

A COVENANT MADE, A CONTRACT BROKEN: RULES AND YOUTH OF COLEGIO EVANGELICO BETHEL

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INTRODUCTION

It is 1:35am. The exaggerated beating of drums pierces the night air. The resonating of the *djemb*-like drums seems to almost overpower the music which blares from large speakers behind the crowd of tourists. In front of the popular bar “The Bhudda” howls and shouts rise up from the crowd which gather on the dirt pathway laden with stones and etched with mud from the afternoon rain. Standing on the balcony of the apartment of one of the town’s missionaries, the smell of a dense cloud of marijuana fills the cool air and drifts through the thickets of trees. The throbbing of the drums fills the core of my chest and masks the beating of my heart. The twenty or so people gathered are tourists - the kind that the locals call “hippies.”

Even though it is Friday, this is not a special night. In fact this is a night just as any other night. It is this spontaneous and unmonitored night life that has gained San Pedro La Laguna its notoriety as the party and drug capital of Lake Atitlan, Guatemala. Ironically, this tourist culture which seems to span the district between the Panajachel dock and the Santiago dock also surrounds all sides of San Pedro’s largest and well-respected Evangelical school, Colegio Evangelico Bethel.

Nestled between patches of surrounding forest, Colegio Evangelico Bethel towers four floors high and spans almost the entire length of the dirt road

leading to the main “hippy” tourist district. Its large red roof as well as baby blue and dark purple painted walls is hard to miss from the *lanchas* (speedboats) that race across Lake Atitlan at all hours of the day. If its size and colour were not enough to get your attention, then the school’s large painting of the volcanoes, mountains and blue waters of the Lake might. More catching to the eye, however, are the large blue, yellow and red letters over this painting with the words “*Jesús es El Señor de San Pedro de La Laguna.*” Mirroring its sister painting on the side wall of Bethel Church located at the top of town; the words of this painting are held in high esteem by this school and strikingly contradict the reputation of this area at the base of the town. Just before Colegio Bethel is where the restaurants and bars such as “Nirvana,” “The Bhudda” and “Munchie’s,” begin in the hub of San Pedro’s night life district. These restaurants and bars, among others, are clustered along the small jagged paths that eventually lead to San Pedro’s Santiago dock and *calle principal*. Seemingly in an odd part of town, it is the restaurants, the bars, the hotels, hostels and internet cafes that are the newest amenities to this area, while Colegio Bethel embarks on its 15th year anniversary.

Inside the school, as one walks through the massive black iron doors, is a large concrete basketball court with trees lining its sides and “Indian Nose”

mountain providing the backdrop. Almost as impressive as the beautiful painting on the side of the school is a large sign held up by two tall posts painted in a semi-gloss green with the words "A Dios Sea La Gloria" painted in large yellow letters. Mimicking this display, the same words grace the backboards of the basketball nets on either side of the court.

On the first level of the school along the walls are 7 signs each wrapped in clear plastic showing scenes and Bible verses of Christian values. The first level of the school holds the *primaria* or elementary classes from pre-kindergarten to grade six while the upper levels have class rooms for the three *Basico* levels with youth ages 13-15 years old. The third level has rooms with large wooden doors such as Musica, Dormitorio, the computer lab and the Pastor's Office to name a few. At the pinnacle of the school is the rooftop which is a large concrete space revealing a breathtaking view of Lake Atitlan to the left and the entire town resting under the boughs of the mountaintop trees to the right.

METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT

A central component of my research project was methodology – so much so that it has become a priority to elaborate on my methods in order to understand the unique context of my research in San Pedro. This research project began as a general curiosity regarding the peculiar large population of Evangelical churches in San Pedro. I began to walk around the town only the day after arriving in San Pedro, eager to begin my project. In a matter of days, I had already made several acquaintances among the various churches. As a result, I quickly stumbled upon Colegio Bethel which is a school under the wing of Bethel

Church, the largest Evangelical church in San Pedro.

It all began when I wandered up to Bethel Church one late afternoon after having met some members of Getsemani Baptist church. Bethel was closed but the guardians, a local family, were standing by the red iron fence that surrounds the front of the church. I introduced myself and the children gave me a tour of the church and brought me to its rooftop. I couldn't help but gasp because of the view which spread before my eyes. I spent a good deal of time with the children chatting about the town. They mentioned that two of their brothers attended Colegio Bethel. Curious, I asked them what this was and they explained that it is a *primaria* and *Basico* school. They pointed down to the bottom of the town telling me that it was located there. With the help of a local youth, I eventually found the school and wandered into the office of its Director.

As the sun was setting and dinner time was nearing, the Director, spoke to me about the structure of the school, the various expectations of the students and the overall change in San Pedro due to tourism. He pointed to a stack of papers and lifted one up to show me that the students had to follow a number of rules such as no dancing, no attending discos, no smoking, no drinking alcohol and no taking drugs. I visited the school again the next day, but this time the Director was not there. While writing a description of the school for my field notes, I met the physical education teacher. He became one of my key informants and an invaluable source of information and insight not only regarding Colegio Bethel, but also the town. Over a series of casual conversations, I became fascinated with the pressures and behaviours of the youth in the school as he would tell me stories about some of the problems the students

were experiencing. Successively, I began to narrow down my research project to a study of the behaviour of youth at the *Basico* level.

Colegio Bethel consists of two levels of schooling which are divided into mornings and afternoons. The *Primaria* level - which is the equivalent of elementary school in North America - is scheduled during the morning and consists of grades one to six. The *Basico* level on the other hand takes place in the afternoon and consists of students ages 13-15 years of age in three different grades - first, second and third. I decided to concentrate on youth only in *Segundo* and *Tercero Basico*, ages 14-15, after several informants noted that *primer Basico* students tend to be in a younger state and thus overall tend to be more observant of the rules.

The early stages of my research consisted of conversations. Most were the result of being in the right place at the right time. Looking back, these initial conversations with key informants at Colegio Bethel were some of the most instructive. Next, my interviews became semi-structured as I began to develop questions along the way.

Also noteworthy is the information made available by San Pedro's Municipality. Statistics on Colegio Bethel and information regarding the education system of Guatemala in general were highly accessible due to personal contacts I had made in the Municipality. Interestingly, the majority of employees at the Municipality were Christian. Many had recognized me when I visited the Municipality for the first time since I had attended some of their churches or had met members of their families.

Observations were an instrumental part of my research on the behaviour of the youth in *Segundo* and *Tercero Basico*.

Often spending three to four hours at Colegio Bethel in the afternoons, I was able to observe students in their everyday interactions as well as on special activity days. Sitting on the steps of the first floor of the school, I took notes during the half hour recesses some days which I found helpful to establish a presence at the school. At times however, I had difficulty creating relationships with the youth in *Basico* due to the restrictions that class can place on an anthropological study. Several times I was able to sit at a desk with the youth and observe classes in both the *Primaria* and *Basico* levels. This was an inestimable method for my research as I gained access to not only the students, but also the curriculum and the methods of teaching among the youngest to the oldest students.

One of the focal points of my observations in the afternoons was the Director's office. While having conversations or simply dropping into the office to say hello to the staff members, I was able to witness problems with students as they unfolded. Though I had not expected observations to take such importance in my work, they were also the primary means for me to gather information at church services or *cultos* in six Evangelical churches in San Pedro that seemed to reveal patterns among the youth as well as in relation to observations made during the time of the town's festival, the *Feria*.

Another highly pertinent method in conjunction with interviews and systematic observations was as a participant observer. Certainly having some proficiency in Spanish allowed for easier interactions during my research, but my own position as a practicing Christian seemed to create a "bond" or trust with many Evangelicals that I met. Access to any type of information was easily

obtained and most times, offered without having to ask. In addition, I quickly began to realize that being a Christian doing anthropological research among other Christians put me in a very unique position as a “native anthropologist” doing “traditional anthropology.” I gained a plethora of information as the step of the non-Christian anthropologist being “evangelized” or “witnessed” to (giving a testimony to another person of one’s experience as a Christian) by Evangelical informants was not a priority for my informants. In addition to gaining the trust of many people, this also afforded me with access into churches, homes and Colegio Bethel itself. In some instances I was even asked to sing solos for the worship times of the *cultos* in several churches and for some special night services. However, it is also important to note that as a Christian studying in this context I do not claim, as Kirin Nayaran illustrates, the “assumption that a native anthropologist can represent an unproblematic and authentic insider’s perspective” (Nayaran 1977: 23).

It is crucial to note that although my faith has been one of the greatest assets and at times a research method in itself, it has in no way been taken for granted. In some cases my faith had no positive effect in terms of access to the youth both in the school and at the churches. This was due to general disinterest among some youth and also due to the awkwardness of their age group of 14-15 years. My position as a Christian also put me under the doctrinal restraints of San Pedro’s Evangelical churches and overall community. As members of the churches, students and teachers of

Colegio Bethel could not participate in certain activities, so I too had to comply with their religious norms. Also, this meant that I was expected to maintain attendance at the churches on a regular basis. This proved to be very enjoyable and useful for research, but after a long day of field work, at times exhausting. Due to this unique setting, the trust and the close relationships created with my informants, I will attempt to keep all names under the protection of pseudonyms or try to use no names where possible. Certainly for this research paper, I also endeavour to allow for my informants to speak for themselves as much as possible in order to avoid “the monophonic authorial voice of the conventional ethnographic monograph” and instead preserve the “polyphony” of voices encountered during my field work (Ferguson, 1997, p. 2-3).

MISSION AND VISION OF COLEGIO BETHEL

"Trabajo de servicio"

A teacher at Bethel sometimes has work "de servicio" meaning that they are there to help the student, both boys and girls. There are many problems among the students at the school: divorce, orphans, separation, drugs, or students who can't or don't want to study. The school is a place to help, a "trabajo de servicio." We help

those who need it such as kids in San Pedro and in the College itself who don't have the economic resources needed for school materials like books. We give space to the children for an education. There are two reasons for this help: The first is that really, a lot of kids in San Pedro need it. The second reason is that it is all work for God. God goes to people. For example, when Jesus washes the feet of his disciples....This work that we do is demanded by God who is always with us. The focus therefore for us is to raise up students who graduate with a good education - to be professional men and women. The most important part is that they bear fruit - that you can see their fruit and that they can work, and can defend themselves against bad things. This mission we have for the students is one where they grow physically, spiritually and mentally. In so doing, the teachers are able to attend to the "necesidades" of the children and take the hands of those who need it. Its "phenomenal work." (Conversation with informant).

It is this same "trabajo de servicio" which gives the teachers and staff of Colegio Bethel the dual roles as friend and disciplinarian. Certainly the above account provides detail into how the role of friend is met. However, the role of the disciplinarian is one that is directly related to a system of rules and norms that is in place at Colegio Bethel. As such, every student at the beginning of the school year in January must agree to and sign a "Consentimiento de Responsabilidades del Alumno." The rules which are also known by the title "Reglamento Interno del Colegio," are written on this contract and are twenty-two in total. Below these rules is a blank section for any "falta" (error), the date that it was committed, and the "tratamiento" (treatment) that was

enforced. Below is a summarized list of the rules:

Consentimiento de Responsabilidades del Alumno

1. Come punctually to class daily. If late, I must return to my house and it will be noted in my personal record.
2. When for serious causes I cannot attend class, I must obtain written and signed permission from my parents/guardian to give to the Direction.
3. I must respect and obey all teachers and all staff members. This must be within/outside of the establishment.
4. I will behave with dignity and respectfully inside/outside the Colegio. No saying bad words, nor calling my friends or any other person by nicknames. Respect other's property.
5. Respect all belongings of the Colegio.
6. Keep proper respect and obedience toward the authorities of the Colegio (Pastor, full Direction, Director, Secretary, Assistant teacher).
7. Do not leave class and/or the Colegio without the teacher's permission, the Director or in his absence the Secretary and/or Assistant teacher.
8. Avoid rough games with my friends.
9. Participate in all classroom/Colegio activities in general and do not participate with another establishment in simultaneous activities.
10. I must come to classes uniformed, bathed, and clean with my shoes shined.
11. I am prohibited from riding my bicycle inside the establishment to avoid accidents.
12. Return the sports equipment that the Colegio lends me immediately after using.

13. Bring all my school items to receive classes and avoid disorder.
14. If I am a male, I will come with my hair trimmed “formally” and not shaved or with another style. If I am a woman, I will come with a good hairstyle, without earrings, necklaces, makeup or nail polish and without high heels. The length of the skirt must be to the height of the knees and socks must be medium length.
15. Enter my class with order, without running or pushing.
16. In class, I cannot get up without raising my hand.
17. Finish my homework and assignments that the teacher gives with responsibility and care.
18. Avoid all types of conflicts inside and outside the Colegio, as well as gossip.
19. I am strictly forbidden to dance, attend discos, smoke, drink alcohol, take drugs and or participate in gangs.
20. I will use the washrooms, for I am strictly forbidden to urinate in any other place.
21. I will not write or mark the classroom walls, washrooms, desks nor in any other place.
22. Attend all services of my church and the Sunday school to learn more of God.

In order to learn more about the perceptions of youth with regard to the rules of Colegio Bethel, I had a number of *Segundo* and *Tercero Basico* youth participate in free listing, pile sorting and interviews in the form of questionnaires. The information that I gathered from these activities with the youth revealed that there were other rules that are not included in the above agreement. According to my results these rules seem to be broken frequently which is also supported by in-

class observations that I had made prior to conducting the activities. The rules that were mentioned in the free listing, questionnaires and pile sorting are: no chewing gum, no taking fruit off the trees, and no throwing garbage on the ground - the latter is a rule that one student said was enforced by the guardian of the school. In addition, from the use of these techniques it was also apparent that the rules that almost every student noted as most important were no dancing, no attending discos, no smoking, and no taking drugs. Interestingly, the students did not include being in gangs which is included in the same set of rules under rule 19. These rules in particular were most often grouped together by every informant at least once in either the unconstrained or constrained sorting. As a response to one of my interview questions “In the past year, are there rules that you have broken and if so, what are they?” other important rules that were mentioned and from my results, those broken the most were: respecting the teachers, not marking walls, attending Sunday school, bringing all school items to class and not leaving the class without permission.

ANALYSIS

MISSING IN ACTION

“Donde están los jóvenes?”

Sitting on the plastic beige coloured lawn chairs in the over-sized auditorium of Bethel Church, a middle aged man wearing a tipico jacket stands at a podium replacing the Senior Pastor for the night. The man giving the service begins to talk in mixed Tzu'tujil and Spanish about the teachers of Colegio Bethel which have travelled to the city for their conference. Intermittently, the man

says the word "hap" and motions with his arms as though rain is coming down. He speaks briefly about the streets and the mud which has covered some roads to the city from landslides.

The man looks out from the stage at the approximately 25 people, and begins to say "Hermanos, hoy es el 24 de junio. La Fiesta de San Juan." Everyone remains silent as he continues with words interspersed with "hermanos." He tells the attendees that on Wednesday there was a youth, a boy, who attended the culto, but afterward went to San Juan for the fiesta. No one moved. It was so quiet in the auditorium that you could hear a pin drop. He waved his hands in the air at the crowd, stating the obvious, that there were no youth despite the two young men that had shown up. He continued saying that last night there were pickups going back and forth to San Juan at 2:00am and, of course, they only cost 1Q which makes it easier for Pedranos to go. Next, he asked everyone to open their Bibles to Luke Ch.9 v. 37. reading the story of the "Healing of a Boy with an Evil Spirit." He read until the end of verse 43. The voices of women pierced the quiet of the auditorium reading with him aloud.

The leader, breaking his silence, asked the church again "Donde están los jovenes?" (Where are the youth?). Next he stated that the church had 77 youth. He asked a rhetorical question after this asking "Cuantos jovenes en nuestra iglesia?" (How many youth are in our church?) Some women in the church repeated his figure and he fell silent and solemn once more. He looked around quietly from the left side to the right side of the auditorium. "Están allí, hermanos" (They are there, brothers). He paused and then repeated again "Están ayi, hermanos...en San Juan" (They are there

brothers...in San Juan). He shook his head slightly with sorrow declaring with an index finger pointing up and out that the most important thing is to pray. That is what counts. We walked up to the front of the burgundy steps which met the stage and prayed for a half hour on our knees. He led the prayer giving thanks for the rain that now fell in sheets of water over the large church windows. The women who knelt beside me cried out "Maktioch padre por la lluvia...maktioch. Gracias Padre" (Thank you Father for the rain...thank you Father). The leader continued to pray and ask for God's forgiveness over the youth that had gone to San Juan and for all that had not come to the culto. He asked God for blessing over them and to protect them. The prayer ended and everyone went back to their seats. (Excerpt from field notes.)

During both the festival of San Juan, the neighbouring town, a two minute drive from San Pedro by pickup, and San Pedro's own festival (also known as the *Feria*), the attendance of the youth at Bethel Church was exceptionally low. Indeed during one Tuesday night youth group at Bethel there were approximately ten people in attendance, including myself, the youth pastor and one of the missionaries. Coincidentally, the low attendance of youth occurred in conjunction with San Pedro's yearly festival called *La Feria*. Out of an estimated seventy-seven youth in Bethel church, only one from Colegio Bethel attended, whom I will name "Alberto". It is also important to mention that while the number of youth seems outstandingly low, the actual age range for a youth in Bethel Church is about 16-25. A youth is a person who is within this average range and not married. However the population I was studying was referred to as *pre-*

jovenes (pre-youth). Interestingly, when referring to youth in Bethel, the *pre-jovenes* were also lumped into the larger category of youth when “youth” in general were being referred to at any time. This made it difficult for me to distinguish how severe the lack of attendance by the *pre-jovenes* was since I had no idea what percentage of the seventy-seven “youth” they constituted.

A few weeks before meeting Alberto I had taken observations in his class of *Segundo Basico*. He talked a lot with his two other friends at the back of the class by the windows. They didn't seem to pay much attention to the lessons but instead made jokes and caused a great deal of noise in the class. However, around this time that I met him, I noticed that he was no longer in class when I continued my observations.

Although there were few people at the youth group, it was precisely the small attendance at this night's youth group and the insistence of the Youth Pastor, which gave Alberto his chance to speak to us. He stood in front of the group and gave his testimony. He said that he had attended an *encuentro* (a conference called a “meeting with God”) in a church in a different city and that he had accepted Christ for the first time. We thanked him for sharing his experience and continued the service. The theme of the *culto*, as directed by the Youth Pastor, was sin and reconciliation. Kneeling on the red carpeted steps at the front of the church, under the prayer direction of the Youth Pastor and another youth, we prayed for ourselves and especially for the youth that were thought to be at the *Feria*. We asked God to forgive them of their sins and to lead them to the church services instead. During the praying, the Youth Pastor knelt beside Alberto's younger brother, “Juan” and prayed the

“Sinner's Prayer.” This is a prayer that a person repeats when they make the decision to accept Christ into their hearts and lives. He prayed with him and eventually Alberto knelt with his brother as he cried and spoke to him telling him that God was going to change everything in his life.

It was only later at a *vigilia* (a special *culto* lasting about 5 hours from 7pm-12pm) at Bethel two weeks later that I learned the deeper meaning behind Alberto's life and the reason for his absence from class. While I sat with the Youth Pastor at the *vigilia*, Alberto gave his testimony in front of the 100 or so people in attendance. He spoke the same words about how much God has taken away the pain and hurt in his life and that now he was truly happy. As I listened, the Youth Pastor leaned into my ear, pointed to Alberto and said “le gusta las drogas” (he likes drugs). I was shocked and he repeated that this was true. Then I asked the Youth Pastor if this was the reason that “Alberto” was no longer at the Colegio. He responded yes, nodding his head. Alberto, it turned out, had been kicked out when he was caught with the drugs.

At the *vigilia* when Alberto had finished his testimony, the Senior Pastor walked onto the stage for a moment and told the congregation how wonderful it was that Alberto had come to accept the Lord. He shook his head in amazement at the crowd and said that he hardly ever saw Alberto before at the church services. Now, it was unbelievable to see him in attendance and so wonderfully changed.

In retrospect, Alberto was in fact the same youth that I had learned about in an interview with Colegio Bethel's Director. While questioning the Director about the pressure of drug tourism in San Alberto, the Director told me about a

youth in *Basico* who he had to suspend from the school for selling drugs. He told the boys parents “if he doesn’t change, he’s going to be expelled from the school.” The Director was incredulous that he was selling drugs – a boy from Colegio Bethel and a boy of Christian parents. In his mind it almost seemed impossible. When I asked him how this boy had access to drugs to sell in the first place, the Director responded that there were older locals that told him to sell the drugs which he purportedly offered to tourists and to his friends. The Director related this behaviour to the desire to have money and “cosas buenas” (good things) and that selling drugs is “easy money.” So it turned out in fact that Alberto was the same boy. I was startled to see how I had at one moment watched him with his friends in class misbehaving and being told by the teacher to quiet down to hearing about him, and at the time not knowing it was him, involved in selling drugs, to the last stage in which I met him, as a truly joyful, loving and well-behaved 14 year old boy.

The lack of youth at the various services that I attended and the fall-out of Alberto in Colegio Bethel speak to a pressure that the youth experience not only from the town and its luring rule-breaking activities, but also of a pressure that is from within this system. The very tone of preaching that occurred and the topics of prayers in the church services that I attended were directed either very scornfully at the youth that were not in attendance and thus presumed to be at the *Feria* or mournful and beckoning for their return. Such reaction to their absence at the services illustrates that the internal pressures that come from the churches of the Evangelical community in San Pedro and from their member families. Comparatively, there is a certain

code of conduct or system of rules that is found in both Colegio Bethel and in the churches. In fact, not attending the church services is a direct breach of the rule 22 on the contract of the *pre-juven* students at Colegio Bethel “Attend all services at my church and the Sunday school in order to learn more about God.” Thus when the youth do not attend services or even give their testimony about accepting Christ in the midst of problems such as involvement with drugs, it means not only that rules were broken in the context of church, but that this behaviour also translates into their school life at Colegio Bethel. Moreover, such situations are a constant and increasingly immediate reminder within the church and the family of a system of values and a lifestyle that is pressed upon the youth but all the same creates its own pressure on the youth by telling them that they are sinning because they are not at church for one reason or another or for whatever other rule they break. Thus, it seemed that any desire that the youth may have to go to church services and to obey the rules that are in place both in the churches and Colegio Bethel itself, is crushed under the weight of pressure that is coming internally from this system of lifestyle and values that seems to be intertwined and almost inseparable among the churches and Colegio Bethel – a system that at times appears to be falling apart.

INTERPRETATION

PERCEPTIONS OF RULES

“During the Feria there is a lot of music so we are told not to go to discos. We are Evangelicals and this causes more people

to fall. Some friends of mine will drink alcohol.” (Student, Segundo Basico)

“Alcohol has a serious consequence. The Director will call you in and say 'yesterday you were caught drinking' and we could be suspended for 1-2 weeks. Going to discos and taking drugs means that you can be thrown out once and not be able to come back during this time. In the case of drugs, if the police catch you then you can be put in jail. Bad words are not common here in the College but their consequence is 2-3 weeks. Smoking is the same.” (Student, Tercero Basico)

*“Durante la hora de servicio no podemos ir a la Feria. Necesitamos ir a la iglesia porque la Feria es **una cosa del mundo.**”
“During the service hours we are not allowed to go to the Feria. We need to go to church because the Feria is **a thing of the world.**” (Student, Segundo Basico)*

*“Those who go to discos don't have Christ, **but we are Christian.** These are rules set so that we don't contaminate our minds, body, like saying bad words. Doing these things will cause people to think that we are bad.” (Student, Segundo Basico)*

*“No discos and no dancing go together. We are **supposed to be blessings** to others for God. If people see that Christians are doing this then they can think 'podemos hacer tambien' (we can do it too) and 'that God will forgive us.’” (Student, Segundo, Basico)*

*“There are some students that bring cigarettes and **drugs of all kinds** and gum which they hide in their pants. Some students put drugs in their notebooks and leave class to go take the drugs.” (Student, Segundo, Basico)*

These perceptions of the rules of Colegio Bethel were gathered from interviews and pile sorting with the 16 youth from *Segundo* and *Tercero Basico*. From these statements, it is clear that some patterns have developed. The rules themselves are part of an ideology that links the church to the school and the school to the home. Clearly, these rules which are also enforced and upheld in church have translated into a “discourse” among the *Segundo* and *Tercero Basico* students which seems to reflect that found in the church and Colegio Bethel.

However what is intriguing is not how these rules are instrumental in limiting the activity of the students, but rather how they are a tool which creates identity. In several instances, the students used words such as “we are Evangelicals.” Such words assume an oppositional relationship to activities leading to sin which are associated with the rest of the community and thus disrupt the non-Evangelical community’s perceptions of Evangelicals – what values Evangelicals represent and their behaviour. For example, one *Segundo Basico* student said “Those who go to discos don't have Christ, but we are Christian....Doing these things will cause people to think that we are bad.” Here the rule of no attending discos has become a marker of what an Evangelical is and more importantly, not what he does, but what he does not do. As such, the identity of an Evangelical student is related to behaviour which is confined and defined by a certain set of rules such as those which pertain to both Colegio Bethel and the churches.

There is also a construction it seems, of an “us and them” discourse, the creation of the “Other” among the Evangelical community as reflected in the

comments made by some Colegio Bethel youth. Regardless of the degree to which these *Segundo* and *Tercero pre-jovenes* obey the rules, this “Other” attitude becomes to the student, something to the effect of: those who do not obey these rules are different from us who do and we are “good” and they are “bad”. This same idea of being either “good” or “bad” corresponds to the verse that the Director of Colegio Bethel repeated to both the *Segundo* and *Tercero Basico* classes that I observed on the last day of school before the vacation week and the *Feria*: “Everything is permissible’ – but not everything is beneficial (1 Corinthians 10:23, NIV)” It was this verse that the Director asked all students to think of before participating in anything during their vacation. They were encouraged to think twice the phrase: “Is this what Jesus would do?”

This verse written by the Apostle Paul and quoted in the context of warning to these students was ironic for two reasons. The first is that the words “everything is permissible” does not apply to these youth; the activities such as drinking, smoking, drugs, dancing, going to discos and attending the *Feria*, is in no way permissible if one considers that in order to attend Colegio Bethel the students must sign the contract of prohibitions. The second is that in the New International Version of the Bible, this verse from First Corinthians is found under the title “The Believer’s Freedom,” but in the case of attending Colegio Bethel the youth have no freedom. If they cannot attend the *Feria* itself, then how can they be given a choice to exercise the free will that God has given them? Inevitably, the students have signed a contract that binds them to agreeing to the prohibitions set against them. Thus they are in no way “free” to even make to exercise decision making powers because

in theory they have none. But this *is* all in theory of course, the verse itself was said because the rules and the contract the students must sign are just not enough. In the end, rules or no rules, contract or no contract and *Feria* or no *Feria*, the students are always faced with the decision of making their own decision – without Colegio Bethel to help them.

Furthermore, the rules of Colegio Bethel have become methods of example-setting to the rest of the community. This is seen in the previous statement of “Doing these things may cause people to think we are bad” but also in the other statements such as “We need to go to church because the *Feria* is a thing of the world” and “We are supposed to be blessings to others for God.” Thus the rules written and enforced in Colegio Bethel need to be obeyed in order to create a certain type of behaviour – one that sets an example and makes them blessings to “others.” More interestingly however, is that because these same rules are entrenched in rules and norms of behaviour set by the Evangelical churches in San Pedro, they encourage youth to adopt a standardized and idealized identity of an “Evangelical” which defines itself in relation to others. In this sense the rules of Colegio Bethel, and more largely of all the churches in San Pedro, are a way to reinforce this identity by continuing a polarity in behaviour and participation in certain “taboo” activities. This is supported by the same observation that Sheldon Annis made in his research on religion and production in the town of San Antonio, Guatemala: “When local people explain what being a Protestant means, they usually do so by contrasting Protestantism with Catholicism. They usually define in terms of a series of negatives” (1987, 80). Thus the rules of Colegio Bethel may even serve as a set of negatives to create a contrast between the

Evangelical community and the Catholic community which is still very strong and the predominant religion in San Pedro de La Laguna. One of my informants, a self-proclaimed Catholic, described San Pedro itself as a town with two religions: the Catholic religion and the Evangelical religion.

Another function of the rules themselves and obedience to them serves to uphold the reputation of Colegio Bethel itself. Several of the *pre-jovenes* in both *Segundo* and *Tercero Basico*, most specifically the males, saw the creation and maintenance of the rules as a way to preserve the reputation of the Colegio Bethel. Perhaps it may even be the case that Colegio Bethel's good reputation in San Pedro is because the rules have become the backbone or character of the school itself – in other words, its identity.

The rules of Colegio Bethel may be characterized as a microcosm of the larger set of rules of the Evangelical churches themselves. For example, one informant told me that a Pastor of one of the churches in San Pedro preached that attending the activities of the *Feria* was a sin. When attendance was low at one of the services, he sent one of the elders of the church as a scout to the *Feria*. The duty of the scout was to attend the festivities in order to formulate a list of the names of people he encountered at the *Feria* who were not at the *culto*. This sin of attending the *Feria* was applied not just to the youth, but in fact to all the members of the church that did not attend the *culto*. The list, she had heard, would be kept and used for future purposes by the Senior Pastor.

A BAILAR O A DANZAR?

Rock music blares from large speakers and fills the streets around. Through the windows the lights flash out onto the town below. Darkness wraps around San Pedro La Laguna with only street lights and lights from houses to be seen. The town is filled with this blaring music which pours out from the doors and windows. Hundreds of youth are dancing and clapping to the music. Others stand a little further away from the stage and watch with their friends. Some teenagers create a mosh pit at the front of the dance floor. About twenty guys slam their bodies into one another, their arms flailing as they fall to the floor from the impact. Sweat drips from their faces and glistens in the light of the disco globe in front of the band. The girls in their trajes, dance, clap and laugh as they watch the guys pick each other up off the tiled floor. Red, orange, green, yellow and blue flash from the round circles in the globe and create streams of light that bounce chaotically off the walls. On-lookers fill the doors, clamouring to see the band, but don't come any further. (Excerpt from field notes)

Youth in San Pedro dancing. Not a rare sight. But these are Evangelical youth and to any eye it would seem that they are breaking not only one of the rules of Colegio Bethel, among the other Evangelical schools, but a rule of some of the churches as well. Strangely, the place where they are dancing is Bethel church and the chaperon is their Senior Pastor, who stands looking on at the back of the auditorium with his arms folded and Bible tucked under his armpit.

When I walked into Bethel's auditorium I saw the band equipment and the floor empty of its usual chairs. Soon I learned that this was going to be a "dance." I was stunned so I approached a girl that I knew from the Pentecostal

church and asked her how there could be a dance when youth in the churches and schools were prohibited from dancing. She replied that it is different. What they are doing is “danzar” not “bailar.” Danzar is dancing in the presence of God to worship music in fellowship with God and other Christians. “Bailar” is any non-worship dancing like Salsa, rap, reggae, rock or dancing in pairs.

Certainly there was a difference between the two types of dancing. What appeared to be music that the youth are discouraged from listening to – “musica del mundo” (wordly music) - turned out to be worship music and the dancing, to be without physical or paired contact. When the night became calmer and the hours passed, the music turned slower and instead of “slow dancing” which might be seen in dances among youth in North America, the heads in the room bowed down in prayer and hands were raised in worship. That night, the last band which was from Quetzaltenango (also known as Xela), played their music while the Christian youth prayed. Most of the youth who were not Christian left the auditorium at this point or hovered at the door ways. The band members began to call people to the front of the room for healing. Very soon, girls, boys, and even some adults that had come were collapsing to the floor in heaps of tears and anguished cries to God. The band members were touching people’s foreheads and praying over them and then instantly falling to the ground. This healing by the band was an act associated with Pentecostals. Bethel church however is a Baptist church. Regardless however of the denominational differences, this proves that what took place that night was more than a dance or good time, but consisted of a ministry to youth in San Pedro.

This form of “danzar” coincidentally occurred only days after the end of San Pedro’s *Feria*. This was the first time in San Pedro’s history of Evangelical faith in the community that any church had held a dance for youth. The bands were welcomed warmly and most youth appeared to be enjoying themselves although the Senior Pastor seemed very wary of the activities and called himself “*la policia por la noche*” (the police for the night) among the bunch of “*locos*” (crazies).

The next day when my host family inquired how the “*concierto*” went and if I had enjoyed myself, they mentioned that it seemed to be a big deal in the town. According to what they heard, the dance at Bethel Church was announced on the radio station and in the streets to everyone. Apparently, the whole town could hear the music coming from the church. They asked me if I had danced which was a question that I got every time I returned from the *Feria* and every time I replied “no.” But this time when I said yes they were shocked at my answer. I tried to explain to them the difference between “danzar” and “bailar” but they didn’t seem to understand the difference. They repeated that Evangelicals don’t dance and that this is one of the rules of the churches and the schools. Why, they asked, were the youth allowed to dance at the church and not dance at the *Feria*?

It seems that this dance, which was a suggestion from some of the youth in Bethel, is almost an adaptation of the “*cosas del mundo*” Colegio Bethel and the churches are directly opposed to. While this dance was a way of ministering to both Christian and non-Christian youth, it was successful in doing so by using an activity which is of course familiar to the youth. The concept of a “dance” was thus modified to take on characteristics such as

worship and fellowship to make it suitable in a church environment. Furthermore, the dance occurred during a unique time - the vacation week for San Pedro's schools and after the *Feria* – a time when many youth would be looking for things to do to. This dance in fact represents what the absence of youth at the Friday night Bethel service also represents – that the majority of Pedrano youth are losing interest in Christianity.

Even more than losing interest in Christianity, youth seem to be lacking a desire to follow the rules that have been connected to it. But this “no bailar” rule has to do with the activities, such as sexual interaction, drugs and alcohol, that may occur if the dancing is directed at one another and not to God as would be the case with “danzar.” This distinction between “bailar” and “danzar” illustrates that the rules of church and the Colegio represent a lifestyle of Christian “values.” These values are set in opposition to a town where the “temptations” that the rules attempt to prevent and the churches preach against are abundantly waiting to be discovered.

In all the different churches and services that I had attended during my research time in San Pedro, I had not seen as many youth as I did at that one dance at Bethel church. It was almost overwhelming to see the amount of youth that attended the dance. Surely the attendance at this dance demonstrates that there is a lack of interest in Christianity and its rules so great that the youth have almost to be lured in by exciting church activities. In order to gain the attention of the youth, these activities - it seems from the success of Bethel's dance - must act as substitutes or adequately mimic the “wordly” activities that the churches and Colegio Bethel are trying to prevent the youth from participating in the first place.

There could have just as easily been a *culto* for youth that was in fact a “concierto” of worship music or perhaps just bands but no dancing. But “danzar” was certainly more effective in attracting the youth because it appeared much closer to what many of the youth try to do which is “bailar.”

CONCLUSION

During the initial undertaking of my research, my expectations were that the breadth and the strictness of the rules of Colegio Bethel would cause certain patterns of behaviour to appear among the *Segundo* and *Tercero* youth. In addition, I believed that the pressures for youth to disobey such rules and norms inside and outside of the community were a direct impact of tourism and the drug and party culture located in San Pedro and around the Colegio. However, my findings suggest that there is a much greater problem of disinterest in the Christian faith and in the churches as a result of these very rules and the sanctions associated with them.

I have learned that the rules of Colegio Bethel are in fact a metaphor for the difficulty that many youth in the age group of 14-15 years face by living in the dual communities of San Pedro. San Pedro itself is a double-edged sword. At once, one can find a strong and nurturing environment for Evangelical youth in the home, the churches and most especially at Colegio Bethel. But at the same time one can find that San Pedro is notorious for easy access to drugs and party life which are also made readily available to the youth.

For many youth, daily life consists of a concerted effort to stay away from the activities and lifestyles that bombard them in their town. The lives of Colegio Bethel

youth and the cases mentioned of those who could not abide the rules thus reveals the larger process of globalization that is quickly sweeping through San Pedro. Furthermore, while these youth are being pulled in various directions, in some instances it is almost willingly. Disobedience to some of the most minute rules at Colegio Bethel, I believe, such as committing “faltas de respeto” as simple as chewing gum or leaving class may be used as a way to set themselves apart – make themselves different - and provide some “action” from the mundane routines of class and daily life. On the whole, Colegio Bethel must continue in its mission and vision to support these students. From my observations, it is my opinion that the staff and teachers at Colegio Bethel are among the best I have seen. They are strongly rooted in Biblical values and strive to their utmost to provide a supportive environment where the students may grow in a holistic.

Despite such support from Colegio Bethel and the strength of San Pedro’s churches, however the pressures on the youth from the community and tourism will continue to increase with time as the lack of control over cultural and economic activities in San Pedro remains. At this rate, more rules will have to be added every year to Colegio Bethel’s contract of rules and responsibilities for students in order to compensate for new activities that youth may partake in. This, however, is hardly a solution. In my opinion, the Evangelical churches ought to be making an even more concerted approach to support the youth through more services such as youth groups and foster relationships of respect and learning in the churches and Colegio Bethel. If the youth

are not present at the *cultos* or the youth groups, then efforts need to be made to go where they are. Prostrating them in services and assuming their whereabouts and activities only makes matters worse. It must be mentioned though that Colegio Bethel has already taken a great step under the supervision of the Director to include a program of monthly themes such as “respect” which are implemented by activity days and are reinforced within classes. In the end, I believe that all efforts to implement rules and discipline youth in San Pedro as a whole are in vain without a change in the attitudes of the members of the Evangelical community as a whole. In order for youth to grow into knowledgeable and respectful citizens in San Pedro, the attitudes of the members of churches, the schools and the parents have to make a collective commitment to creating a more positive and loving environment for the youth. Colegio Bethel’s mission and vision and their reputation are certainly a place to start. But the values behind such rules and the norms of the churches must also be explained and understood by first the parents and second the youth who are expected to obey them. If Colegio Bethel and the churches want its youth to change and be changed, then they must ensure that the community is being taught to be examples to the youth of godly men and women instead of just preaching and enforcing this lifestyle. Only after change happens internally, can there be changes occurring among the youth and furthermore in San Pedro as a whole.

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