

CENTRAL AMERICAN SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STUDIES PROGRAM (PROCADES)

REVISED PROJECT DESCRIPTION

First presented to the Council of Advisors,
International Institute for In-Depth Evangelization (IINDEF)
in October 1977 by Clifton L. Holland

I. INTRODUCTION

The Central American region, which includes Guatemala, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama with a total population of 20.2 million people, is characterized by high population growth, rapid urban expansion, increasing poverty, and a widening gap between city and countryside. The general political and social situation is dominated by military dictatorships and by a social system in which a few privileged families share the wealth, while the majority of the population is repressed and marginalized—the exception is Costa Rica. Today, the situation has become more critical due to numerous catastrophes that have occurred since 1963, such as volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, hurricanes, floods and droughts, a war between two nations, and tremendous economic inflation that has made the poor even poorer.

The Christianization of Central America by Roman Catholic missionaries followed the military domination of the region by Spanish “conquistadores” during the 16th century, with Hispanic Catholicism dominating the animistic American Indian (or Amerindian) religions aided by military and civil powers. Evidences of animism still exist in Central American folk Catholicism, as seen in superstitious and magical practices within Amerindian and West Indian societies that maintain elements of their ancestral religions. Notable differences of popular religion exist between the rural peasantry, urban dwellers, indigenous peoples and the communities of foreign immigrants that compose contemporary Central American society. The society is called “Catholic” because the majority of its members have been baptized and married by the Catholic Church, but only a small minority (perhaps between 10-25% of the population) are active practitioners. The popular Catholic Christianity of Central America has been characterized as a religious nominalism reflecting the Colonial era, with the masses yet to be evangelized by the true Gospel of illumination and freedom in Christ.

Nevertheless, the posture of the Roman Catholic Church has changed greatly since the Second Vatican Council in 1962-1965 and the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968. The radical changes produced by these councils can be seen in reforms involving organization restructuring at various levels, changes in the liturgy, new attitudes and commitments on the part of bishops, priests, nuns and a minority of socially conscious lay persons who are committed “to the poor, to the oppressed Latin American masses, victims of internal colonialism and institutional violence.” The spirit of Vatican II and of Medellín also has produced a conservative and repressive counter revolution, both within the Catholic Church and among powerful socioeconomic and political interest groups. But, at the same time, the new socially-conscious minority is growing among those impatient and

dissatisfied with the slow pace and direction of social change based on the current developmental model of dependent capitalism. This vocal minority has opted for the Theology of Liberation, for Socialism or for Marxism in their search for justice in society.

During the past few years a new trend has emerged among urbanized, middle-class Catholics that is of a more “spiritual” character and relatively indifferent to principal social and political problems. This trend is represented by the Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement, the Cursillo Movement, and the Christian Family Movement that are growing among those searching for a more personal, relevant, and dynamic faith. It is quite possible that a direct relationship exists between the growth of these movements and the general lack of security and confusion felt by many Catholics as a result of recent changes within the Catholic Church and within Central American society in general.

Among the Protestant denominations, many of which have grown significantly in a relatively short time span (the majority since 1960) and mainly among inactive Roman Catholics, there exists a fragmentation and alienation that seriously affects the credibility of their message as members of the Body of Christ (defined here as the Church Universal). This crisis of Christian unity and brotherhood is evident in the lack of participation of many denominations in organizations like the Evangelical Alliance and other interdenominational service organizations. When it has been possible to form an Evangelical Alliance in a given country, usually less than half of the existing denominations, numbering from thirty to sixty in the respective countries, have participated. Many times the following has occurred: if certain denominations become members of the Evangelical Alliance, then other groups will not participate or will withdraw from membership. Another indication of the larger problem is that many new groups have come into existence that have drawn members from older denominations, many of which have lapsed into a “cold orthodoxy” that lacks creativity and spontaneity and is dominated by authoritarian leaders and tradition. However, some of the older denominations are now experiencing renewal and revitalization with a corresponding growth in vitality and membership as signs of increasing social relevance and strength.

The growth dynamics of religious groups often have been evaluated superficially, with a tendency to accept the generalization that “if a group is growing numerically then it is healthy.” However, there is often no direct relationship between “numerical growth” and doctrinal orthodoxy since some of the religious groups with a high rate of attendance and membership growth in Central America are Marginal Christian Groups, such as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah’s Witnesses).

On the other hand, many Protestant denominations that are considered “evangelical” have irregular growth patterns within the Central American countries. For example, a particular denomination may have a high rate of membership growth in one country but not in other countries of the region, or it may have unbalanced growth within the various regions of a country. However, in each Central American country, some Protestant denominations are growing rapidly, while others have slow growth, are barely holding their own ground, or are losing members and declining in social strength.

In our experience, many Christian leaders are concerned about the quality of discipleship among members of their local congregations, and about the social relevance and credibility of many of these congregations in the context of Central America where so much poverty and social injustice exists. Many are alarmed about the “evangelistic” methods of new religious movements whose growth is based mainly on proselytizing active members from other churches, rather than on reaching out to nominal Christians and unbelievers.

The preceding evaluation should lead us to ask a series of related questions. What favorable factors do growing religious groups have in common, irrespective of doctrine or orthodoxy? Are Marginal Christian groups growing mainly because of their “unique message” or because of other significant factors. What factors have favored the dynamic growth of the Charismatic Renewal Movement in both its Roman Catholic and Protestant variants in each country? What role does social action have in the communication of the Gospel of Christ within the Central American context? Why are some evangelical denominations experiencing rapid membership growth, while others are stagnant or declining? Why do some denominations have irregular growth patterns within a specific country or among several countries? How does the growth of “our” denomination relate to the overall growth of the Body of Christ in Central America? What are the various dimensions of growth that should be considered in a biblical concept of “integral church growth”? What is the general state of the health and growth of the Body of Christ within the Central American region? What can be done to help the various denominations of this region experience integral church growth in all of its biblical dimensions?

INDEPTH-Central America, an interdenominational evangelical service agency serving the churches of Central America, is interested in helping church leaders find answers to these and similar questions and problems. For this reason, we have created the “Central American Socio-Religious Studies Program” (known by its Spanish acronym, PROCADDES) as part of the regional development of our ministry. This new program is defined as “socio-religious studies” because the investigation, analysis and description of religious reality or phenomenon must be understood within the regional context of Central America in all of its dimensions (i.e., the contextualization of the Gospel); because the various religious groups are component parts of a national society and reflect its complicated character.

In the following paragraphs, the major objective of PROCADDES is defined, together with a description of specific goals, the general development of the program and the resources needed to accomplish our task.

2. GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To study and analyze the historical development and integral growth of the Protestant Movement in the context of Central America, utilizing a multi-dimensional model of church growth, with the participation in each country of researchers trained in the use of this methodology, in order to assist the various denominations and local congregations participate more actively in the integral growth of the Body of Christ in Central America through a process of critical self-evaluation and strategic planning.

3. SPECIFIC GOALS

- 3.1 Awareness, support and sponsorship: to create awareness of the need to conduct a multi-dimension church growth study of each country of Central America in order to accomplish our General Objective; to seek the sponsorship of interdenominational organizations in each country (such as the national Evangelical Alliance, Ministerial Association, and/or Bible Society) that will provide leadership, office space and logistical support; and to establish an Advisory Council to assist us at the regional level.
- 3.2 Human resources: the recruitment and training of needed project personnel in each country—coordinators, supervisors, interviewers, secretaries, etc.
- 3.3 Description of the Protestant Movement: to determine (1) the various denominations and organizations that exist in each country; (2) the geographical distribution of each denomination (churches, missions and preaching points); (3) the composition of each denomination’s membership (race, ethnic, national origin, language, socioeconomic levels, etc.); (4) the extent of their overall national ministry (departments, programs, activities, etc.); and (5) when possible, to do the same for all non-Protestant religious groups.
- 3.4 Identification of variables: to investigate, describe and analyze the internal and external factors that influence the multi-dimensional growth of religious groups: (1) the general factors of the national and Central American context; (2) the specific factors of the urban, suburban and rural milieu; and (3) the principal factors that influence the growth of each denomination at the local, provincial, sub-regional, national and international levels.
- 3.5 Relationship between variables and growth: to conduct surveys of various “universes” (such as “communicant members,” “formal and informal leaders,” “inactive members,” “adherents,” “dropouts/disadopters,” “those who have been proselytized by other religious groups,” “Marginal Christian groups,” etc.) in order to obtain concrete data that is statistically reliable about internal/external and favorable/non-favorable church growth factors.
- 3.6 Communication and motivation: to produce, publish and distribute a series of reports and studies about the Project in order to communicate the results to Christian leaders and motivate them to take a more active role in the integral growth of the Body of Christ in Central America.
- 3.7 Leadership training: (1) to conduct a series of “Integral Church Growth Seminars” for the orientation, training and mobilization of national church leaders in each country who will make concrete plans for the integral growth of their denominations and local congregations; and (2) to recruit, orient, train and utilize “Church Growth Specialists” who will have a high level of commitment to the integral growth of the Body of Christ in Central America through their respective denominations and service agencies.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

- 4.1 Contacts will be made with key Protestant leaders in each country to help make them aware of the need to study and analyze the multi-dimensional growth of their respective denominations at the national and Central American regional levels (March-September 1977)
- 4.2 Form a Regional Advisory Council composed of professionals in the social sciences and religious studies to assist and support the Project at the regional level (by September 1977).
- 4.3 Establish a formal relationship with interdenominational organizations (such as the Evangelical Alliance, Bible Society, Relief & Development, etc.) in each country to officially sponsor the Project at the national level in cooperation with PROCADES. When possible, form a PROCADES Coordinating Committee that represents the various support groups (denominations and service agencies) in each country (by September 1977).
- 4.4 Recruit and train needed personnel in each country through the National Coordinating Committee or sponsoring organization (January-June 1978).
- 4.5 Conduct interviews with key Protestant denominational and service agency leaders in each country using our standardized questionnaires for the purpose of (1) learning more about the historical development and current status of each denomination and service agency; and (2) obtaining the names and addresses of the national office and international headquarters for each denomination and service agency in order to compile a **National Directory of Protestant Organizations in each country**. When possible, to do the same for non-Protestant religious groups and service agencies (1978-1979).
- 4.6 Encourage key denominational and service agency leaders to form a **History Committee** for the purpose of producing or updating its own history and sharing this information with the community at large in each country.
- 4.7 Compile a **National Geographical Directory of Protestant Congregations** (churches and missions) in each country, to be published and distributed by the National Coordinating Committee or sponsoring organization (1978-1979).
- 4.8 **Encourage the study of the following “universes” in each country by specialists trained in the social sciences:**
 - 4.8.1 Active communicant church members: baptized members in full communion who are actively participating in a local congregation (measure levels of satisfaction with their religious experience).
 - 4.8.2 Formal and informal church leaders: ordained and non-ordained pastors and lay workers (measure levels of satisfaction with their organizational experience).

- 4.8.3 Inactive church members: those who identify themselves as being “Protestants” or “Evangelicals” but who are not currently active in a local congregation (explore reasons for their lack of involvement: attraction/rejection factors).
- 4.8.4 Disadopters: those who were active in a local congregation but are no longer interested in “religion” (explore reasons for their lack of interest: attraction/ rejection factors).
- 4.8.5 “Los descarriados” (some times called “apostates”): former Protestant or Evangelical church members who have been proselytized by non-Protestant religious groups, such as the Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses or other Margin Christian groups, and are now inactive in one of those groups (measure levels of satisfaction with their current religious experience and the reasons given for leaving the former group)
- 4.8.6 Members of other religions: members of non-Protestant religious groups who have been born and raised in their respective churches (measure levels of satisfaction with their religious experience).

4.9 Conduct special studies of the following (1978-1980):

- 4.9.1 The larger urban areas of Central America: cities of over 100,000 people.
- 4.9.2 Geographical areas and “homogeneous groups” (defined by race, ethnic and language variables) that are experiencing rapid numerical church growth.
- 4.9.3 Unreached or unevangelized homogeneous groups in each country.
- 4.10 **Compile a Status of Christianity Country Profile** for each country of Central America using the model provided by MARC-World Vision and the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (target date: 1981-1982).
- 4.11 Prepare, publish and distribute a series of **Research-in-Progress Reports** about the regional study of Central America as well as for each country (1978-1985)
- 4.12 **Prepare workshop materials for a series of “Integral Church Growth Seminars” in each country of Central America:** to train, motivate and assist church leaders in the process of evaluating their own church growth experiences and in conducting strategic planning in order to achieve higher levels of integral church growth during a specific time frame: one year, two-three years, three-five years, etc. (continuous development)
- 4.13 Conduct a series of annual evaluation seminars or workshops with the “church growth specialists” in each country to analyze the integral growth of the Body of Christ in Central America, based on the annual reports provided by each denomination in each country using a standardized format (1980-1985).
- 4.14 Conduct a final evaluation of the Project and engage in strategic planning with each National Coordinating Committee in Central America (target date: 1985)

5. PROJECT RESOURCES

5.1 Personnel

5.1.1 **Project Director:** Clifton L. Holland, Coordinator of Socio-Religious Studies for the INDEPTH-Central America team with headquarters in San José, Costa Rica; Holland has an M.A. in Missiology from the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary (Pasadena, CA) and is a candidate for the Doctor of Missiology (DMiss) degree at the same institution; he has lived in Costa Rica since 1972.

5.1.2 **Assistant Director:** Alberto Pozo (Licenciate in Latin American Studies at the National University in Heredia, Costa Rica).

5.1.3 **Research Assistants:** Rodolfo Sánchez and Miguel Salas

5.1.4 **Project Secretary:** Miss Sandra Gómez Alpizar (bilingual secretary)

5.1.5 **Central Coordination Office:** INDEPTH-Central America, CLAME building, San José, Costa Rica.

5.2 **Regional Advisory Council** (no formal meetings were held; each member acted as a consultant to the Project)

Anthropology	Dr. Alan Hamilton, Professor of Anthropology, Latin American Biblical Seminary, San José, Costa Rica.
Communications	Mr. Paul Pretiz, M.A. in Communications Research, Latin America Mission, San José, Costa Rica
Geography	Dr. Jane Ratcliffe, Adjunct Professor, Department of Geography, De Paul University, Chicago, Illinois, USA (a specialist in the geography of belief systems).
History	Dr. Wilton Nelson, Professor of Church History, Latin American Biblical Seminary, San José, Costa Rica. Dr. Jean B. A. Kessler, Church Historian, member of the INDEPTH-International Team, San José, Costa Rica.
Missiology	Dr. Orlando E. Costas, Director of the Latin American Evangelical Center for Pastoral Studies (CELEP), San José, Costa Rica Dr. Victor Monterroso, Professor of Evangelism and Church Growth, Latin American Biblical Seminary, San José, Costa Rica.
Political Science	Dr. Charles Denton, Director of the Social Science Institute on Population (IDESPO), National University of Costa Rica in Heredia.

Psychology	Dr. Jorge Taylor, Professor of Pastoral Psychology, Latin American Biblical Seminary, San José, Costa Rica.
	Dr. Horacio Harris, Professor of Psychology, University of Panama, Republic of Panama
Sociology	Dr. Osvaldo Mottes, Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Latin American Biblical Seminary, San José, Costa Rica.
	Lic. Roberto Paredes, Sociologist, San Salvador, El Salvador.

5.3 List of sponsoring organizations in each country:

Guatemala	The Bible Society of Guatemala, the SEPAL Team (OC Ministries International), the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Mission and AMEG (Association of Guatemalan Evangelical Ministers)
Belize	The Bible Society of Guatemala, the Mennonite Center in Belize City, the Gospel Missionary Union, the Conservative Baptist Mission and the Southern Baptist Mission
El Salvador	The Bible Society of El Salvador and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod Mission
Honduras	The Bible Society of Honduras and the Evangelical Committee for Development and National Emergency (CEDEN)
Nicaragua	The Evangelical Committee for Development (CEPAD)
Costa Rica	PROCADES / INDEPTH-Central America Team and the Evangelical Alliance of Costa Rica
Panama	The PROCADES National Coordinating Committee, the Evangelical Association for Development (AEPAD), Radio Station HOXO, the Bible Society of Panama

5.4 Estimated Budget for Phase I (1977-1980 = 4 years)

“A” Budget: US\$54,450

“B” Budget: US\$83,710

5.5 Estimated Budget for Phase II (1981-1985 = 5 years)

“A” Budget: US\$33,000

“B” Budget: US\$66,000

Notes:

The “A” Budget gives the estimated cost of financing the Project based on the maximum participation of the sponsoring organizations in each country, and anticipating that they will be able to provide needed personnel, office space, equipment, transportation and other materials.

The “B” Budget is based on the possibility that the sponsoring organizations in each country may not be able to provide all the essential resources for completing the Project in each country without greater outside assistance from the INDEPTH-Central America Team and other funding sources.

Update on actual outside funding sources: in addition to funds generated in each country from sponsorship organizations and managed by the respective Coordinating Committees, additional financial assistance was provided by several international mission agencies, churches and private donors, including World Vision International, Open Doors with Brother Andrew, the personal support network of Clifton L. Holland (mainly from Presbyterian churches in California who contributed to his “Work Fund” via the Latin America Mission), and a group of private donors who wish to remain anonymous.

This project was approved by the Council of Advisors of the International Institute for In-Depth Evangelization (IINDEF) in October 1977 by Clifton L. Holland, thereby creating the Central American Socio-Religious Program (PROCADES) as a formal ministry of IINDEF under the direction of the author.

Last revised on 15 June 1985
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