

# Enchanting Self-discipline: Methodical Reflexivity and the Search for the Supernatural in Charismatic Christian Testimonial Practice

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## Abstract

Social science has long operated under the assumption that enchantment, seeking out this-worldly manifestations of the supernatural, impedes the cultivation of self-discipline. How, then, to account for a Christian brotherhood whose testimonial practice is at once enchanting and disciplining of the self? In this article, I define self-discipline in terms of its distinctly reflexive (self-aimed and self-governed) and methodical (systematic and auto-regenerative) character, and in doing so, I disentangle the concept from rational calculation as one (among other possible) means of disciplining the self. I draw on Ricoeur’s theory of personal identity to theorize a relationship of the self whose reflexive and methodical character is found not in rational calculation but in arational narration. I then show how the testimonial practice of a charismatic Christian businessmen’s brotherhood is disciplining of the self insofar as it is enchanting, how the practice is methodical and reflexive because it is one of arational narration.

## Keywords

religion, social theory, ethnography, Weber, narrative, discipline

“Yes, our God is a supernatural God but that doesn’t mean we can just kick back in the hammock and wait for the miracle!”

—Diego, Mexico City Director, Good News Businessmen’s Brotherhood

This is one of Diego’s favorite aphorisms. He frequently repeats it to fellow members of the Good News Businessmen’s Brotherhood (GNBB)<sup>1</sup>—“brothers,” as they call one another—to remind them of an organization-defining ethical commitment. Good News brothers are

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businessmen (*hombres de negocios*), not especially wealthy or powerful businessmen, but the idea of being a businessman is an important part of belonging to the organization: Members seek to forge an ethic of self-discipline, to become, as they playfully put it, “*hombres negados al ocio*,” men who negate laziness. At the same time, members of the brotherhood are charismatic Christians: *Charismatic* describes a style of religious worship focused on powerful sensory experience and evidence of this-worldly spiritual manifestations. This style of worship was initially associated in the Christian tradition with Pentecostalism, but it has spread throughout many different strands of Christianity (hence the need for the more general term *charismatic*). As GNBB brothers seek to forge an ethic of self-discipline, their endeavors are accompanied by a simultaneous quest to enchant their everyday lives, to accumulate this-worldly evidence of the fact that they are *hombres sobrenaturales*, supernatural men. Diego’s aphorism serves as a reminder to Good News brothers of their dual commitment to self-discipline and seeking out the supernatural. It reminds them that the two ethical commitments go hand-in-hand: One has to work for one’s miracles, and an *hombre sobrenatural* must also be an *hombre negado al ocio*.

Sociological conventional wisdom has long operated under the assumption that tendencies to seek out this-worldly manifestations of supernatural forces represent obstacles to the cultivation of modern self-discipline (Bellah 1970; Berger 2010; Eisenstadt 1968; Foucault 1995; Gorski 2003; Kalberg 2001; MacKinnon 1988; Marshall 1982; B. Martin 1995; Poggi 1983; Schluchter 1989; Weber [1905] 2002; Zaret 1992). This is because concepts of self-discipline tend to be entangled with rational calculation, a position famously established in Weber’s ([1905] 2002) argument that the magic-eliminating features of Protestant theology blazed the trail to modern practices of self-discipline, practices of scrutiny and exhortation of self that are reflexive and methodical insofar as they are subject to rational calculation.

In this article, I argue for a definition of self-discipline that emphasizes its distinctly *reflexive* (self-aimed and self-governed) and *methodical* (systematic and auto-regenerative) character. Such a conceptualization disentangles self-discipline from rational calculation, which is then understood as one (among other possible) *means* of disciplining the self. The article’s primary task, however, is to conceptually describe and empirically substantiate an alternative means of practicing self-discipline. I draw from Ricoeur to establish the theoretical foundations of a relationship of self whose reflexive and methodical character is found not in rational calculation but in arational narration. I then show how Good News brothers’ testimonial practice is methodical and reflexive—disciplining of the self—insofar as it is a practice of arational narration, insofar as it is enchanting.

## SELF-DISCIPLINE AND (DIS)ENCHANTMENT

Self-discipline is a particular kind of discipline. Gorski (2003) conceptualizes discipline along two dimensions—levels (social vs. individual) and modes (coercive vs. normative)—and he suggests that self-discipline operates at the individual level and the normative mode. Similarly, I identify two defining features of self-discipline, one that pertains to *self* (level in Gorski’s terms) and another that pertains to *discipline* (Gorski’s mode). What Gorski calls level of discipline refers to the agents and the targets of disciplining procedures, and a defining feature of self-discipline is that agent and target are one and the same, the self is both the subject and the object of disciplining practices. Self-discipline, in other words, is by definition *reflexive*. By mode, Gorski refers to the normative versus coercive means by which discipline is achieved. In contrast, I take the defining mode of practices of self-discipline to lie in their *methodical* character. Indeed, to the extent that disciplining practices are

methodical—that is, systematic and auto-regenerative—the normative and coercive means required to maintain them are relatively less prominent.<sup>2</sup>

My conceptualization of self-discipline also draws on Weber ([1905] 2002), who, throughout *The Protestant Ethic*, refers to modern self-discipline as “the methodically rationalized ethical conduct of life.” Furthermore, Weber understands such methodically rationalized conduct to be *self-discipline* in particular because it is reflexive, because, that is, it is the self that bears responsibility for examining and exhorting the self, a point he repeatedly makes by contrasting Catholic and ascetic Protestant ethical practice. Weber ([1905] 2002:84) notes, for example, that while the Catholic monk would use his meticulously recorded religious journal to seek authoritative interpretation from his “directeur de l’âme” (soul director), “the Reformed Christian used the journal ‘to feel his *own* pulse,’” to monitor and “bookkeep” his own everyday conduct.

Disenchantment, or *de-magification*, is the crux of Weber’s ([1905] 2002) argument about the ascetic Protestant origins of methodical and reflexive ethical practices of the self, which is why Weber centers his analysis on the Calvinist Reformed Church (see also Kalberg 2001; Schluchter 1989).<sup>3</sup> For Calvinists, salvation is predestined, unknowable, and impossible to influence, rendering vain any attempt to seek assistance or consolation from intermediaries of any kind (religious experts, sacraments, relics, angels, protective saints, good works, even faith), thereby radically erasing magical coercion from theological doctrine and spiritual practice (Poggi 1983; Schluchter 1989; Weber 1978, [1905] 2002). De-magification in turn cultivates a “systematization of the ethical conduct of life”: The elimination of quasi-magical means of obtaining salvation puts an end to all manner of living ethically “from hand-to-mouth” as a practical orientation to salvation; as a result, “the ethical practice of ordinary people [is] divested of its random and unsystematic nature and built up into a consistent *method* for the whole conduct of one’s life” (Weber [1905] 2002:80, 84). Furthermore, because disenchantment eliminates the possibility of recourse to intermediaries for assistance and reassurance in the uncertainty of one’s salvation, for the Reformed Christian, the self bears the responsibility for methodical examination and exhortation of the self. In practical terms, all the Calvinist can do to make the unknowing bearable is to assume his own salvation and work methodically to convince *himself*.

Disenchantment solicits the methodical and reflexive examination and exhortation of self: deprived of intermediating religious officials, sacraments, rituals, doctrines, and even faithful commitment as a means of feeling *certitudo salutis*, the Reformed Christian who wishes to reassure himself about his state of grace has no one to turn to but himself; he has no choice but to enter into a methodical relationship with himself; objectify his conduct in order to make constant inventories, calculations, and adjustments; and turn himself and his life into the simultaneous subject and object of thought and experimentation (Kalberg 2001; Poggi 1983; Weber [1905] 2002). Of course, Calvinist believers do, as Weber acknowledges, look to pastoral leaders for advice about the torment of lacking all means of knowing or influencing their own salvation. However, the counsel they are provided only reinforces the sentiment that the individual believer alone bears the responsibility for exhorting and examining oneself, that such examinations and exhortations should be methodical, and that rational calculation provides the means of making them methodical. Calvinist pastors teach their salvation-anxious congregants “that they simply [have] a duty to *regard* themselves as elect . . . a duty to strive for the subjective certainty of one’s [own] election,” and that “*tireless labor in a calling* [is] the best possible means of *attaining* this self-assurance” (Weber [1905] 2002:77–78). In practical terms, this leaves the individual Calvinist believer in emotional circumstances that are simultaneously empowered and lonely: “The Calvinist ‘*creates*’ his salvation *himself* . . . more correctly: he creates the *certainty* of salvation,” and as a result

one's entire existence, and in particular that which potentially pertains to "tireless labor in a calling," is subject to a "*systematic self-examination* which is *constantly* faced with the question: elect or reprobate?" (Weber [1905] 2002:79).

Disenchantment solicits ascetic Protestant self-discipline, but rational calculation gives the Calvinist the substantive content of his methodical reflexive ethical practice. The individual Calvinist believer's ethical conduct falls under his own jurisdiction, and it achieves its methodical—that is, systematic and auto-regenerative—character to the extent that it is rationally calculable, such that "the sanctification of life could almost assume the character of a business arrangement" (Weber [1905] 2002:85). Ascetic Protestant self-discipline reaches exemplary extremes in practices like those of Benjamin Franklin, who undertook "statistical bookkeeping of his progress in the individual virtues," and Paul Bunyan, who conceived of the relationship between God and sinner as analogous to that of shopkeeper and customer (Weber [1905] 2002).

Weber's emphasis on rational calculation raises questions about the extent to which the analysis of modern self-discipline applies to contexts devoid of the disenchanting force of the Calvinist predestination doctrine.<sup>4</sup> Weber ([1905] 2002:98) himself addresses this question in *The Protestant Ethic*, noting that of all the ethical terrain he includes in the concept of "ascetic Protestantism," the Baptist movement is the furthest reach. Because Baptists reject predestination and embrace continuing revelation, their brand of self-discipline cannot depend on disenchantment; rather, Weber ([1905] 2002:10) argues, "since predestination is rejected, the specifically *methodical* character of Baptist morality rests above all on the idea of 'waiting' on the working of the spirit." Weber's suggestion that Baptists arrive at self-discipline in their pursuit of continuing revelation would be more convincing were he to provide a sense of *how* this ethical relationship of self with self is methodical. He suggests "waiting on the spirit" as the means by which Baptists cultivate self-discipline, but what this means in practice and what makes it methodical are questions he leaves unanswered.

Not long after publication of *The Protestant Ethic*, following a trip to the United States, Weber (1946) wrote the "Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism," an essay in which he leaves behind the waiting on the spirit hypothesis and turns instead to social mechanisms to account for discipline in a U.S. Protestant context devoid of disenchanting Calvinist theology.<sup>5</sup> Most subsequent sociological explanations of Protestant discipline in the absence of disenchantment follow Weber's turn away from the self and toward the sectarian social sources of discipline—surveillance, scrutiny, punishment (ostracizing and financial penalties), and networking, which exist independent of theological orientation (Berger 2010; Gorski 2003; B. Martin 1995; D. Martin 1990; Miller and Yamamori 2007; Nolivos 2012; Wacker 2001).

Without disputing the importance of social sources of discipline, I turn back to ethical relationships of the self with the self to reexamine the connection that Weber finds between self-discipline and disenchantment. In an examination of Good News brothers' testimonial practice, I argue that theirs is a case where "enchantment," seeking out this-worldly evidence of the supernatural, cultivates self-discipline, ethical practices of the self that resemble Weber's ascetic Protestants in their reflexivity and methodical character. The article will demonstrate that testimonial practice is a practice of self-discipline for Good News brothers *because* it is an enchanting one: The practice fosters reflexive and methodical examination and exhortation of self *insofar* as it is oriented to a search for evidence and experience of the supernatural in the details of everyday life.

When members of GNBB speak of the supernatural (*sobrenatural*), they are not referring to an intangible otherworldly force that can be worshipped but not felt or seen. For brothers, the supernatural refers to experience or evidence that God is concretely manifesting in this

world, intervening, and shifting things around in one's life. To find evidence of the supernatural is to have an experience that confirms the belief that as Neitz (1987:27) puts it in her discussion of charismatic Catholicism, "God is alive, objectively real and can be directly experienced in one's day to day life." I use the term *enchantment* as a way of describing a GNBB orientation to the supernatural that lies in between magical coercion and prayerful worship.<sup>6</sup> Good News brothers do not have an explicitly magical orientation to the supernatural because although they seek to find and feel God intervening in the details of everyday life, they do not pretend to control or directly manipulate the way this happens. Nevertheless, as I will show, the GNBB testimonial practice is one of spiritual coaxing, if not explicit coercing. Brothers do not have precise formulas or specific recipes, but they hold a firm conviction that giving testimonial shape to past experiences has effects on life as it is lived and that recounting stories of miracles lived is the best way to ensure ongoing experience of the miraculous.

Thus, whereas rational calculation provides Weber's Calvinist with the substantive content of his methodical reflexive practice of the self in a disenchanting world, for the Good News brother living in an enchanted world, it is arational narration that provides the substantive material for entering into a reflexive and methodical ethical relationship with himself. By *arational*, I mean that unlike the Calvinist's calculative assessments of his "tireless labor in a calling," the Good News brother's narrative accounts are not bound to or fueled by the capacity of the human mind to logically explain or comprehend. Indeed, the stories brothers tell and the narrative material they collect over the course of their everyday lives are oriented away from rational explanation: The more that a testimonial account defies rational explanation, the more persuasively it can serve as a vehicle for intimately feeling, seeing, and hearing God's this-worldly manifestation. Although unbound from rational explanation, the narrative orientation to everyday living that GNBB testimonial practice cultivates has its own methodical (systematic and auto-regenerative) character. In fact, the methodical character of the practice rests on the distance it keeps from rational explanation: Good News brothers' testimonial practice is oriented toward finding reason-defying evidence of God's this-worldly manifestation; it is guided by a belief in an unknowable and unmasterable connection between *giving* and *receiving* testimony, between recounting and experiencing the miraculous; and it is buttressed at every step by brothers' persistent reminders to themselves that, in any case, they do not and cannot *know*—neither what they actually need and want from their lives nor what lifetime occurrence might or might not be a means of realizing these ultimately unknowable needs and wants.

If the calculative relationships of self of the sort that Weber describes in *The Protestant Ethic* are by definition rational, narrative relationships of self are perhaps by definition arational. A number of scholars work with the idea that narrative constitutes the substance of selfhood (Calhoun 1991; Coleman 2006; Csordas 1997; Giddens 1991; Harding 2000; Holstien and Gubrium 2000; Ricoeur 1992; Smilde 2003, 2007; Stromberg 1993; Taylor 1989). Ricoeur, however, provides the most extensive analysis, albeit in philosophical terms, of the narrative constitution of selfhood. Ricoeur (1992) shows how through different processes of dialectical mediation—between sameness and selfhood, description and prescription, continuity and discordance—narrative spans the distance between the stable enduring features that define one's *character* and the more muddled responses to unforeseeable events that constitute one's *actions* in everyday life. And for Ricoeur (1992:162), "narrative unity of life," a constant and ever-elusive aspiration of personal identity, is necessarily "an unstable mixture of fabulation and factual experience."

A number of obstacles stand in between narration and life as one lives it, obstacles that fiction, for example, sidesteps. Fictional narratives distinguish between—sometimes

playfully and experimentally so—the roles and voices of author, narrator, and character; any attempt to narratively interpret oneself as life story, on the other hand, requires one to occupy all three roles oneself, an impossible task, Ricoeur (1992) argues, without recourse to fiction. Furthermore, narrative interpretation means that “[l]ife must be gathered together . . . into a singular totality,” when there is nothing, with respect to one’s grasp on one’s own life, that can provide narrative beginning, to say nothing of ending. Finally, life histories are intertwined and caught up together in such a way that giving “narrative unity” to a life story entails insulating it in a sequestered world, much like a work of fiction. For these reasons and more, Ricoeur (1992:158) argues, “narrative unity” is bound to remain an inevitable yet ever-elusive aspiration of personal identity: “How, indeed, could a subject of action give an ethical character to his or her own life taken as a whole, if this life were not gathered together in some way, and how could this occur if not, precisely, in the form of narrative?” This is inevitably a mix of fabulation and empirical experience because “[i]t is precisely because of the elusive character of real life that we need the help of fiction to organize life retrospectively” (p. 162).

Ricoeur (1992) offers a convincing theoretical account of the processes by which narrative, in mediation of fabulation and experience, stitches together selfhood, but because he provides a general model, we do not see any particular practices or techniques that constitute the stitching. Although he does not share Ricoeur’s conceptualization of narrative as the substance of selfhood, Foucault (1988a, 1988b, 1990, 2006, 2010, 2011) does, as part of his later shift from discipline to self-discipline, examine a series of narrative practices of the self, that is, ancient Greek and Roman techniques for cultivating attention to and government of the self. Prominent among these “technologies of the self” is “self-writing,” a practice that links care of the self to “a constant writing activity,” or regular stock-takings of everyday life that make the self the simultaneous subject and object of “a whole set of meticulous notations on the body, health, physical sensations, regimen, and feelings” (Foucault 1994:220). The resulting “relationship between writing and vigilance,” Foucault (1994:232–33) argues, makes narrative out of experience and transforms experience via narrative: “New concern with self involve[s] a new experience of self. . . . Attention [is] paid to the nuances of life, mood, and reading, and the experience of oneself [is] intensified and widened by virtue of this act of writing. A whole field of experience open[s] which earlier was absent.”

Self-writing is a technique of reflexivity: It makes the self the simultaneous subject and object of ethical thought and experimentation. It is also a practice of caring for the self not as a means to pursue a higher good but as an activity that is itself a higher good such that the technique operates independently of instrumentally rational calculation. However, returning to the earlier definition of self-discipline, it remains unclear how the practice of self-writing is *methodical* in the relationships of the self it cultivates. As with Weber’s description of Baptists waiting on the spirit, it is clear how self-writing is a self-focused practice that operates independently from rational calculability, but it is unclear what makes the practice systematic and self-perpetuating.

This article examines a different narrative technique for cultivating a relationship of the self with the self. Good News brothers’ testimonial practice is a striking empirical instantiation of the kind of entanglements between the narrating and the living of life that Ricoeur theorizes. In their testimonial practice, Good News brothers dedicate themselves to an arational—resolutely unknowable and unmasterable—intertwining of life and stories about life. The resulting entangled connections between narrative and life and between fabulation and experience are endless, indeterminable, and generative in the way that Ricoeur’s conceptualization of the narrative knot of selfhood would suggest. Furthermore, as I will

demonstrate, it is precisely the arational narrative character of the practice that makes it reflexive and methodical, a practice of self-discipline. Good News brothers cultivate methodical reflexivity not through rational calculations of a disenchanting world but in arational narration, in a quest for the logically inexplicable in the details of everyday life in an enchanted world. My analysis of GNBB testimonial practice, in contrast with Weber's characterization of Baptists waiting on the spirit and Foucault's account of self-writing, shows how testimonial practice cultivates reflexive and methodical relationships of the self, that is, self-discipline in the full sense of the concept.

## METHODS

The analytic strategy I use to interpret GNBB testimonial practice is a variation of the negative case method. When social scientists use the negative case method, they usually select an empirical case that challenges the theoretical core of a research program to which they are committed, a program whose explanatory reach they seek to expand by accounting for the otherwise anomalous case (Burawoy 1989, 1990; Emigh 1997; Lakatos 1981; Riley 2003, 2010). In this article, I take the first step in the negative case logic of inquiry, and I select an empirical instance that diverges from the expected outcome predicted by a theoretical core. However, I do not take the second step, which would entail reconstructing the theoretical core to expand the explanatory reach of a research program to which I am committed.

I examine the case of GNBB testimonial practice in light of one of Weber's core arguments about religious ethics and the character of modernity, the idea that disenchanting Protestant theologies cultivate self-discipline. GNBB is a negative case from the perspective of Weber's thesis, to the extent that members of the brotherhood find their means for cultivating self-discipline in their search for this-worldly manifestations of the supernatural. However, my interpretation of the GNBB case in light of the Weberian tradition seeks neither to falsify the thesis nor expand the generalizable reach of the Weberian theoretical core. Rather, I aim to loosen the link between ascetic Protestantism and discipline that Weber finds in rational calculability to show that a connection between Christian ethics and discipline can also be established in the methodical pursuit of evidence of the illogical and the reason-defying in the details of everyday life.

GNBB is a fruitful case for exploring the relationship between enchantment and self-discipline because the search for evidence of the supernatural and the struggle for ever-greater mastery of self (*dominio propio*) are the principal pursuits that define the brotherhood. GNBB is not a church, and brothers persistently remind their audiences—and one another—of why their fellowship transcends conventional religion: GNBB is a lay organization that meets in hotels and restaurants and invites guests into potent personal relationships with God, which, as they describe it, exist independently from any particular religious affiliation or doctrine. The overwhelming majority of Mexicans have a connection to Christianity of one sort or another such that the invitation into a personal relationship with God “independent of religious affiliation” is understood to refer to a relationship that disregards Protestant-Catholic divisions. Brothers attend GNBB meetings during the week and go to the church of their choosing on Sundays; over half of Good News brothers are Catholic. For Catholic participants, the brotherhood offers an opportunity to discover a different kind of relationship with God, to learn to pray in the same way one chats with a close friend, and to explore a personal, Protestant-like relationship with God that does not require leaving the Catholic Church, which in Mexico can fracture families and communities. The “religionless” invitation, however, is more than ecumenical nondenominationalism. GNBB brothers distinguish

their activity from conventional religion as part of a claim to supernatural efficacy: The defining characteristic of their practice is a potent this-worldly relationship with the Holy Spirit that transcends the details of ritual, denomination, and doctrine.

Finally, Good News brothers also distinguish their organization from religion by taking seriously the idea that theirs is a brotherhood of businessmen dedicated to an industrious work ethic. This blend of businessmen's ethics and attention to the Holy Spirit was the focus of 18 months of fieldwork I did inside GNBB from July 2011 to January 2013. Throughout my fieldwork, I openly introduced myself as an agnostic sociologist interested in doing participant observation for research purposes, and I did far more observing than participating (despite frequent invitations, I never delivered a testimony of my own). I spent 18 months attending weekly dinners and weekly planning/training meetings in two different chapters (four meetings a week) in Mexico City. I also attended two national conventions, five leadership training sessions, and a matrimonial retreat. I accompanied brothers on innumerable visits to schools, small businesses, police stations, and government offices, where they deliver a "secular" version of their message. I also went along on five weeklong evangelizing revivals in four different cities.

Following every meeting, dinner, or training session, I wrote extensive field notes in a journal, and the following day I would write up syntheses on the computer. I refer to both the raw notes and the syntheses as I reconstruct the ethnography. I also conducted 72 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with leaders and rank-and-file members of the organization. For the purposes of this article, I selected excerpts from interviews and field notes that best illustrate the relationship between Good News brothers' quests to enchant everyday life and their self-disciplining endeavors.

## HOMBRES NEGADOS AL OCIO

### *Combatting Spiritual Tepidity*

In June 2012, 300 Good News brothers from around Mexico arrived in León, Guanajuato, for "Leadership in Action," a weekend-long training session with the aim of forming new leaders and retransmitting the ethic that constitutes GNBB leadership. These trainings remind participants what it means to be a Good News brother: At the heart of the brotherhood is a potent, this-worldly relationship with the Holy Spirit; however, such a relationship is never definitively won; it must be constantly and rigorously cultivated.

Near the end of the training program, Pedro, a charismatic young GNBB leader from Guatemala, came to the stage to introduce brothers to the concept of "spiritual tepidity" (*la tibieza espiritual*). Over the course of a dramatic 40-minute presentation, Pedro explained what it means to have a relationship with God that is hot and what the consequences of tepidity are. The difference between hot and tepid comes down to a relationship with the Holy Spirit, a brotherhood-defining distinction between natural and supernatural living:

The Holy Spirit cannot live in a tepid heart and without the Holy Spirit what are we? *Hombres naturales*. The GNBB vision says we are ordinary everyday men in a common and ordinary world, BUT full of God's Holy Spirit transforming us into extraordinary men because the Spirit is in us, but if the Spirit isn't there?? *Hombres naturales*.

To be a member of the Brotherhood is to be an ordinary everyday man in the ordinary everyday world *but* full of the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit. However, once supernatural is not forever supernatural: When a brother's spiritual life turns tepid, when he has grown



complacent, his heart becomes an inhospitable place for the Holy Spirit, and he becomes once again *un hombre natural*. The only way a brother can prevent this is to commit himself with evermore dedication to God's work.

How does a brother hold on to this commitment? Pedro suggested that dedication to God's work is part of a divine gift exchange of sorts: Gratitude for what one has been given motivates a desire to give back to God, efforts that in turn yield more divine gifts:

I am here, out of gratitude, for love and because I have understood my friends that there is a way to repay God for everything that he has done for us, and it is to serve, it is to bring other men to his feet. We'll never pay back the debt of course because every time we serve, God blesses us more. That's why I ask, why would you *not* go out and serve? Because when you go out and serve you receive. And so really we are not going out to serve, we are going out to receive.

Central to the belief system underpinning GNBB activity is the idea that the more a brother serves, the more he will receive, and the more he dedicates himself to doing God's work, the more he will find experience and evidence of God in the details of his everyday life. Underlying this belief is the conviction that, as Pedro explained, "When it comes to Godly affairs, either you move forward or you slide backward."

GNBB brothers are called to be "ordinary everyday men filled with the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit," but neither membership nor initiation nor ritual guarantees this sort of living. And because feeling the power of the Spirit in one moment guarantees nothing about feeling its presence in the next, the risk that a brother's heart might turn tepid is never discarded. Faced with the ephemeral feeling of a hot relationship with the Holy Spirit, GNBB leaders counsel brothers to dedicate themselves methodically to God's work. For Good News brothers, however, in contrast with Weber's Calvinists, the ends of God's work lie in feeling and obtaining salvation for oneself and others. The means of its measurement lie not in the rational calculations of ethical bookkeeping but in enchantment, the search for and narrative accumulation of reason-defying occurrences that serve as evidence of the supernatural in the details of everyday life.

### *Giving and Receiving Testimony*

Pedro's exposition of the spiritual tepidity theme is an exercise in social discipline, a reminder to GNBB members of the group-sanctioned definition of what it means to be a Good News brother and an exhortation filled with collective energy to live up to the founding vision of the brotherhood. To the extent that one accepts the invitation to give in order to receive testimony, however, this entails a disciplining practice that is not reducible to the social context that gives rise to the invitation. Pedro reminded his fellow brothers, "the more you serve, the more you will receive," and for members of GNBB, the key to understanding this lies in their testimonial practice.

Testimony, brothers frequently remind one another, is their principal tool: Recounting narratives about how they used to live and how they live now—giving others an opportunity to identify with an intimate narrative of overcoming substance abuse, credit card debt, anger, or depression—is the special invitation to Christ they are called to disseminate. Testimony, however, is also brothers' principal aim. That testimony is the simultaneous means and end of GNBB activity is made clear in the double meaning that brothers give the word: *Testimony* refers to a narrative account of God's this-worldly supernatural intervention, and it refers to the supernatural intervention itself; it is the miracle and the story of the miracle. Furthermore,

brothers understand the existence of these two different kinds of testimony to be intertwined: A brother has to *give testimony*, to offer narrative accounts of God's miraculous intervention in his life, if he hopes to *receive testimony*, to continue finding God's supernatural manifestation in the details of his everyday life. When a brother finds a testimony, evidence of God's intervention, he should give testimony: He should recount the story to others, out of gratitude and to ensure the credit goes where it is due.

The invitation to give testimony is an invitation to adopt a reflexive and methodical narrative approach to one's life and its unfolding. It is an invitation to do a self-inventory and think about the sorts of testimonies one *needs*, it is an invitation to examine one's life and look for evidence of having received testimony, and it is an invitation to look for opportunities to give testimony, knowing that the more one gives testimony, the more one receives, offering further occasion to give testimony. This circular loop of testimony as means and ends is part of the truth in Pedro's warning that "in Godly affairs, you either keep moving forward or you will slide backward": Either a brother keeps looking for more testimonies and more opportunities to give testimony in order to find more testimonies to give, or soon he will not have anything "fresh" to talk about and so will lose occasion and desire to give testimony, negatively affecting his expectation for finding further testimonies. The ethical circle of testimony as means and ends is either a virtuous or a vicious one.

### *Testimonial Enchantment: Narrating the Supernatural*

Adopting this sort of testimonial orientation to life requires that a brother look for and find opportunities to give testimony. Brothers are given this opportunity every week at the staple event of each GNBB chapter: a weekly "businessmen's dinner" to which members invite friends, relatives, colleagues, and anyone they come across who shows signs of spiritual need to dine and listen to brothers' testimonies. The way testimonial practice intertwines life and stories about life is shown in a testimony Diego gave at a dinner the week after we returned from the leadership training in León. Diego told us that the national GNBB president had called him and asked him to pick up the trainers, GNBB leaders flying in from Guatemala, and drive them up to León. He recounted how, despite having neither the money nor a suitable vehicle, he proceeded anyway, faithfully moving forward and letting God take care of the details. He described finding generous offers from fellow brothers: a hotel room free of charge, a van to borrow, and some gas money. Finally he told us how, in something like divine recompense, his wife called at the end of the first day of the training to tell him the payment from a client he had long been waiting for had finally arrived:

On Friday evening my wife calls and says, "I wanted you to know there is an email here about a payment." "A payment??" I asked. "Yes," she continued "it's from X client and says your payment is ready and you can come pick up your check on Monday." [*Diego pauses here perhaps for dramatic effect but also to regain composure—the emotion of the story is getting to him.*] . . . And so imagine what it is to be in this Brotherhood—you know I am really amazed by the pragmatic, practical side, the economic side, how it seems like things happen magically when you have a powerful Father and you decide to go to work for Him and wooooooh, He gives you means and more means and in a way that is supernatural.

I happened to be there with Diego that first evening of the training when he received the phone call from his wife telling him the payment had come through. I saw him step away from the group for a moment to take the call; when I looked again, I saw tears coming down

his cheeks as he held the phone to his ear and looked into the distance. At the time, I was hoping he had not received sad news. But these were tears of joy. Diego was undoubtedly relieved to have received this payment for which he had been waiting months, but the emotion he felt at the moment, and the emotion he feels again as he recounts the story, is due to more than relief from financial anxiety. Diego is overcome in the moment, and again recounting the moment, because this piece of news, that the long-awaited payment had finally arrived, coming at this moment, the day the training began, after he had faithfully done everything he could to come and to bring his Guatemalan brothers with him, this is confirmation for Diego that he has a powerful Father who is looking out for him.

The methodical character of the testimonial practice lies in the connection between giving and receiving testimony, the conviction that shaping lived experience into testimonial narrative has effects on life as it continues to unfold. To participate in GNBB is to give testimony, but before a testimony can be spoken, it has to be lived, and so as brothers learn to give testimony, they are also learning to look for and find testimony. Finding testimony in turn entails paying a different sort of attention to oneself and one's life: It means learning to scrutinize one's life as it unfolds not with the aim of giving it rational, calculable order, as with the Calvinists, but rather in search of evidence of the supernatural, the illogical, and the reason-defying.

### *Enchanting Testimony: Narrative Anticipation of the Supernatural*

Members of GNBB have a word for the experience that Diego had in León: *una Diosidencia*. This concept exists because there is always an alternative possible interpretation for testimonies like these, the more reasonable account: chance, coincidence. Brothers have a saying that they frequently repeat to each other to help ward off these doubt-fueling rival explanations: "No hay coincidencias, solo hay *Diosidencias*" (There are no coincidences, there are only *Godidences*). The more a brother reminds himself and his companions of this, the more often he asserts the supernatural in the face of what could reasonably be dismissed as coincidence, the more mundane details of everyday life take on a miraculous sheen and become further experiential evidence of the intervention of God's spirit in daily life.

GNBB dinners include an activity that helps orient brothers toward looking for testimonial material in their lives. Toward the end of each weekly dinner, brothers pass out a slip of paper to everyone in the room, members and guests. "On these *papeletas*," they are told, "write down your necessities, the things that you need but you think aren't possible—the logically possible we can take care of ourselves. Write down the necessities that you can't take care of yourself." The dinner audience is told to think of their lives as divided into four areas—work, family, health, and finances—and to inventory their own needs and write down the things they find wanting in each of the four areas. The audience is also advised to write the date at the top of their *papeletas*, to keep them, and to check back periodically to see in which of their areas of want God has been intervening.

Brothers often experience serendipitous moments, *Diosidencias*, when they are beginning to attend GNBB chapter meetings, which they then regularly refer to in testimony. Often, these are rather mundane miracles that serve as a sort of supernatural confirmation. Some brothers find the supernatural intervention during a period of hopelessness, helplessness, or panic, and these moments bring pronounced feelings of relief and gratitude; sometimes these moments have an apparently coincidence-defying connection to the things they had been writing on their *papeletas*.

Ernesto discovered that God was intervening in his life in the moments after he lost his job and was beginning to panic about how he was going to provide for his family. Ernesto

had long been working in one of Mexico City's largest street markets, where business is informal and the goods are pirated—making political connections and black market alliances essential to the trade. Ernesto had been earning a good living from this work—making compact disc covers and cases for music and movie vendors—for around 15 years, since he was a teenager. He had grown uneasy about the associated ethical dilemmas and risk levels—his brother had been imprisoned doing the same work—but he found it difficult to leave. One evening, a close friend invited Ernesto to a businessmen's dinner, and he went. The dinner was pleasant, as he recalls it; he still remembers the testimonies he heard, but he was not particularly moved and had no plans to return. He filled out one of the *papeletas* that evening, but he did not pay much attention and later lost track of it. Two months later, Ernesto crossed the wrong person among the network of market organizers, and his access was cut. He spent the following day driving around the city deep in nervous melancholic thought, worried about paying the rent and feeding his family. At some point, as he was whiling away the afternoon in his car, Ernesto pulled up at a stoplight and reached down into his change bucket to clean out the receipts that had accumulated, and there he found the *papeleta* he had written on at the GNBB dinner two months prior. He immediately remembered what he had written, but he read it again anyway sitting at the stoplight; at that dinner two months ago, he had written a request to God, asking for an escape from his risky and uncomfortable black market work:

At the stoplight I open up the *papeleta* and I read it again. And I realized that what was happening to me, it was what I had asked for. . . . And the first thing that I felt was a sort of melancholy, and I said, "Yeah, You exist, You exist. I had forgotten You, but You exist. Truly, You are powerful [*Tú poder es muy fuerte*] and I am sure that next Thursday I will be there [at the next GNBB dinner]. I have to go." . . . And the next Thursday I went [to the GNBB dinner] and since then I haven't stopped coming.

When Andrés first heard about GNBB, he was not interested. He was playing on a soccer team with some old friends in his neighborhood; a couple of these friends invited him to the businessmen's dinner, but it just sounded strange to him. When Vicente, another old neighborhood character on the team, invited him, he was more intrigued, in part because he had seen Vicente change dramatically. Vicente had cleaned himself up after long having been known around the neighborhood for being a criminal, a drug addict, and generally an angry, swearing, unpleasant guy. But Andrés was also intrigued by Vicente's invitation because he took him aside and asked, "Andrés, do you have any particular necessity right now?"

Andrés did have a particular necessity, and he said this is the only reason he went the first time. Andrés had been a taxi driver most of his working life, and 10 years prior his taxi license and license plates were stolen from his cab and he had been trying to recover them ever since. "That is all I have, that's what I work with," he said. "It's my patrimony." For 10 years, Andrés had been working with forged taxi license plates and trying to get back the real ones, going to one office after another, filling out form after form. This was the tiresome struggle preoccupying Andrés when Vicente invited him to a GNBB dinner and asked if he had some necessity in his life:

The first time that I went to a dinner I found it laughable when they said that, leaving the restaurant, "my life would never again be the same." . . . But that night on the *papeleta*, that's what I wrote, asking for my plates. . . . I think it was after something like three weeks of writing *papeletas* . . . I arrived with my documents and this time it was easy, as if nothing had happened. . . . Truthfully, I didn't believe it. I remember the

day I finally went to go get the plates it was a Wednesday. . . . I went to get the plates and then I went to the [GNBB] dinner,<sup>7</sup> and Rodrigo says to me, “Hey Andrés you gotta give the testimony.” But I couldn’t give testimony that day, I just couldn’t. [*He pauses, losing his words for a moment as tears well up.*] . . . . And that, as we say sometimes in our testimonies, is the reason I am here.

As they share testimonies over dinner every week, brothers are inviting their guests to believe at the same time that they are teaching one another about testimonial practice. One of the first lessons a new recruit learns is that one needs to have a testimony (evidence of God’s intervention in his life) in order to give testimony. Testimonial practice entails a reflexive examination of self, with a view to stories that might be told and occasions for their telling, and it entails a methodical exhortation of self in both of these searches, knowing that finding facilitates the telling and telling facilitates the finding.

### A Man of Praction

The methodical examination and exhortation of self in search of evidence of the supernatural yields a peculiar semi-paradoxical relationship between self and God. On the one hand, brothers seek to discipline the self, more and more to deny the desires, interests, and motivations of the self in order to expand the role of God’s will in determining their actions and decisions. Learning to cease to rely on oneself and one’s own capacities (*dejar de confiar en sus propias fuerzas*) is the defining characteristic of what it means to be a “Man of Honor” (*un Hombre de Valor*), as it is explained in training sessions for new members. At the same time, one cannot sit back and wait for God to take control. In addition to disciplining the self, in the sense of denying the desires and emotional inclinations of the self, the self also has to be disciplined in the sense of being activated and constantly invited into greater commitment and activity in God’s work. Above all, the self has to be kept busy to ward off what brothers sometimes refer to as “the mother of all vices”: *ocio* (laziness/sloth).

Timo, a 27-year-old up-and-coming GNBB leader, has a word for this semi-paradoxical relationship between self and God, a simultaneously denying and activating sort of self-discipline: *praction* (prayer + action).<sup>8</sup> Timo explained *praction* to me when he was telling me about a vision that God gave him for starting new GNBB chapters, an activity—like any other—that requires putting oneself to work but in so doing harnessing one’s activities entirely to God’s will:

God, on one occasion gave me a vision about how to start new [GNBB] chapters. . . . You work for a month, asking God, praying for the new chapter, praying to find a space where you can hold the meetings, praying as you ask permission from the owners of the space, and as you are determining the day and time of the meeting you ask for God’s direction—in this case it was 8:30 a.m. on Saturdays. Then you have the restaurant, the day, the hour, all from asking God, praying and action, *praction*, prayer and action, prayer and action, I call it *praction*. And then for a month you do “Fire Teams” [*Equipos de Fuego*],<sup>9</sup> all around the area where the meetings will take place. You go from house to house, you get on buses, go to markets, sharing with all the people that live, walk, work in the area, sharing your testimony and telling them about the Brotherhood. And then for a month every morning at 5 a.m. you go to the restaurant where the meetings will be and you stand outside and pray, petition God for the restaurant, for the meeting, for the meeting time and for the date the chapter will open, and you ask God to send the people to the meeting that he wants to send. . . . That’s

how we worked for a month and at the first meeting we had 80 people there and 27 were first-time guests. . . . And guess what? I already have my eye on two more restaurants and I am already asking God which of the two, I mean maybe both, but which to begin with. And then the process starts all over again.

Timo's ardent efforts are in part the product of his adherence to the central GNBB ethical principle that Pedro emphasizes in the spiritual tepidity training: "In the affairs of God, if you don't move forward you will slide backward." To become a brother is a commitment to testimonializing one's life. Once one decides to do this, a brother either keeps moving forward, looking for more testimonies, looking in more corners of his life for evidence of the supernatural, or he will start to slide backward, the mundane details of everyday life will lose their supernatural sheen, and he will once again become *un hombre natural*.

### "Show Them, Father, That Giving Is How You Continue Receiving"

The ethical commitment to giving and receiving testimony is a belief that Good News brothers express, but it is also a practice, something they *do*. That the testimonial ethic is necessarily practiced as well as professed becomes apparent when a brother shows some reluctance to engage in the doing. Bruno had been going to one of the Mexico City GNBB chapters for well over a year when I arrived, and nearly a year after that he had not yet delivered a long testimony at a weekly dinner. Each dinner features two testimonies, a short testimony about a recent occurrence and a long testimony, "the main dish" as the brothers call it, that is a longer account of life transformation. After two and a half years in the Brotherhood, Bruno had yet to serve up his main dish. Brothers usually volunteer for one or the other testimony, but on one occasion, Alfonso, chapter president and dinner programmer, turned to Bruno and asked if he wanted to do it. Bruno shook his head, "No, not yet."

*Alfonso:* How many years have you been here with us?

*Bruno:* Two and a half.

*Alfonso [in a semi-teasing tone]:* Since you arrived you have always said the same thing . . . Bruno0000??

*Bruno [adopting a more serious tone]:* Well, I am going to share something that I spoke about last week with Roberto [GNBB leader from Tamaulipas]. . . . Roberto asked me how we give the [GNBB] mission statement.<sup>10</sup> . . . "The thing is," he tells me, "someone should give it, and someone who is *living* the vision. So that it has an effect on the others." And in this case, since it is a mixed event,<sup>11</sup> you know with my wife there, I don't think I can say that I am completely happy in the marriage until we are both serving God together.

*Alfonso:* Bruno0000, you cannot say that you are not blessed by God, excuse me but you cannot say that you are not blessed by God. *Today*, you were blessed by God, and you have a testimony to share with someone else. You do not have to wait until your life is in complete harmony before you can stand up and tell someone that you in some area of your life have been blessed by God. And this I say for everyone. The [GNBB chapter] manual talks about this very thing, if there is an area of our lives in which we haven't succeeded, we just don't mention it. But in those areas of your life in which you have been blessed, in which you have been transformed, in which you have received blessings from God, *please* talk about these!

Bruno could not refuse the invitation after Alfonso's lesson, and he agreed to deliver the long testimony for that week's dinner event. Timo was a guest at that week's training meeting. He did not say anything during the meeting itself, but he addressed the issue directly when Alfonso asked him to say the meeting's concluding prayer. Timo's intervention carried a special weight because it came after the discussion ended, in the quiet moments of the closing prayer—it is of course especially in these moments that brothers hear more than their own voices:

Beloved God we give you thanks Lord for this meeting. . . . And today in the name of Jesus I ask God that all of these men Lord go back to their homes with the firm conviction that each and every one of them has a testimony Lord, a testimony that you have made in their lives Holy Father. *Show it* to them Lord. Display their own testimony to them Lord, to them, not to us Lord, display it to them, show them this testimony that you have made in their lives. And show them, Father, that *giving* is how you continue receiving. Giving testimony is how you continue receiving testimonies Holy Father. . . . In Jesus's name we give thanks, and let it be so.

Alfonso and Timo exerted pressure on Bruno to enact this ritual of group commitment, but as they did so, they were also teaching him what testimonies are and how to find them, a lesson that was ultimately about Bruno's relationship with himself. The message for Bruno is that the testimony is already there; he just needs to learn to watch himself and his life differently in order to see it. The testimony holds the promise of the supernatural, but it also holds a rigorous injunction: Look for it! From this perspective, a brother's self-examination is both an inventory of his miracle-necessities and a careful combing over of his life looking for evidence of the miraculous. Timo, in the closing prayer, asks God to help them: "*Show it* to them Lord . . . not to us Lord, display it to them, show them this testimony that you have made in their lives." The promise of the supernatural comes with the duty to seek it out, and this charge is followed by another: Once you have found the testimony, the evidence of the supernatural, "*please* talk about it." Timo reminds the brothers in prayer that the supernatural promise of the testimony and the injunctions of the testimony, to look for it and to talk about it, are intimately connected: "Father show them that *giving* is how you continue receiving. Giving testimony is how you continue receiving testimonies Holy Father."

### *Practicing Testimony*

The structure of GNBB activity encourages brothers to make everyday practice out of the ethical principle of giving and receiving testimony; and the practice has concrete consequences for their lives, in particular with respect to poise, command of oneself, and control over one's emotions. When brothers stand up to give testimony, they spend some time describing the changes they have seen in their lives since beginning to participate in GNBB, and the stock-taking usually includes an account of moving from a life of emotional chaos to one of emotional poise. Timo, for example, describes finding GNBB in the middle of his college years, when he was a 21-year-old with big substance abuse problems, had an emotionally abusive relationship with his mother, and was on the brink of failing out of school. He had earned the name "good-for-nothin' (*el bueno para nada*)" at school and at home. At the end of his college years, two years into his brotherhood life, Timo was sober, in a caring relationship with his mother, and had been doing well enough in his classes to earn a scholarship from his department to do a master's program.

The format of testimonial delivery draws out and dramatizes the contrasts of before-and-after brotherhood life. In my interviews, I asked brothers to talk about how they saw the influence of GNBB participation on their lives, and here too they would often describe, with a little less dramatic delivery, moving from a life of disorderly emotional chaos to one of intuitive emotional composure. “I was very undisciplined in every way, at work, at home, on the soccer field,” Andrés told me when I asked him about life prior to the brotherhood: “At home I was a dictator, ordering everyone around. . . . My work [taxi driving] is exhausting, and I would fight with people all the time. . . . On the soccer field I was mean, nasty with the other players and the referee. I would hit people, they were afraid of me.” Andrés explained that Good News brotherhood helped him find a more disciplined way of living his life. When I asked him to explain what he meant by “disciplined,” he emphasized order, composure, and an ability to find beauty and satisfaction wherever he looks:

The Word says that you have to keep yourself in order. Order encompasses everything, family and work. For me, “order” means that I am on good terms with God, with my family, relatives, friends, siblings, with everyone around me, that I keep myself in order when I am working. That way everything flows [*todo fluye*] . . . when you begin to live this way everything is satisfying, everything is beautiful, you start to see everything differently . . . everything just flows.

Of course, everything does not always *flow* in an easy way. “There will always be problems,” Andrés said, immediately qualifying his description of the flow he had found. “But these problems, now you leave them to Him above, He helps you resolve them, He tells you, He points out the path.” Essential to finding the flow Andrés described is disciplining the self in the dual sense that Timo tried to capture with his notion of *praction*: reflexively examining and exhorting the self while also learning to cease relying on one’s own forces (*dejar de confiar en sus propias fuerzas*), to cease trusting in one’s own desires and wishes.

Ernesto’s description of the impact the brotherhood has had on his life touches on both these dimensions of disciplining the self. He began by describing to me a reflexive methodical relationship with himself that he had found:

What has changed is the way that I perceive things, the way I started studying myself internally, looking at myself in the mirror and saying, “Okay Ernesto, in what ways are you yourself slipping up?” . . . I began looking at my interior life [*ver todo lo mio interior*] and little by little expelling all of the bad things and replacing them little by little with new things, good things, things that are beneficial to me, my family and the people around me.

Ernesto is also, however, constantly reminding himself that he has limited control:

I do whatever I can, get up early, go to work, go to see clients. . . . [But] it’s up to the client if he wants to work with me, and this I do put in God’s hands, that he intercedes for me, but if the client says no I don’t take it personally . . . before the brotherhood I would say things like, “Asshole doesn’t want to work with me?? I hope he suffers!” Now it’s different, “I did what I could and if he doesn’t want to, no problem,” we remain friends.

Good News brothers’ guiding notion, that the more one gives to God, the more one receives from God, frequently rubs up against life experiences that seem to invalidate the



principle. "God is not a vending machine," brothers remind one another, to discourage an instrumental, conditional, needy, or covetous relationship with God. God may not be a vending machine, but at times brothers feel like He is going in the opposite direction: During some periods, it feels like the more one gives, the more God refuses to give back. Diego recounted a poignant experience of this sort. He was coming back from dropping his wife off at their church to do some volunteer work when he noticed his wife's computer was not in its usual spot on the living room table. He went upstairs to look for it and saw that his own computer was not sitting on his desk either. Diego rushed back downstairs and saw the curtains over the dining room window swaying in the breeze, the screen missing from the open window; he had been robbed. "At first I was furious," Diego recalled, "I was cursing God, denouncing God. 'Are you kidding me!? Don't you think this is going too far?'" Diego said he was fuming for half an hour, in angry disbelief and in stubborn protest of his new reality.

"Then suddenly I fell to my knees and began crying," Diego continued, emphasizing the sudden and unprovoked character of the experience: "I was crying and giving thanks—although it seems illogical. A verse from the Bible came into my head: 'The will of God is always good, pleasing and perfect.' And then 'give thanks, give thanks,' as though someone were speaking inside my head." One week later, Diego was giving testimony to his brothers about the weekend's events: He told them about the robbery on Saturday and the sudden illogical transformation of his angry resentment into gratitude. He concluded with a description of Monday afternoon, when he and his wife were working with new and better computers, paid for with an advance from a sympathetic client who had heard the news. Diego described being moved by the offer from his client, but what stunned him more than anything was his own emotional response: "I was content, they stole my computers and I was happy, wow!"

Because the divine gift exchange of testimonial practice is full of faith-trying times, periods when the giving and receiving of testimony do not appear to align, emotional poise is crucial to keeping a firm hold on the testimonial ethic. In periods of testimonial drought, when a brother is seemingly giving but not receiving, he learns to do different things. First, he becomes mistrustful of the idea that he actually knows his own needs and wants. Second, to the extent that he maintains calm orderly emotional composure in the midst of turbulent times, this itself becomes reason-defying evidence of the supernatural, something he and those around him see as far greater than anything he could muster through his own efforts. Emotional composure is thus another domain of Good News brotherhood where self-discipline and enchantment fold into one another: Emotional responses are sites of endless struggle of self with self; and brothers describe feeling changes, shifts from turbulence and struggle to calm and acceptance, that seem to transcend the sum of their own efforts. The convergence of enchantment and self-discipline in the emotional realm helps Good News brothers' testimonial ethic persevere in practice.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

I have argued that Good News brothers find self-discipline in the arational narrative character of testimonial practice: Brothers cultivate reflexive and methodical relationships of the self insofar as the practice entangles life-story narration with the ongoing experience of life, an intertwining propelled by brothers' belief in an unknowable yet potent connection between narrating and experiencing the miraculous. It is no accident that for brothers, *testimony* refers both to the story of the miraculous occurrence and the occurrence itself, that testimony is both given (spoken) and received (lived). The invitation to give testimony is a call to both

transform the details of one's everyday life into narrative evidence of the supernatural and regularly inventory one's necessities and comb over the details of life, looking for evidence that those necessities are being met. The invitation to speak differently about one's life is thus also an invitation to experience one's life differently.

The argument that the enchanting character of GNBB testimonial practice cultivates self-discipline among its members has broad implications for questions about the relationship between two evident global trends: the growth of charismatic religiosity and the spread of neoliberal economic rationalities. Scholars who address these questions usually point to an affinity between the two trends but find different types of connections. Some argue that a charismatic orientation to this-worldly experience of the supernatural serves as existential relief for believers in the midst of the socioeconomic tumult that accompanies neoliberal transformation (Austin-Broos 1997; Brenneman 2012; Chesnut 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; O'Neill 2010; Robbins 2004; Smilde 2007). These scholars find different kinds of supernatural "source material" (Smilde 2007) that provides existential relief for the "dis-ease" (Chesnut 1997) of neoliberal economic transformation. Chesnut (1997) argues, for example, that his Brazilian Pentecostal informants find a sense of meaning and power in conceptualizing the "pathogens of poverty" in terms of illness with supernatural cause and remedy. Robbins (2004) suggests that for the Urapmin people of Papua New Guinea, the "accessibility" of the power of the Holy Spirit soothes and distracts from the social humiliation that accompanies postcolonial neoliberal economic transformation. And O'Neill (2010) argues that congregants of a neo-Pentecostal mega-church in Guatemala engage in "spiritual citizenship" practices, like planting prayer-filled stones around their city, as a means of finding feelings of existential security and political power in the dangerous and precarious context of Guatemala City.

Other scholars suggest that the affinity between the contemporary spiritual and political economic trends lies in production-friendly ethics that charismatic religiosity tends to foster: ascetic self-restraint and work in a calling as a means of glorifying God (Bacik and Kurt 2011; Berger 2010; Beyer 2013; Hayhoe 1992; B. Martin 1995; D. Martin 1990; Miller and Yamamori 2007; Nolvos 2012; Özdalga 2000; Özoral 2014; Pinheiro-Machado 2008; Silverstein 2008; Uygur 2009; Yong 2012). Rudnyckij (2010) provides a compelling version of this second type, showing how managers of an Indonesian steel factory blend the practices of a new-age charismatic Islamic movement, Emotional and Spiritual Quotient (ESQ), with neoliberal economic rationality as part of a package of industrial reform. Rudnyckij (2010:132, 24) argues that ESQ's "reconfiguring work as a form of worship" is a crucial enabler of what he believes is the essence of neoliberal industrial reform: "the increasing extension of economic rationality and calculative reason into the diverse domains of human life."

However, very few of these analyses of the affinities between global growth in charismatic religiosity and neoliberal rationalities consider directly the relationship between enchantment and discipline. Comaroff and Comaroff (2000, 1999) propose an analysis that is exceptional in this respect as they directly address the end-of-the-century relationship between enchantment and productive discipline, but their conclusion is merely the contrapositive of Weber's early twentieth-century assessment. Comaroff and Comaroff argue that the drift toward enchantment in contemporary religiosity represents a growing separation of the charismatic faithful from their self-disciplining means; they maintain, however, that this drift away from calculable rationality and methodical discipline is precisely what constitutes the late twentieth-century affinity between charismatic religiosity and speculation-driven neoliberal "occult economies." To the extent that contemporary charismatic Christians are separated from the means of methodically disciplining themselves, this only preserves their affinity with a new kind of economy that has grown equally estranged from calculability and

rational planning. Underneath the polemical assertion that witch hunts and pyramid schemes characterize the religious and economic trends of our times, Comaroff and Comaroff offer a rather straightforward reiteration of Weber's argument about enchantment as an impediment to methodical discipline.

The diverging conclusions that Rudnyckyj and Comaroff and Comaroff draw about the disciplining character of charismatic spiritual practices reflect an underlying disagreement over the nature of the neoliberal political economic context in which they develop. Rudnyckyj (2010:133) is skeptical about Comaroff and Comaroff's characterization of the irrational and undisciplined character of contemporary trends in charismatic religiosity and neoliberal economy because their argument relies on "sensationalist accounts of mystification and fetishism, including witchcraft . . . the resurgence of zombies, pyramid schemes." Rudnyckyj's rival explanation posits an affinity of the opposite sort: amplified rationalization. He shows how charismatic religiosity can affectively "inculcat[e] ethics of accountability that are deemed commensurable with norms of transparency, productivity and rationalization for purposes of profit" (p. 132) so as to meet the productive requirements of a neoliberal economy that, as he understands it, represents another progressive step in the expansion of rationalization processes inherent to capitalism. Rudnyckyj and Comaroff and Comaroff's disagreements can largely be attributed to differences in the empirical phenomena that they select for analysis: zombie witch hunts and pyramid schemes versus the shop floor of an industrial plant.

The evidence I present here does not bear on the character of neoliberal economic development, in Mexico or elsewhere, and neither does it adjudicate debates about particular connections linking the growth of charismatic religiosity with that of neoliberal political economy. This analysis of Good News brothers' testimonial practice does suggest, however, that self-discipline per se is not at stake in these debates in the way that most accounts suggest. Social scientific definitions of self-discipline tend to conceptually muddle the practice (reflexive and methodical relationships of the self) with the means of practice (rational calculation). For this reason, scholarly assessments have found the affinity between charismatic religiosity and neoliberal rationality either in something other than self-discipline or in self-discipline by rationally calculable means. For Rudnyckyj, the new-age charismatic religiosity of ESQ is self-disciplining insofar as it transforms work into worship and inculcates ethics of rationalized productivity; for Comaroff and Comaroff, charismatic religious practitioners drift away from rational calculability and in so doing are separated from their disciplining means. Most common of all are the analyses that turn away from the reflexive self and find the sources of discipline in the social sectarian features of charismatic religiosity—surveillance, scrutiny, punishment (ostracizing and financial penalties), and networking (Berger 2010; Gorski 2003; B. Martin 1995; D. Martin 1990; McGuire 1977, 1982; Miller and Yamamori 2007; Nolivos 2012). In short, all these analyses of charismatic religiosity either point away from self-discipline or else find the means of disciplining the self to persist *in spite of* the enchanting tendencies of charismatic religious contexts.

While I cannot adjudicate, based on the evidence presented here, among different arguments about particular connections between contemporary charismatic religiosity and neoliberal economic development, I do want to argue that my analysis suggests we rethink the role that self-discipline tends to play in these arguments. Different configurations of self-discipline—reflexive methodical relationships of the self—are not reducible to variations in the political economic context from which they emerge. Good News brothers' testimonial practice would function just as well on the shop floor of a steel factory as in a zombie witch hunt. This is because the content of testimonial selfhood is arational narration, a relationship of self that connects the narrating and the experiencing of life while refusing the knowability

and masterability of the connection. This argument suggests a more general need to untether self-discipline from rational calculability and conceptualize it instead in terms of reflexive and methodical practices of the self. Drawing this distinction between self-discipline and rational calculation opens the possibility of finding other arational and noncalculable means of methodically making the self the simultaneous subject and object of experiment and thought, that is, other means of disciplining the self. Such a distinction makes it possible to explain the coexistence of enchantment and self-discipline in the testimonial practice of the Good News Businessmen's Brotherhood. It makes it possible to identify practical means of disciplining the self that are effective not in spite of but *because of* the enchanting character of charismatic religiosity.

I can only speculate about implications of the argument for other cases and contexts. My working general hypothesis, however, is that for better or worse, the ability to enter into meaningful methodical reflexive relationships of the self is not wedded to rational calculation, and as such it is also not tied to any particular political economic context. Perhaps this is an ironic tentative conclusion for an article partly inspired by *The Protestant Ethic* to draw, but it is in any case a tentative conclusion and should be read above all as a call for further research.

## NOTES

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1. I have given the organization and its members pseudonyms to protect their anonymity.
2. Of course, such definitions of discipline, be they Gorski's or my own, are conceptual distinctions: In practice, the means by which Good News brothers reflexively and methodically make themselves the simultaneous subject and object of ethical examination and exhortation exist among an array of other disciplining means whose bases are more social, normative, and coercive. For the purposes of this article, however, I bracket social disciplining means to focus on practices of self-discipline as I conceptualize it here, that is, reflexive and methodical examination and exhortation of the self.
3. Whether this disenchanted anxious orientation to salvation spawned a modern *spirit* of capitalism, whether ascetic Protestantism has a unique claim to this modern ethos, and whether such an ethos is causally relevant to explaining the origins of modern capitalism are questions that have generated more debate than resolution (see Gorski 2005; Kaelber 2005; Lehmann and Roth 1993; Marshall 1982; Poggi 1983; Robertson 1933; Samuelson 1961; Sombart 1915; Swidler 1986; Tawney 1926; Zaret 1985). That the disenchanting, "supra-mundane" God of ascetic Protestantism cultivated an inward-looking methodical self-discipline, a scrutiny and exhortation of self with an eye to rational, calculable evidence of mastery of one's self and one's world is a more widely accepted tenet of Weber's thesis (Kalberg 2001; Poggi 1983; Schluchter 1989).
4. Many scholars have suggested that because Weber's explanation of ascetic Protestant discipline places such emphasis on the disenchanting features of Calvinist theology, it does not do justice to other sources of Protestant discipline (Gorski 1993, 2003; Lehmann and Roth 1993; MacKinnon 1988; Marshall 1982; Poggi 1983; Zaret 1985, 1992). Weighing in on the comprehensiveness of Weber's explanation of ascetic Protestant discipline is beyond the scope this article. I focus exclusively on

- Weber's argument that disenchanting elements of Calvinist theology cultivate rationally calculable ethical relationships of self because this is the part of the analysis that accounts for self-discipline, that is, the *reflexive* and *methodical* character of ascetic Protestant discipline.
5. The United States was the contemporary holy land of both capitalism and Protestantism, but the Protestant religiosity Weber witnessed there—including an adult baptism in a mountain stream of North Carolina—was far removed from the disenchanted, unreachable, unknowable divinity of Calvinism (Weber 1946).
  6. There are long-standing debates about conceptual definitions of and differences between magic and religion (see Durkheim 1965; Evans-Pritchard 1976; Favret-Saada 1980; Frazer 1990; Malinowski 1948; Mauss 1972; Weber 1978). As with most of these scholars, Weber draws a conceptual distinction between coercing and worshipping the spiritual: The former entails spiritual beliefs, practices, and rituals aimed at provoking specific effects; the latter entails spiritual beliefs, practices, and rituals aimed at veneration and supplication of an omnipotent spiritual force. The distinction is a conceptual one, and Weber (1978) suggests that in practice, rituals of prayer and worship often contain traces of magical coercion (e.g., Catholic notions of an interceding priesthood and salvation in sacraments).
  7. Andrés's chapter has their dinners every Wednesday, and so the fact that he got his plates back on that day adds to the meaning.
  8. In Spanish it is smoother: oración = oración + acción.
  9. This is a Good News Businessmen's Brotherhood term that refers to evangelizing in the street.
  10. This is the brief introduction to the Good News Businessmen's Brotherhood mission that begins every dinner event.
  11. Once a month, brothers have a mixed dinner event, where women are also invited, giving these dinners more of a family feel.

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