
STUDY

Translated to English by John Bell

A NEW TYPE OF FEMINITY AND MASCULINITY: LOOKING AT GENDER IN THE EVANGELICAL WORLD OF LA PINTANA*

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In this article Sonia Montecino explores the relationships between men and women in the Evangelical world of the borough La Pintana in Santiago, pointing out the existence of important cultural changes in definitions and conduct associated with both females and males. According to her, the masculine world has changed, abandoning the marks that popular culture designated as marks of virility: football, alcohol, and violence. The same thing is happening with the women, who are widening their horizons, adding as marks of femininity, motherhood, and affiliation to a community and the dignity of womanhood itself. Nevertheless these changes do not necessarily

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imply a change in unequal gender relationships while a rise in neo-machismo causes men to hold arbitrary and unlawful power. Women however, can use the rhetoric of equality, thanks to Biblical interpretations, to offset male domination. Evangelical men and women, influenced by “the world” through the media, adjust their relationships to models without reference to their backgrounds, which means undertaking a “journey” which is both complex and at times tense, and which will, of course, vary from generation to generation.

Introduction

The intention of this article is to report on the make up of gender relationships in the evangelical world of the borough La Pintana in Santiago at the end of the 90's. To talk about La Pintana and evangelicals is synonymous, in our country, to something of a popular nature, to identities that are interwoven with poverty, marginality and more often than not, social indigence. To separate these identities into feminine and masculine ones means undertaking an exercise which has to be examined simultaneously in both a centred and uncentred way, given that gender here is crossed by class (and/or ethnic origin), by generation and by religious affiliation. Thus, which of these elements weighs more than others at the moment of defining the symbolic constructions of being man or women or of asking about the relationships between them is a theoretical dilemma which is not easy to resolve.

In this inquiry, we propose to show evidence of changes and continuities in gender representation and relationships in the evangelical world of La Pintana and their correlation to the processes involved in the cultural transformation —globalisation— of Chilean society. And so it interests us to know about the new femininity and masculinity: the economic and domestic behaviour and the rituals of men and women: the language with which gender is tackled in the mediums of evangelical communication and finally the elements present in the processes of cultural remoulding.

In these pages we comment especially on one of the topics tackled, which is the one of femininity and masculinity¹, and we touch on others. The reason for this is that we think that the changes in gender relationships are talked about more than any other profound change in systems of symbols and power.

¹ Some of the ideas which are discussed here were gone into in more depth thanks to Project No. SO13 – 99/2 of the DID of the University of Chile.

The methodological strategy

The investigation contemplated a qualitative methodology, in which life histories, in depth interviews an ethnographic registry of worship and Dorcas² meetings were the favoured strategies³. The borough La Pintana contains various social situations and the homogenous and unpredictable image, which there is of this borough, does not really exist as such. La Pintana was created in 1981, and has undergone two phases of population growth. The first from the 50's (when it was part of the borough La Granja) to 1985 and which was characterised by a slow migration, but which began to make itself felt at the end of the 60's with the taking over of the lands of the ex San Rafael farm by poor from the borough Santa Ana. The second phase came about between 1985 and 1994 and is characterised by a massive movement of population to remove poor people from different districts in Greater Santiago and settle them elsewhere. Little by little we began identifying these dissimilar areas, sketching out the topology of the districts that oral tradition had drawn for us, knowing which street was "worse" than others, visiting churches and the houses of worshippers. We had a kind of "protection", since we were identified with the evangelicals as we visited their houses and their centres of worship and they often accompanied us in our search for people to interview. In this way the "ghost of delinquency" and the dangers were removed. The stigmatised identity which many of the people that we interviewed told us that they felt also played an important part in this: for us it was the experience of a group of people who felt singled out, looked down and devalued by Chilean society. We began to understand the danger of confusing one part with the other and also began to question our own prejudices.

One of our most important personal experiences was to get to know something we had read about regarding the "Evangelical Community", their unity of feeling in regarding poverty as a "culture" and an identity.

To get to La Pintana you have to go through various communities and the confrontation of segmentation, on the one hand, and social differences, on the other, was embodied in the personal voyage we had to make to get near to the people we interviewed. The Chile of wastefulness and ostentatious consumerism was transformed, in La Pintana, into a Chile

² Dorcas are meetings specifically of women during days and hours outside worship.

³ 30 life histories were studied of 15 men and women from different generations, belonging to 11 churches: Congregation of Vitacura, Pentecostal Methodist, Second Pentecostal Methodist, Apostolic Pentecostal, Reborn, Of God, Congregation of the Church of Christ in Chile, Trinitarian Congregation of Chile, Wesleyan, Bethlehem, 7th Day Adventists. In most of them we went to worship and attended Dorcas meetings and vigils.

of precariousness, of narrow streets, empty of men until sunset, when those who have work return home and the unemployed and those with other underground jobs emerge, streets which sometimes harbour children and glue sniffing youths, streets where the people's creativity can suddenly burst out. It was in this Chile that we went to houses that were modular, houses made with a mixture of materials, narrow, one touching another like the hairs on a person's head, houses that at the beginning were sheds and to which, during the good times, people had gone and added rooms, kitchens, bathrooms, houses with a little bit of a garden which families that had a rural tradition fought to populate with flowers, herbs and trees. In the Chile of La Pintana we were confronted with the image of women constantly going to the market, to the school, to the first aid station, to the churches, hardworking and untiring in their trips around the community, sometimes forming groups of friends, other times couples sharing news but always a feminine world travelling a rough and ready path with the purpose of doing something.

But we are also dealing with a Chile where the poor disguise their wants and act generously. This generosity and extravagance was what we received in the evangelical community of La Pintana. In each case, independent of the amount of income, "the bread multiplied" so as to invite us to lunch, tea or breakfast: we also saw how they stretched themselves to the limit to lay a table and how neighbours or relations were also often invited to share the little food that they had. Solidarity was not just a word. It was a lesson for us and touched a nerve: a theme for reflecting about the different Chiles which make up our country, a theme for thinking about social policies but, above all, a cultural question about the influence of market values (understood both as economic and symbolic) in our 3rd world reality.

Little by little we started weaving a pattern of friendships and contacts, which allowed us to interview a great variety of people belonging to different churches. What helped us in this was the fact the problem that interested us did not appear to be directly religious but fell within the experience of what it felt like to be a evangelical man or woman today. Thus we found out that a part of the evangelical community rejects investigations which pretend to find out how many worshippers or churches they have or which centre exclusively on their religious experience. There is a suspicion that this is part of a plot to destroy them. Only in some cases did we have to get permission from the pastor to undertake interviews or to participate in the Dorcas meetings or meetings of worship. In general they opened the doors to us, there was a great deal of trust and we could make

profound conversations and observations to both evangelical men and women. This was how we set off on our “journey”.

A NEW TYPE OF FEMINITY AND MASCULINITY AMONG EVANGELICALS IN LA PINTANA

New evangelical masculinity: flight, movement and relearning.

As can be seen in specialised bibliographies, the challenge which the men who follow the Gospel face every day is to be able to testify as to what is to be a “new man” and to show by their social and body behaviour that they have passed through the old barriers that defined their virility.

The transformation into this new man signifies a potentially conflictive process since the masculine role models which have marked these men since infancy and through much of their adolescence are paradigms of the gender identities known in our culture. Thus, for example, the great majority of those we interviewed had an absent father, one who either starved them of love or who had left home, others lived with a violent father or an alcoholic one and only in a few cases was there any mention of a caring and loving figure in their childhood. Luis Godoy (45 years of age) says of his father:

“He was an irresponsible person: he left this life, he died, it seems from the same thing, drinking. The fact is that after he left, the home broke up and I had to turn to vagrancy. So I started to live my life without any studies, like a little animal without anything, sleeping under cardboard boxes. When you grow up like this, you don’t suffer from hunger, a tramp never suffers from hunger, but what you suffer from is a lack of love, someone who understands you”.

This testimony illustrates the painful experience of someone who grew up fatherless, someone who was abandoned and who has had to make it himself in the vagaries of life and make up for the lack of affection he received and also shows up the irresponsible father, whose alcoholism leads him to death and to the symbolic death of the family.

It is an experience which is common among men, above all among the older ones, who began to work when they were very small and sacrificed their education so as to bring some income into the house. We are dealing with sections of the population who have been deprived since birth of opportunities to study and a family environment. We can also report that although several of the younger men boast a better education, the

figure of the absent father is still there and reinforces the idea of being a “hobo”, with addiction to drugs and new examples of being marginalised. Manuel Muñoz (21 years of age) relates:

When I was a kid I didn't play much, I grew up with my neighbours, and we used to spend our time going to the centre. We went to steal magazines like “Caras”, “Cosas”, “Time” and trendy clothes from the shops and at night we used to sell them. That's why I didn't play a lot when I was a kid. I took lessons from a teacher in boxing and basketball but in the free time I had I did other things, like being with my friends, doing drugs. I did glue sniffing for a year, every day, two jars, up to three during the day. My dad never showed he was worried about me, we were miles apart.

This indifference and absence of the father is one of the essential factors in the formation of this new type of virility. What about the female figure, the mother ?. During the childhood of the men we interviewed, the mother has been present or has died but in general we are dealing with a woman who, within the context of her poverty, has always been together with her children. In the same way, grandmothers who have been an important presence in extended families by giving love and help are especially valuable.⁴ In this way the female appears as the possibility of order within the home, of resistance to the breaking down of the nuclear family which the figure of the father suggests. Thus, Manuel Muñoz, regarding his mother:

I am a son to my mother, not to anyone else: with her I've always had a good relationship. You know that a son is never bad for his mother...

Although the mother dedicates herself exclusively to housework or shares it with a paid job, she will always go out of her way as a mother to make sure that her children grow up and develop. There are no negative visions of the mother, she will always be marked as positive, by her selflessness and by the notion of sacrifice, in front of the figure of a father defined as negative and irresponsible. Thus the “ontogenetic” horizon of the evangelicals whom we interviewed crosses with the “philogenetic”, to form subjects who share the common experience of constructing types of masculinity where the lack of a father figure is fundamental and the presence of the mother the point of departure for structuring their existence.

⁴ We are using the concept of help here in the sense of keeping daily life together: food, cleaning, looking after those who are ill etc.

From this cultural horizon they have to begin their road towards creating a completely different model. If we now analyse what other characteristics there are associated with virility, we can say that one of the central elements is alcohol. There are innumerable testimonies pointing out that the “journey” has made it possible to leave addiction and repeating the scene of the drunk who goes to church, be it for sentimental reasons or from the urgings of mothers, partners or neighbours, and experiences there the apparition of the “spirit”.

The process of leaving drinking is certainly not automatic, and the men often suffer relapses, in which will power and the help of both the community and the pastors are fundamental. Jaime Duran told us:

At that time I was sick, sick drunk, alcoholic. I used to drink every day, all day. But they were good times, I mean at bottom they were bad, but to remember them for me is good...”

We can appreciate that in the man who has just become an evangelical there are always ambiguities as far as alcohol is concerned: in his conscience he knows that it is bad but he also remembers the pleasure it brought. There are other cases like this which we saw in the comings and goings of men to church, which seemed to act as a therapy for trying to leave the “vice” of alcohol, a therapy which poor men had more to hand than a doctor.

It is interesting to point out that, in relation to alcohol, the argument that we heard in various churches was that of not getting drunk, of not setting a bad example, but that it was all right to drink moderately, have a glass of beer or wine from time to time. Jaime Duran again:

To be an evangelical doesn't mean that we can't do normal things, many people have got it wrong about evangelicals. We can go to the beach, we can have a barbecue, and we can drink a little wine, not fight for the wine. This is where the rich are more intelligent, they know how to behave, they go to parties but they know their limits, they don't walk about drunk or fight. So you've got to know how to control yourself, got to be more proper, more like a gentleman.

Even if this account bothers us we can still appreciate that it points out the opposites which masculine identities consider in their own process of change. In the first place there are the differences between the evangelicals and the non- evangelicals and from this the stereotype visions of the former as being persons “deprived” of the normal desires of life (to have a good time, eat well etc). On the other hand there is the rich/poor

opposite, where the second is one of belonging, to know one is poor and an evangelical. And finally the gentleman/"pleb" opposite, the "proper"/"improper" one, is homologous and takes into account the idea of belonging to a class but also a difference in manners. Knowing how to control yourself is the key to comparing yourself with "gentlemen", with the "well educated".

From this we can read the entrance of the evangelicals into the world as having a kind of symbolic "whitening" or "cleansing" effect. The transformation of the popular vision of masculinity by way of a "journey" means a step not only towards a new type of virility but also the adoption of customs, gestures and behaviour patterns of another social class. Controlled as opposed to uncontrolled will be the sign of change. This can also be seen as a notion of order and disorder. In this sense entering the world of evangelicalism means going through a kind of "civilising" process as a clear contrast to the world of "barbarism" in which the men are living.

Leaving alcohol brings leaving friends along with it, that is to say leaving the masculine world where manliness has been defined. The argument from the churches is that these people are not real friends but only a source of temptation. There are a lot of accounts from those who have been converted about not receiving any of the groups they used to get drunk with or that, after their conversion, the same groups do not now consider them to be friends, which only confirms that the relationship they had with the groups was a false one.

We can deduce from this that one of the hardest tests for the men is to leave alcohol, since we are talking about an innumerable amount of aspects here, from physical need to the range of social and symbolic practices associated with it which legitimise this type of masculinity. Because of this we believe that the emphasis which the evangelicals give to their renunciation of alcohol speaks not only of the fact of doing it but also of the inseparable relationship that alcohol has with the male character.

Another topic, which is mentioned in this new concept of manhood, is the nexus between masculinity and violence. Confronting this the evangelical argument proposes peace. There are numerous accounts of drunken men arriving home and beating their wives or behaving violently towards their children. Violence appears in the histories of men's lives as a model from infancy, then as a way of forming relationship between themselves, and finally as a verification of their authority over the family. The model that they must strive to get to is the man who is pacific and tranquil. Antonio Carrillo thinks:

O.K I still get mad, I still shout but I'm much more understanding now, there's peace with God. God says, "You left My peace": He left peace here in the world, He left it for us."

Obviously the changes that occur are not as radical as the churches publicly announce. The men have modified their physical violence—although we knew of many cases of matrimonial conflicts that were brought to the church precisely because of conjugal violence—but “getting mad” and “shouting” are difficult to wipe out overnight. In the same way as alcohol, you can be a “little” violent, but the main thing now is to have on your horizon a moral conscience which says that this behaviour is not right.

Another important and relevant element is language. The change in men is crystallised in a new language. The most obvious is the use of swear words. “God sealed my mouth, my mouth was like fire, now I don’t swear” Eugenio Avila asserts.

Suppressing swear words goes hand in hand with non - aggressive behaviour, with leaving violence. This change is considered by the majority of men to be fundamental in being “another person”. We can join this to the fact that entering the church always means a widening of vocabulary, new words and new oral constructions. The reading of the Bible and the sermons of the pastors give men new models for forming arguments and discussion. The universe of oral language expands, even for those who told us that they do not know how “to read the Bible”. So from a man who categorises the world through a limited vocabulary, he passes to be one who is constantly open to religious and biblical arguments, “intellectualising” himself, or we could say, becoming “enlightened”. Another element is the change in dress. The men left us in no doubt that their “journey” brings with it a change in their clothing and a concern for the way they dress. The evangelical model of the man with a suit and tie is the something they want to emulate. However linked to this is the topic of cleanliness (or “purity” in the most subjective terms) Another interviewee recounts:

I’m an evangelical, a man who’s accepted Christ in his life. We do what He wants us to do. In my case I get myself ready at 6 in the evening, put my clothes on, clean and wash myself and go out looking spic and span, smelling good, because that’s how I should be to preach the Gospel.

The opposites, dirty/clean, smelly/odourless, are terms for pointing to a renovation which is spiritual but also bodily. Evangelical man must personify purity of soul and at the same time show a purity of body.

Lastly, the experience of “feeling Christ within you” or being “filled with the Holy Spirit” provokes a feeling of pain and happiness which is expressed with tears. It is noticeable how the men refer to this constantly in their life as evangelicals. Carlos Muñoz:

When I began to talk to him, the pastor began weeping and he came up to me and embraced me and then we both began to weep and he told me: Brother Carlos, what a beautiful thing the Lord has given you, he has given you such a beautiful gift.

And so there is another possible language: that of emotion and of the love between brothers. If we think of the classical ways of male socialising, in the repression of feelings and in the unwritten law that “men don’t cry”, we can infer that there has been an important change as far as this is concerned. We are now talking about a man who can let out his pain and his feelings without having the reputation of being a “homosexual”, this being, on the contrary, a characteristic which forms part of the new virility.

In this way idea of a masculinity which abandons alcohol, violence, swearing and being badly dressed means a transition towards a model of virility completely opposed to what men have known since their infancy and where their identities have been structured prior to their “journey”. As we have seen, the transition is not an easy one and implies a restructuring of behaviour and a change in feelings and wishes, so as to take on board rules that are unknown and customs of other social classes.

We think that the process through which our subjects pass is a double one: on the one hand there is the idea of “changing your skin” but at the same time this also means achieving a kind of improvement in status—either real or imaginary—which we have called a “whitening”. So the takes place as follows: I am a new man and leave behind the stigmas of poverty (drunkenness, violence, swearing and dressing like a tramp) and I change myself into “another”, someone else, a model nearer to those of the social classes that are superior to mine. In this way the devaluation of poverty as a stigma is overcome or at least alleviated by attempts to become (or get near to) the model. We could say that the make up of the masculine evangelical identity is indissolubly linked to the metamorphosis of the symbols which specify, for this man, how to belong to another class.

It is important to make clear that what we observed in the reality of La Pintana allows us to say that there is not just one masculine identity but variations within a process of change and that in many cases, especially in younger men, what there is an identity in transit. This is very important, above all because we have to consider that they tend to be more irregular in

their adherence to worship, more itinerant in their belonging to churches and less constant in their religious affiliation. The new evangelical masculinity is arrived at by the process of basing this “new man” on a reworking of popular moulds which combine elements of the new virility with the old.

The construction of a neo-machismo: the fight to be a father provider

In the arguments used by the majority of the men, the concept of machismo is used to speak about their “previous life” and also about the elements that make up their new one. They visualise at least two great themes in this respect: on the one hand the problems of paternity and on the other, the work of a wife. As far as paternity and conjugal relationships are concerned we can interpret the changes in the process involved in the re-making of masculine identities and also sketch out the forms of evangelical neo-machismo.

The most relevant learning experience is the one of transforming the subject into a pater familias. Accounts point out that the notion of “becoming a father” is formed, in one way, by being the provider who “invests” money in the family, who does not squander it and who contributes to the daily and future existence of the family nucleus. From this comes the concept of being “responsible”. This responsibility is legitimised by belonging to a family where the actual God is the father (and not now the “son of a mother”, the bastard, but a son of God, which is how the subject reaffirms his identity). Afterwards comes the topic of responsibility towards the wife and children. Generally the evangelicals regard this as a fundamental step: the new treatment of the wife is part of the new paternal identity which defines virility.

In this way the responsible man will have to act as such before God, his children, his wife and the social environment he finds himself in.

Nevertheless, these changes, according to testimonies, do not signify a complete transformation in the personality of the subject, understood as being the matrix of his existence. It is not as if these new attributes imply submission—we could say the “feminisation” or “domestication” of the macho—or subordination. What is in the process of being reformed is the attitude with which he fights or argues for what is right. This basic attitude is respect for “others”.

One can appreciate that there are various strategies associated to this idea of paternity and the experience of a transformation in the subject does

not mean a total stripping out of all the cultural data which he had previously, but a shaping of them towards this new manner of being, where the most crucial factor is going to be the feeling of respect as a means for relationships. Antonio Carrillo's experience is the following:

Following the Gospel you dedicate more time to the kids, to being with them, having a good communication with them. The oldest one doesn't lie to me because he knows I'm not going to punish him. I don't punish, I might tell him off or give him advice but I don't treat him badly or beat him. Before I used to be aggressive to the kids, without any patience: I used to raise my hand at them for anything and so they didn't have any respect for me only fear. Now no, the older one has changed, I talk to him and we have a really good relationship, he tells me about his things and I listen. Everything is thanks to God, Jesus made the changes, he teaches you to guide your family, teach them and your wife, and do everything with love and peace: when you give love you receive it, what you sow you reap.

So this "paternal responsibility" for teaching all the family leads the man to feel that he has a mission inside himself, like a "teacher". The paternal "before and after" are signalled by the end of violence and the entry of love. Above him is the God, the great father who illuminates him to act. Here we can appreciate one of the elements which make up evangelical neo-machismo: the man takes on the weight of family life as a father, his presence becomes vital in its development and his children and his wife become like disciples. This is the new power of men, where violence or mistreatment are not legitimised but only teaching and guiding what is good and bad. We can also see that men do not lose their power in public as well as in private. As we have seen while visiting families, it is obvious that the men have to make an effort for assuming this paternal responsibility⁵, of supporting the family economically, respecting the wife etc. Nevertheless the idea is not one of making female and male complementary figures, or the idea of an equality between them. A man who has based his power on the identity of the aggressive macho, the drinker, the fighter, the one who abandons his family, the waster passes to be one who assumes the role of the pivot of the family, the boss, and the leader. He establishes his dominion through a new language but at the end of the day we are still talking about power over others.

⁵ As we have seen, a very strong characteristic of Chilean machismo, different from others in Latin America, is the one of not assuming a paternal role: in other countries a macho has the obligation to maintain and worry about all his children, whether they are legitimate or not, and also his godchildren.

The battle that men have to overcome the anomaly of their family origins and how they have been brought up is very clear: maybe it explains the “fundamentalism” with which some of them assume the role of *paterfamilias*. It is overstating the fact to say that the “whitening” process they have gone through is a total one: in our opinion, this exaggeration of the paternal role hides the fear of the fractures which threaten the new order they have constructed by de-constructing it. It is not uncommon to encounter evangelical fathers imposing discipline and strict hours on their children as a way of not repeating the nomadic life style to which they were submitted.

In our judgement, the elements of a hyperbolic paternity, the unquestionable dominance of the man in the family, the imposition of rules etc. all of which illustrate evangelical neo-machismo, are reflected in the public sphere, that of the Church, by the figure of the pastors, and above all in the Methodist and Pentecostal Churches. The evangelical way presents men with arguments for establishing their authority in the family—in several cases their authoritarianism—endorsed by the notion that “the man is the head of the family” and the woman “a fragile piece of glass”. If virility was measured by the power of violence in the past, it is now measured by argument and regulation. It is interesting to note that it is precisely those men who most utilise literal references in the Bible so as to analyse events happening in the world and understand them, that spend more time reading, maybe because the masculine model of the pastors imposes this type of exercise on them, or maybe because they need to legitimise their own authority by the Word.

It is important to point out that readings serve to confirm the power of the father figure in the family, but could also be used to propose new models for understanding masculine and feminine characteristics:

Jehovah made Adam fall into a deep asleep and placed him over all the beasts and the birds and the cattle of the fields and because Adam didn't find any suitable help, He created woman. She was ideal for man but man didn't recognise this so, what happened?. Now women have raised themselves up higher than men, because men are more arrogant, they're less humble and they have to go through a lot of things, like I did, before they can say: sorry.

The concept of a woman's “suitability” and “help” gives rise to a reflection on the differences between genders and the possibility of their being complementary. Not opposites like “head of the family” and “fragile as glass” but a link of mutual co-operation where it is assumed that the feminine part possesses more spiritual value than the masculine and a

verification that women have “raised themselves up higher” than men, make it clear that the experience of a process of change is unavoidable on the feminine side.

It is crucial to clarify what the phenomenon of change means in the symbols of masculine power. It is clear enough in the Pentecostal churches and larger Church associations, where hierarchies, sermons and practices can be classified as “neo-machismo” in the sense of “who’s in charge” and in the sense that even though most of the faithful are mainly women this is not expressed in the rituals of worship. Nevertheless this is not the case in the smaller associations and in those which are much more permeated with reform and cultural modernisation. There it is possible to find a balance —and at times a predominance— between men and women in the church and sermons which speak in favour of complementary gender relationships.

But it is also important to differentiate these new masculine evangelical identities in generational terms, since it is obvious that the younger men (between 25 and 30 years of age) have arguments and reasoning where it is possible to recognise a tension between the older practices of power and the new ones, even though their evangelical wives also question the latter. On the other hand the older men have reasoning and arguments that are clearly authoritarian, leaving their wives little room to exercise domestic and public power.

We have also detected that many of the matrimonial crises of young evangelicals based on feminine criticisms of macho behaviour. Many of them say that they find it difficult not to exercise authoritarian power over the family, not to control the wife or the household budget etc. It is worth commenting on the fact that there is often a before and after in the history of these men —and as we have seen, among the women as well— within the same evangelical “journey”. I.e. many times matrimonial crises are produced when they are already in the church. The fact that the couple belong to an evangelical group does not automatically mean a life without conflict. On the contrary we believe that the re-socialisation of gender is what generates many of the disagreements and problems among couples, above all with the men and their adjustment to a “new life”.

Guillermo Recabal told us:

When I married I was in love with my wife but I treated her very badly and for about a third of our married life things started to come apart and we were on the point of separating. We have now been about fourteen years with the church and we’re still changing, because the Gospel after so many years has had a real impact on my

married life. I used to have a wrong vision of the Gospel: I used to think that the husband is the head and the wife has to submit to her husband, because that was what the Word, the Book, says: I'm the one in charge and my wife cannot express an opinion and if she does it has to be in favour of me. But this was destroying my marriage. I am the head but I have to love my wife like Christ loved the Church and this implies sacrifice, suffering, working more than normal because you have to provide for your wife and family. Ten years ago I thought that I ran the house and they had to do what I wanted but two years ago God showed me that this was not the case.

This conflict is quite common and illustrates that the simple "journey" does not mean a world where black turns to white and that, on assuming the masculine and paternal models that the church proposes, the process is one full of "sacrifices". Adding to this conflict is a moral referent that can be "read" in different ways and also the fact that there are contradictions in the manner of understanding the exercise and legitimacy of power. To dominate and to love are not verbs that blend together harmoniously. The testimony quoted above illustrates the complications and delays that are often the result for men converted to the Gospel. Moreover there is new complexity added because of social changes in the female gender which are impossible to lay aside when analysing masculine ones.

The other great theme that defines the assumption of a new masculine identity is determined by conjugal relations, and especially by accepting whether or not the wife can work. In the first case masculine efforts to be more loving and to treat their women better are much more in evidence. But one of the elements that makes for tension is the one of being the "provider". The "journey" in the Gospel means assuming the role of supporting the family both spiritually and economically and, above all, it is in this latter role where it is possible to see the change most strongly. It is also contradicts the actual situation of poverty and the precarious existence that the families of La Pintana experience and which, especially in times of crisis, force the women to look for additional income.

We can see that in almost all the cases, less strongly in the case of young men, men feel that if the woman works outside the home, they (the men) would lose their control and power. The argument which legitimises this is that family "order" is destroyed by the fact that the daily chores are altered: the woman does not have the time to "look after" her children or husband. The looking after/taking care of role consists of feeding the family, washing the clothes and doing the housework.

Carlos Muñoz says:

If you get married and have the wife working you're never going to have your things like you should have them, your things ready for you, because you need your shirts and your clothes and who's going to get them ready and clean them if she's working?. And you're not going to be able to fight with her because she's working and it's your fault because you're the one who gave rights to her. In my house when there's something heavy that my old lady can't do I help her but washing the plates or making food, forget it!. There are some women who think that they're right little madams, I've seen them, they want the husband to even change nappies, to take the kid's nappy off. No way, that's the woman's job.

This quote is representative of the most extreme of adult arguments, traditional and neo-macho: poles apart is the position taken by Antonio who told us:

My wife works outside the house: I find the idea that the wife has to be in the house something antiquated, prehistoric, something out of the Middle Ages. I think in the house is where they work the most, spend all day working. For me it's good (that my wife works outside) because it's extra money, because to get ahead takes a world unless you've got a good salary, to get to be General Manager you need a miracle. On the other hand your wife's wage means you can afford the extra things that you acquire for the house, it's a way of growing that's much quicker and it's for the two of you. But it's got to be work that's not too heavy, work where they don't moan too much, because if they work too much they throw that in your face as well: I work more than you and then the problems start, but it's good that they work.

This testimony of a young man shows that he is conscious, like many others, that to get out of the poverty trap and to comply with the ideals of a "whitening", women have to get an income outside the house. Nevertheless this entails a danger for the new forms of masculine, since the women start to have tools to demand rights. However the experience of "getting on together" seems to be more important in some cases than the struggle for power.

What is generally felt is that the family will begin to fall apart if the woman is not at home. This is due to a maintaining of the Marian example, in the belief that without women no daily domestic chores will be undertaken. In all these arguments we find that feminine domestic work is overvalued. And that is not so strange if we also think that that the great majority of these men came from a family nucleus where the presence and the axis of life. And as we shall see later on the Marian idea of the woman as the "administrator" of the household was added to this experience. That

is to say, to the concept of the Mother as the giver of order, was added the concept of her participation in the “miracle” (as many men call it) of survival and of the multiplication and fair distribution of the little amount of goods that were available in the household.

These Marian images are seen to be legitimised in masculine dialogue since when we asked which were the Biblical figures most relevant to men and women, Mary, being the mother of Christ, and who accepted Him at her breast, was the person quoted in the majority of cases. From the men came also Jesus Christ, of course, Jacob, Abraham etc. Even when Ruth and Anna appeared as important figures, the Virgin always occupied a privileged position. This piece of information made clear to us why, from the male point of view, Marian symbolism continues to be kept and we think that maybe it is that which makes possible the concept of the female as the person who structures the family order, in spite of the fact that the “new evangelical men” have assumed the paternity and governance of the household.

The visions of the evangelicals we interviewed about female work go from a fierce traditionalism among the older men to a more modern and flexible one among the younger: but both share the idea that the home is a female and domestic kingdom, among the first group exclusively for women, and among the second with an idea of sharing household jobs.

So there is not just one way of understanding the problem and even less, an unequivocal way of behaving, but the change of ideas in the younger people leads us to believe that we are looking at a process of transformation supported by the churches themselves —as being a stimulus towards a new masculinity and new social skills— and perhaps without having adequate models to propose themselves, this leads the men to take their models from examples in the world around them.

One last theme of interest is that male histories generally reveal that converting oneself into “another man” is a difficult process both because of pressure from the church, from their “brothers” and from their wives, and from external factors where there is a stigma in being an evangelical. In the world of the workforce, and we are referring here to a workforce of his equals not his bosses, the man who decides to distance himself from the norms of male behaviour is rejected. We believe that what they get in exchange must be considered a reward: an emphasis on their dominion in the family and the church. New phenomena, like the formation of an evangelical football club (the Osana⁶) are understandable: others include

⁶ It is important to point out that many of those interviewed declared that they did not play football, but that they did see games on the television and followed some club.

the incorporation of musical instruments (which allows the men to play a leading role in the church services while also having modern connotations), the understanding that one can drink but not get drunk and the presentation of an evangelical candidate for President of the Republic, thereby opening the possibility of political participation from a religious viewpoint. All these are elements that make it possible for these men not to completely lose traces of their previous identity and not to appear “odd” in a globalised world which also defines the dominant masculine “areas” as football, politics, drinking etc.

We can conclude that the masculinity of the male evangelicals of La Pintana is in a stage of transition and that we could not determine fixed behaviour but only detect tendencies in a variegated world of symbols and values which take things from the past that have a certain significance in order to refashion them.

The modern and the traditional intermingle to show us people who are fighting to leave behind their feelings of abandonment, their apprenticeships, their old ways of living in the world. These people, who are living a process of change, are similar to chrysalids, but also to *oxolatl*⁷, a whole which has been made up, at times, of opposites within itself, but always a human being who is trying to construct his own subjectivity and humanity, and struggling to make life triumph over death.

The negotiations over the new evangelical femininity

As in the case of the men, it is clear that the women carry a popular feminine model that will be redefined when they enter the church. The theme of maternity is the one that crosses all their lives: nevertheless the theme of conjugal relationships also plays a part as does the one of work—either in being denied the possibility or in the fight to get income—, together with the those of religion and cultural practices. In this way we could say, turning to Buxo, that evangelical women generally construct their gender identity from a “mirror” model, i.e. from a multiplicity of elements that are defined by their stay in the world.

In relation to family configurations, we found that almost always the women had a positive opinion about their parents, the figure of the father emerging as an important axis in infancy and as a key socialising factor:

⁷ The *oxolatl* is an animal with the characteristics of both an amphibian and a reptile (it has both gills and lungs), and which has been used metaphorically to refer to the mixed identities of Latin America.

My father was called Segundo Llevul, he suffered a lot when he grew up, his parents died young. People used to hire him, take advantage of him, pay him to look after animals, that's what happened to my father. So, when he married my mother, we were eleven but he but he never let us go without: he said that he would never let us suffer what he suffered. He really brought me up well, I got a lot of love from my Dad, he always loved me more than anything (Rosa Llevul)

This image of a caring father is not an infrequent one, the father who is present and worries about his offspring, above all in women who were brought up in the country. The testimony that we quote above is from a mapuche woman, and it can be seen that her father—given the patrilineal and localised structure of the mapuches— occupies a central place in her universe. In other cases of women with non-ethnic but country origins we also found this positive evocation of the father.

The de-structuring of the family in economic terms or in terms of affection which occurs when the father dies or abandons the home is revealed in other accounts,. Here we come face to face with the lives of those who were brought up with an absent father, experiencing chaos, disorder and the beginnings of an extremely precarious existence. Even when there is abandonment, love for the father is a common factor. In discussions he is almost always the loving object of women in their infancy. Nevertheless in many cases the pain caused through the loss of affection from the father expresses it:

I was the apple of my father's eye but when they separated I stayed with my grandmother..... I grew up and because I looked like my mother my father didn't love me any more: at fourteen I was thrown into the streets and there things began to happen to me and I suffered (Maria Canto).

This story demonstrates the complex relationships between male and female, which we shall see later on: from love to complete rejection, from a complete and fulfilling life experience to one of orphanhood and abandonment. This experience will mark the lives of the women themselves later on and their relationships with their partner.

We find another family model in some of those we interviewed who came from an evangelical background. In these cases we see that the figure of the father is present in an authoritarian way, while the mother appears as someone who is both submissive and subordinate, long suffering in the face of a dominating husband. A lot of the time, the masculine presence is a domineering one, especially in those cases where the women work on their

own account in houses. The family model is one of subordinate gender relationships. Young women, especially those who have had work experience question this and try to break it, more than anything else in the way that the maternal side is represented in the relationship.

Generally in these stories the mother does not occupy an influential role in the first few years of her children's infancy: it is as if she were a presence that nobody talks about, it is just "natural" for her to be there with the children, sharing in the precariousness of life and the dramas of poverty. What is a constant theme is the association of the mother with work. Orfa Nicoreo recalls:

When we were little, I remember that my mother always worked, she helped my father and she also worried herself about the house and about us.

Here we are dealing with the model of a mother in a multiple role who goes from the house to the street, who has a double working day, a mother who is defined by one thing only: work. Thus reproduction and production join together to form a feminine figure which the daughters will imitate later on. We also see that even with the presence of the father, poverty obliges the mother to "help". We believe that his concept of "helping out", and not the concept of father and mother equally supporting the household, legitimises the devaluation of female work both inside and outside the household and devalues her own status in the world.

In the biographies of the evangelical women in La Pintana we find an oscillation between a loving and caring father and an absent one, one who has abandoned the home, and the images of a mother who is always a presence, sometimes negatively in terms of her submissiveness, mostly positively in terms of her working, and her loving and unconditional motherhood. We could say that these mixed gender models are tinged with several different hues, above all with reference to the father, which give us clues towards understanding female and male relationships: there is a step from love to violence for example. As far as the mother is concerned, the Marian influence is clear since she is a metaphor for the feminine which is characterised by her capacity to reproduce but also by her genetic and productive capabilities. She is a powerful figure but not exempt from contradictions for her daughters who want to be like her and do not want to be like her, even when circumstances almost always lead them to imitate her, in spite of themselves.

In this sense it is interesting to point out that in various cases we found that it was an unmarried woman's first baby or rather getting

pregnant at an early age which marked a woman's life. For example, Leonor Carmona told us:

I was sixteen when I got pregnant and my mother supported me but my sister didn't. I had the baby but as it was a girl my husband didn't want it. From the day I got pregnant I worked on my own account, doing cleaning, washing. I even bought the nappies as he wouldn't give me a thing. I've always worked: afterwards with my second husband I also helped him: he's very good so I've got nothing to say about him.

This experience is symptomatic of those who have lived a feminine-maternal role from the side of negation and pain. Moreover it reveals the stigma of giving birth to another woman —another mother?— a person who belongs to a socially devalued gender. This testimony shows us a journey that will be common enough among those we interviewed: there is a first relationship with a partner that is completely negative and then a second one that is positive.

We can say here that the accounts of the lives of these women point to the fact that they go from a positive experience in their relationship with the father to a negative one with their husband or partner, which is generally overcome by a split in the relationship and that they go on to a second relationship which is always better. In the case of women whose father has been absent, the path of negativity and suffering is repeated until they encounter a partner who manages to alleviate their painful and dolorous existence. This journey is one that has certainly been lived through by evangelical women who are over thirty years of age: in the younger ones we observed a process of adjustments which are tied to new feminine models which are much freer from cultural tradition.

It is important to point out here that almost all the women have experienced some sort of violence from their partners. Leonor Carmona again:

He used to say to me —when I came back from delivering the washing and the ironing and I had money— “Give me that money, you bitch”, I'm sorry about using that word, but that's how he treated me. If I didn't give it to him, he'd hit me with his fists. When he was drunk, anything would annoy him and so he'd hit me.

To be a woman who is beaten up, devalued and humiliated by the partner is an existence which has led many to rebellion and separation. Those who are widows of a violent husband also feel his death as a “liberation”. This is Maria Canto's case:

I suffered with my first husband: he and his family didn't like me because I was poor. He used to hit me and so did my mother in law: once he stabbed me with a knife, but everything happens for something. After I was widowed, my life changed, I worked and I lived well until I met my second husband and he looked after me.

If we follow the line of argument of many of those we interviewed we find that there is always a conflictive relationship with the male gender, especially with the partner. On the other hand we also find that suffering, whether it is due to poverty in infancy, through maltreatment at the hands of the partner or a painful pregnancy will have a really positive outcome. I.e. this living in "hell" will be overcome and in this the "Way" of the Gospel plays a key part.

The entry of women into the world of the churches marks a great change in their lives of pain. Generally the majority have begun their "journey" because of a child's illness or a personal one, or because they have been abandoned by their partner or separated from him: the youngest because they want to leave a life that is full of drugs, vices or parties. In every case we can say that this begins the construction of a "new femininity", which will be the product of cultural elements which have already been defined within a gender and new ones proposed from bible reading and the churches.

The characteristics, which this change represents, are tied to the "illumination" which occurs in the women, expressed a lot of the time in the idea of a "divine light". In the darkness of their lives, they visualise a clear path down which they can walk. A second theme is the one of "domesticity", of an almost "insolent" character. They re-learn rules of behaviour which exchange "meekness" for female rebellion and changes of mood towards their children and partner. Finally there is the topic of language, "bad language" which is corrected via bible readings, sermons and the exchanges of dialogue at the Dorcas. We also see here that entry into the Evangelical world, the world of the Gospel, makes discussion wider and the use of new terminology to refer to people and things. Maria Canto's account illustrates other characteristics:

The change doesn't come at once, immediately: it's like a process, it's not like changing your clothes and becoming clean. It's a process and it was difficult for me, I used to go to church and smoke before I went. One day I said to Jesus "Jesus, my tongue hurts smoking this cigarette, why don't You take this cigarette away from me ?. I can't pray to You and be smoking. I stopped smoking very quickly because I got really ill. You learn a lot of things from

church. From what they preach you can strengthen your life, because they teach you to feed yourself, to bring your children up, to change your ways, how you act, how you dress...and so I can teach my children, I can talk to them.

This testimony demonstrates the process of change and the rewards of conversion. It does not only deal with what they gain on the spiritual plane, but also how this “divine essence” penetrates and is part of their daily lives. On the one hand we see the theme of body and health, shown by clothing, the new clothing of the evangelical and on the other the theme of the children and the female possibility of having a “word” with which to teach them. Thus body and maternity come together in a redefinition of their meaning. Finally if we listen to Teresa Vera, we come across other elements:

I liked my friends. One day they threw me a party, they brought drink and marijuana, because we used to be into marijuana. God was already with me and I felt really divided into two, although more of my heart lent towards Christ. So at three in the morning I told them that I had an announcement to make. I told them that I’d taken a decision, that I wanted to walk and join with other brothers and sisters and lead another life. They all rushed at me: that day was chaotic for me because when you decide to follow the paths of the Lord you’re like a child and you only start growing in the church. That day I was only recently restored to God. But when He entered my heart it was like a ball of fire, a power that warmed me and I saw all my life like a film and I cried like I’d never cried before and shouted “Father” but I knew that I wasn’t shouting for my own father. And so I left marijuana and alcohol and little by little I started growing.

In this account we find one of the key points in the conversion of women. We are talking about a rebirth: women living allegorically a new infancy until they reach adulthood. However this occurs via a loving reference to a Holy Father and is important since the male universe that generally surrounds women, is negative for them. It also gives them the possibility of a renewed “encounter” with the symbolism of the father and a kind of reconciliation with the masculine world. The mystical and loving bond with God will also act as compensation for the lack of affection they have experienced with their partner or in their daily lives. Many of our interviewees told us how they were in daily contact with Jesus in their body and their spirit. That is to say they live an “enchanted” life, transformed by this “warmth” and “power” which they experience in their lives.

The construction of the new evangelical femininity is a process that forces women to become completely involved. You can see this in the way that on both the private and the public planes, the new femininity finds its expression in a woman who is reflective, in the sense that reading the Bible and interpretations of it allows her to understand the world and herself. On the other hand it also gives her elements of dignity, in that she is valued by God and by her brothers and sisters in the church. We can say that within that devalued universe that they experienced by being poor and being women, they find a sense of dignity and purpose in their lives via the church. We can add to this the fact that it is possible to discover gifts that God has given them, for example gifts of prophecy, of dreams, of preaching, of artistic skills etc. Thus women get a kind of power and recognition which they did not have before: the power of reasoning and by referring to something superior —the Word— it makes it possible for them to confront their partners and the world in a different way.

But it also means that they live constantly with tension, since the “journey” with a husband, whether he is evangelical or not, always implies a negotiation so as not to play a subordinate role and return to the subjection of “before” the Gospel. This is much clearer in the younger women. The adults, once the crisis is over, adapt themselves to the macho behaviour of their husbands, changing inside themselves the way that this affects them, i.e. transforming their attitude towards their husband, and thus freeing themselves from tension:

When I found Christ, my husband began to go to church. As I was born into an evangelical family I knew more than he did and I used to explain the Bible to him, but as he had more time on his hands than I did and a better memory, he didn't depend on what I told him. And so he began to use the Word against me. He began by getting support from the Bible in the things he told me- “You have to be obedient to your husband, submissive, look at the example of Sarah”. It affected everything, he became more and more critical: “You're a lady, you've got to wear these clothes”. But I'm young” I used to say to him “so I want to wear something else”. On and on about everything and always backed by the Bible and giving me other examples. The biggest fights we have had were because I didn't want to always stay in the house, I wanted to work, study and do other things with my life.

Here we confront a recurrent topic among evangelical couples, especially if they are young, in which, permeated as they are by these new female models, they fight to have a more autonomous existence.

This leads to real verbal “duels” between the couple, through examples and quotes from the Bible.

The men are trying to legitimise their power through the Word and the women reply in the same way. It is the church that helps them to balance out their relationship by looking at the problems in “marriage reunions”. Many dedicate themselves especially to solving these disputes, which leads us to believe that male-female conflict has penetrated the evangelical world. If we consider the general changes in the world of Chilean women, taking into account the fact that evangelical women possess new tools for thinking about their life and the condition of their marriage and that evangelical men fall into a neo macho attitude, it is obvious that there will be gender conflict.

Another common case is that of couples where the women go on their “journey” but the men do not. We see here the permanent conflict and negotiation that women have to undertake when the men do not share their faith. They have to preserve the equilibrium in their relationship and find a balance between serving God and “serving” their partner: protect their rights but at the same time conciliate their husbands or partners. It is clear that these women also suffer the effects of their “changes” on a daily basis and need to use the tools of autonomy that they have acquired.

It could be said that the new evangelical feminism means adjustments on the private plane which give power to women, but it is a power which has to be constantly negotiated with the men. The moral authority of women who live with non-evangelical men gives them a social prestige that the latter cannot obviate and being able to argue with the Word gives a new power to those who live with evangelical partners. In both cases we are talking about experiences which are not without difficulties.

A complicated theme in the evangelical world is that of sexuality and reproduction. As is common in our culture, themes like this are hidden under a myriad of veils. Nevertheless we found that a double standard is practised by the faithful who “walk” with Christ. It is clear that the message from the churches does not include family planning and that therefore there is no stimulus in using contraceptive methods. However in the couples, especially the young ones, there is an appreciation of the use of pills, intrauterine devices and natural methods. Many of those we interviewed told us that the use of these contraceptives was linked for them to the possibility of escaping from poverty, since by having less children families could aspire to something better.

It is interesting to note that regarding this theme—as in others (such as female aesthetics)—we found more flexibility among the women than

the men and a tendency for them to take up a more modern position than their male counterparts. In our opinion this has led to gender relationships in the evangelical world being more complex, since the women want their positions to be heard and taken into consideration while the men, who are more conservative, want to impose their own.

Finally, on a representative level, the women identify with Mary: but also strongly with Ruth and Tabitha. In the case of the Virgin, the universal influence of the Marian cult is obvious: in the mother who suffers for her child there are elements from the women's own lives. In our judgement the identification with Ruth is through two other elements: on the one hand it can be read superficially as a search for a positive relationship with the mother-in-law, but, on the other and more profoundly, there is the theme of a self same gender reconciliation, i.e. the possibility that two women, who both symbolically want to "possess" the same man, can have a loving relationship. In this way we read this strong emphasis on Ruth as being the model of a woman who is capable of having a positive relationship with other women. As regards Tabitha she appears to be a model for the Dorcas woman, who sets an example to her sisters in public and gives herself to the community, as we shall see below.

The Dorcas: the kingdoms of women

It is common knowledge that women predominate numerically in the evangelical churches, something which does not have its correlation in their power structures, but it is also clear that in worship, on the public level, the women will play a greater or lesser role depending on the type of church and the character of the pastor. In the case of the Pentecostals there is a marked gender discrimination against women, where they are never allowed to ascend to the pulpit. The opposition to this acquires in this case the language of a male/female conflict with very obvious connotations as to hierarchy and power (i.e. the idea of above and below). Only men are allowed to be above in the pulpit: when the women preach or give witness, it is below. The Pentecostal doctrine justifies this by quoting from various Biblical references and from Genesis.

This is not found in the creed or practices of the smaller churches and congregations or those with a more open and "modern" attitude. Here you can see that men and women have the same access to the pulpit and in the smaller churches the women are pre-eminent. The pastor's wife has important power. This does not mean that there explicitly exists here the

idea of feminine domination but we can see that there is a certain power given to women.⁸ It is notable how men and women in these churches share an equality as far as preaching during worship is concerned and we have seen how women who do not know how to read preaching “from memory”, and being respected and given prestige precisely because they “speak with the Holy Ghost”.

It has been noted, therefore, that in the bigger churches, especially the Pentecostal ones, the masculine represents power. By way of a contrast, in the poorer and smaller churches this is not the case and male and female members circulate in a more egalitarian manner. In these churches, as we have mentioned above, women are in the majority and take an active part in the ritual, the younger ones in the choir and the pastors with their electronic musical instruments. It is clear that the idea of male domination disappears and gives way to an equality in gender; even when the pastors are the leading actors, there is none of the male domination that is found in other places of worship. We could say, taking on here an idea of Manuel Ossa’s, that the smaller and poorer churches represent a kind of matrix, a type of ritual female congregationalism in the Marian image —although not virginal— a community while the bigger churches represent the domination of the Father, of a masculine God, where the community disappears as does communion between equals⁹ and gives way to a collectivised, regulated and ritualised society.

Female discrimination is compensated by the existence of the Dorcas in Pentecostal worship, and not only there but also in the majority of the evangelical churches, both large and small. In the Dorcas women meet once a week: we are talking about a eminently feminine experience here, a kingdom of women, where all other public negations disappear and where they can weave a solidarity together, talk about their problems, purify themselves through the Word¹⁰, become involved and help each other mutually with marriage problems, with the household economy and by taking care of each other’s children. On the other hand there is the part

⁸ We are making here the distinction between domination and power, understanding that the first supposes a hegemony within an institution while the second, power, is not necessarily hegemonic and can be held at some levels and not at others.

⁹ There is a clear differentiation between strata and status within the evangelical churches and generally, the poorer people look for the church where they feel more comfortable as regards their class.

¹⁰ One follows an interesting trail in analysing the phenomenon of liberation and purification through the Holy Ghost and the Word in psychoanalytic theory. It is noteworthy how people, men and women, once they have spoken about their life in public, break out of their repression and become reconciled to their past (a past that is usually painful and full of rebellion against their parents).

where the women can preach and, in the case of the non-Pentecostal evangelical churches, assume the role of pastor. In the Pentecostal churches, even though the Dorcas are the private arenas of the women, they still cannot be “above”: they have to preach from “below”.

We believe that the Dorcas are an essential element in producing the changes that lead towards a new evangelical feminism. It is there that women really learn how to socialise and recreate their identities together with their equals. But, more especially, this feminine arena is the door which allows their connection to the world and its social riches through sharing different actions. Thus the step from the house to the street, from the private to the public is taken through their participation in the Dorcas, amplifying their feminine experiences and pushing them towards the social milieu, showing them that it is not only their private kingdom that is theirs. Maybe it is this experience that does the most to help the women confront their own identity and value within the church.

CONCLUSION

In the light of what has been expressed above and from observations in the field, we can say that gender relationships in the evangelical world, studied in La Pintana, are of a variegated character and permeated by two great cultural doctrines: the first is given by the Marian matrix, which is both hybrid and popular and the second by the new values imposed by the current of cultural globalisation which operates in our country. The values and symbols which emerge from a trans-national scenario have made a cultural impact on the area studied and are re-read from the point of view of local cultural parameters. The dialogue between the local and the global is plagued by tensions and conflicts and adds to the process of the conversion of the men and women, to “shedding their skin”. The most pristine tension appears in the most primary social bond, as gender relationships are, that is to say the way in which power and prestige are distributed among the partners.

This produces a generational oscillation that goes from domination/submission, analogous to masculine/feminine in the case of the older couples, to tendencies towards equality and complementing each other in the case of the younger ones. Nevertheless, in general terms, a conflict still exists where the new masculine and feminine identities collide together, especially when the latter start to reclaim rights for themselves, rights which had not previously been considered, such as work, obtaining income and being well treated.

The process of change assigned to the Gospel is different in men and women. In the case of the former the central theme is the transformation of the man into a father who is actually present, a provider, a man who has “civilised” himself and who raises his status by joining some church. For him the symbols of clothes, of cleaning and of good language are synonymous to a rise in social status. The men appear to have stronger tendencies towards climbing upwards socially through the Gospel. What the women obtain is an expansion of their feminine experience, since the maternal model lives on and becomes more profound added as it is to a woman who is now more reflexive and who possess new horizons for understanding the world and understanding herself. On the other hand for the women it is clear that the Gospel gives them a spiritual life which “purifies” and cleanses them and which makes them “enchanted” by the world, at the same time as it gives them knowledge and a group of mutually binding equals (the Dorcas) which signify support and strength to confront their daily life of poverty.

In a lot of cases this produces the reestablishment of a certain order in gender relationships when facing the anomic experiences of the past, plagued with desertion, violence and the precariousness of existence. This order is full of “bourgeois” concepts, where the prevailing one is what we have designated neo-machismo. In only a few occasions did we perceive that this order brings forth new ways of tying men and women together. Nevertheless we can say that the social changes in both the real and symbolic position of the women could usher in a new process of transformation, which, in our judgement, will spring from women who will appear with visions and practices much more modern than the men.

In young couples the saying “be meek but not stupid”¹¹, takes account of the tensions with which women live trying to accommodate their men: on the one hand they cannot appear to be too powerful in front of them and on the other they do not want to let themselves be subordinated to them.

One phenomenon which cuts across the generations and which shows how the global universe inserts itself into the private one is consumerism and, in a way, having double standards. In the first case it is obvious that the evangelicals have not been able to isolate themselves from the consumerism within Chilean society and in the second to specify a way in differentiating themselves from the rest: thus televisions and radios are fetishes which, arranged as they are like altars, speak of spending capacity

¹¹ This is a re-working of Jesus’ message. It is used, according to one woman we interviewed, to explain the message in modern terms.

and status. In this way the evangelical asceticism of the past is no longer a reality and this can be seen in the economic behaviour of the faithful.

Linked to the above is the fact that the participation of the brothers and sisters in the “world” through the many facets of the media implies that they are exposed more to non-evangelical messages and culture than to the messages and culture of their own churches. The “neo-Pentecostalism” observed in Chile and other countries in Latin America is not greatly echoed in La Pintana and the reason is based on mistrust for the money which is fed to the radio and television stations and the fundamental fact that these programmes are directed towards the middle class, a new segment of the population which they want to evangelise. Nevertheless the evangelicals listen to and see these neo-Pentecostal messages, which contain North American elements and used as if they were Latin American, many of which are imitated and reworked at local level.

We also witnessed a process of flexibility in the guidelines of evangelical life, which has different nuances depending on the type of church. In this sense the most conservative are those that have Pentecostal and at times Methodist roots, while the more liberal are smaller and from other denominations. Whatever the case, we have seen that none of them have escaped from the changes that the global world has engendered.

Finally, for women as well as for men, “walking” in the ways of the Gospel supposes conflicts and a complex process of change. In the case of the first we noted an identity that is “in transit”, since they go in and out of churches much more frequently than the women. The change for men is a much more radical one since they have no cultural models to follow which allow them to be this “new man”, which only confirms their power within the family and over their partner. Women, on the other hand, revert back to their Marian model and this puts them in a complicated position, where dignity and submission become terms that lead to tensions. Nevertheless the former is the one that takes precedence for them, one which proposes a new dialogue and new practices that are shattered in the case of partners who do not know how to balance their new role as father and provider with that of a man who can have an equal relationship with his wife.

Without a doubt future generations of evangelicals will go about solving this gender conflict. For now we can say that we are facing a cultural transition on a global level in Chile, a global transition which is being expressed in a particular manner in the world of La Pintana.

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