



**CONTRADICTION WITHOUT PARADOX:
EVANGELICAL POLITICAL CULTURE
IN THE 1998 VENEZUELAN ELECTIONS**

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ABSTRACT

Venezuelan Evangelicals' responses to candidates in that country's 1998 presidential election seem to confirm the view that their political culture is inconsistent, contradictory, and paradoxical. Not only were Evangelicals just as likely as the larger population to support nationalist former coup leader Hugo Chávez, they rejected Venezuela's one Evangelical party after it made a clientelist pact with the infamous social democratic party candidate. In this article, concepts from recent cultural theory are used to examine qualitative data from these two voting behaviors. Ways to make sense of the contradictory nature of Evangelical political culture are suggested.

RESUMEN

Las respuestas de los evangélicos venezolanos a los candidatos de la elección presidencial celebrada en 1988 en ese país parecen confirmar la observación de que su cultura política es inconsistente, contradictoria y paradójica. Los evangélicos no solamente exhibieron la misma probabilidad que el resto de la población de apoyar al nacionalista ex líder golpista Hugo Chávez, sino que también rechazaron al único partido evangélico de Venezuela luego de que éste hiciera un pacto clientelista con el desacreditado candidato del Partido Socialdemócrata. En este artículo se utilizan conceptos de la teoría cultural reciente para examinar datos cualitativos acerca de estos dos comportamientos electorales y se sugieren modos de interpretar la naturaleza contradictoria de la cultura política evangélica.

Venezuelan Evangelicals’¹ responses to candidates in that country’s 1998 presidential election clearly challenge traditional views of their politics. While a modernization perspective envisions Latin American Evangelicals as favoring self-government, personal initiative, and cautious, peaceable change,² in this election (see Table 1 in the Appendix) Evangelicals were just as likely as non-Evangelicals to support Hugo Chávez—a nationalist candidate whose revolutionary and totalitarian rhetoric sparked acrimonious polemics. And, while a critical perspective envision Evangelicals as easily swept into patron-client political logic,³ in this election a pact between Venezuela’s one Evangelical politician and an infamous social democratic candidate resulted in outrage and public mobilization against it by Evangelical leaders offended by its clear clientalist character. The 1998 election, then, presents yet another case that contradicts the search for monolithic political tendencies among Latin American Evangelicals. Indeed, recent research regards their political culture as inconsistent,⁴ the result of a “tense syncretism,”⁵ or irreducibly “paradoxical,”⁶ and favors empirical examination in context over deductions from theology.⁷ In what follows, I provide an analytic framework that makes sense of not only the pluralism evident in the reception of Chávez, but also the focused opposition mobilized against the political pact. In doing so, I suggest ways to make sense of the contradictory nature of Evangelical political culture.

I. CONCEPTUALIZING EVANGELICAL POLITICAL CULTURE

Interpretations of Latin American Evangelicalism as a contradictory and inconsistent result from the expectation that culture functions as a set of rules and values *enacted* by members of that culture.⁸ Contemporary theories of culture, however, do not look for coherent sets of deeply held values and beliefs that determine behavior, but

rather repertoires⁹ of discourses and symbols that are used by individuals and groups to define the terms of interaction, debate, and conflict.¹⁰ Here I conceptualize Evangelical political culture as a repertoire of schemas relating to the relationship between the observable universe and a supernatural order. These schemas are available for organizing experience, orienting problem solving, and inspiring and legitimating action.¹¹ Because schemas are abstractions that reduce complexity and limit alternatives, they enable action—just as a road map is helpful because it provides only necessary details.¹² Embodied in communicable form, they permit intersubjectivity through time and space. A repertoire of schemas can have contradictory or inconsistent applications for two basic reasons: *multiplicity* and *transposability*.¹³

Multiplicity means that any repertoire contains overlapping and often contradictory schemas.¹⁴ Two schemas that seem to have been important for Evangelicals in the 1998 elections are what I call “spiritual communion” and “supernatural autonomy.” First and foremost in the Evangelical repertoire is the idea that human behavior facilitates the action of supernatural agents. In the Evangelical framework, when humans sin or otherwise break communion with God, they facilitate Satan’s agency and may even become his agents. When, on the other hand, they establish communion with God through prayer, reading the Bible, and righteous behavior, they facilitate God’s agency and may become His agents. This schema of spiritual communion is the primary one Venezuelan Evangelicals use. Those individuals, groups, structures, or acts that appear to facilitate human communion with God are supported; those that seem to prevent it are rejected. Because this schema involves human facilitation of supernatural agency, it permits Evangelicals to think of themselves and the surrounding world as malleable to their effective action. They use it primarily to conceptualize situations in which there are clear signs of obedience or sin, or understandings of what these might mean in a potential course of action.

The second schema points to supernatural agents who act autonomously. Since God is omnipotent, He is not confined and can act through whatever means He chooses. Likewise, Satan can take the initiative by trying to discourage Christians, lead them away from God, or keep non-Christians from finding God. This schema of supernatural autonomy de-emphasizes the importance of human agency and is used primarily in situations that definitely seem to further or hinder God's will, yet in which there are no clear signs of human obedience or sin. It functions as a sort of "backup" schema that makes sense of important situations that otherwise would not fit into the Evangelical repertoire. The schemas of spiritual communion and supernatural autonomy are contradictory—one emphasizes human behavior, the other disregards it. If pressed, some Evangelicals will reconcile these two ideas by arguing that God is omnipotent, but gives humans free will to choose to help God or not. Venezuelan Evangelicals rarely seem bothered by such contradictions.

Transposability refers to the fact that schemas are applied over a variety of situations and that application is always underdetermined. No situation is exactly like any other, and the way a given schema is applied usually involves ingenuity, improvisation, and negotiation. Thus, those who apply the same schema to the same situation may apply it differently depending on what aspects of the situation they choose to key into.

These two sources of contradiction—multiplicity and transposability—do not mean that the engagement of cultural repertoires in action is irreducibly paradoxical or inevitably subject to individual whim. To the contrary, strong tendencies and even consensus can develop in two ways. First, situations with clear and distinct features relevant to the repertoire engender relatively more consensus regarding which schemas are relevant to the situation and how. Second, strong tendencies or consensus in interpretation can result from social processes—through the mobilization of certain definitions of the situation by individuals with relevant power.

Below we will see that in the case of the Chávez candidacy, his political history and campaign was diverse enough that individual Evangelicals were able not only to apply both the schemas of supernatural autonomy and spiritual communion, but were able to use the latter enroute to contrary conclusions.¹⁵ And since there was no mobilization of opinion either for or against Chávez by Evangelical leaders, individual variety was the norm. The characteristics of the political pact (The Democratic Action (AD)= Authentic Renewal Organization Pact (ORA), on the other hand, were much clearer. This, combined with mobilization by Evangelical leaders, resulted in a considerable amount of consensus in opposing the pact.

II. EVANGELICALS IN THE 1998 ELECTIONS

The 1998 Venezuelan elections represent one of the most unexpected, vertiginous processes of change in recent Latin American history. In about a year, Hugo Chávez went from fringe candidate with single-digit electoral support to the landslide winner of the presidential election. In the process, Venezuela's two traditionally dominant political parties themselves moved to the fringe, and the structure of civil society changed completely as old alliances fell apart and new ones formed. Evangelical engagement in these processes presents us with one aspect of this story.

The Data

The data used in this article reflect the empirical characteristics of the two cases. One of the central features of the Evangelical reception of the Chávez candidacy was precisely that there was no public mobilization in support or opposition. Rather, there was a conspicuous lack of public statements, as individual believers were left to their own devices. This story only began to appear in my participant observation¹⁶ well into 1998—casting new light on data I had previously collected. To establish the empirical

trend, a colleague and I were able to attach questions regarding religious affiliation to a poll carried out a little less than four months before the election.¹⁷ The trend confirmed, I added questions to the life history interviews I was already carrying out with Evangelical men. In all, I was able to tape interviews regarding the election with thirty men, and had informal conversations with dozens of men and women. In the analysis I use quotes that represent the most typical ways that respondents related religious ideas to the Chávez candidacy.¹⁸

One of the central features of the mobilization against the AD-ORA Pact, in contrast, was the way it was done in public. Indeed, I learned of the controversy in the mass media before it appeared in my participant observation. During the electoral process I collected articles on the controversy, and after the election a couple of Evangelical leaders lent me their own collections of clippings. I supplemented this by reviewing a wider selection of papers from this period in Venezuela's national library. These print materials not only guide us through the objective course of events, their content permits us to construct an interpretive account of the meanings put into play in the conflict.

Plan of Analysis

In the analysis that follows, I will first look at Evangelicals' diverse reception of the Chávez candidacy. Negative opinions focused upon Chávez's totalitarian tendencies as a threat to Evangelicalism and his history of violence as contrary to the Christian message. Positive opinions keyed into three aspects of Chávez's discourse. First, I will show how his consistent recognition of Evangelicals and mentions of God led sympathetic Evangelicals to suspect God was autonomously working through Chávez and his movement. Second, I will look at the way Chávez's continual use of Bible verses in his campaign led some Evangelicals to portray him as being "worked on" or "used by God." Lastly, I will show how both the schemas of spiritual communion and supernatural

autonomy permitted Evangelical supporters to look past Chávez's history of violence. I will then look at the outrage caused by the AD-ORA pact and the mobilization against it. First I will show the automatic support an Evangelical politician such as Godofredo Marín may receive as someone in spiritual communion with God. Then I will show how the pact contradicted this schema, and was portrayed by leaders as a betrayal.

II.1. Evangelicals and Chávez

A casual observer might reasonably expect a religious movement normally thought of as conservative, or at least politically cautious, to oppose a polemical candidate such as Hugo Chávez. At minimum, one could expect a movement that strongly and aggressively seeks unity in religious ideology to unify *either for or against* such a polemical political option. Nevertheless, in the 1998 elections, neither expectation was correct. Evangelicals did not unify either for or against Chávez's candidacy mirroring the tendencies of the larger society. See Table 1 in the Appendix.

II.1.a. Negative Opinions

Respondents who opposed the Chávez candidacy based their negative opinions on the same two aspects of his political portfolio as most non-Evangelicals—his totalitarian tendencies and his violent past—but with their own Evangelical slant. Respondents frequently expressed fear that a Chávez presidency would impede the work of Evangelicals, as well as discomfort with his role in the bloody February 1992 coup attempt. Fredy, a high school electronics teacher, told me that he didn't want to vote for Chávez. I asked him why not and he responded:

Fredy: Well, because Chávez has a project for the country, just like how he tried to throw that coup, no? I'm not going to say that for sure it would be bad, but it seems like he wants to install something like what is in Cuba. So I can imagine, if Chávez wins, we *hermanos*¹⁹ would be preaching in the Metro [Caracas's subway system] with the police behind

us threatening us: ‘You can’t preach here!’ They might impose certain things that would block the path of the Gospel.

The opinion of David, a member of a large, middle-class Pentecostal church in Caracas, was typical of those Evangelicals who saw Chávez’s past as anathema to Christian morality. He said he was planning to vote for the candidate opposing Chávez.

David: I prefer Salas Römer a thousand times more. Why? Because the other candidate is this Chávez. And with what he did years ago, with that coup attempt, with all that, with everything he did, you know, all the violence, so many dead. That’s not godly. I don’t approve of that, I don’t agree with that, so that’s why, we can’t vote for a candidate that transmits violence.

Such negative opinions are not terribly surprising, given the worldwide involvement of Evangelical groups in conservative politics. Understanding how so many Evangelicals were able to support Chávez presents a greater challenge. That is the goal of the next three sections.

II.1.b. Movimiento Bolivaria No Revolucionario-200 (MBR-200) Support For Evangelicals

From the time he left jail and began public appearances as leader of the MBR-200, as well as throughout the campaign, Chávez mentioned Evangelicals whenever he mentioned emergent actors in civil society working for change.²⁰ Alongside unions, peasant organizations, student groups, and others, Chávez would call for Evangelicals to support his movement’s attempt to revolutionize Venezuela. This was part of a conscious strategy by the MBR-200 to mobilize such emergent social actors.

Of course this immediately captured the attention of some Evangelicals already sympathetic and conversant with the MBR-200. Keison, a member of the downtown church with which I was doing fieldwork, grew up in the 23 de Enero, a massive housing project at the western end of Caracas. In the years before becoming Evangelical, he participated in underground urban guerrilla groups and even provided logistical support

with his car in both 1992 coup attempts. A year and a half after the second coup attempt failed he became Evangelical, leaving behind his political participation but maintaining his interest. In the days before the fifth anniversary of the February 4 coup attempt, there were advertisements in daily newspapers about an MBR-200 rally in the Plaza Caracas. Keison invited me to accompany him and a couple of other sympathetic Evangelicals. Interested in what at that time was a subaltern event, I brought my tape recorder and interviewed people attending. Keison knew many of the different leaders of the MBR-200 and pushed me to interview them. Usually after a couple of questions, Keison interrupted and took the role of interviewer while I recorded.

Behind the stage where Chávez would speak several hours later, Keison spotted one of the coup leaders and then a leader of the civilian movement: ex-Lieutenant Colonel Luis Reyes Reyes.²¹ After I asked him a general question, which he was not quite finished answering, Keison blurted out: “And your opinion of Evangelicals in Venezuela?” At first he was at a loss for words, but quickly gained his stride:

Luis Reyes Reyes: Well, [pause] look, [pause] We respect [pause]. I am an Apostolic, Catholic, Christian. Ummm, ah, look, we see Evangelicals with a lot of interest. We are friends of the Christian movement here in Venezuela. We admire them. We think that everything that is done to strengthen faith, to help foment ethical principals, as all Christian movements might have, we consider them something positive here in the country. We view them with a lot of respect, we have good relations with them in conversation and, to say it in one word, we admire them and respect them profoundly.

Keison: So in the case that the Movimiento Bolivariano 200 would attain power, would there be a guarantee of respect for Christian groups?

Luis Reyes Reyes: Absolutely, we would respect them. Not only would we respect them, we would eventually promote them (*promoverlas*). They would help or contribute to the regeneration of the country.

Keison was enamored of this response and repeatedly mentioned it throughout the afternoon. Reyes Reyes had touched on a key concept in Venezuelan political discourse: “*promover*.” Most Venezuelans of all classes see the State not as a group of organizations

that regulate activity and maintain order, but rather as the entity that controls and distributes the country's oil wealth and has the responsibility to be the primary mover in the development of a modern society.²² Concomitantly, in Venezuela's current fiscal crisis, most social sectors continue to believe the State is wealthy, and critique its inability to carry out this development.²³ Anything, from the lack of a manufacturing sector to the absence of civil society, will often be portrayed as the result of the State not "promoting" them like it should. The prospect that Evangelicalism would not only be freed from the bureaucratic regulation of their Evangelistic activity but would be promoted by the State, represents the sort of official appreciation and State support that Keison and other Venezuelan Evangelicals feel they are due.

After the interview, as we waited and talked, I asked Keison and Ramiro—another key informant from the same church—their opinions of the MBR-200:

Ramiro: Personally, I think, Jesus Christ said these divine words: "Lucky are those that hunger and thirst for justice because they will be satiated." God said that if we [Evangelicals] don't speak, the rocks would speak instead. And these men are making a call for justice. I think there was nobody more revolutionary than Jesus Christ because when Christ walked on the earth he brought justice because he saw how the poor were oppressed. So I think that in all of this, God is always there, God is there because if they don't stand up, who's going to? God has to use someone to stand up. If he has to use these men and place someone up there [in power] who is really of the people and for the people, then God knows what he is doing.

Keison: One thing that Ramiro said with which I agree a lot is that the Bible says, that "blessed is he who thirsts and hungers for justice, even he who is not a follower of the Gospel—if they hunger and thirst for justice, they will be satiated." So I believe that God, like Ramiro says, is seeing that those who are in power are not the ones, and that there are some people that might hunger and thirst for justice. So God, in his wisdom, could move one of these men. And I think it's interesting what the Lt. Colonel said a minute ago, that they not only would respect the Christian movement in Venezuela, but that they also would use it to regenerate the morality of the society.

In their answers, both Keison and Ramiro use the schema of supernatural autonomy. They find in their perception of the MBR-200 as working for justice—including just

treatment for Evangelicals—a means for arguing that God might be using its leaders even though they are not Evangelical.

After several other speakers from the MBR-200, Chávez took the stage. The crowd was not big, probably two thousand people. He gave a fiery speech attacking then-president Rafael Caldera's administration, Venezuela's traditional parties, as well as abstractions such as "neoliberalism" and "imperialism." Several times he quoted Bible verses. Each time he did, Keison yelled "*¡Amen!*" or "*¡Gloria a Dios!*" ("Glory to God"). Toward the end of the speech Chávez made a call to the different elements of civil society to support the movement, and as was his custom, mentioned Evangelicals along with unions, peasant organizations, student groups, and others. Keison was waiting anxiously for it, and as soon as Chávez uttered the word, Keison exploded with a scream: "*EVANGELICOS!*" and jumped up and down laughing with joy. Then he turned to Ramiro and Me and said excitedly, "That guy is converted to Christ! Let's go up and shake his hand!"

I reluctantly followed Keison over to the gate in the fence surrounding the stage. They let us in and we made our way through the crowd—Keison barging through with me in tow. At the stage, the guard said "journalists only." Keison quickly responded that I was a North American sociologist and showed him my card. The security guard immediately let us up on the stage. I followed Keison over to where a television crew was interviewing Chávez. When he finished, Keison pushed his way through the crowd, saying, "Comandante, Comandante." When he got close, Keison said, "The Evangelical people love you a lot, but we need to hear something: a greeting for the Evangelical public." I gave Chávez the already rolling tape recorder, into which he said:

Hugo Chávez: Today, the 4th of February 1997, five years from the people's resurrection, from the Plaza Caracas, packed with people, I send a warm, very Christian greeting, committed to all Evangelicals, those people who walk with the cross of Christ through the streets carrying a hopeful

message to the people. The voice of the people is the voice of God. With Christ, with Bolívar, with Zamora we will again have a fatherland [*patria*]. Accept my warm greeting and may God bless you all.

As Bastian has pointed out, such courting of Evangelical groups has become a common strategy among new political actors that do not have a ready-made political base.²⁴ The scenes described above demonstrate how sympathetic Evangelicals can interpret such courting. Consistent demonstrations of respect toward Evangelicals, promises of future support, or simple recognition can combine with the Evangelical desire to see God working for better in the world. Within this view, such a politician or political movement can easily be seen as an instrument that God will use to bring justice to a fallen world.

II.1.c. Mentions of the Bible

As is the case in most modern elections, the bulk of Chávez's support was gained not through the social networks of grassroots organizations, but rather through a skillful campaign making full use of the mass media. Chávez's campaign speeches and interviews frequently mixed elements from the writings of Bolívar, Simón Rodríguez, Venezuelan literature, and most importantly for the purposes of this article, the Bible. Indeed, his adaptation of a Bible verse became his most popular campaign slogan: "*El que tenga ojos, que vea, el que tenga oídos que oiga.*" ("Let he who has eyes see, and he who has ears, hear").²⁵ Chávez's use of the Bible received a lot of attention and frequently met with the tongue-in-cheek derision of leading opinion makers. The day after Chávez officially opened his campaign at the end of July, all of the major newspapers made reference to Chávez's use of the Bible. *Ultimas Noticias* said, "Chávez gave his usual message in which he appealed to the Bible, to Bolivarian thought, to Christianity, to Catholicism, to humanism, social justice, state reform, the fight against

corruption, the perfection of democracy and several authors... .”²⁶ Three of the headlines of the four articles *El Universal* ran about the event were “Hugo Chávez Frías: ‘I ask God to Be up to the Task,’” “Waiting for the Messiah,” and “Demon or Saviour?”²⁷

Nevertheless, his religious rhetoric was popular among average voters.²⁸ And for average Evangelicals, his religious rhetoric and frequent mentions of the Bible could easily be portrayed, through the schema of spiritual communion, as evidence that God was working on Chávez or planned to work through him. In the Chávez rally described above, Keison used the following terms to explain his support to another Evangelical:

Keison: Chávez is citing the Bible. That’s what is getting our attention. That’s what we’re interested in. We are interested in the fact that he is citing the Bible. The Bible says that “God honors he who honors Him.” When has [then-President] Caldera cited the Bible? Never. He mentions idols [Catholic saints], but he doesn’t cite the Bible. He cites the Pope, but hasn’t cited the Bible.

In interviews during a plaza service two days before the elections, Francisco and Andrés reveal why Chávez’s mentions of the Bible were so important to them. I asked Francisco whether he thought that God could use a person like Chávez, even though he was not an Evangelical.

And do you think that Chávez, not being converted and not being a member of an Evangelical church, can be used by God?
Of course...because Chávez has read the Bible, and the Bible says that faith comes from hearing the word of God. So a man that reads the Bible acquires knowledge of God. God can touch that person. So I believe that God can use this man. Because if in forty years of democracy we have failed [it is because] God has not been able to penetrate the hearts of these politicians. He hasn’t been able to because none of these men who have governed Venezuela have been Christians.

Andrés is a barrel-chested Afro-Venezuelan from the region of Barlovento, two hours East of Caracas, and was a key informant throughout my work with his church. He is an extrovert and perpetual optimist who is joking and facetious more often than he is serious. In the same plaza two days before the election, he came up to me and interrupted me while I taped a conversation between two other Evangelicals on the steps of the plaza.

Knowing he is rarely shy, I asked him in front of the other two whom he was planning to vote for?

“For Chá-vez, Chá-vez, Chá-vez. Nu-e-vo Pres-i-den-te,” he chanted. Then, with a false look of seriousness on his face, he turned to the plaza on the step where he was standing and, acting as if he were speaking to the multitudes, said: “Chá-vez! We’re going to enter the new millennium with a broad vision, a *cutting-edge* vision, a *cuuuuuutting-edge* vision (*una vision de puuuuuunta*) with our new President Chávez [dramatically pumping his fist in the air].” I followed up by asking, “And do you think it is legitimate for a Christian to vote for Chávez?” The unstated premise was that Chávez was not an Evangelical. He answered in a more serious tone, “I really think that this man can do something for Venezuela. And people think that this man doesn’t know the Bible. But he *is* getting to know the Bible and that’s why you hear him citing biblical texts! I think that God himself is permitting this man to rise up.” For Keison, Francisco, and Andrés, the fact that Chávez knows and uses the Bible means that despite his not being an Evangelical, God might be working on him or through him.

II.1.d. Violence

As noted above, Chávez’s history of violence, as well as his repeated mention early in the campaign of the possibility of taking up arms again was a stumbling block for many Evangelicals, just as it was for the general public. Even among early Evangelical supporters such as Ramiro and Keison, there was concern. After the 1997 rally described above, I asked for their general impressions. Ramiro described how he admired Chávez for his stance against corruption and desire for a more just society, but added the following: “Putting aside the violent part, I think his ideas are right on track.” After Keison gave me his positive assessment, I asked him if he saw parallels to the Christian vision of the world.

What parallel do you see with the Christian vision?

The parallel I see is that he is willing to take up arms, and with arms blood is going to flow and that is where we, since the Bible says, “Thou shalt not kill,” we are not willing. We want this to happen peacefully, and if God wants to place him there, let it be by a legal election, just as God requires...the only thing we do not agree with is the use of arms for people to kill each other.

Keison was apparently so concerned about this aspect of Chávez’s discourse that he mentally replaced the word “parallels” with the word “contrasts.”

Ignacio, an elderly Evangelical I interviewed during a plaza service, used a biblical example to portray Chávez’s violent past in a way in which God’s agency might be seen. He suggested that perhaps God might be “processing” Chávez like he did Moses. Among Venezuelan Evangelicals, “processing” refers to the idea that God builds character among his followers by putting them through trials of fire; in the same way that “fine gold” is smelted.

Ignacio: Maybe it was God who put this man [Chávez] through all of this...and God has put a sensitivity in this man like he did with Moses. ...Moses didn’t like [the abuse of the Egyptians], and God processed him through that to the point that he killed an Egyptian and had to flee. And God processed him so that he would have a personal encounter with God. Now, you don’t know if this guy is [shrugging shoulders]...

He ended his sentence by shrugging his shoulders leaving open the possibility that God is processing Chávez like he did Moses, and will likewise bring him to a personal encounter with God.

For Alberto, Chávez’s violent past is clearly not acceptable. But God can work in mysterious ways. He sees in Chávez’s use of the Bible evidence that God might be at work.

Can a Christian vote for a coup leader?

As a Christian, we can’t. But you don’t always know what God’s will is. If God has brought this man to this position [imminent winner of the elections] it must be for some reason. This man was in jail, which is where they preach the Word a lot. And he has cited the Bible. The Bible says in

Isaiah 55: 11 that the Word of God doesn't come up empty handed. So if this man can cite the Bible, then there is something in his heart... I think God is working on him slowly.

In the interview with Andrés above, I followed up with the same question. In his response, he uses the schema of supernatural autonomy. He argues that it is God who puts worldly leaders in their position. And the fact that the impending victory is of a strong man, who will fight oppression and corruption, is evidence enough that God must be at work in all of this.

And do you think it's okay for a Christian to vote for a coup leader, I mean, someone who tried to throw a coup?

Look, you know that I always try to go to the Bible. I follow the Bible. The Bible says that God is the one who places and gets rid of kings (*pone y quita reyes*). And if God permits this man to rise up, and he puts a *caudillo* there so that the oppression and corruption finally are defeated? Then I think that God must be at work in all of this (*Yo creo que Dios tiene que tener sus manos metidas allí*).

Thus, while Chávez's history of violence was indeed one of the principal stumbling blocks for Evangelicals—just as it was for non-Evangelicals—the idea that God can work in mysterious ways, as well as the presence of other signs that God might be working through this candidate, could be marshalled to move past this obstacle.

II.2. The Democratic Action (AD) =Authentic Renewal Organization (ORA) Pact

An Evangelical party—the Authentic Renewal Organization (ORA)—has participated in Venezuela's last three electoral cycles, each time gaining one or two seats in the Congress. Such was ORA's success in the 1988 elections that Jean Pierre Bastian regarded it as the model for the new "confessional politics" of Latin American Evangelicals.²⁹ That year, their first participation, they gained almost 1 percent of the popular vote for Godofredo Marín as presidential candidate, and gained two seats in the Congress. Bastian writes that the "mechanisms of electoral manipulation" they used served as models for other similar attempts at confessional politics.³⁰ Indeed, while

support for Marín has been less than unanimous among rank-and-file Evangelicals,³¹ pastors have generally seen him as an important ally in the Congress³² and have permitted him to campaign from the pulpit when he requests it. They rallied around him in 1988 with strong support from the pulpit and gave the party official, if somewhat less enthusiastic, support again in 1993. In April of 1998, he visited one of the churches where I was doing my research. The pastor introduced him, gave him his endorsement, and permitted him to announce his candidacy from the pulpit.

From interviews done in the following weeks, one can see the built-in support an Evangelical candidate will receive through the schema of spiritual communion. Vincenzo was enthusiastic after he heard the news that there was an Evangelical candidate for president.

Here in the church they are telling us that there is an *hermano* that is going to declare his candidacy for president. Wow! What a blessing that would be if an *hermano* would win. I think everything would change. He would need support but, I don't know, I think the support of God would be enough. I mean God would touch people's hearts and all this would change.

Pedro, on the other hand, saw voting for a Christian candidate as a way to not be at fault if he does poorly in office.

Pedro: If I vote for a person who does not have Christ in his heart and he starts doing things that are not pleasing to God, [I would be to blame because] I voted for him, knowing the Truth. But if I vote for someone who knows the Truth and he does things that are not pleasing before God, the blame is placed on him because he knows the Truth.

In the last week of July, presidential candidates had to officially register their candidacy with the National Electoral Council. For each candidate, the event was followed up by a rally in the Plaza Caracas, in front of the Council's headquarters. On July 22, Luis Alfaro Ucero registered as the Democratic Action Party's (AD's) candidate. To the surprise of most of the Evangelical community, Godofredo Marín was at Alfaro Ucero's side during the registration ceremony and in the rally that followed, as a

representative of the independent parties supporting Alfaro. Marín introduced Alfaro at the rally, saying it was “a great honour,” and ended his speech by asking God to bless the candidate.³³ For years, Alfaro Ucero has had de facto control of AD, and for most Venezuelans epitomizes the corrupt party *caudillo*. Indeed, from the time of his nomination as candidate by AD up to the elections, he consistently nudged Chávez out for the lead in negative perceptions.³⁴

The alliance between Marín and Alfaro caused an immediate uproar in the Evangelical community—disarming Marín’s supporters and spurring his opponents to mobilize. On the first of August, an article in a major daily newspaper entitled, “Alzados en ORA” (“Rebellion in ORA”), reported that a number of party coordinators in Caracas had resigned their party membership in protest over the pact.³⁵ A couple of days after the announcement, Keison gave me a copy of a letter from an Evangelical pastor and member of ORA from an interior state that had been sent to various different Evangelical associations by fax the day before Marín’s announcement. The title read “Ora-Guarico Rejects the National AD-ORA Pact.” In the text of the letter, the author says:

Author: I want to warn the Evangelical people and *guariqueños* [residents of Guarico state] that the AD-ORA pact is a vulgar deal in which morality has been exchanged for economic privileges,³⁶ with a complete lack of dignity and credibility, surrendering our ideals to immoral, unethical actions that lack any respect for the people and above all for God.³⁷

An editorial in *El Mundo* written by pastor David Ayala at the end of August is entitled “Pray...for Marín” (“*Ora...por Marín*”), using a play on words with the name of the party.

Ayala editorial: Today, Godofredo, with evident desire to guarantee himself a seat in Congress, has surrendered himself to the Alfarist party—AD—promising them his Evangelical followers, as if they were sheep or dopes without free will. The position assumed by our old-fashioned Evangelist speaks badly of his spiritual condition. His disguise as a spiritual Christian and follower of the inalterable divine Word has been uncovered.³⁸

Pastor Vinicio, the leader of a small congregation I was studying in a barrio of Petare at the eastern end of Caracas, mentioned the situation from the pulpit during the announcements at the end of a Sunday service in August.³⁹ He held up and read to his congregation two paid advertisements from “Christians with ORA Always,” a supposed group of Evangelicals supporting Marín. The first advertisement thanked him for sacrificing his candidacy in favor of that of Alfaro for the good of the country, and ended with, “*Brother Marín, you can count on the support of Christians.*” The second advertisement said, “We Christians want...” and asked Evangelicals to vote for Alfaro. Pastor Vinicio put down the articles on the pulpit and said, “These advertisements intend to speak on behalf of the Evangelical people. Well I’m an Evangelical and I’m not going to vote for Democratic Action.” He followed this by enjoining the members of his congregation to vote for “whomever God touches you to vote for.”

Encouraged by other Evangelical leaders, Keison wrote a highly emotional letter regarding the situation of Venezuela, AD, and ORA, and sent it to several newspapers. While no local newspaper picked it up, two months later it appeared in *Victoria Patriótica*—a magazine published by the Movimiento Quinta Republica as part of the electoral campaign. The last of the articles in the magazine was Keison’s letter, printed verbatim, with the title, “Why I Do Not Support ORA.” In the article he describes his perception of the Venezuelan crisis and then gets to his motivation.

Keison letter: Reflecting on this situation and asking why things are the way they are, it is my duty as a citizen and a Christian to ask myself: What responsibility does Democratic Action have in this tragedy? And the overwhelming answer has to be that it has a large part of the responsibility. ...What left me flattened was when I read that in the nomination ceremony of Alfaro Uceró there were only two spokesmen, one was from AD, and the other was Godofredo Marín from ORA. ...Of course I am not against a Christian having a position in the highest structures of political power, but I thought that when this happened he would be an example of morality and rectitude for the professionally corrupt who use politics as a means to enrich themselves and not in order to serve. ...With this I don’t want to discourage *hermanos* that in the future might know how to do right what others betrayed. But I do not want

to be seen as linked to ORA for being an Evangelical Christian committed to the work of God. I do not and will not support ORA.⁴⁰

Marín and his advisers had clearly underestimated how Evangelicals would react to a pact with AD. In mid-October, ORA ran advertisements entitled, “Why We Support Alfaro,” and giving two reasons first, “Because *Alfaro* is the only presidential candidate that invited us to participate actively in his next government,” and second, “Because with *Alfaro* we have more similarities than differences.”⁴¹ However, these *realpolitik* explanations provoked laughter and derision among those Evangelicals who read them. Nevertheless, ORA supported Alfaro’s candidacy right up to the end—even after several regional chapters of ORA defected to support Chávez,⁴² and Alfaro Uceró’s candidacy was abandoned by AD itself in favor of Salas Römer. Marín indeed regained a seat in the Congress through the deal,⁴³ as a “diputado por lista” for AD-ORA in the State of Monagas—but in the process undermined the party’s already weakened base among Evangelicals.⁴⁴

III. DISCUSSION

The analysis presented here suggests we can avoid portrayals of monolithic political tendencies deduced from theology while realizing that Latin American Evangelicalism is no more paradoxical than any other religion or ideology. Conceiving of Evangelicalism as a repertoire of multiple, often contradictory schemas that are transposed by actors, which can lend themselves to both individual variety and collective unity depending on the features of the situation and social processes, we can capture both the diversity and the consistency in the complex engagement of Evangelical political culture in particular contexts.

The Chávez candidacy presented contrasting features that could be keyed into by opposing and supporting Evangelicals alike. Those who opposed him could present his

violent past as sinful and his totalitarian tendencies as obstacles to the task of spreading the Gospel.⁴⁵ Those attracted to Chávez's candidacy could use his public recognitions of Evangelicals to suggest that God was autonomously working on him. His continual mentions of God and the Bible could be used to suggest that Chávez might be on the road to gaining communion with God with the result that he would become His agent and do His will. There was no public mobilization by Evangelical leaders—indeed they were conspicuous in their silence. This lack of mobilization certainly had a lot to do with the fact that Chávez presented Evangelicals with several highly relevant, yet contradictory features. But it should not be reduced to this. One can easily imagine that if Chávez had not only publicly recognized Evangelicals but also sought a high-level meeting with Evangelical leaders or made concrete promises of, say, increased religious freedom, they would have mobilized on his behalf and presented positive applications of Evangelical schemas as the “correct” applications. Alternatively, one can easily imagine that if Chávez had coddled the Catholic hierarchy or perhaps linked Evangelicalism with cultural imperialism, Evangelical leaders would have mobilized against him and presented negative applications of Evangelical schemas as the “correct” applications.

In the case of ORA we can see the automatic application of the schema of spiritual communion that an Evangelical candidate can receive. However, the same schema that generates such immediate support prevents it from being the blind clientalism critical views describe. Application of the schema depends on the candidate comporting him- or herself in a way that fits within it. Indeed, Marín behaved very much in the way analysts such as Bastian describe: he attempted to deal his Evangelical following in exchange for political favors. And it should be emphasized that his maintaining a congressional seat from which he could continue working for improvements in religious freedom was in Evangelicals' best interests. Nevertheless, Marín's support for a candidate widely viewed as a corrupt party *caudillo* in evident

exchange for one of AD's congressional seats was viewed as a betrayal of God and Christian principles, and an insult to the Evangelical people. His later *realpolitik* explanations of the pact did not engage schemas in the Evangelical repertoire and only hurt him. In this case, Evangelical leaders did mobilize. Marín's pact with Alfaro Uceró was so offensive to Evangelical sensibilities and so close to home that this mobilization is not surprising. Furthermore, Marín was not in a strong position to begin with. As early as 1994, when I began my research with Venezuelan Evangelicals, I heard complaints that Marín was a dealmaker who coddled the status quo, was enamoured with secular political power, and did not take the moralistic antiestablishment stances they would like. The 1998 pact provided ample opportunity for his detractors to gain the interpretive upper hand.

APPENDIX

TABLE 1

Voting Tendency by Religious Affiliation		
	Non-Evangelical	Evangelical
Sáez	13.3%	11.4%
Chávez	40.6%	41.4%
Salas	19.3%	16.1%
Fermín	3.5%	5.7%
Alfaro	4.2%	3.4%
Undecided	10.3%	12.6%
Not going to vote	7.0%	5.7%

From poll conducted by Consultores 21 from August 7–17, 1998 based on a stratified national sample of 1,500 cases in urban centers greater than 20,000. The maximum sampling error is 2.58 percent.

TABLE 2

Voting Tendency by Religious Affiliation and Gender				
	Fem/Ev.	Fem/Non-Ev.	Male/Ev.	Male/Non-Ev.
Sáez	18.4%	19.2%	6.1%	6.9%
Chávez	28.9%	31.3%	51.0%	50.4%
Salas	15.8%	21.4%	16.3%	17.0%
Fermín	10.5%	4.1%	2.0%	2.8%
Alfaro	2.6%	3.8%	4.0%	4.5%
Undecided	15.8%	11.3%	10.2%	9.2%
Not going to vote	5.3%	7.3%	6.1%	6.7%

The qualitative data for this article comes from a larger study of Evangelical men, hence the absence of female voices on electoral preferences. This needs to be noted since, as can be seen by the table, gender was a highly salient variable in voting tendencies. Evangelical females were similar to non-Evangelical females in their tendency not to vote for Chávez. The 20 percent difference between male and female voters here is largely explained by women's much greater inclination toward the one female candidate, Irene Sáez, toward nonparty candidate Claudio Fermín, and a more frequent "undecided" response. These gender differences will be analyzed in future quantitative work.

Notes

¹ There is no easy solution to the terminological difficulties of studying non-Catholic Christianity in Latin America. At least two thirds of Protestantism in Latin America is what in North America would be called Pentecostal. Latin American Pentecostals themselves do not dislike the term Pentecostal but generally refer to themselves as *Evangélicos*, to denote their professed prioritization of the first four books of the New Testament, which tell the story of Jesus, or *Cristianos*, to denote their “Christocentrism” and imply that Catholics are not true Christians. Baptists and other historic Protestant denominations usually refer to themselves as Evangelical as well. To complicate matters further, Catholic Latin Americans generally refer to all new religious movements as “Evangelicals,” while Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Seventh-Day Adventists do not use the term to refer to themselves. Here I will use the term Evangelical to refer to my Pentecostal informants, since it permits me to avoid the awkward prose that would be necessary for using qualitative data in which informants frequently refer to themselves as Evangelical. The term also permits the adequate presentation of some of the ambiguities caused by this conflation. As will be seen below, the difficult relationship between Congressman Godofredo Marín, a Baptist, and Pentecostals is framed by the fact that they use the same term—Evangelical—to identify themselves.

² D. Martin, *Tongues of Fire: The Explosion of Protestantism in Latin America* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990); A. Sherman, *The Soul of Development* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997); E. Willems, *Followers of a New Faith* (Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1968); C. Smith, “The Spirit and Democracy: Base Communities, Protestantism, and Democratization in Latin America,” *Sociology of Religion* Vol. 55 (2) (1994): 119–43.

³ C. Lalive D’Epinay, *Haven of the Masses: A Study of the Pentecostal Movement in Chile* (London: Lutterworth 1968); J. Bastian, *Protestantismos y modernidad latinoamericana: Historia de unas minorías religiosas activas en América Latina* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Economica, 1994) and “Minorités religieuses et confessionnalisation de la politique en Amérique latine,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 97 (January/March): 97–114; A. Chestnut, *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997); A. Corten, *Pentecostalism in Brazil: Emotion of the Poor and Theological Romanticism* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999).

⁴ D. Levine and D. Stoll, “Bridging the Gap Between Empowerment and Power in Latin America,” in S. Rudolph and J. Piscatori (eds.) *Fading States and Transnational Religious Regimes* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997): 63–103.

⁵ R. Ireland, *Kingdom’s Come: Religion and Politics in Brazil* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991).

⁶ P. Williams, “The Sound of Tambourines: The Politics of Pentecostal Growth in El Salvador,” *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America*, ed. Edward L. Cleary and Hannah Stewart Gambino (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997): 179–200; A. Droogers, “Visiones paradójicas sobre una religión paradójica,” *Algo más que opio: Una lectura antropológica del Pentecostalismo latinoamericano y caribeño*, ed. Barbara Boudewijnse, André Droogers, and Frans Kamsteeg (San José, Costa Rica: Editorial Departamento Ecueménico de Investigaciones 1991); Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1995).

⁷ See T. Steigenga, *The Politics of the Spirit*, (Lanham: Lexington 2001); P. Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2001); and A. Peterson, M. Vásquez, and P. Williams, *Christianity, Social Change, and Globalization in the Americas* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

⁸ See S. Ortner, “Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (1984): 126–66.

⁹ A. Swidler, *Talk of Love: How Culture Matters*: (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

¹⁰ See G. Obeyesekere, *Medusa's Hair: An Essay on Personal Symbols and Religious Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1979).

¹¹ Smilde, David A. "The Fundamental Unity of the Conservative and Revolutionary Tendencies in Venezuelan Evangelicalism: The Case of Conjugal Relations." *Religion* 27 (4) (October). 1997.

Smilde, David A. "Letting God Govern: Supernatural Agency in the Venezuelan Pentecostal Approach to Social Change," *Sociology of Religion* 59 (3) Fall. 1998.

¹² This is a modification of Sewell's point that all structures simultaneously enable and constrain. See William H. Sewell Jr., "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation," *American Journal of Sociology* 98: 1–29. Kenneth Burke powerfully argued that these are more intimately connected than being two sides of the same coin insofar as it is the constraints themselves that enable. See Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, ed. J. Gusfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

¹³ Sewell, "A Theory of Structure," 16ff.

¹⁴ Sewell argues that there are two dimensions to multiplicity: the multiplicity of repertoires and the multiplicity of schemas within any given repertoire. In this article I will be focusing on the latter. *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Regarding the effectiveness of symbolic ambiguity and inconsistency in leadership, see J. Padget and C. Ansell, "Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400–1434," *American Journal of Sociology* 98 (6) (May 1993).

¹⁶ The data for this article were collected during the course of a dissertation project on the conversion of men to Evangelicalism in Venezuela. This included six months of participant observation in 1994 and two and a half years (April 1996 to December 1998) of participant observation and interviewing with members from two Caracas churches.

¹⁷ The survey was carried out by Aruba-based Consultores 21, an independent polling company that works throughout Latin America but primarily in Venezuela. As the elections neared, such cooperation from polling firms—for whom an election cycle is something like the holiday season for retailers—became impossible.

¹⁸ It is worth pausing to consider what kind of generalizations can be made from these data since they were collected from a nonrandom sample during a period in which the very object of study—electoral opinions—was undergoing considerable change. The data *can* provide an intuitively plausible portrait of ways in which Evangelicals in this historical context related religious ideas to political options. However, given the nature of the sample, they *cannot* tell us the *relative distribution* of these different ways of making meaning within the population, nor whether there were *other ways* of making meaning that eluded the data collection altogether. For example, an unfortunate result of the fact that these data were collected as part of a project on Evangelical men is that, entirely beyond my intention, I did not conduct a taped interview with even *one* woman. The survey data suggest that there is a story here that I cannot tell (see Table 2 in the Appendix).

¹⁹ *Hermano* means "brother" in Spanish and is the most common term used when referring to fellow Evangelicals.

²⁰ This was part of a conscious effort on the part of Chávez and other members of the MBR-200 to build alliances with new social and political actors that were emerging. *Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200, ¿Y Como Salir de Este Laberinto? Propuesta Bolivariana*, twelve-page mimeograph (Caracas, no date [1992 or 1993]); *De la estrategia y linea de masas*, twelve-page mimeograph (Caracas, no date [possibly 1993]); *Conferencia de Organización (Caracas)*, Coordinadora Nacional del Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200, fifteen-page mimeograph (Caracas 1994); *La Importancia de la Asamblea Nacional Constituyente para el MBR-200*, ten-page mimeograph (Caracas 1995).

²¹ Like the other coup leaders, Reyes Reyes was forced to retire from the armed forces as part of the presidential pardon. Reyes Reyes would, two years later, join the Chávez administration as Minister of Transportation and Communications, and then be elected to the National Constitutional Assembly.

²² Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State: Nature, Money and Modernity in Venezuela* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

²³ In a 1999 poll, 82 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that Venezuela is the richest country in the world and 76 percent agreed that the government has not been able to distribute this wealth because of corruption. “82% estima que Venezuela es el país más rico,” *El Universal Digital*, 16 June 1999.

²⁴ J. Bastian, *Protestantismos y modernidad latinoamericana*.

²⁵ Beginning with the book of Jeremiah, this metaphor is used in the Bible in a negative sense to criticize insensitivity to social injustice: “Hear this, you foolish and senseless people, who have eyes but do not see, who have ears but do not hear.” Jeremiah 5:21. See also Ezekiel 12:2, Mark 8:18, Acts 28:27. *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995). Chávez used the metaphor in a positive sense to motivate people to support his antiestablishment campaign.

²⁶ “En mi gobierno un civil será el ministro de la Defensa pero yo seré el Comandante en Jefe de Verdad: Chávez.” *Ultimas Noticias*, 25 July 1998.

²⁷ *El Universal*, 25 July 1998.

²⁸ Richard Gott seems to argue that the growth of the Evangelical movement paved the way for Chávez’s millenarian rhetoric. “Chávez’s millenarian notion of a new start after the evils of corruption of the past must have struck a chord with the thousands of voters familiar with the language of Protestant preachers and Seventh-Day Adventists. Since Chávez speaks with the rhetoric of an Evangelical preacher, invoking pain and love and redemption, the chiliastic nature of his popular appeal should not be underestimated.” R. Gott, *In the Shadow of the Liberator* (New York, Verso, 2000): 46.

²⁹ J. Bastian, *Protestantismos y modernidad latinoamericana*, p. 273.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p. 273.

³¹ Froehle points out that in 1993 more Evangelicals voted for the Social Christian and Democratic Action parties than for Marín. See Bryan Froehle, “Pentecostals and Evangelicals in Venezuela: Consolidating Gains, Moving in New Directions,” in *Power, Politics, and Pentecostals in Latin America*, eds. Edward L. Cleary and Hannah Stewart Gambino, (Boulder: Westview, 1997): 201–25.

³² Indeed, while in office, he has been instrumental in several political battles over religious freedom.

³³ “AD respetará la ley y las normas electorales,” *El Universal Digital*, 23 July 1998; “No al Retroceso Democrático,” *El Nacional Online*, 23 July 1998.

³⁴ “Chávez se ubica en 42% y Salas Römer en 36%,” *El Universal Digital*, 25 November 1998.

³⁵ “Alzados en ORA.” *El Nacional Online*, 1 August 1998.

³⁶ Included in the fax was a balance sheet of the congressional stipends received by each party represented in the Congress, including ORA. The author is arguing here that Marín’s real motivation was not to lose this income.

³⁷ Euclides Gonzalez, “ORA Guarico Rechaza el Pacto Nacional ‘AD-ORA,’” one-page document circulated by author, July 1998.

³⁸ “OA...Por Marín,” *El Mundo*, 26 August 1999.

³⁹ Context is important here. It is common for pastors to use the announcements period to warn their congregation of dangers in the surrounding social context, for example, a new church in the area spreading a “false creed,” or a particular street corner where a church member was robbed the week before, etc.

⁴⁰ Keison Carrillo, “¿Porque no Apoyo al Movimiento ORA?” *Victoria Patriótica* 1 (October 1998): 12–14.

⁴¹ Paid advertisement in *El Nacional*, 14 October 1998.

⁴² “Factor Democrático y ORA de Aragua estan con Polo Patriotico,” *El Nacional Online*, 3 December 1998.

⁴³ Despite not following AD in withdrawing support for Alfaro the week before the presidential election, Marín gained the AD-ORA congressional seat. This was possible because the congressional elections took place a month before the presidential elections.

⁴⁴ The similarity of the Evangelical vote to that of non-Evangelicals (See Table 1 in the Appendix) masks what can be seen in historical context. In 1988, ORA received .87 percent of the popular vote (63,795 votes). If we use Johnstone’s 1986 estimate that 2.6 percent of the Venezuelan population was Evangelical, then ORA received fully a third of the Evangelical vote (P. Johnstone, *Operation World*, 4th ed. [Bromley 1986]). In 1993, ORA received .37 percent of the popular vote (20,814 votes). If we use Johnstone’s estimate that 4.8 percent of the Venezuelan population was Evangelical that year, then approximately 8 percent of Evangelicals voted for Marín P. Johnson. *Operation World*, 5th ed. [Bromley: Send The Light Books and WEC International, 1993]). In the 1998 elections, ORA received only .12 percent of the popular vote (7,518 votes) for their presidential candidate. If we use the figure of 5.5 percent of the population being Evangelical (www.providence.edu/las), this gives us a percentage of only 2.2 percent of Evangelicals voting for ORA’s presidential candidate (all voting percentages taken from www.cne.gov.ve).

Marín maintained his seat in the Congress until it was abolished in August of 1999. He achieved perhaps the greatest public notoriety of his career in that period, when he was one of the leaders of a well-planned media stunt in which he and other members of Congress scaled the fence that had locked them out of the congressional building. The event received international coverage and sparked a day of protesting and rioting around the Congress. He has not run for public office since that time. However, ORA still exists as a party participating in regional elections in Venezuela’s interior.

⁴⁵ Engagement of the schema of spiritual communion should be clear here. Chávez’s “sinful” violent past is contrary to communion with God and compatible with communion with Satan. Hindering the spread of the Gospel would hinder Evangelical efforts to put others in communion with God.

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