

A Study of Evangelical Mega-Churches in Central America, 2011-2015. An Initial Analysis.

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The PROLADES Evangelical Mega-Church study is, at this time, only in its initial stages. Research so far has been mainly based in Costa Rica, Guatemala and El Salvador, and whilst looking to expand the project in terms of staff and resources, the focus has been on gathering descriptive profiles of known mega-churches. The project has a working definition of a “mega-church” and some claims about mega-churches in Central America that it aims to test.

The project is using the definition from Scott Thumma’s work on mega-churches in the USA, at Hartford Institute for Religion Research. Thumma states:

The term “mega-church” generally refers to any Protestant congregation with a sustained average weekly attendance of 2,000 persons or more in its worship services (2007).

There are and have been large Roman Catholic congregations in Central America for some time. Thumma notes that if solely using the attendance figures as a guide, these Churches would meet the criteria for a mega-church. However, he argues that Roman Catholic Churches do not have the same characteristics as similar size Protestant Churches. For example, most do not have strong charismatic senior ministers, contemporary worship with sound system and projection, a range of programs and ministries, and a robust congregational identity (Thumma, 2007). Thus a comparative study would be difficult, and for these reasons we are only choosing to look at Protestant mega-churches. On the other hand, the PROLADES team would be interested in looking at the comparative aspects between Protestant mega-churches and Roman Catholic Charismatic Renewal Churches, at some point in the future.

There has been little scholarly research and writing done on the Protestant mega-church phenomenon in Central America, with an early article being from 1994, *Fundamentalism and the Church in Central America*, by Amzie Yoder. It is from this article that some statements about mega-churches in this region were made, and are thus being tested by this project.

Claim 1: Evangelical mega-churches are conservative, theologically, socially and politically.

Yoder notes that most Central American Evangelicals read the scriptures with an objective, fundamentalist tendency, while ignoring historical and literary criticism. Furthermore, they view the Old and the New Testament as equally inerrant, and often do not factor the separate nature of each scripture. He argues that this may be because

Evangelical Christians in Central America have often been a rejected or persecuted religious minority (Yoder, 1994, 47). This has been observed since the early 1960s and Evangelicals refer to Biblical authority as an explanation for their 'aggressive evangelization' of all who are not part of their specific religious movement (Yoder, 1994, 48).

Claim 2: Evangelical mega-churches in Central America are predominantly Pentecostal, Charismatic or Neo-Pentecostal.

Claim 3: Evangelical mega-churches have a strong tendency toward sectarian exclusiveness that promotes dogmatism and fanaticism.

Yoder observes that Central America has hundreds of different denominations all working in a competitive and individual manner, mostly as a result of doctrinal controversies. Each Church lays claim to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and issues of control and power among leaders have led to painful Church splits (Yoder, 1994, 48).

Claim 4: Evangelical mega-churches have leadership structures that are very hierarchical and authoritarian.

Hierarchical leadership structures are based on a literal interpretation of the Bible (Yoder, 1994, 48). Church leaders with the most charisma, marketing skill and crowd management capabilities are the most successful at maintaining leadership. Furthermore, while they may be a professional in a secular field, most have very limited formal theological training. The incomes of these pastors are to everyone's envy and perpetuate inequality (Yoder, 1994, 48-9).

Claim 5: Evangelical mega-churches are predominantly composed of members with little education and who are at lower socio-economic levels of society.

The majority of members have little education and see Church as their best hope to counteract their socio-economic status (Yoder, 1994, 48).

Claim 6: Evangelical mega-churches preach and teach the prosperity gospel, of health, wealth and happiness that promote capitalism and the free enterprise system.

Yoder argues that these Churches focus on teaching that God will financially bless those who faithfully give their tithes and offerings (1994, 48). The gospel of prosperity is an important element to justify affluent lifestyles related to the public and political world. Wealth is perceived as proof of God's approval and poverty as evidence of spiritual failure (Yoder, 1994, 49).

Claim 7: Evangelical mega-churches support right-wing political parties and government.

These churches have a tendency towards a conscious alignment with political systems in order to promote the Church's religious goals and agendas. Evangelicals aspire for political party roles and several evangelicals have gained office (Yoder, 1994, 49).

It should be noted that the Yoder article is thin on references and outside sources. He gives no evidence for his claims, with no reference to specific Churches or countries in Central America. In addition this article is over fifteen years old. I will continue to look at other more recent scholarly work surrounding the Evangelical mega-churches in Central America, to determine if the research that has been completed since, corresponds with these claims.

A more recent article (2009) on mega-church efforts in international development, highlights how United States Churches are 'awakening to the importance of tackling poverty and social issues, even as they continue to focus on evangelism' (Gramby-Sobukwe/Hoiland, 2009, 104). There is a new emphasis on the Church members engaging in hands-on ministry as opposed to funding more professional development agencies. This has been a part of the shifting nature of Christian missions, including an increasing awareness of the evangelical community's engagement with society beyond evangelism (Gramby-Sobukwe/Hoiland, 2009, 104-5). This article presents another key theme that may be tested when studying mega-churches in Central America. Are these communities, in a similar way to those in the United States, becoming more mobilised on issue of social justice?

I will use the observations of Dr. Clifton Holland from his research, and other field work carried out elsewhere in Central America, to test these claims. This work is only supposed to create initial analytical conclusions. Follow up visits to the Churches in question, and over a sustained period of time will be necessary. In addition, the conclusions I make will come with limitations, and will only represent the small sample of Churches I am dealing with here. The conclusions should certainly be built upon or re-examined at a later date. I hope that this work will serve as a useful starting document for the wider project, and one that gives some sense of the current scholarly work surrounding this issue.

Protestant Mega-churches in Costa Rica

The PROLADES fieldwork on the San José Metro Area mega-churches will follow some research done by O. Segura Guzman on two local mega-churches. His thesis (2010) dealt with issues of assimilation into these Christian communities and how welcoming Churches are to new-comers. He compares two mega-churches, one Pentecostal and one non-Pentecostal, with a house Church and a Jehovah's Witness community. Although the thesis brings up some interesting issues about Church growth and desertion, which may be useful for this project, I will be limiting myself to looking at his first-hand research of the two mega-churches.

Vida Abundante, Coronado

The Vida Abundante is located in the suburbs of San José, originally founded in 1993 as a house Church, it is now a mega-church with a weekly attendance of 4,500, with 750 of these being children. The Church places an emphasis on family issues. The Vida Abundante in San José is a mother Church to four others in Costa Rica, one located in

Miami, and one in New York State. It is one of the few non-Pentecostal mega-churches in the country (Segura Guzman, 2010, 180).

The Church holds four services: Saturday, 7-9pm; Sunday, 8-10am, 10.30-12pm, 5-7pm. Segura Guzman notes that there are security measures in the car parks, and an elementary school which serves as a Christian education centre on weekends. The main sanctuary can seat 1,350 people. He notes that surrounding the entrance of the Church there were stands selling Christian books, Bibles, snacks and bags of groceries which could be purchased and given to the needy families in the area (Segura Guzman, 2010, 101). The Vida Abundante hold several conferences a year, which are weekend long and also focus on family issues. There are also weekly small groups and a newcomer orientation once every two months (Segura Guzman, 2010, 103).

The service is comprised of songs, video announcements and a sermon. Segura Guzman noted that the sound and lighting were minimal, although every service was transmitted live via the Church's website. Pastors and worship leaders were dressed casually and he notes 'like any other mega-church in the country it is mainly attended by middle and upper class people' (Segura Guzman, 2010, 102). He summarises that the main values of the congregation include, a 'Christ centred Church with an evangelical theology', and maintain a Christian leadership modelled on Jesus. Apart from these values, Segura Guzman notes that there is no defined doctrine or liturgy (2010, 105). The sermons usually centre on popular psychology and self-help (Segura Guzman, 2010, 119).

The senior pastor, main pastors and elders had not received any formal theological training. The leaders promote themselves as a Church with a leadership of humility rather than of financial corruption, which is their view of the other mega-churches in Costa Rica (Segura Guzman, 2010, 107-8).

Analysis: Vida Abundante, Coronado

In terms of the Vida Abundante being theologically and politically conservative (Claim 1), the fieldwork does not focus on political loyalty. Segura Guzman notes that there is no real traditional theological message; the values and content of the sermons that he notes are not particularly conservative.

Segura Guzman states that unlike the majority of mega-churches in Costa Rica, this Church is non-Pentecostal. Thus Vida Abundante does not support Claim 2, but his statement about other mega-churches in Costa Rica does. More research is needed to determine if Vida Abundante is the exception to the rule.

The field work suggests that Vida Abundante subscribes to sectarianism (Claim 3), Segura Guzman notes that, being an independent Church, they criticise other mega-churches of 'financial corruption'. However, concerning the claim that sectarianism leads to dogmatism, it is less convincing, as the writer goes to lengths to demonstrate that this Church has no official dogma. 'A good member would know more about self-help than

the scriptures' (Segura Guzman, 2010, 187), although this concept, over time could come to constitute a dogma in itself.

The account suggests that the leadership structure at Vida Abundante does function in similar ways to other mega-churches (Claim 4). Segura Guzman notes a hierarchy from the senior pastor, to main pastors, worship leaders and ordinary Church members. In correspondence with Yoder's claim, these leaders have little or no theological training. It is not clear from the fieldwork what standard of life the leaders of the community maintain, only that they preach a leadership of humility. This value follows that these leaders should not, therefore, have an extravagant income that promotes inequality.

Segura Guzman's work disproves Claim 5, by noting that 'like any other Church in the country' it is attended by middle and upper class people. This also suggest that the other mega-churches in Costa Rica will follow the same pattern.

Perhaps uncommonly, this mega-church does not teach the prosperity gospel as part of its founding values (Claim 6). However, Segura Guzman does not expand on the content of the sermons, which he notes is comprised of 'popular psychology and self-help'.

The only reference to the Church's role in social justice in the community was the bags of food sold for the poor in the neighbourhood. This suggests that the Church has some sense of the needs of their local community, but it is unclear how much this motivation affects day to day Church life.

Centro Evangelistico de Zapote

The Centro Evangelistico de Zapote was once an Assemblies of God Church, but in 2002 became independent. It was originally founded in 1985 and today it has a congregation of 6,800 people that regularly attend services. Service times: Sunday, 7.30am, 10am, 5pm; Tuesday, 7pm. As one enters the Church there is a small book store/ information centre, where one can buy CD copies of the sermons and teachings (Segura Guzman, 2010, 154). The Church leaders are two senior pastors and then associate pastors. There is an elementary school as part of the building, which on Sunday is used for Sunday School. The Sanctuary seats 1,800 in both pews and chairs, and Segura Guzman notes that the music and sound system were good quality (2010, 155). According to a pastor, this Church is mostly for high and middle-class people, with an emphasis on younger generations (2010, 169).

Each worship service begins with one of the pastors spending at least fifteen minutes urging the congregation to speak in tongues and 'claim their miracle'. Segura Guzman notes that in this particular service the pastor spoke in tongues, over loud music, with no interpretation (2010, 156). Meanwhile people come to the altar, where ushers are on hand with blankets in case someone is 'slain by the spirit' and fall into an 'immodest pose'. During this time the praise music from the band begins, and increasingly more people came to the altar. Segura Guzman viewed the pastor as 'pushing' rather than 'motivating' people to experience the spirit (2010, 157). The first forty minutes of the

service is comprised of this praise, then follows the sermon, and after this an altar calling for anyone who had accepted Christ into their lives. Names were taken and registered (Segura Guzman, 2010, 157-8).

The Tuesday service was reported to have more of a 'concert style', but again with a similar motivation to speak in tongues. The congregation, first women and then men took their offerings and tithes, and placed them on the floor of the altar. Segura Guzman noted that if one tithed, they were then due to receive a miracle (2010, 159). In addition to these services, every Monday-Friday at 6.30pm the Church had a paid television program that is broadcast in Costa Rica, this program is effectively an edited version of the weekly service. The Church is linked with television stations in the United States, and the program is also broadcast across Latin America. Some services are also available in audio on the internet (Segura Guzman, 2010, 160).

It was reported that the Church focused on evangelism, with mission activities being 'the most important thing'. In addition there is the belief that 'addiction based on demonic oppression' is the cause of all 'sin and disease' (Segura Guzman, 2010, 163-5). The smaller cell groups called 'La Vision' have a larger emphasis on prosperity theology. However, the sermons were always centred around topics of prosperity and miracles. Segura Guzman notes that a good member of this Church learns how to become a miracle hunter, constantly seeking miracles of prosperity (2010, 179).

Analysis: Centro Evangelístico de Zapote

Centro Evangelístico de Zapote does seem to be conservative in theological terms (Claim 1), if one includes the practice of speaking in tongues, and that the devil is considered to be the source of sin. Their emphasis and practices also revolve around the importance of mission. It is unclear if they are fundamentalist in their views on scripture, and again the fieldwork does not speak to political allegiances.

In support of Claim 2, the Centro Evangelístico de Zapote is a neo-Pentecostal Church.

This Church does demonstrate some sectarianism (Claim 3), as it broke away from the Assemblies of God. However, the research does not expand upon why this happened, and how in any way the theology or practices of the Church may have changed.

In a similar way to Vida Abundante this Church is mostly made up of middle and upper class members, which again disproves Yoder's Claim 5.

The prosperity gospel is clearly key theme for this Church, as well as emphases on tithes and offerings in exchange for miracles (Claim 6). In this case adherents would believe that wealth is a sign of God's favour. The leadership, which again seems hierarchical (Claim 4), is not described as being affluent or otherwise. However, in a Church that places such emphasis on the prosperity gospel, it would follow that senior pastors would be wealthy.

There is no mention in the fieldwork of the Church's potential interest in issues of social justice. The emphasis on mission in Costa Rica and elsewhere suggests that this may be more important at this time than other community concerns.

Protestant Mega-churches in Guatemala

Some initial fieldwork on mega-churches in Guatemala has been carried out by PROLADES director Dr. Holland, but a more extended discussion can be found in the thesis of Israel Ortiz (2007). This work mainly focuses on the rise of Neo-Pentecostal Churches in Guatemala and how they are involved in social justice work. For a wider discussion of these Church's social action this article is valuable, but for this project I will, again, be solely looking at mega-church profiles.

The Christian Fraternity (La Fraternidad Cristiana)

Pastor Jorge Lopez started the Christian Fraternity with a small group of families in 1978. In 1979 he and his small group of committed members began to hold worship services in a room of a hotel in Guatemala City. As the congregation began to grow they moved several times to larger spaces until in February 1991 a new building was inaugurated, with a capacity for 3,500 people (Holland, 2011, 35). Accelerated numerical Church growth made this congregation one of the first mega-churches in the country, with 12,000 members by 1999. The same site is home to a bilingual school, a medical clinic, and a Sunday school. The Church celebrates three services on a Sunday, and maintains a number of cell groups to encourage growth (Ortiz, 2007, 72).

In the early 2000s, the Church leaders purchased another larger property, and built a new Church complex with an auditorium seating 12,200. It was inaugurated in 2007 (Holland, 2011, 35).

The congregation considers itself to be a fraternal community where Christian love is expressed and which functions according to the order established in the Bible. They claim that they have never received any economic resources from outside the country, as they have a national leadership and their own financial support. The emphasis is on a Church for the family, and many families attend the worship services (Ortiz, 2007, 71). The Church has developed some evangelical and compassionate ministries to support children and those in prison (Ortiz, 2007, 72).

Ortiz does note that other local evangelical leaders criticize this type of mega-church due to the great quantity of 'economic resources that are used up and the lack of great social projection towards the members' (2007, 72).

Iglesia El Shaddai

Another local Church, El Shaddai started as a house Church in 1982 but was officially established in 1983 by pastors Harold and Cecelia Caballeros. El Shaddai experienced accelerated growth in less than two decades. There are now twenty-five El Shaddai Churches in Guatemala and fifty affiliated Churches in other countries. El Shaddai has

its own radio station and a series of schools, including a bilingual school in Guatemala City. Membership is composed of middle and upper class people (Ortiz, 2007, 72-3). The main auditorium seats about 5,000 people and the cumulative number of Sunday worshippers is approximately 4,700. There are several buses that bring people in from the greater metropolitan area of the city. At this time Cecelia Caballeros is the senior pastor of El Shaddai after Harold resigned to pursue a political career. It is reported that Church attendance declined after Cecelia Caballeros took over leadership (Holland, 2011, 16).

El Shaddai maintains relations with other foreign Churches and entities like the Counsel of International Church Growth Directors, in Seoul, Korea. Former Guatemalan President Serrano Elias was a member of this Church before becoming President (Ortiz, 2007, 73).

The Showers of Grace (Misión Cristiana Evangélica Lluvias de Grace)

The Showers of Grace emerged out of the National Presbyterian Church, and was founded in November 1984 with the aim of becoming part of the evangelical community (Ortiz, 2007, 74). The Church was established by Edmundo Madrid Morales, who became one of the 'new apostles' in the New Apostolic Reformation movement, which is considered to be Neo-Pentecostal. The main auditorium seats 5,000 people but with an estimated weekly attendance of 4,700. The Church has a large parking lot, but fifteen to twenty buses that bring people in from around Guatemala City. The Church also sponsors 960 cell groups throughout the week (Holland, 2011, 25). At least four members of the pastoral team had studied Theology at the Mariano Galvez University (Ortiz, 2007, 74).

The Church's key doctrine is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The pastor is the maximum authority in the Church and the majority of members belong to working class and poor families. The same team have recently founded a Church aimed specifically at higher classes in a residential zone of Guatemala City. The Church is characterised by a special emphasis on growth and promotion of cell groups (Ortiz, 2007, 75).

The Family of God Church (Iglesia de Jesucristo La Familia de Dios)

The Family of God Church was founded in June 1990, when it boasted just 400 members but now has 10,000 belonging to middle and working classes. The senior pastor's testimony and preaching on television has been a key element for recruiting new members, and the Church experienced a period of growth and expansion. Despite the charismatic Pentecostal orientation of the Church, the senior pastor studied at the Central American Theological Seminary (SETECA), which is historically linked to the conservative non-Pentecostal Central American Mission (Ortiz, 2007, 76).

In 1991 the Church acquired land and rented a radio station, in 1992 the group founded the Neo-Pentecostal Biblical Theological Seminary. Furthermore, in 1994 the Church bought a television station from the government, which now provides 24-hour programming all over the country (Ortiz, 2007, 77). The main Church building seats

5,000 and the main Sunday service is at 10am, it is reported that rented buses bring attendees from neighbouring areas (Holland, 2011, 33).

Ortiz notes that there have been criticisms of this Church for their emphasis on exchanging spiritual and material blessings as a way of raising funds (2007, 77).

Analysis: Guatemalan Mega-churches

The research available at the present time for the Guatemalan context is mainly Church profiles. Thus these accounts do not focus on the extent that the Churches are theologically, politically and socially conservative (Claim 1). Nevertheless, all these Guatemalan mega-churches are characterised as Neo-Pentecostal, with a strong charismatic focus, which is considered conservative in itself. Ortiz sums up that these Churches:

... place importance on evangelism, spiritual warfare and prosperity theology. Some lay people are involved in political parties and trying to get political power, they believe they are contributing to the spiritual and social development of the country (2007, 111).

These theological characteristics would be considered conservative, although he does not expand on particular political or sociological ideology. One could assume that considering the nature of these Churches, these aspects would also follow a conservative tendency.

The focus of Ortiz' thesis was solely on Neo-Pentecostal Churches in Guatemala so although all the Churches above support Claim 2, more research is needed to test this claim fully.

Some of these Guatemalan Churches are independent, but nearly all have emerged out of another denomination, little in Ortiz' research demonstrates how or if the Churches criticise others (Claim 3). However, Ortiz does note that there have been criticisms about the Family of God Church, and the Christian Fraternity, concerning financial corruption, and some from local evangelical leaders.

In accordance with the other mega-churches studied Ortiz' research presents evidence that these Churches maintain hierarchical leadership structures (Claim 4). Senior pastors are usually the supreme authority, for example Ortiz notes this when presenting the Showers of Grace Church. However, unlike the Churches studied in Costa Rica, some of the pastors have been trained in theology, for example, the Family of God Church and the Showers of Grace. In terms of their relative income compared to adherents, Ortiz does not mention this. However, he does note that the Christian Fraternity has been criticised for not using their economic resources for their members. It would be worth investigating whether these resources go to the pastors instead.

In reference to Claim 5: mega-church members are mainly of lower socio-economic status, there is only one Church in this study to support that – The Showers of Grace

Church. However, even this Church is branching out into upper and middle class neighbourhoods. The rest of the Churches notes cater to the latter social group. Despite his findings, Ortiz still notes that catering to upper and middle class groups is different than in 'the rest of Central America' (2007, 79).

These Neo-Pentecostal Churches certainly place an emphasis on prosperity theology (Claim 6). Criticisms have been made against the Family of God Church and the Christian Fraternity, for the way they raise and spend funds, based on spiritual promises. Ortiz, in general, has placed emphasis on the prosperity gospel, but more research is needed to look into the smaller differences between the Guatemalan Churches.

The accounts of these mega-churches do suggest that at least some are involved politically in Guatemala (Claim 7). Indeed, evangelicals have been involved in national Guatemalan politics for some years. Harold Caballeros of the El Shaddai Church is pursuing a right-wing political career. However, it is unclear if the Church itself is affiliated with right-wing ideology and furthermore if this right-wing ideology represents all ordinary members who attend the Church.

Conclusion

I will conclude by noting some common themes found in this sample of Churches and trends noted by other scholars. All the Churches studied here are distinct and keep their own differences, and the project recognises this. However, it is possible and important to draw out the similarities and assess them in total.

Leadership

The sample of Churches studied demonstrates that these mega-churches tend to have hierarchical leadership structures. It is unclear from a lot of the profiles how privileged the pastor's standards of living are. Thus more research is needed on this issue, and the wider leadership practices within each Church, in order for us to examine if leadership of these Churches does promote inequality of believers. Furthermore, if there is a notable difference between Churches in which the leaders have received official theological training and those which have not.

Segura Guzman notes that it is becoming a trend for the wives of pastors also to become pastors, even if they do not share the pulpit. The mega-church is a family affair, and all members of the family find good, paid professional jobs within the Church structure (2010, 194-5). An example from the Churches studied would be El Shaddai, in which Cecelia Caballeros took over as senior pastor from her husband. However, in this case it seems she did take on the preaching and general running of the Church. Women also have more liberty to be leaders in these Churches, in comparison to more traditional Churches in the Central America (Ortiz, 2007, 94).

In terms of leadership, the only way for a regular member to go up the ladder of leadership is by practicing adulation of higher level leaders. One needs to show unconditional support and service (Segura Guzman, 2010, 195).

Socio-economic status

There are few mega-churches in this sample that cater to a lower-middle socio-economic class. The initial evidence suggests that Claim 5 is perhaps out of date, and that mega-churches, at least in Costa Rica and Guatemala are almost solely catering to the middle-upper socio economic class.

Segura Guzman highlights that the main market for mega-churches is middle class professionals. He poses the question: is the gospel becoming a middle class ideology in Costa Rica, and are lower classes being reached by evangelical Churches? (2010, 278). The same evidence was highlighted by Ortiz, who notes that the Churches he studied are also unusually middle class. Others middle class Churches in Central America, including: 'Amor Viviente' in Honduras; 'Centro Cristiano' and 'Ciudad de Dios' in Costa Rica; 'Iglesias de la Amistad' and 'Castillo del Rey' in Mexico City and Monterrey, and 'Iglesia Fuente de Agua Viva' in Puerto Rico (Ortiz, 2007, 79).

Ortiz likens the Guatemalan Showers of Grace Church to those Brazilian Neo-Pentecostal Churches, which are found among the working classes (2007, 80).

Worship Style

The general worship style of these mega-churches does stress a charismatic experience. There tends to be a big band, a sound system and an emphasis on music and singing. In depth research needs to be carried out to evaluate if the worship style is a large factor in attracting people to these Churches, and what members are gaining from this sort of worship style.

The worship in these Churches mixes with a series of charismatic experiences within the established pattern of service. It is in this context the members have a religious experience. Worship allows the believer to 'centre on the person of God' without the need for mediators, they are instead empowered through the Holy Spirit. The stage design, light and choreographed dances also attract people (Ortiz, 2007, 81).

Ortiz notes a potential problem with this sort of worship. Namely, that although the emphasis on the subjectivity of Christian experience 'rescues' a fundamental part of Christian life, there is a danger of putting experience before rationality of faith and the scriptures (2007, 82). Indeed the musician and the music, play an essential role in the liturgy, that it can be a risk that the worship leaders become more important than the senior pastor (2007, 94).

This can be demonstrated in the evidence from the Vida Abundante Church in Costa Rica. Segura Guzman suggests that an average Christian at this Church would not have any real knowledge of the scriptures. It may be valuable to test this theme in other Churches.

Theology

A very important part of the further research carried out by this project will be to draw out the subtleties of the theological messages of these Churches, and compare them. We

need to determine how traditional, conservative or fundamentalist these Church's specific theologies are. This is something that can only be carried out over a prolonged period of time. The majority of mega-churches examined place importance on prosperity theology, and more than likely this will emerge as a theme in this Central American context.

In terms of the theology of Neo-Pentecostal Churches, Ortiz notes a pattern in their theology. These Churches tend to view the world as their parish, and consider themselves carriers of the message which brings spiritual life and economic freedom to people and society (2007, 111). There is importance placed on evangelism, spiritual warfare (in which one is waging war against sin and temptation) and the prosperity gospel (Ortiz, 2007, 111).

Politics

The scholarship dealt with here does not significantly deal with political allegiances. The questions that need to be asked include: Are the Churches involved directly in politics? Do they hold loose political allegiances? Or do some of these Churches not involve themselves in the political spectrum at all?

Ortiz notes that some lay people are involved in political parties and trying to get political power, through which they believe they are contributing to the spiritual and social development of the country (2007, 111).

Social Justice

The same further research needs to be carried out into the potential social justice work done by Churches. There is little in the fieldwork that speaks to this too, and thus the project must examine the Churches outreach, their activities outside of the immediate Church community, and whether there are Church programs sanctioned elsewhere in the country and the world.

Sectarianism

Nearly all the Churches in this sample have emerged from other denominations or members of their pastoral team have done so. Sectarianism is tied to issues of theology, thus the project needs to be concerned with what the differences are between the specific Churches. Furthermore, what the relationship is between Churches and other denominational institutions? Following on from this, if sectarianism exists does it promote dogmatism that may alienate other Christians, and is this something particularly problematic in Central America?

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