

Eternal Politics: Life and Death in the Evangelical Community

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Abstract

This study explores how evangelical communities in Latin America understand and structure the concepts of life and death, based on their interpretation of time and its impact on the construction of collective identities and communal memory. Through the analysis of funerary practices and rituals, the dual system of life and death under the evangelical prism is examined, highlighting the crucial role of death not only as a biological event but as an act loaded with political and social meaning. The importance of rituals and ceremonies in shaping collective memory, as well as in defining community identity in contrast to other Christian denominations and in the broader public sphere, is emphasized. The paper reveals how these communities use their understanding of life and death to establish a "grand narrative" that strengthens their internal cohesion and outlines their symbolic boundaries, while addressing their insertion and participation in the broader society.

Keywords: *Evangelical Community, Life, Death, Time, Collective Memory, Community Identity, Funerary Practices*

INTRODUCTION THE TIMES OF LIFE AND DEATH: THE CONCEPTION OF TIME

Just as life has its own timings, death seems not to have just one; it always presents itself as an unexpected event. However, Evangelicals follow a different path. Time defines "who they are" and "where they are going" (Vermeer & Scheepers, 2021).

For Evangelicals, the conception of time determines their world, their activities, their beliefs, their faith, their life, and their death. Their conception of time, or "Evangelical time," is one that is constructed through the conjunction of three different moments: the mythological, the individual, and the communal.

Firstly, the mythological time is the biblical one, starting from creation. Human life begins with the mythic tale of Adam and Eve (Gen 2:7-25) to the death and resurrection of Christ. Genesis is seen by them as the beginning of a series of covenants or alliances between God and man. Gradually, figures like Noah, Abram, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and others build the path for the coming of Christ, also called "the time of waiting" (Elisha, 2013). As cultural heroes, these figures are configured as mediators between their people and God. However, it is the New Testament, written by Luke, Matthew, Mark, and John -narrating from the birth to the death of Christ- that constitutes a new moral, organizational, and ritual normative of Evangelicalism, or called "the time of salvation" (de Kock, 2020; Robins, 2021).

For Evangelical communities, the biblical time underlies their understanding of life and death. According to them, only through the death and resurrection of Christ is a spiritual rebirth possible, and a state of immortality of the soul and spirit within the "kingdom of heaven" (Ebner, 2017). Thus, the resurrection combines their conceptions of life and death into one that leads to belief in spiritual salvation or "spiritual purity" (Lundberg, 2009). In this way, death is no longer seen as an end of everything but as the achievement of a terrestrial life to a fully spiritual life: the concept of life finally absorbs that of death, reversing and re-signifying it as a great ritual event of liberation or imprisonment. The soul is finally freed from the impure body or is imprisoned in the eternity of absolute spiritual impurity (Plaul, 2023).

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Mythological time gives way to personal time. This is a specific type of time and determines the position of believers in relation to non-believers. Generally, personal time is made up of the "distant past" and the "recent past" (Augé, 1998). Evangelicals consider the distant past as the time before their condition as Evangelicals, in this period they saw themselves as distant from God - they did not attend Christian religious services -, with problematic family relationships, addiction issues, marital deceits, individualism, and selfishness, etc. It is a time seen as violent, painful, sad, and transgressive. In sum, it is considered as the memory of an unsatisfactory personal life.

On the other hand, the recent past is measured from that first religious experience that motivated their initiation, change, or spiritual migration to Evangelicalism. This time configures a new symbolic and emotional system, which is part of a process of religious "conversion" that ultimately leads to the rite of baptism (Kaiser, 2016).

It must be considered that, in the case of Evangelical communities, the distant past is linked with the recent past from the so-called first "encounter" or "approach" (or "first religious experience"). From this fact, the new Evangelicals will form a network of friendships ("brothers" or "sisters" in Christ) and with them will establish the bases for conceiving Evangelicalism as a way of life (Latkovic, 2011). All this new great turn initiates what Evangelicals consider as communal time or "the time of and for the community".

This communal time spans from the acceptance and integration of the believer into various aspects of the community to the performance of the baptismal rite. Unlike personal time, which is by definition individual in nature, communal time is shared and lived together through evangelization and spiritual growth. Thus, for Evangelicals, during this time, the new believer develops a system of special socio-religious relationships both within and outside the Evangelical community: they can openly visit other churches or Evangelical communities, become an Evangelical leader, participate in the administrative or organizational areas of the community, propose changes or reforms to evangelization plans, etc. (Curry, 1994). Communal time is when every Evangelical openly develops as such; in it, Evangelicalism stops being just a religion but also starts being seen as a way of life.

Up to this point, we understand that the crucial point that initially allows for the understanding of the concepts of life and death among this religious group is strongly delimited by the way they understand time. However, what characterizes Evangelical churches from other Christian-inspired churches is the importance they place on understanding the past.

For Evangelicals, the past is always seen as a basis for understanding the present and the future, insofar as the past has constructed the present. Moreover, the past in general is seen as a source of both communal and personal memory; in it, the distant past undergoes a process of being forgotten in the present but is constituted as a memory to construct a new "self".

Evangelicals forget the distant past to build a present; and, as a result of this process, the distant becomes minimized and the recent expands. The distant past is reduced to crucial points that marked the turn of change towards Evangelicalism: a process of signification and re-signification of sin, death, and the path to God. The recent past leads to the displacement of the idea of death; it ceases to be conceived as taboos and prohibitions, but becomes the fundamental drive of earthly life and heavenly life (Escobar, 2014; Formenti, 2017). In this sense, understanding past experience and constructing future experience establish the frameworks of what it means to be a good Christian.

In this ought-to-be, the relationship of otherness established between the Evangelical subject and the non-Evangelical is not only discursive, oral, and imaginary but also performative. In this relationship, the foundations of memory as a political, social, and religious project of the community are built, forming an "us" distinguishable from "others". What is noteworthy in Evangelicalism is that both parties do not exist separately: it is not the other that makes us, and vice versa, but both function as a single "us(others)" (Meireis, 2008), in which the "us" represents the recent past, while the "others" symbolize the distant past. This can be seen in the Christian premise "we are all children of God". Here, the "all" equates to "us(others)", which includes both Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals. But this can also be observed in the theme of temporality and the general construction of time: us/present; others/past (Kim, 2014). Together, in their conjunction, they open up the

desired future of the Evangelical community: all human beings, whether Evangelical or not, have to, sooner or later, become a single “us”. Thus, the concept or idea of the present as time is represented as a temporal point in the current moment from which the past is viewed and the future is constructed.

At this point, for Evangelicals, those who exemplify the “us” are found in the condition reached by their deceased, or “brother-ancestors”, who are those who, although not physically present, represent and symbolize the conjugation of all times, the change from an impure state to spiritual purity, the identity of the community, the memory, and the foundations of Evangelical memory.

At the same time, we must consider that for Evangelical churches, forgetting is also part of their memory, meaning, Evangelicals “forget” the distant past of what the deceased was in life; at the wake, as a purification ritual, they assign any characteristic or condition that manifests a state of sin to the non-Evangelical individual. Thus, the brother-ancestors⁵ represent the “what do we want to be?” of the community, that is, the desired ideal of the Evangelical individual. Indeed, the deceased are physically dead (past) but symbolically “alive” (present), and by being considered as present, they fulfill certain fundamental roles within the community. For Evangelicals, time is ultimately established as linear and infinite. Therefore, it can be deduced that, upon the death of an individual, all times converge to give meaning to the Evangelical conceptions of life and death.

We understand from this that an Evangelical community reminisces the past to build an eternal future, and if the past signifies a relationship with sin, the dead are never of the past, they are the present and the future at once, because to consider them as past is to consider them “dead” and destined to the oblivion of their identities. In this way, Evangelical believers form part of a community that is embedded in time. No matter how short earthly time may be, what matters is the symbolic immortality they wish to achieve. Thus, the Evangelical community does not build its past but its future.

CONCEPTIONS OF LIFE AND DEATH

The conceptions surrounding life in the Evangelical community are based on the Old and New Testament. According to the Old Testament (OT), life has three meanings. *Khayyim* means “sense of movement or action,” *Néfesh*, which means to breathe or “blow” (breath of life), and *Ruach*, the “life-giving” spirit. According to these conceptions, human life is understood under notions of “fullness” and “vital existence.” According to the OT, life is the supreme gift that God gives to human beings, and their happiness is based on obedience to God.

And according to the New Testament (NT), life has three meanings: *Zoé* (“physical life” and “spiritual life”) and every human being can - according to their actions - live according to “the flesh” or in sin or “live in the spirit,” according to God’s commands; *psyche* or soul, which is the principle of life; lastly, *bios* or so-called “earthly existence” that encompasses all those resources necessary for subsistence (Grudem 2005; Baker 1992). We understand from this that God is the origin of life, which can only be received through Christ. Life is enjoyment, happiness, and wisdom.

Death, on the other hand, begins with Adam and Eve. The first two human beings were not created to die but to choose between immortality and death; thus, the first concept of death manifests as “disobedience.” As a result of the original sin, death affects the physical dimension (losing immortality), the moral, and the spiritual. The last two are related to a “state of spiritual death” and moral incapacity insofar as the human being has transgressed God's norms. Thus, death is understood as the separation between the human being and God (Algranti, 2017).

From these elements, death in Evangelicalism acquires a new meaning. Death is not a punishment from God, but a product of the “fallen world” (Grudem 2005). The fallen world is the harm that human beings do to their bodies through acts of sin. Old age, illness, injuries, natural disasters, etc., are presented as “experiences” of death. Thus, death is considered an enemy; however, it is Christ who will ultimately destroy it. (1 Co 15:26).

⁵ This term has been adopted and used as proposed by Goody (1962).

In each of these spaces, a person can be “alive” or “dead.” Being alive is having an active and interacting biological, physical, and/or spiritual form; but being dead is being out of this world and absent in an entirely spiritual form. Death is not a final event but is a passage from earthly life - according to the behavior of each individual - to a final destination that can be heaven or hell.

Below, we present the table that summarizes these conceptions of life and death, which, in turn, we will develop in depth:

Table 1: Conceptions of life and death in the Evangelical community

State or Condition	Life (Conceptions)	Death (Conceptions)
Subject	Evangelical	Non-Evangelical
Space	Eternal Life (heaven)	Eternal Death (Hell)
The celestial world (the beyond)	Will of God (design and predestination)	Will of Man (freedom and independence)
	Salvation and spiritual purity: happiness and wellbeing	Punishment and spiritual impurity: suffering and pain
	Community and Collective Memory	Anonymity and loss of identity
The terrestrial world (the here)	Family and friendly reunion	Loss, disappearance, and absence
	Will of God (spiritual faith, wisdom, and knowledge of God)	Ignorance and/or transgression of the Will of God
	Procreation of children (family)	Loss (absence of family)
	Evangelization and Community	Sin (Individuality and Corruption)
	Health (physical, moral, and spiritual wellbeing)	Disease (Affliction, suffering, physical, moral, and spiritual pain)

For Evangelicals, the concept of life in the earthly world has several meanings and dimensions: a) life conceived as the will of God, through spiritual faith; b) life as the procreation of children; c) life as the product of evangelization, the knowledge of God, and Christian life; and d) life as physical, moral, and spiritual health and well-being.

Firstly, for Evangelicals, death and life are part of God's plan and will. But this will is not only achieved through faith but also through a long process of insertion into the Evangelical world, its beliefs, its rites and ceremonies, and the world (Rogers, 2013). In summary, “God's will” is the metaphor they use to designate their free choice of Evangelism as a way of life. This first sense refers to the Evangelical life as a constant state of perfection of the belief system, that is, living as an Evangelical.

Evangelical life is also a process of continuous spiritual and moral transformation. Accepting the condition of “Evangelical” is not enough to be recognized as such; this implies modifying the symbolic system and meanings by which these individuals used to interpret the world: assigning new ethical and moral values, establishing new parameters in social relationships with non-Evangelicals, constantly elaborating an Evangelical identity discourse, etc. (Schattauer, 2007). To “give life” from an Evangelical perspective is to reinterpret the world under these beliefs, confronting them with those that at one point constituted the pillars of their daily life. In this “confrontation,” the new meanings are understood as part of a natural will, from which, according to them, they cannot escape. Thus, “God's will” is the will of each Evangelical individual to justify the world of their (new) ideas, beliefs, emotions, and representations, which is established during various periods of teaching of Christian life within the community (Rocha, 1998).

“To be alive” for an Evangelical is to be an active member of the Evangelical community and to live under its belief system (Algranti, 2017; Jackson, 2016). Thus, this first way of understanding life is based on humans learning to live under their own will to continue being Evangelicals, which means learning what death means (not being Evangelicals) (Lundberg, 2009) and what this event entails.

Secondly, life is made through procreation (Stasson, 2014). According to Evangelicals, a marriage conceives a child not only through the sexual relationship between a man and a woman but through God's participation in such conception. In this sense, for Evangelicals, the children who are born are also children of God, for it is He who grants life. However, it is also considered that every newborn is born in a state of temporary (spiritual) death (Gokani & Caragata, 2020). For them, it is necessary for every father and mother, among prayers and signs of acceptance by the community members, to reverse the temporary state of death of the newborn by establishing the beginning of their spiritual life.

Thirdly, life is given through the evangelization of beliefs. This is another way of giving life on the family and community level; teaching the Evangelical beliefs which progressively build personal capacities and the awareness that all life is a representation of God's will, his beliefs, his norms, his values, and defining their position before non-Evangelicals. Thus, within the family and community sphere, an individual who has undergone the rite of baptism is considered an Evangelical or "alive" member (Chevalier, 2019; Stasson, 2014). This ritual marks the socio-religious life of the believer because they become not only a child of God but also an active part of the Christian community. Similarly, conversion is considered a change in ideas about the individual and the family. The Evangelical community represents itself as an extension of the family, which implies a responsibility and a participation in the process of indoctrination in Evangelical beliefs in a progressive and continuous manner.

It is from the Evangelical community that the change in perceptions about religious beliefs is modified. Spirituality is no longer understood as something that sustains itself, as if faith were present from birth and manifests naturally. Evangelicals hold that faith and belief in God are matters that are progressively built with actions, attitudes, and responsibility that each congregant acquires within the Evangelical community (Anselm, 2015).

Fourthly, life understood as a state of well-being and health. Considering that physical, moral, and spiritual life are interrelated through how committed and submissive an individual is to the "will of God" within the Evangelical community, every state of material, physical, and mental health is directly related to the correct or incorrect following of religious beliefs (Mäule, 2009). On one hand, having a good state of health is assumed to mean they are spiritually progressing towards a progressive consolidation of Evangelical precepts. Physical and psychological health is linked for this group to a constant state of spiritual perfection. For Evangelicals, the correct way to "think" and "act" can only be under Christian norms, and those who fall within these limits are seen as individuals who are alive, and their physical and emotional health are "proof" of it, that psychologically they are stable individuals, and physically, healthy individuals, that is, "alive" (Elisha, 2013; Lundberg, 2009).

On the other hand, "life" is also understood as a state of material and economic well-being (not necessarily wealth). The money or material objects obtained through work activities are indicators that God not only nourishes their spirit but also provides them with the necessary resources to live according to their personal and daily family needs (Ross, 2014). Under this conception, they consider that one cannot leave their work or related activities and give everything up for the community, as extreme devotion to it is a sign of "neglect" of family and personal life. "Living" is to relate to others, in realms that are not necessarily Evangelical; the perspective of the community lies in not "imprisoning" an individual's life but granting them a sense of freedom and free choice, so they do not feel compelled to deny or go against the world to which they belong (Yee, 2020).

Up to this point, we can understand that the concept of earthly life for the Evangelical community is directly linked to the way of being and living that it establishes for its congregants. It is the individual who personally assumes a desired condition and identity, in this case, the Evangelical one, assuming that it is God's will to give life to human beings. And from there, a constant process of social, spiritual, religious, and moral transformations is carried out to give meaning to the Evangelical belief system that individuals desire for themselves. Earthly life is the Evangelical life, in community and communion with their Evangelical peers. It is also the basis for understanding the world around them, the one they have left behind, and the one they aspire to build as a group. Thus, the concept of "life" as spiritual purity cannot be a concept that concludes with the biological death of an individual: "life," like Evangelical time, must be infinite and unending. In this sense,

earthly life must give way to a fully spiritual life; in other words, “eternal life,” the conception of time, and religious beliefs would lose their meaning.

EARTHLY DEATH

If earthly life is understood from spiritual, moral, and religious perspectives, closely linked with the personal and community life of the members of the Evangelical community, earthly death underscores the opposite side: a) death as sin (transgression of the norms and will of God); b) death as a state of illness (spiritual, bodily or physical, and moral); c) death as ignorance of God (referring to a non-Evangelical or non-Christian religious and spiritual condition); and d) death as loss (grief, pain, suffering due to the absence or death of loved ones).

Firstly, death as sin. To understand this conception of death, it is necessary to comprehend what sin is -and how it is considered- for this religious group, as the other conceptions of earthly death are directly linked to this. According to mythological time, sin existed before Adam and Eve. Lucifer and some angels, by going against God's will, were the first beings to commit sin. In Eden, the transgression of the rule not to eat the forbidden fruit initiated man's sin. Eating the forbidden fruit opened the way to discernment about good and evil.

From these events, Evangelicals understand that sin is part of human nature (Ebner, 2017). Although every human being is born with “inherited sin,” they consider it their duty to reverse this pre-established condition in every individual; through different ways of giving and granting life to others. Thus, we can understand that for believers, sin is everything that opposes God's will, the community, and its beliefs. Sin is expressed in fault, inequity, rebellion, and injustice, characteristic of what they consider as the “conscious disobedience of the human being” (Lundberg, 2009). For Evangelicals, sin has four manifestations: actions (theft, murder, fraud, etc.), attitudes (arrogance, lying, insult, etc.), the desire for the forbidden (desire to sin), and going against the “moral law” or non-compliance with the norms and will of God (Baker 1992; Grudem 2005).

Death considered as sin is for Evangelicals of earthly order. In this order, every human being is “free” (life) or “imprisoned” (death) to the extent that they establish a set of moral and ethical norms for social and religious life. In Evangelical communities, “living” is done as long as God's will (the will of the community) is fulfilled, and the set destiny or objectives are followed. For them, God is the perfection of everything, and this is manifested in “living” as Evangelicals; while sin is seen as chaos, disorder, and imperfection, in sum, temporal death. Thus, they understand that earthly death is the product of sinful behavior which renders the body and spirit impure. In this sense, the condition of sin is related to the decision to act freely reflected in a spiritual state that affects the intellect, responsibilities, desires, personal goals, emotions, and health (Aune, 2008).

Thus, all non-Christian behavior and attitude are considered sin; however, these are represented as part of the individual's will to live -as Evangelicals denote- “in the reign of the devil” (Armstrong, 2015). For them, every sin represents, not the will of the Devil, but the human will to follow non-Evangelical norms and beliefs. Sin is thus the representation of everything that is outside the limits of the community, and if it is considered as a space of life, wickedness, greed, delinquency, etc., are characteristic of every human being in a state of impurity, death, and constant agony (Bryant, 2005). Thus, for Evangelicals, a man in a temporal state of death or sin is seen as an individual who walks and lives in the world aimlessly, like a wandering soul in conflict with itself.

Secondly, the conception of “earthly death” within Evangelicalism leads us to a parallel notion of understanding it as illness. For Evangelicals, the state of spiritual and bodily impurity of every sinner not only establishes them as “spiritually dead,” but this condition also affects their body (Rocha, 1998; Stasson, 2014). In the Evangelical community, diseases, specifically severe ones (such as AIDS or cancer), and personality disorders (depression, schizophrenia, paranoia, narcissism, antisocial behavior, etc.) are products of living “far from God.” Therefore, every physical and mental illness is linked to a state of spiritual impurity (Henquinet, 2020). An individual dies or lives to the extent that their acts, attitudes, and morals remain in accordance with “God's will.” They consider that in the earthly world, the body and spirit are one, therefore, an individual must take care of their body and also “nourish” their spirit.

Thirdly, which individuals are considered spiritually dead in the earthly world? Evangelicals are very clear when constructing the “other,” and these are the non-converts such as atheists, agnostics, and all those individuals

who belong to other religious denominations (Ross, 2014; Vermeer & Scheepers, 2021). In Evangelicalism, all people who profess other religious and spiritual beliefs are the product of “ignorance towards God,” that is, of the so-called “fallen world.” According to Evangelicals, these people are a reflection of evil, chaos, disorder, violence, in other words, a “living” reflection of sin.

According to Evangelical churches, the death of non-Evangelicals is considered a “loss,” as their souls will not reach the kingdom of God because they did not congregate in their earthly life to the Christian community. But it is also considered a material loss (Dos Santos Costa, 2015), as it does not present as growth in community membership. While for Evangelicals, salvation is seen as a “spiritual gain” and an increase in the congregated population.

Fourthly, Evangelicals consider the “world of the flesh” and the “fallen world” as the spaces in which non-Evangelicals live. For them, it is important to conceive the idea of eternal salvation, not as a metaphor for life, but as a representation that their identities as Christians, their soul, their memory, and their remembrance will “live” eternally in a state of absolute spiritual purity (death and salvation as a state of complete happiness) and will be considered as examples to follow within the community (Gokani & Caragata, 2020). Therefore, they see in the death of non-Evangelicals feelings of grief, guilt, pain. In the Evangelical community, it is considered that these pre-mortem feelings and emotions are characteristic in the environment of every non-Evangelical individual who “unconsciously” knows that their impure soul is destined for eternal death in hell (Hiilamo, 2022). Thus, they also consider the death of a non-Evangelical as a “bad death,” since it is an impure soul which does not deserve to be part of the community memory and should be considered as anonymous.

Up to this point, we can understand the conception of earthly death as that which is located outside the religious, moral, and spiritual precepts that Evangelicalism establishes as the normative framework of Evangelicalism. A non-Evangelical is always a subject of sin, whose everyday life is plagued with suffering, grief, pain, lack, illness, etc., a product of their own will to want to live away from “the path” of God, the impure will live eternally but confined to the anonymity of their souls, their bodies, their identities, the remembrance, and the collective memory.

Thus, for Evangelicals, earthly death is a “disappearance” and a “loss” but also an “example” of how the “brothers” and “sisters” of the community should not live.

THE HEAVENLY WORLD AND ETERNAL LIFE

For Evangelicals, physical death only has two outcomes: heaven and hell. Upon the end of earthly life, according to Evangelical churches, every believer in the Evangelical faith must continue living, but only in spiritual form. This continuation of earthly life is considered the “promise” that God has in store for them.

Considering the belief in the promise of spiritual immortality, Evangelicals understand, from their biological death, that the “new life” will be filled with new attributions and rewards for their own (Knoetze, 2015). Thus, the conception of eternal life is based on four dimensions: a) death as will, design, and predestination by God; b) as salvation and spiritual purity embodied in a state of complete happiness and well-being; c) the recognition of an individual's death as a state of “eternal life” by the Evangelical community and their role in the formation of the community's collective memory; and d) death as the reunion of the individual with their loved ones.

Firstly, Evangelicalism considers that the death of any individual is the result of “God's will.” Faced with the unpredictability of death, Evangelicals declare that the timing of an individual's death is predetermined and designated by God. This community strategy towards an individual's death conditions them to be obliged to constantly follow the precepts, norms, and religious beliefs as they consider every individual not only as a being for biological death but also a being for eternal spiritual life (Ebner, 2017; Jackson, 2016). Thus, “God's will” as a community will is to gather the faithful and their beliefs around constantly defining what life and death are.

Following this conception, Evangelicalism emphasizes that the state of eternal life is based on the belief in the salvation of the soul, embodied in a state of spiritual purity considered as the only state of absolute happiness and well-being. Thus, death is not understood by Evangelicals as a painful event of suffering and grief; rather, it is seen as a joyful, happy, and hopeful event (Lundberg, 2009).

As can be seen, death does not imply a spiritual rupture or emotional instability for them. It rather implies a state of well-being, desire, prosperity, and security about the future of their spirit. Hope is seen from here as security but also as motivation to continue belonging to the Christian community.

Thirdly, the “security” and “motivation” surrounding the anticipation of an individual's death encompass the belief that the death of an Evangelical member does not imply their disappearance or discontinuity from the community. The “kingdom of heaven” is an imagined space for the expansion of the community and of the faithful Evangelicals after earthly life. “Heaven” is considered the “promise” or “reward” of a life under Evangelical beliefs (Meireis, 2008), but also as the only place where the spirit of Evangelicals can finally dwell. However, on a first level, the Evangelical community does not openly recognize what this place consists of; they do not know if in it their physical form, their memories, and feelings will be maintained (Währisch-Oblau, 2015). But, on a personal level, Evangelicals express that “heaven” has a representation very similar to their conception of family and community.

Thus, fourthly, the conception of heaven or the “heavenly kingdom” is imagined as a place of reunion with their family, their loved ones, and their Christian community (Yee, 2020). Therefore, they declare that heaven “must” be the same -or similar- to their everyday space, but with the caveat that it is a space where everyone is Evangelical, sin and the idea of it do not exist, individuals “live” in their physical form of greatest fullness and strength.

In this way, “heaven” for Evangelicals is a space to “live” eternally, where reunion and rest -in the face of the earthly world which is seen as a problematic, conflictive, and sinful place- are configured as the “great” promise to a life under the teachings and beliefs of Christianity, but above all, it is a place that gives meaning to the reason for the Evangelical community as it represents “the path” to the salvation of its believers.

HELL AND ETERNAL DEATH

Evangelicals maintain that not all individuals will reach the kingdom of heaven; those who have sinned can only expect the “kingdom of darkness” or hell.

Just as they imagine heaven, hell also seems not to have a particular form. However, on a personal level, they believe that hell must be very similar to the earthly world in a state of sin that they observe in their everyday life or through the media: poverty, murders, rapes, illness, suffering, pain, spiritual lack, etc. (Lundberg, 2009).

From these general considerations, within Evangelical thought, every individual who meets their final destiny in hell or also called “eternal death” will be understood as: a) a product of man's free will to commit sins; b) a punishment that produces spiritual impurity and a state of pain and suffering; c) causes the individual's identity to fall into anonymity; and d) is considered an absence, loss, and oblivion.

Firstly, Evangelicals declare that every non-Evangelical individual who has not “submitted” to the “will of God” can only expect the condemnation of their soul after death. Thus, “eternal death,” as a direct continuation of “earthly death,” represents what they consider “divine justice.”

From these considerations, hell is understood in Evangelicalism as the punishment God grants to those who have not been aware or have refused during their earthly existence to establish themselves as Evangelicals (Plaul, 2023). Thus, the death of every individual must also be considered as a state of suffering inherent to absolute spiritual impurity.

For this reason, a second dimension that involves hell establishes that Hell is a place of torments. For Evangelicals, the image of “torment” and “suffering” can only be imagined with what is experienced in the earthly world. No one claims to know the specific evils that will afflict those who die in sin; they can only place it as the “utmost suffering,” both bodily and spiritual (Knoetze, 2015).

What is important in these narratives is that Evangelicals assume that every individual destined for hell will possess -just as in heaven- their physical form and soul similar to what they had in life. At the same time, they assume that in hell, every individual will experience hunger, physical pain, burns, sadness, etc., which can well be assumed as representations of the problems in the current world. However, hell implies not only suffering,

pain, and punishment, but also oblivion and absence. The greatest punishment awaiting non-Evangelicals does not lie so much in the type of physical suffering that awaits them after death, but rather, that their spirit, their soul, will be forgotten by those still alive, who will gradually forget about them, their remembrance, and memory (Jelin, 2002).

For Evangelicals, the true suffering in hell is that individuals will be destined for absolute solitude and lack of communication. When it is mentioned that "they cannot pass from there to here," Evangelicals refer to the fact that the souls in hell will not be able to reunite with their families and loved ones, will not be able to be part of the memory and remembrance of those still alive, thus, their identity will slowly be forgotten to the point of becoming anonymous: the true hell or "torment" is to be "eliminated" (or disappear) as a subject forming part of the identity (Schattauer, 2007) and collective memory of the deceased non-Evangelical's close environment (Dos Santos Costa, 2015).

Fourthly, Evangelicals insist that "eternal death" is always a bad death, one that should not be, as they consider that the death of every individual - which is part of a communal and family process - must be accepted and approved by the community: the "good death" (Escobar, 2014; Jackson, 2016). In this sense, they emphasize that a majority approval of an individual's death implies that everyone recognizes that he or she is ready to enter the kingdom of heaven. Thus, they believe they should not worry about a destiny full of suffering and pain; on the contrary, they feel happiness and joy for this death.

However, when a non-Evangelical dies, they see in that event a conjunction of feelings and emotions of sadness and pain, not on the part of the Evangelicals, but on the part of the non-Evangelical environment that sees death as loss and absence.

According to Evangelicals, these feelings and emotions can only represent an awareness of the fatal destiny of the deceased's soul and, as if in a mirror, they see in that event a time that represents the culmination of a life in sin (Curry, 1994). Thus, the loss represents the physical and spiritual absence of the deceased, but also a feeling of fear in the face of death: the awareness that when they die, their identities will slowly disappear.

In summary, eternal death is established as metaphors and representations by which Evangelicals describe and uphold the destiny of the souls of non-Evangelicals. They emphasize this state as absolute impurity, which does not deserve recognition of the particular identity of the deceased. Instead, they stress that the impure will suffer eternally in hell: their remembrance, their memory, and their identity will fade from the thoughts of their families and close environment.

It is worth noting, finally, that for Evangelical communities, there is no place for those who die other than heaven or hell. Thus, the belief in an intermediate world or space loses meaning and importance (Karecki, 2014). Purgatory does not exist for Evangelicals, not because God did not create it, but because an individual being "good" or "bad" can only expect their end to be rewarded or punished in one of these two worlds. Therefore, an individual cannot "wander" nor wait for their final destiny to be conditioned by the prayers of the living or by intermediaries like virgins or saints.

Thus, following the conceptions of life and death, there is no day of celebration for their dead, as that would imply remembering those who should not be remembered, those whose presence has turned into absence, and those who suffer in hell the anonymity of their identities. For this reason, the dead do not have a day or a specific place to celebrate their life and remember their death. The only dead that the Evangelical community establishes to remember are those who have reached eternal life because these have a real presence within the group, a daily and continuous presence.

CONCLUSIONS: DEATH AS POLICY

Evangelicalism centers its beliefs primarily on the Bible, and fundamentally, on the four Gospels of the New Testament. They consider that "everything comes from God" - wisdom, discernment, etc. They also maintain that life comes from God. It is a religious community that turns its biblical precepts into the foundation for constructing a moral, spiritual, and behavioral socio-religious state; its community maxim is to learn and know how to "live." The discourse on life and death is the central axis by which they determine the position and state

of an individual. Furthermore, they see evangelization as a means to incorporate a non-believer into the state of spiritual and bodily life. In this sense, Evangelicals have constructed their own perception of time as linear and infinite, where only the conception of the past (remote, before becoming Evangelicals, and recent, upon conversion) and the future (eternal life after physical death) exist.

Regarding the conceptions of life and death, these are understood from two planes: the earthly and the heavenly. On the earthly plane, an individual is considered alive as long as they are a believer and accept God's will. It is a state of joy, happiness, and purity. At the same time, they consider that an individual can be alive but "spiritually dead." This state is considered part of the "fallen world" resulting from living in autonomy and the desire to be distant from God. On the heavenly plane, Evangelicals consider themselves "saved" and that they will live eternally in a state of complete happiness and purity alongside God and their loved ones. Whereas a non-Evangelical will also live eternally, but in a state of suffering, pain, and sorrow. Eternal salvation represents the continuity of their identity, their remembrance, their memory, whether for their family or for the Evangelical community. This is considered "symbolic immortality." In contrast, non-Evangelicals will see their identity, their memory, and their remembrance immersed in anonymity. Thus, as an example of what constitutes a "bad death."

Through biblical reading, Evangelicals have established the prohibition of worshiping the dead. The dead are also considered alive in a spiritual form (brother-ancestors) and are in a state of perpetual contemplation of God. Brother-ancestors, not being "dead," still have roles and functions within the community. By defining their final identity during funeral ceremonies, the limits of their opinions and wills are established. Thus, when Evangelicals gather for any activity or to make decisions, the choice that the deceased would have made in life is also considered a valid vote. Moreover, the inclusion of brother-ancestors redefines the very structure and organization of the community to include them. The concept of brother-ancestors is fundamental to understanding the concept of symbolic immortality, as they consider that if they are to live eternally, their presence in this world cannot be reduced only to temporary remembrance or to specific dates of celebration or commemoration of the life and death of the deceased. Symbolic immortality allows them to continue being present in the earthly world. The central idea of the conceptions of life and death is to separate and delineate the concepts of purity (impure body/pure and impure soul/pure). Thus, reincarnation after the final judgment is conceived as absolute purity, the reunion of the body and soul, both in a pure state.

Regarding attitudes towards death, Evangelicals have established four types: one's own death, death by accompaniment, the death of others, and forbidden death. One's own death is conceived only for Evangelicals. This type of death is considered a "reward" as they will enjoy eternal life and symbolic immortality. Death by accompaniment refers to the loved ones of Evangelicals (mother, father, siblings, children, relatives, and close friends). Evangelicals consider themselves directly responsible for the final state or destiny of their souls; through prayers and supplications - especially when the individual is close to dying - Evangelicals believe they are saving them, as they are "evangelizing" them and bringing them the word of God. The difference between the death of others and death by accompaniment lies in the fact that only Evangelicals can achieve the condition of brother-ancestors since this requires the recognition of the entire Evangelical community. The death of others is conceived as the death of non-Evangelicals. In it, the destiny of the deceased's soul is hell, a place of chaos, suffering, and sadness, but above all, of subjective dissolution, leaving their identity in a state of anonymity. Forbidden death will only be conceived for those individuals who have committed suicide, whether Evangelical or not. In it, no type of forgiveness, prayer, or evangelization is conceived.

Death is understood as both policy and memory. For Evangelicals, being part of the public space leads them to rethink themselves. The modest growth in the number of faithful converts compared to other Evangelical churches has presented a barrier that does not grant them recognition as an institution, community, and Evangelical denomination within the public sphere. To insert themselves into the public without seeing their identity transgressed or confused, they have reorganized the Evangelical community, basing it on the inclusion of the deceased as vital elements in their evangelizing efforts. Concurrently, the Evangelical subject also constitutes an element for building memory. They see in their living and their dead individuals possessing the sacred (followers of God's will). This narrative shapes their religious and political discourse, delineating the boundaries of their identity, that of others, and allowing, in turn, strategies for insertion into the public to be

generated. The discourse and conceptions about life and death are presented as rhetorical elements through which they can “convert” or “rebirth” a society that, according to them, is in decline (the “fallen world”). Considering that every individual is by nature “impure,” the evangelization process is presented as a strategy to reverse such a condition. They wish to be part of the public, gradually turning it into the “private,” into the Christian, into the Evangelical. In this sense, building memory is configured as a political process where the “diversity” of identities must give way to a “homogenization” of the moral, spiritual, and bodily subject of the non-Evangelical. To turn the “impure” pure.

The institutional character of Evangelical churches is based on constructing a “grand narrative” about the human and the divine; in it, life and death are central concepts that will allow the group solid social-religious cohesion and establish symbolic boundaries against other Christian communities.

This narrative is based on the conception of Christ as a cultural hero, as a normative and identity principle of the community. For Evangelicals, the life and teachings of Christ must be clearly reflected in their religious identity: Christ is the central symbol of their citizenship status and the link that allows them to differentiate from other Christian-inspired religions, so the construction of a memory as a group cements the roots of their Christian and evangelizing project in a local context. However, they have only been able to construct “private memories” restricted to the socio-religious space of the community. Their identity as Evangelicals has been confused with other Christian denominations, and in a state of clandestinity, they have been forced to remain on the margins of the public sphere and any national project that sees them -as a religious group- as political subjects participating in local and national life.

The dominant political, religious, and public space has turned aggressive against them. Censures, prohibitions, and rejection for who they are have led them to remain alert and to contemplate as necessary their inclusion within the public sphere they request to be part of. Their struggle has begun.

Seeing their religious identity confused with others, the political role they have assumed is to form the bases of a collective memory that allows them to move within the public. Here, Evangelical subjects have also become political subjects, where the life/death conception becomes the central discourse of their political-religious action.

They have decided not to directly confront their critics. Instead, they have built a strong social capital that includes both their living and their dead. Concurrently, they have constructed a historical time that allows them to delimit, not only their discourse as a religious community and their communal identity but also, their political action towards the “others.”

The time of life and the time of death are attached as part of that grand narrative through which they establish the margins of their identity and their political project. Time defines them. The past is presented as a historical process for the struggle of symbolic recognitions by Evangelical actors, through which they have been circumstantially negotiating their participation in micro-scenarios and public spaces (their workplaces, educational environments, and their family and friendship circles).

The first challenge they have taken on is to establish the margins of their political and religious project with the Catholic Church, to then give way to a memory of public recognition. The construction of memory for Evangelicals is a matter of dispute and conflict, not only with the Catholic roots and tradition from which many of their faithful come but also for being part of the public space. Evangelicals perceive that the bridges between the Catholic Church as an institution and society have been crumbling to the point of seeing in such a breakup an open window through which they can insert themselves into the public space.

Evangelical churches acknowledge two forms of recognition and insertion within the public sphere that allow for the construction of memory for other social, political, and religious institutions: dates, anniversaries, and commemorations, as well as objects that materialize memory (monuments, museums, etc.). Regarding the former, by distancing themselves from a vast commemorative religious calendar (saints’ days, virgin days, patron saint festivals, Day of the Dead and of the Living, etc.), Evangelicals have limited their religious celebrations to two important dates: Easter and Christmas. The issue this presents is that both celebrations are shared with Catholics and other Protestants of different denominations. Here, constructing their own, unique shared

memory is made impossible by traditional Catholic celebrations. Moreover, the numerous people celebrating these religious holidays, as well as the massive textual and audio-visual production by the media that trivializes such festivities, greatly diminish their evangelization project and public presence. Taking cemeteries as an example, Evangelicals have seen these public spaces as places where their Evangelical identity is reduced to anonymity and dissolved in relation to other religions, especially Catholicism. This leads us to the question of materializing memory. The numerous presence of Catholic churches, alongside figures and images of Christ, virgins, and saints, are seen by them as objects that cannot form part of their memory and beliefs, denying them a presence in the public. Only the location where they hold their meetings is represented as a space of memory, but by using a house, it goes unnoticed and falls into anonymity. The question now is: What have Evangelicals done—or are doing—to address these issues?

Evangelicals have established the body as the central space of memory: the metaphor of the body as a temple, moves beyond its initial category and becomes the main axis for their construction. Believers see themselves as living religious symbols, as monuments through which they can speak—unlike a statue of a saint or virgin—and interact with others. The personal and community private memory they have been building allows them to carry out a personal and focused evangelizing project. Over their years as Evangelicals, they have learned methods, techniques, and rhetoric by which they do not need commemorations of religious dates, nor objects or sacred symbols. The (their) body represents the sacred for them. This is why the dead also matter. However, to reach this conception, the community has seen the need to reconstruct an internal democratic order, where their civil and political rights are guaranteed independently—alongside—of their religious condition. They understand that the endeavor of building memory through the event of death is a democratizing process for the community. The death of an individual is the means to renew the community's control norms, as well as to perform a review of the participants and how the community is progressing as an institution. Herein lies the importance of ceremonies and rituals as symbols of the sacred. The community prepares its members for internal community life, for family and parental life, but, above all, for civic coexistence.

On this aspect, the concept of “symbolic immortality” is key to understanding not only the meaning of life beyond death; it is also a political concept, where the dead also have responsibilities within the project of constructing the community's memory and internal democratization.

Death for them is not only a socially constructed ritual to face mourning but is also a process that allows for the gradual construction of the group's collective memory. By redefining the boundaries of their belief system, they define their identity and the destiny of the community. The construction of memory, therefore, revolves around the understanding of death as a process of internal reorganization, assigning roles and functions to both the living and the dead. Death becomes the foundation of the formation of memory.

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