ecuadorian military officer commented to Henry Klassen, 'We used to treat the Indians like animals. But now you evangelicals have made something out of them. We have to start treating them like people'" (Maust 107).

After their conversion, early indigenous evangelicals became more organized and thus more capable of forming a passionate, cohesive body from which to lobby for indigenous rights. Even the cynical, non-Christian David Stoll concedes that if all other positive results prove illusory, as they likely will, the evangelical movement has successfully encouraged the forming of indigenous organizations in Latin America. Such

organizations can and have been mobilized to put increasing pressure upon the ruling elites to concede basic equality (330).

Even the most stalwart secularist would be hard pressed not to admit that from a merely social advancement viewpoint, Evangelicalism had been a "God-send" to Ecuador's large indigenous population. According to Reichert, the freedom from debilitating intoxication, the promotion of woman's rights within a traditionally misogynistic culture and a bettering of individual self-image, are all indirect gains for the indigenous people of Ecuador (138). Apparently what started as a tiny mustard seed of Evangelical faith has grown into a formidable plant with many beneficial branches.

### **Conclusion**

It has been a pleasure as well as privilege to be in Ecuador during the writing of this paper and have an opportunity to personally experience the culture. The remarkable beauty of this country is exceeded only by the endearing warmth of its people. Like most countries, Ecuador is a nation with a complex and intriguing past. The rise and decline of religious systems, such as animism and Catholicism, have had a significant role in the writing of national history. With its unique approach to ministry and unwavering focus on the transforming power of Jesus Christ, Evangelicalism currently stands to be a guiding hand in the future of Ecuador. Whether or not you conclude that a divine presence has aided the expansion of Evangelicalism, what is irrefutable is that the Evangelical movement has been and continues to be an important influence in shaping the cultural landscape of Ecuador.

# Appendix A

1. During a conversation between indigenous Quichua leader Basilio Malan and missionary Roberta Hostetter, author John Maust was able to gain insight into the condition of the Quichua people before the Evangelical spirit had found its home within their hearts. Maust also shares the effect that the life-transforming message of discipleship in Jesus Christ had upon the Quichua (Ecuador's largest indigenous people group):

“The evangelicals are destroying the Indians’ culture,” intellectuals said in their attacks on missionaries.

“But that’s foolish,” Basilio told Roberta. “We have kept our typical music, customs and our language.” Nearly 450 years of Spanish rule had not eliminated Quichua culture, so how could the critics assume that the missionaries had done that in only a few years?

No the missionaries had not changed the Quichuas’ culture, Basilio felt. God had changed the Quichuas, on the inside, in their hearts. As a result, many negative aspects of their culture had withered away.

Less than twenty years earlier, drunken Quichuas filled the mestizos’ saloons and littered the highways. How many thousands of Quichua fathers used to wake up with their heads pounding and their money spent or stolen? What Quichua man, in his rage and drunkenness, had not beaten his wife and children only to hate himself for it later? How many Quichuas had gotten cut and bruised in the wild brawls?

Now that Quichua Christians were not spending all of their money on *chicha*, they provided better for their families. Believers were able to afford cement-block homes, rather than the mud-walled ones.

Seeing these changes, onlookers mistakenly scoffed, “ Oh, you people are becoming evangelicals so you can get rich.”

Basilio remembered the inauguration ceremony for a new school in San Antonio. An official from the Ministry of Education reminded his Quichua listeners- nearly all of them evangelicals- of how they previously had lived in mud huts and traveled dirt roads.

“Now, look at you,” he said. “You have good houses and good roads. You’ve got better food and health than you ever had before. Just look what education has done for you.”

An elderly man could not contain himself. “Education nothing,” he objected. “ It’s the gospel that did this. The gospel came in here and changed our lives.” (Maust 116)

2. The president of the Secoya-Siona indigenous organization, Elias Piaguaje Payaguaje, expressed the gratitude of his people for the help received this way:

‘The situation of the Secoya-Siona people back then was like this. We were sick with parasites, exploited by the businessmen of that time for the work they could get out of us, hunting for animals, fishing, or as transporters for their cargo. We lived in our own culture, partying for four days at a time with yuca alcohol. In a drunken state we used to fight among ourselves, we were illiterate, in our own rituals, we were poor economically, because we did not know about money, and we only spoke



one language. In the midst of this awful desperate situation the Summer Institute of Linguists came along in 1954... first they learned the language, which cost them ten years of study. They built an airstrip, which gave the Secoya-Siona people health services. After five years they had not been able to achieve their goals. During those five years they did not collect a single cent for their medicine because the people did not understand the value of money” (Reichert 172)

# Appendix B



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